Chris Copper begins his discussion by writing: ‘Quite simply the tourism sector does not engage with tourism researchers: indeed the sector could be seen as a research-averse (Cooper and Ruhanen 2002).’ This statement has a number of parts. Firstly, there is a lack of engagement, and secondly the attributed reason given for the lack is that the sector ‘could be seen as risk-adverse’. To me this is the ‘pot calling the kettle black’. The engagement between academics and industry is a two way street. Some academics may decide not to engage with industry for a number of logical reasons and they may also be thought of as risk-adverse. I do agree with Chris Cooper that lack of engagement between researchers and the tourism sector discussed by Chris Cooper is a real phenomenon, a serious problem, and not one that tourism academics should dismiss. Indeed a lack of engagement has caused, in Australia at least, a marginalisation of university tourism academics and at least in part a loss of support for university tourism departments which are then either closed or absorbed into a business school. I consider that the reasons for a lack of engagement are not only the
risk-adverse nature of parts of the tourism sector, but that this is one of a number of antecedents. In effect, I am attributing a portion of the blame to tourism researchers.

One reason why academics avoid industry engagement is because they are forced into an instrumental approach to research due to the current myopic focus in many universities on quantitative outcomes such as the number of papers produced and the quantum of quality research grants obtained. This may partly explain the sometime heard statements by senior tourism academics that they see no need to engage with industry. Indeed, a logical and persuasive argument may be made that the purpose of universities is teaching and contribution to new academic and theoretical knowledge.

A second reason why academics may choose not to engage with industry is their research focus. Some academic researchers consider the purpose of universities is to teach and thus may focus their research outputs on pedagogy and university teaching related topics such as trends of student numbers in a programme. While Of course there is an argument that good teaching in an applied field such as tourism requires knowledge of the practical operation of various organizations such as National Tourism Offices, Destination Tourism Organizations, five star hotels and so on, and that this knowledge may be from first hand industry engagement. Some academics may have joined their universities with no experience in the tourism sector, apart from personal experience of their own holidays or travels. Without having contacts and established relationships with stakeholders in the tourism sector, it can be difficult to obtain the access and data needed to write a meaningful and practically relevant paper. In part, this is because major tourism organizations such as Tourism Australia may receive approaches to contribute to research projects from many academics and many are from researchers who have no established track record in tourism research. This is my own experience as a research manager in a State Government Tourism Organization. Lack of knowledge of practical issues of importance to business managers or policy officers engenders further difficulty in engagement and leads to a cycle of increasing isolation.

Other academics may conduct research projects and write papers that draw upon data and information from the tourism sector but may not feel any need to transfer the results and findings back to industry stakeholders. This is more common than may be
expected and a source of irritation to tourism managers, leading to refusals to participate in new projects. Alternatively, an academic may undertake research of practical interest but may be restricted by contractual agreements to not disseminate the information.

Finally, academics may feel no need to engage because their areas of interest are theoretically driven and they can write a paper that is accepted in an A* journal without the need to collect data or engage with stakeholders. These academics may not be driven by application of the knowledge (Pearce and Benckendorff 2006) but are curiosity driven. Cooper writes that: ‘The issue of the relevance of research findings is an enduring critique facing many curiosity driven researchers and the knowledge management framework provides a comprehensive answer’. My opinion is that in the field of tourism, as an applied area, there needs to be a balance between curiosity driven research and practical outcomes. In my own work, I try to achieve both outcomes. The counter-argument to a need for practical outcomes is that research produces uncertain outputs and there is always an opportunity in the future for research outputs to make a contribution.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty of the future value of tourism research outputs, many papers do provide an assessment of the practical implications of the work. Interestingly, the value of the outcomes is asserted but I am unaware of any assessment of the actual impacts of tourism papers against the stated implications. In addition, many are simply noted as having policy implications without any detail. It would be interesting to obtain third party rating of publication outputs on measures of the value of a paper such those discussed in Scott (2012).

A Contribution to New Knowledge?

As mentioned above there is an argument that the purpose of academic life is to teach students and develop new knowledge. But what is tourism knowledge and especially what is new tourism knowledge? Firstly let’s think about three types of knowledge: 1) theories (service chain), 2) concepts (service quality) and typologies (types of tourists such as backpackers, adventure traveller, etc.), and 3) examples or instances (a particular tourist or a particular service event). While each and every tourist may be
considered as a unique instance, in practice they can usually be grouped under a typology heading (this tourist may be classified as a backpacker).

