

BALANCE OF POWER IN DEVELOPMENT OF AN
ASSOCIATION OF TOURISM RESEARCHERS

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INTRODUCTION

This is the story of what appears to have been a change in the balance of power associated with different forms of knowledge in an association of tourism researchers, founded by interested parties to support and further the development of their field of research, which as with a number of such organizations, has not gone entirely smoothly. The study was carried out by the author, an anthropologist, as a quasi ethnography, qualitative in nature, and it was aided by his position as a Founding Fellow of the association and as a two-time member of its membership committee. The study was centered around the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967), which has been used in anthropology, sociology and other social sciences (See, e.g., Hammersley and Atkinson 1995), in which theory tends to grow inductively out of ethnographic field work that often considers the subjective element in human action and the give and take between the researcher and people being studied. Further theories with more specialized applications emerged as the study developed. Its organizing issue concerns a specific problem in the production of knowledge encountered by the association in the course of its development.

The association under investigation was founded in Spain in 1988 as the INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY FOR THE STUDY OF TOURISM (now, more simply, ACADEMY). Certainly, it was not the first of its kind to appear in the course of the development of the sciences, nor more specifically, in the field of tourism research, which emerged in the

twentieth century more than a century after the first linguistic recognition of the subject in Western languages such as French and English. (@1800, according to Böröcz 1986: 39-41). Though not the oldest in the line of such organizations (See, e.g., Dann and Liebman-Parrinello , eds. forthcoming), it had a kind of uniqueness derived from the multinational nature of its planned membership (@ 17 different nations were represented by its Founding Fellows). But the apparent multi-national nature of the developing association was somewhat mitigated by a single official language- English. If Nash's (2007: 224-26) personality assessment of founders of the field from anthropology and sociology and his personal acquaintance with subjects can be used as a basis, traits of independent-mindedness and marginality were often exhibited among the Founders. This aspect of their character would seem to have fit well into a field that has often been referred to as multi-faceted and fragmentary (See Crick 1989). Just how international was the initial membership? Dann (2009: 5) points out that, among the Founders, only @ 60% spoke English as a first language, which according to him, is one of a number of his reasons for questioning the international character of the Academy.

The establishment of the Academy was accomplished with the aid of the World Tourism Organization and the Spanish government (the latter of which was then very much involved in its own tourism development). Initial meetings were held in Madrid and Santander, where it was agreed that, granted invitations and support from local sponsors, further meetings would be held regularly around the world. The initial meetings in Spain followed discussions among a small, informal group, headed by the editor of the interdisciplinary, international journal, ANNALS OF TOURISM RESEARCH (founded 1973) and a member of the faculty at an American university. In preliminary discussions, this group laid out the beginnings of an organizational

plan for the association that was voted on at the Santander meeting. Further voting on Academy matters were to take place mostly in biennial meetings that followed.

It was expected that a good deal of Academy business would be accomplished at these meetings, envisaged as being held in various locations around the world. First, there were to be discussions of administrative matters on the basis of a developing set of by-laws, which were to be voted on from time to time. Second, recruitment and early socialization of new members would take place in connection with a ceremony associated with a wine and cheese "social" (to which members would bring wine and cheese, and in which new members would be installed). Third, invitations by future sponsors would be discussed and voted on. Fourth, certain specialists from the Academy would meet with local sponsors and discuss tourism questions of interest to them. Fifth, formal academic sessions would be held, during which members presented papers (to be considered for a future collaborative publication under an Academy title). Sixth, sponsors would be given an opportunity to offer various forms of hospitality and to "advertise" their destination with tours, talks, dinners, etc. As it turned out, all of this usually took place in an atmosphere of give-and-take, which a number of informants say has turned out to be a most valuable part of Academy meetings; and indeed, despite beginning problems, an atmosphere of effervescent sociability tended to prevail in early meetings.

The presentations of papers and hoped-for collaborative publications, were particularly significant in the early days of the Academy when outlets for tourism research were (perhaps because of what some thought was the dubious subject matter involved) not so readily available. With the need for publication always present in this group of academics, faults in

the functioning of the publication committee could stand out. As one member put it (after a collaborative paper he and some students had submitted to the publication committee had been either lost or rejected, "Rather than helping to create visibility for a joint work, young scholars have been penalized because their contribution has been hidden at the very time they most need publicity for career advancement." And another informant- older and more respected- was smarting recently over the rejection of a proposed academic session he and others had planned for a forthcoming meeting. Such problems have continued throughout the history of the Academy, and one of them, which has become salient in this analysis, concerning the presentation and publication of research efforts, constitutes the heart of this paper's analysis. One should keep in mind, however, that such problems were not unique to associations of this kind. Indeed, they were frequently to be found in the associational history found in various aspects of the development of tourism research. (See S. Smith 1989: 130; Dann, G. and G. Liebman-Parrinello, eds. 2009).

