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Out of the Comfort Zone: Situation, Participation and Narrative Interpretation in Tourism Research

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Abstract

Tourism is largely concerned with considerations of being, meaning and identity. However despite some definite fracturing of the powerbases of the tourism academy, its gatekeepers of knowledge remain dominated by those who prefer the comfort of conventional scientific objectivities, and much tourism research still adheres to positivistic and scientific principles and approaches in its attempts to trace the ways in which human meaning is created in tourism exchanges. Here I advocate the further development and application of research methodologies and programmes which foreground the 'situated researcher', encourage active participant involvement and create reflexivity, contending that such approaches can offer unique insights into the meanings people ascribe to experiences, practices and performances. Drawing on my study of tourist-brand relationships, I illustrate the capacity which reflexive and participant-led research programmes using methods (auto-ethnography and narrative interpretation), and participatory and sensory devices (auto-driving, photo-elicitation and visual texts) have to fathom the complex and often hidden symbolic meanings of the tourist experience.

Key words: progressive, interpretive, narrative, authority, voice, autoethnography, auto-driving, projective techniques

Introduction

Tourism is concerned with considerations of seeing, being, meaning, knowing and identity (Jamal and Hollinshead 2001). It is a human, active, ludic, sensory, pleasurable and experiential activity with a complex sub-strata of discourses. For qualitative tourism researchers, where depth of meaning in human behaviour is paramount, the challenge is in 'finding out', and developing methods that enable the researcher to penetrate the surface and mine the rich complexities of individual experience. This paper is based on my interpretative, autoethnographic doctoral study which addresses individual relationships between tourism products and consumers at a micro-level. In explaining why and how I came to adopt an individual, participatory approach, I draw attention to

the strictures and constraints that bind (and blind) qualitative tourism researchers and, in telling about my own study, highlight issues of authority, participation, situation and influence.

Denzin's (2004:1) observation that 'experimental, reflective ways of writing first-person ethnographic texts are now common place' does not apply within tourism enquiry, the majority of which still fails to step beyond the comfort zone of traditional, systematic and selective data collection and reporting. Despite increasing acceptance of 'traditional' qualitative methods within tourism, it is lagging behind other cognate fields in acknowledging and receiving diverse, progressive turns in research. Moreover, the largely positivist perspectives which dominate fail to adequately explain the depths of meanings and behaviours so critical to industries and research fields concerned with people (Ateljevic 2000, Jamal and Hollinshead 2001). Indeed, according to Hollinshead (2004:65-66) 'tourism studies is not yet in rude "qualitative" health' and pays little cross-disciplinary attention to the subjective, the discursive or the interpretive, in short, to those elements which are the essence of qualitative research. This can be attributed largely to the 'gatekeepers' of the tourism academy – the journal editors and editorial board members, manuscript reviewers and research degree supervisors and examiners who collectively 'set the parameters in which individuals are encouraged to work if they wish to be at the centre of issues in their discipline' (Spender 1981:186). It is those in privileged positions that should be driving research forward, and yet they are myopic, adhering as they still primarily do to positivist notions of fixed paradigms and systematic, structured data collection, analysis, validity and reliability. Much published research is dominated by traditional ways of 'doing research' which are embedded within the cultures of many management science-dominated tourism departments (Hall 2004, Hollinshead 2004). External assessments of research 'quality' drive academic funding within the United Kingdom, with the criterion of 'quality' being quantitatively assessed (for example the ranking system of the Research Assessment Exercise which evaluates candidates according to the numbers of publications in quantitatively ranked journals). However, there is a growing body of researchers, writers and academics who recognize that in order for tourism research to meet the needs of a field as significant, complex,

experiential, people-centred and interactive as tourism it is imperative to push out the boundaries, and receive paradigms that value diverse, flexible, reflexive and participatory approaches, methods – and appropriate judgement criteria.

Situation, Self and Participation

I was schooled in the conventional social science approach to academic writing – that is, within the boundaries that are set and accepted by the 'members' (Miller *et al.* 1998) of a particular discipline and so, when I began my doctoral project, initially I did not question, and indeed, had no awareness of, any other approach to writing. Consequently, I initially adopted the 'accepted' format – distancing myself from the work by using the passive, which as Holliday (2002:127) argues 'pushes the person of the author into the background'. However, I struggled, it did not sit with the culture and the nature of my research - I was unable to detach and disembody myself as a multiplicit, experienced tourism professional and consumer from myself as a researcher. Arguably, in today's Westernised world we are all inescapably tourists (Robinson 2003), and I had increasing difficulty in trying to reconcile this imposed detachment with my aims, which were after all concerned with meaning and gaining deeper understanding of people's behaviour. I needed to adopt an approach that reflected the multi-dimensional complexity, the significance of context and the value of the human element in research, and that integrated the perspective, the cultural consciousness and the self-awareness of myself as the researcher within the process. An approach that, rather than trying to eliminate my involvement, enabled me to use it to interpret people, places and situations. As I began to read about research approaches that embrace the flexible, emergent nature of the research, acknowledge the writers voice, make use of the first person and include personal experience, I felt liberated and excited, and at the same time, vulnerable and isolated. My supervisors were thankfully very supportive, but I was breaking new ground and, apart from some interdisciplinary texts, I had little guidance. I was also very aware that in defying the conventions of tourism research I was taking a risk of not having the work accepted, as was evident in the many words of caution (and hearteningly, some

cautious encouragement) that I received when I presented a paper on my approach at a tourism conference.