It is arguable that most tourism hotel managers do not in their day-to-day business need new knowledge of type 1 (theories). They generally have a reasonable knowledge about how service quality leads to customer loyalty and repeat visits. Of course, it may be that a particular destination wants to develop a brand (i.e., Brand New Zealand) and therefore hotel managers need to learn about how branding works. It may be that a development of a new form of marketing (social media) requires a manager to know how this fits into theories about how advertising works. But in general, the need to transfer knowledge about new theories might be considered a relatively rare event for most tourism managers (or perhaps not depending on their training). Perhaps the requirement for new knowledge of this type is becoming more common due to the increasing pace of technological, social, economic, political, etc. change in society.

The second type of knowledge concerns concepts and typologies. Here there is more complexity and variation. A hotel manager may find it very useful to know about a new type of tourist (MICE visitor) travelling to their destination that can provide new customers. Similarly, the concepts of brands, experiences, third party marketing, and sustainability may be useful for managers or other tourism stakeholders. The third type of knowledge about a particular traveller or time bound-event is needed for operational reasons. It includes information about a traveller’s travel plans such as is found in booking systems, customer databases, andPNRs and also in lists services available such as entertainment sessions, tours departures, flight timetables and so on. However, generally this third type is not the domain of academic study.

Much tourism research published in academic journals seeks to test existing theories to confirm they apply; a fact of interest to academics but not tourism stakeholders. Alternatively, some academic research adopts an alternative theoretical framework that challenges the existing accepted paradigm. This is the core of academic endeavour but usually the results fail to say how much better that new approach is compared to the accepted approach. Instead the contribution of an article is discussed in academic terms, such as its contribution to theory, with any advantageous practical
outcome indicated in general terms only, if at all. Thus while a manager could be expected to be interested in the topic, the results presented in a paper require further processing or interpretation to be useful. As a result, no knowledge transfer will occur because the value of the knowledge embodied in the paper is not understood by the manager.

Another type of academic research describes how a particular concept or theory works in a particular situation in a destination and this may be quite interesting to tourism stakeholders who have a similar problem. For example, the image of a particular destination may be found to be influenced by community attitude to development. Such findings are however embedded in the particular context of that destination and therefore may have a restricted audience. Additionally, due to the complex and fragmented COPs in tourism destinations, it is likely that only a small number of tourism stakeholders will be interested and of course the information (perhaps in a different language) needs to be found by them.

Thus I would like to stress usability in Chris Cooper’s comments that:

the concepts of credibility, anticipated usability, and expected usefulness of knowledge, .... inform judgments about whether or not to use certain sources of knowledge.

Complexity of Stakeholder Needs

If we do consider that academics should teach, as well as develop relevant new knowledge and transfer it to industry stakeholders then we must consider how effective should be the means of knowledge transfer. One of the characteristics of tourism is that there are many diverse groups of knowledge users, geographically separated throughout the world’s tourist destinations, with each group having different needs and levels of existing tacit knowledge and skills. This complexity of knowledge needs is illustrated here in four projects that I have worked on recently that have involved transfer of knowledge to tourism stakeholders. First, in the Philippines that required assessing the quality of the training of front line service staff in handling of food and customer service that was provided by other organizations. Second, in Peru which involved transfer of knowledge about aspects of tourism
marketing to staff from the national tourism organization; the third, a Masterclass for managers from Gold Coast, Australia that covered aspects of designing more memorable tourism experiences, while the fourth required collection, analysis and reporting of best practice in tourism governance for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Looking across these four projects, it appears that each involves particular stakeholders with its own characteristic knowledge needs and appropriate means for knowledge transfer.

The implication is that successful transfer of tourism knowledge requires careful consideration of the level of expertise and particular knowledge gaps of a distinct community of practice (COP). I posit that there are only a limited number of distinct types of tourism COPs. These certainly include a government tourism policy COP, a NTO marketing COP, and a hotel management COP. The point I make here is that each of the individual government tourism policy COPs (in Italy, Australia, and so on) has its particular knowledge needs although there is also a general need to transfer best practice between them. The particular knowledge management task depends on the specific COP’s characteristics.

This raises a number of interesting questions such as: where within a COP is the best practice knowledge located? Are there organizations (academics or consultants) that specialize in managing knowledge of a type useful for a type of COP? How knowledge is best managed in a particular type of COP? - should we try and manage policy related knowledge differently from marketing related knowledge? It appears that there is a lot of complexity in the management of useful new tourism knowledge that has not yet been addressed in the academic literature.