What can be said of the Academy's record in regard to such scholarly production? Those who have been on board since the beginning tend to believe that presentations (and associated publications) in earlier days were generally better than more recent contributions. A particularly good example of earlier efforts is provided by the collaborative production that resulted from the first meeting in Zakopane, Poland (See Smith and Eadington, eds. 1992), in which the subject of Alternative Tourism had been briskly debated throughout the meeting, and papers produced were eventually published by a respected university press. Subsequent efforts that followed at the next two meetings (See Pearce and Butler, eds. 1993; Butler and Pearce, eds., 1995), although perhaps not quite so well integrated, revealed that the Academy

was early on its way towards establishing a solid publishing presence in the field of tourism research- a presence, which unfortunately, has not entirely continued till the present.

Perhaps it should be remarked here that any early publications from the Academy came at a time when members were particularly appreciative of support from the outside world (including the world of university colleagues), which had come to be thought by many as not particularly supportive of tourism-related academic production (See, e.g., Nash, ed. 2007: 230-31). But members persisted with an attitude, expressed particularly well by a Founding Fellow (Jafari 2007) in his personal history in the Nash volume, in which he proclaimed that existing tourism phenomena should be demonstrable and as open to investigation as anything else.

What kind of science did Academy members bring to their study of tourism? With exceptions sometimes verging on the impressionistic, it was a straightforward kind of positivism, which had wrapped itself around much of social analysis in those days, and continues still (See, e.g., Dann, Nash, and Pearce, eds. 1988; Riley and Love 2000); and Academy publications have tended to reflect this sort of approach, which is not to say that members using other approaches could not publish in, or outside of the Academy. For example, there are recurring references to the non-positivist qualitatively-oriented (as opposed to quantitative) methodological tradition as a main influence in tourism research in Erik Cohen's memoir-like collection of articles (Cohen 2004), the work of Riley and Love (2000), as well as the edited volume on the qualitative (as opposed to quantitative) approach to tourism (Phillimore and Goodson, eds. 2004), in which this author (Nash 2004) has an article. On the other hand, there are stories of members who have dropped out of the Academy

because of the strong positivist tendencies therein, which were maintained despite historic changes in related disciplines. As Edward Bruner(2009: 548) points out in a recent book review, there were not many tourism researchers in the non-positivist side of their disciplines in the early days of tourism research. He should be reminded, however, that as far as the Academy was concerned they have existed and were influential in the course of its development.

Further, it seemed that the Academy was coming to the point where collaborative publications in book form were less assured. In the recent history of the Academy, no such publication has appeared recently. For example, there have been none since the Macau meeting of the Academy in 2001; and though there has, indeed, been talk about a collaborative book-length effort from the Beijing meeting (2003), only scattered articles from the meetings have appeared here and there since then. The scarce attendance at one recent meeting in Croatia also was something of a surprise and a cause of some concern. One informant declared, " We need to change our format from one of paper presentations to one engaging more Fellows in discussion and debate. " And still another, in a letter to the editor of the Newsletter of the Academy said, "The Academy is moving from a body of academics with intellectual and theoretical concerns, to one of professionals, many in applied fields." (Cohen 15 (3): 3). So, in a comparatively short period of time, some serious problems seem to have emerged in an association, which in early days, seemed to have been well on its way in establishing a significant publishing profile. Indeed, the developing difficulties came to be regarded as so serious by the members that relevant resolutions were adopted in a meeting in Fethiye, Turkey (2007) and the most recent gathering in Mallorca (2009) to address them

(See below). As an aside, it might be wise here to keep in mind that in the history of research on tourism and related fields is dotted with problems such as those afflicting the Academy, some of them mortality-inducing. Stephen Smith (1989:130), for example, points out that, despite 'stormy days' in the Leisure Research Symposium, which, fortunately, were not mortal.

A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM

Certainly, a good case can be made for the quality of research productivity of the Academy in its earlier days when, as mentioned above, there were not yet significant problems in this regard. More recently, the quality of Academy research productivity, as judged by presentations at meetings and subsequent publications, have not been so well received by potential publishers, as well as by members themselves; and some have not confined their critiques to problems with the presentations and with the publication committee. In anthropology and sociology, for example, Dann (2005: 6), points out that of seven people who are supposed to have made "important theoretical contributions to the sociology/anthropology of tourism, only 3 are members of the Academy." And those in the know should be aware that several scholars who have become leading figures for tourism research in recognized disciplines have had their nominations rejected by the membership. To counter this, perhaps, some steps are at the moment being taken to prevent the Academy from becoming what has been called a place for the happy interaction of best friends. One such step involves asking Academy nominees to present a paper at meetings of the entire membership beforehand. Another, involves a more careful scrutiny of new members. It is too soon to say whether such measures are having any desired effects.

Of course talent must produce something of social consequence, and there are reasons that have been offered for the decline in quality in Academy intellectual productivity. There are those who have raised questions about a lack of theoretical orientation in the Academy, and others have questioned the lack of facility in foreign languages, especially with European languages, with which there appears to be a closer connection as far as tourism research is concerned (See, e.g., Dann 2009) In any case, Cohen's (2005 15(3)) statement that "I suspect that, rather than an association of the best people in the field, (the Academy) has unwittingly become an association of best friends" sounds increasingly on the mark.

EXCURSUS

By looking further into Academy history, we can begin to get at the sources of the problems involved with the quality of its research productivity, mentioned earlier. For example, as far as the relevant historical context is concerned, there had been a massive growth of tourism. Cohen (1984: 377) notes that there were 25.3 million international tourist arrivals in 1950, and in 1981 an estimated 291 million. More recently (for 2001), the World Tourism Organization estimated that there were 700 million international tourist arrivals in the world in one year; and statistics on the growth of domestic tourism, which Smith and Wanhill (1986:329) think comprise "the bulk of world tourism," are even more impressive. Such growth ought to have been associated with some kind of tourism scholarship, and indeed it was certainly noteworthy among the Swiss (Dann and Liebman- Parrinello, eds., forthcoming); and even in America, which has tended to lag behind Europe in research on tourism, there already was an increase in numbers of doctoral dissertations on tourism by the late 1980's (Jafari and

Aaser 1988); and Bruner (2009: 549) has dug up interesting data, which show a small, but substantial increase in recorded tourism submissions (for research grants) to the (American) National Science Foundation from virtually nothing in 1990-01 to @9 percent in 2006-07. Tony Becher (1989: 43-45), in his study of academic “tribes and territories” might have used the word “specialism” for the growing field of tourism research, but it certainly seem to have become more and more significant.

As far as the Academy was concerned, the number of members continued to increase, and the limit of 75 (established in Santander) came to be viewed more and more as a provisional ceiling. But members also began to “pass away.” Of 44 founding members, only 27 are still members of the Academy today (two decades later) when membership is somewhere in the 60’s in number. Those who are no longer on the rolls have either died, resigned, or failed to fulfill some criterion or other of membership; and at this moment, significant changes in the number of members are almost all the result of additions of new members by the recruiting process.

In thinking about potential candidates for membership, one might speculate that nominators would tend to think first about people from their own disciplines. Considering various other factors, it is apparent that no particular language except English seems to have been required, a fact that has some significance for our analysis. And the Academy has had only a few women members (some of these of especial importance) since the beginning. Is the Academy loaded with positivists? Apparently so, but while keeping in mind its qualitative contributions, the significance of that issue has yet to be seriously investigated. Applied or basic orientation? Until recently, there seems to have been a comfortable balance between the two,

but that, too, has not been seriously discussed. On the whole then, factors affecting research orientation on tourism have not yet been seriously considered so far in the history of the Academy.

As an aside, consider the high quality academically oriented students who speak both English and Chinese. They came to be on the Academy's doorstep, so to speak; and they could be more numerous available with an institutional arrangement (in 2002), in which the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's Hotel and Tourism Research Center took over administrative duties of the Academy. Such candidates- at least at the outset- would probably bring with them a more applied scientific orientation, and already two of these have been installed as members; but because the HKPU is undergoing its own evolution, one cannot be certain what kind of changes in orientation any new members of the Academy from there would bring to the membership. The possibilities of this new relationship brings to mind an earlier one between the Academy and the World Tourism Organization in Madrid, which is currently in a period of transition. (For those concerned about the Academy's autonomy, it may be worth noting that any "strings" attached to these relationships have not yet been considered unacceptable by the Academy).