In general, there appears to be an assumption that tourism managers do not have the knowledge that they need to manage their businesses. This view is supported by Thomas (2012), who researched the relationship between business elites and universities. One finding from this paper is that most of the senior managers obtained information needed for their business from other managers. On one hand this may imply that these managers (many operating successful and major tour operations in the United Kingdom) were not accessing useful information. An alternative analysis suggests that the most useful information available to such operators may in fact be
the size and growth of particular customer segments and that this is exactly the
information available from other managers. This provides an explanation as to why
‘academic research is usually seen by practitioners as tangential, unnecessarily
complex and communicated in a manner that is inaccessible’ (p. 559). Here the issue
is not codifying academic knowledge to make it understandable, relevant and legible
to the target audience but in understanding what knowledge is needed in the first
place.

**Dealing with COPs with Different Types of Knowledge Management Needs**

It appears to me that tourism knowledge management should adopt a more nuanced
approach in the tourism sector recognizing and addressing the diverse range of
stakeholders and better target particular COPs with relevant knowledge. What type of
knowledge does a hotel manager need? A manager’s main objective is to manage a
profitable hotel. For hoteliers – it is quite possible to sell a similar room and service
to that sold 200 years ago (perhaps with the exception of wireless internet).
Additionally, the physical and sensory experience derived from a hotel room may not
have changed significantly – at least in terms of the need for quiet and relaxation. So
we must ask ourselves – what has changed that a hotelier NEEDS to know about and
which academics can effectively answer? Here we should remember that global hotel
chains employ experts in room design, customer research and branding. What global
hotel chains often cannot provide to their hotel managers is an understanding of
destination related factors that may be important. This analysis would see academics
as focusing on destination issues and becoming experts on these. In this way,
academics may develop tacit knowledge about a destination that is of value to
destination managers.

We academics should also remember that the tourism industry in many developed
countries has developed many new skills. As Pearce and Benckendorf (2006) note:

‘University researchers, as well as consultants and government officials, represent
one group with the skills to conduct cross-business surveys and benchmarking for
tourist attractions.’ (pp.32-33).
Here it is important to emphasize that academics in many destinations are only one of a number of groups that have research skills and there is no mandated reason why they should be used for generating new knowledge.

A second point about dealing with COPs is also related to tacit knowledge. Cooper writes…

*For tourism it is in the area of understanding and leveraging from tacit knowledge sources that the major gap exists....*

What is missing in this idea is that tacit knowledge can be valuable and therefore its possessor may not be inclined to give it away for free. If a business owner has valuable tacit knowledge we should ask why they should be willing to share it. Generally knowledge will be shared if its possessors consider they will get adequate recompense for it. An academic can provide some return for acquiring tacit knowledge by amalgamating, analysing and synthesising knowledge to produce valuable insights. The issue is that these insights should be valuable to the person who is considered to need the tacit knowledge and be recognized as such. Again this suggests that academics need to focus their attention on a particular COP such as a destination’s stakeholders.

Clearly knowledge is linked to power and influence (Pearce and Benckendorff 2006). If academics wish to transfer knowledge then they must be aware that this implies possession of power. A study by Marzano and Scott (2009) into the development of a Gold Coast Branding campaign highlighted that the marketing manager responsible for the campaign did not use consumer or advertising effectiveness research. This is shown to be effectively an exercise of positional power which ultimately failed as the other stakeholders were not involved. The advertising was not used and the money spent on the advertising gone wasted. Academics face a similar problem in being able to transfer knowledge as they may not be seen as legitimate stakeholders. Transfer of knowledge requires an understanding of destination’s power and politics.

**What to do to--Conduct Best Practice Studies**

One task that academics may wish to undertake is codification and dissemination of best practice tacit knowledge already in the tourism sector (example: there may be
tacit knowledge of a methodology for how to develop new air routes, undertake hotel revenue management, and develop a branding campaign). Here, the knowledge is already available but value is created by comparison of methods and identification of best practice which is then transferred to the rest of the industry. One such report commissioned by the OECD, examined best practice in tourism governance for National Tourism Administrations (OECD 2012).

**What to do to – Outreach Research**

Hawkins (2006) considers there can be a wide spectrum of cooperative discovery, application, and creative problem-solving interactions between the university and tourism stakeholders. These include policy and applied research, technology transfer partnerships, demonstration projects, and creative works in the arts. The discussion above suggests that these projects should be carefully examined to ensure that political agendas are understood and that stakeholders are included in the development of the research brief.

**What to do to – Transfer of New Knowledge from Outside the Tourism Sector**

One obvious need which academics are ideally placed to fulfil is to bring new ideas from other disciplines into the tourism sector. An example would be introduction of first branding ‘technology’ to a tourism destination management organization and use of social media by SMTEs. This may be where there is some resistance from tourism stakeholders who are reluctant to change their methods of operation. However, the longer time horizons of academics may suit such a task. Perhaps recent work on emotion elicitation fits into this type (Ma, Gao et al. 2013).

**Conclusion**

Knowledge management in tourism is heterogeneous and needs to be understood in detail with the position of university researchers in a COP network being dependent on their perceived skills and the environment. Knowledge transfer is in part a political process and set within an environment of competing providers and interests. It will vary between developing and developed destination. Some academics have a production approach whereby they seek to conduct their research and then wonder if
there is a market for it. Knowledge transfer works better when the research project is crafted to meet the needs of a particular COP.

**Concluding Remarks**

I am grateful to Lisa Ruhanen and Noel Scott for their comments and insights on the chapter that began this section. They affirm that the issues surrounding knowledge transfer in tourism are significant and impinge upon the many key challenges facing the sector – not the least of which is climate change as Ruhanen makes clear in her rejoinder. Scott too raises an important issue by arguing that researchers could do more to facilitate knowledge transfer to the tourism sector. Indeed, as university research assessment exercises begin to place a premium upon ‘research impact’, then this may herald a shift in the balance between curiosity-driven and practical research - and perhaps a redefinition of ‘tourism knowledge’ (see Hall, 2011).

Knowledge transfer does not take place for its own sake. Indeed, the tourism sector is highly instrumental in its use of tourism knowledge and will only adopt if it can see the benefits and relevance of that knowledge for its own objectives. In his rejoinder, Scott argues that for knowledge transfer to be effective, then the audience must be understood. Here, the notion of organizational capability is about the capacity of organisations to acquire and apply new ideas – a real challenge if, as Ruhanen argues in her rejoinder, the complexities of climate change and the response of both destinations and the sector are to be understood.

I believe that one of the keys to achieving knowledge transfer in tourism is an understanding of the ‘contexts’ within which knowledge transfer takes place. Here we can think of destinations and the sector as innovation landscapes comprised of an audience of stakeholders who act as barriers, gatekeepers and receptors of innovation (see Cooper et al, 2003; Rowley, 1997). We can also think of them as networked organisations - loosely articulated amalgams of enterprises, governments and other organizations (Scott el, 2008). Collectively, their stakeholders have the overall goal of ensuring that their organisation is both competitive and sustainable. This can be taken a step further by creating ‘networked learning organisations’ which can adapt to
change more quickly and thus can gain competitive advantage. Here, understanding the network architecture is critical in facilitating or impeding the transfer of knowledge throughout the network (Baggio and Cooper, 2010). Increasingly, the context for innovation is less focussed on the individual, but rather it takes place within networks and communities of practice (COPs). Real insights into the behaviour of stakeholders in knowledge transfer can be achieved by viewing them as ‘communities of practice’ (Schianetz et al, 2007).

Returning to Ruhanen and Scott’s rejoinders brings two conclusions. Firstly, the policy dimension implied by the knowledge economy cannot be ignored. Increasingly, governments are grappling with the issues surrounding the nature of knowledge as a global public good. These include access to knowledge, the removal of barriers to knowledge transfer and adoption, and the need to encourage private enterprise to share knowledge. Secondly, knowledge transfer is a discretionary activity, and will follow a path of least resistance (Reagans and McEvily, 2003). The lesson is clear: if the knowledge that researchers generate is to be adopted, then it must be of true relevance to the tourism sector.

**Discussion Questions**

There are a large number of potential research questions and projects in the field of knowledge transfer and tourism. Here are 5 key ones:

1. Mapping the tourism sector landscape of knowledge adoption for barriers, gatekeepers and receptors;
2. Surveying the tourism sector for the type of knowledge sought and the most effective transfer media;
3. Analysing the influence of destination and sector network architecture on knowledge transfer;
4. Understanding the capability of tourism organisations to assimilate and utilise new knowledge; and
5. Surveying the international tourism research community to assess the impact of university research assessment exercises on the type of research undertaken.

**References**


Further Reading