KNOWLEDGE AS POWER

In any organization of intellectually oriented people, say a group of chess players, it may be easier to entertain thoughts about the relationship between knowledge of its members and the power they wield in organizational affairs. As far as Academy life is concerned, members can be designated ideal-typically as either applied or basically oriented or

quantitative or qualitative, which here will be taken here as paralleling a binary distinction between procedural and propositional knowledge in Tribe's scheme (1997: 639). In it, academic disciplinary connections loom large in association with the former and the values of marketability and efficiency tend to be associated with the latter (See Lyotard 1988: 46). Obviously, there are fuzzy boundaries here, but for simplicity's sake, let's refer to these kinds of differences just mentioned as between the academically-oriented and business-oriented, which according to Tribe (2004: 57), seem to have become the two main approaches in tourism studies (He has, however, forgotten to include the English language as an aspect of business orientation these days). With the fact that most of the Academy members are from academe, we can classify them ideal-typically in terms of the disciplines or departments from which they come and in which they tend to act (e.g., sociology, political science, human geography) as academically oriented or business-oriented (e.g., marketing, business administration, tourism). The understanding here is that, insofar as Academy affairs are concerned, the people we are dealing with have been shaped, more or less, by the culture of the department or discipline from which they come (See, e.g., Becher 1989) and will tend to act in terms of its norms.

As the central focus of this paper, we will be concerned with the unanticipated difficulties, which as suggested above, appear to be traceable to a change in the way two groups of members- the business- and academically oriented tourism researchers - produce and use knowledge. So far, we have been rather loose in speaking about the research orientation of these members, and it may be a bit better to sort them out now. Of course, they have been seen as concerned with the subject of tourism, which they are trying to understand,

scientifically. There have been as many as 20 different nationalities represented among these members of the Academy, but all have speak English as a first or second language (See Dann 2009: 6-7). Language wise, there have been no significant changes in the use of English throughout the Academy's history, and this would seem to be a part of the problem. As scientists, most have been positivists, an orientation that had become dominant in the social sciences when they started their careers; but there have also been significant clusters of non-positivists, such as those from anthropology and sociology who are Founding Members, now heading for, or into Emeritus status. These, as Riley and Love (2000) have indicated, were among the important contributors to tourism research since its beginnings. In an apparent response to the rejection of two of their (now better-known) nominees in the early days of the Academy, there have been no further nominations from them, nor any further additions of anthropologists and sociologists to the membership. Could there have been a change in the intellectual, or other qualities of new members who were being recruited? Nash (2007: 171-73), after ruling out other factors such as language, gender, or (except indirectly) academic discipline, has proposed one factor involved here, which was a change in the balance among members in ways of producing and using knowledge, specifically with the business-oriented (by virtue of increased numbers and perhaps the expedition of their thought-ways) gaining power vis-à-vis the academics. Using limited statistical information about department of origin in the Academy's DIRECTORY OF MEMBERS, he found that in the relatively short time period between 1998 and 2003, there had been a substantial numerical change in the two types, as indicated by departments of origin. In 1998-99, the department heading the list was (human) geography (with business-oriented departments not even close), while in 2002-03 members

from business-oriented departments such as marketing and management ranked first (with human geography, anthropology, and sociology close behind). This brief secular trend, involving the increasing weight of the business-oriented in academic affairs of the Academy, is reinforced by the fact that in 2004-05, of 7 new members, 5 were clearly business-oriented and 2 probably so. Add to this the observation of Cohen (2005: 3), a member of some twenty years, who says, "The Academy is moving from a body of academics with intellectual and theoretical concerns, to one of professionals, many in applied fields." Such a change would lead to a significantly different, more uncomfortable balance between the two types in academic affairs than had existed in the Academy at the beginning.

The evidence available, therefore, suggests that, in line with developments in its history, mainly involving the significant growth of a tourism industry and its appurtenances, the Academy has been changing towards a more business-oriented group, not only in its administration, but also in its membership- changes, which can be associated with the problem of presentations and publications in the biennial meetings. What appears to have been going on is a change in the balance between academically-oriented and business-oriented types in the Academy's membership mix- a change which can be understood in terms of the production of the knowledge in which they are involved. As a result, this tendency of the Academy's knowledge producers, like all other knowledge producers (See, e.g., Habermas 1978) has changed and is increasingly reflected in their actions (theoretical questions raised, methodologies used, modes of discourse, etc.) so that their interests are increasingly prevailing over those of the academically oriented- a fact which Erik Cohen, along with some other members, have used- knowingly or unknowingly- in evaluating recent Academy research at its

meetings. The problem is phrased more succinctly by another member-informant, particularly experienced in the area, who says:

“I find that tourism research and scholarship is increasingly being shaped by a management or business perspective. More traditional ‘scholarly’ approaches appear to be associated more with older members, some of whom are retired (or nearing retirement). ... Tourism researchers are looking less at phenomena and topics that run deeper than marketing and management- at the same time, ‘practical’ projects are growing in number.”

REACTION OF THE ACADEMY

Besides the comments of selected informants, the recent minutes of business sessions in its last two Academy meetings (in Fethiye, Turkey and Mallorca) give us a good picture of the Academy’s response to the troubles its members have encountered as far as the quality of Academy research productivity is concerned. Taken together, they indicate that the membership, under its new officers (since the meeting in Fethiye, two years ago), has become significantly aware of the troubles it has encountered and is taking steps to deal with them; and though they may not be responding consciously to the issues that have been raised in the history presented here, it is hard not to conclude that the evidence suggests that some steps are being taken that are in line with the main understandings put forth above.

Beyond a general tightening up, there has come about a general agreement that there has been a decline in the quality of collaborative academic production of the Academy. In conversations at meetings, one now often hears that what exists is often embarrassing and that the Academy’s academic profile is becoming inconsequential. One also hears from older members speculation about the cause of it all- with considerable agreement about what amounts to poor quality in academic productivity, which in turn is traced to faulty recruiting

and/or socialization. If one listens well, the names of current research “stars” in tourism studies who were lost either before or after recruitment to the Academy come into the conversation. The kind of interest that greeted the academic productions in early days (recall the first meeting in Zakopane) is almost entirely missing. Polite applause is the rule. And the response of publishers is not all that great either. Those who recall the old days when the Academy’s publishing efforts were more in demand can certainly agree with those who think that the Academy’s “publishing profile” is in danger.

The response to all this by the Academy has been encouraging, with what appears to be general agreement that a key element is the quality of talent being recruited. As a result, first, an effort is being made to get better qualified members into the Academy by asking everyone to think about the issue and act constructively. Is it likely that this or that recruit will bring credit to the Academy? Everyone is to be involved in the recruitment process, which has become longer and more carefully considered. Besides presentations to the membership at an Academy meeting before-hand, candidates will be asked for full credentials. Any candidate for membership must “discuss his or her research agenda, methods, and outcomes, highlighting their contribution to tourism knowledge in twenty minutes.” There now also is an “Emerging Scholars Initiative,” in which an appointed committee seeks out younger scholars not more than ten years from their PhD., etc. And by way of demonstration, each meeting will have all presentations by Fellows put under the control of a tough, experienced publication committee. First of all, there is selection of presentations by an experienced committee, then scrutiny by that committee for possible publication- with nothing in the way of publication assured. All of this seems to be part of what amounts to a reflexive effort by the Academy, dwelling on the

inner workings of the research act, which partakes of subjective observations by some of the knowledge producers (See, e.g., Giddens 1995), though this still may not yet be the norm for Academy members. Will significant others take the separate existence of business-oriented and academically oriented members seriously; and will they- even more seriously- consider that some kind of empathetic balance of power between these two types of members should be further explored and, perhaps, acted on in order to have a better-integrated group, as in the beginning of this institution? The game is certainly still afoot, and what Clifford Geertz (1983: 161) has said still seems applicable to the Academy- and others like it-today:

“The problem of the integration of cultural life becomes one of making it possible for people inhabiting different worlds to have a genuine and reciprocal impact upon one another... The first step is surely to accept the depth of the differences; the second to understand what these differences are; and the third to construct some sort of vocabulary in which they can be publicly formulated.”

And that is just the beginning. What it has to do with the functioning of the Academy and its members, as well as others, including the generation of knowledge and the process of recruitment, remains for further scientific investigation, to which this paper might have contributed something of significance.

SUMMARY-CONCLUSION

This has been the story of the comparatively recent development of the International Academy for the Study of Tourism, an association formed by a group of scholars seeking to further the cause of a new field of study- tourism. This Academy, which was conceived to be multinational and multidisciplinary, began development in an enterprising way, but has

recently run into problems, one of which has to do with its academic productivity, which can be evaluated in terms of presentations and publications associated with biennial meetings that have taken place at the invitation of sponsors around the world.

Using a quasi-ethnographic method, the author, himself a Founding Fellow of the Academy, has investigated problems that have emerged especially in the quality of the Academy's scholarly productivity, which can be traced to a developing imbalance between academically oriented and business oriented types in the membership mix. The present leadership of the Academy has become aware of the problem, and has been taking steps to deal with it- one of which involves a change in procedures for the recruiting of new members, and another, a more careful evaluation before-hand of members' academic production, some of which may be in line with the analysis in this paper, which is based on information derived from selected member-informants, as well as the author's own observations. At present, it is too soon to assess the value of the author's analysis in terms of actions taken by the Academy, or other associations like it; and certainly, further investigation into the main questions raised in this paper is needed- and invited.

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