Key aspects of the study were situation, participation, and voice with reference to myself as researcher, and to the participants. The traditional, scientific realist style of writing holds that in order to be authoritative it is necessary to adopt the passive, third-person voice, which denies and distances the writer 'physically, psychologically and ideologically' (Foley 1998:110). However, 'voice' is not limited to a grammatical stance; it embodies the power and the assumptions that influence the methods, interpretation and presentation. Research should not be limited by agendas that deny participants opportunities to express their experiences through their own words and texts (Ryan 1995 2000), and in autoethnography this extends to the researcher. Being concerned not only with my own situation, but that of the participants, I considered them as participatory individuals, actively involving them in the research process and contextualising them in the research through a bio-profile and presenting their narratives individually. Similarly, I reflected on my own position, locating myself in the research and adopting an autoethnographic style (what Ellis and Bochner, 2000:740, term 'reflexive ethnography') through the consideration of my own experiences alongside those of the participants.

As well as myself, there were seven participants in the study all of whom (for reasons of confidentiality) adopted pseudonyms which they chose themselves (and which are used in this paper). Tourism elevates the visual above all else (Botterill and Crompton 1987, Adler 1989, Rojek 1995, Ryan 2001, Urry 2002), and in order to foster participant ownership in the research process and to reflect tourism's discourses of play and pleasure, I used auto-driving and photo-elicitation techniques (Hirschman 1986, Belk et al. 1988, 1989, Askegaard 2001) in a series of guided conversations where participants were encouraged to tell their stories of tourism experiences, using visual texts that they had produced as stimuli. Interviews and focus groups are two of the most commonly utilised 'tools' of qualitative tourism research. While undoubtedly effective, they have limitations because they tend to elicit responses that conform to societal rules and constraints, and thus fail to capture the subtleties inherent in human behaviour.

Participants are often reluctant to present themselves in a light that is less than acceptable and rational, and consequently tend to express themselves in ways that are generally understandable and intelligible within the particular social situation. Additionally, these methods involve a high level of manipulation by the researcher who plans the interviews, has some pre-conception of the responses and, despite the openness and lack of structure, influences and controls the proceedings. While such methods enable the researcher to listen, to follow the train of thought of the participants, and provide opportunities for eliciting deeper information, it is the researcher who ultimately negotiates the path of the conversations according to a pre-determined agenda. However, venturing beyond the rational involves delving beneath the surface to explore hidden, personal, emotional and subconscious behaviour and to encourage participants to articulate what they often do not know is there.

In this study I used visual texts (photographs and collages) made by the participants themselves, and which were subsequently used by the participants to lead the conversations. These techniques minimised researcher control and involvement, while enabling the participants to structure and impose meaning into the task (Branthwaite and Lunn 1985). Using what Heisley and Levy (1991:261) term ‘a multiple iteration approach to autodriving’, at the end of the first guided conversation (during which the participants spoke about their tourism experiences in their childhood, as well as the more recent), the participants were each given a disposable camera and asked to take photographs of things significant to their personal tourism activities. I chose to use disposable cameras rather than the supply of a film and processing for the participants’ own cameras for several reasons. Engaging in in-depth research projects can often which involve significant time and effort on the part of the participants. In keeping with tourism’s ludic nature, the tasks (while being acknowledged methods and techniques), were thus developed to incorporate elements of play and fun – to be considered by the participants as being pleasurable (in the spirit of holiday taking) rather than mundane and onerous. The photographs needed to be spontaneous and ad hoc, and the disposable camera had some novelty value which I considered would be more likely to make the task fun and distinct from other photograph taking.

In subsequent guided conversations these photographs were used by the participants to drive the discussions. A key finding of this activity was the significance of constraints in shaping the individual experiences. As the first interviews progressed the significance of the various constraints (such as financial, family, time and psychological) led me to consider that their hypothetical removal might be a way to get closer to people's inner feelings, perceptions, aspirations and behaviour. I considered that if the photographs were representative of the *actual* experience within the various constraints, then it would be more revealing of the deeper feelings and meanings if the constraints were removed – in effect by representing a '*what if?*' situation, then the participants would extend their imaginations and emotions. To this end, the participants were asked to project their minds – to imagine that all these constraints had disappeared, to let their minds run free – to daydream and really express themselves through their collages and depict their ideal travel experiences for example, companions, destinations, activities, and favourite or desired travel items (such as luggage, cameras, clothing). Again these collages were used as stimuli for the interviews which followed, with the participants using the pictures and representations to navigate the conversations according to their underlying desires, influences and motives.

Compared with methods that prioritise control, replication and consistency, such techniques may seem, as Branthwaite and Lunn (1985:101) acknowledge: 'highly ambiguous, novel and sometimes even bizarre'. However, using self generated material and techniques that actively involved the participants are highly effective, as they shift authority from researcher to participant, minimise prior outcome constraints and researcher interference, and thus enhance the quality and quantity of rich and high-context information (Levy 1980, 1981, 1985, Kleinman 1985, Heisley and Levy 1991, Askegaard 2001). Here, they also proved a pleasurable experience for the participants (including myself) – who all produced very rich visuals. Like Elizabeth, several other participants remarked that it had enabled them to gain interesting insights into their own behaviour:

> *It was a pleasure. When I got the time to actually sit down and do it. I kept having little thoughts about it, but actually doing it, I loved doing it. I could sit down and dream all day long.*

Dai commented '*it's been good fun and I found it self-revelatory too'*, whilst Rebecca noted:

> *it was good – I felt I was in control – I could find my own way around it, I wasn't always waiting for you to ask me questions, and – you know, trying to concentrate - think of answers – much less stressful and yes, I had the control, and could just talk ... and go back to things if I'd forgotten something.*

During this period I too constructed a collage, took photographs of my own tourism experiences, and kept records, sometimes written, sometimes recorded onto tape, from the time of the conception of the trip, through the actual trip and the post-trip reflections. I recorded my experiences and my emotions, for example anticipation, curiosity and pleasure through the hedonistic pursuit of leisure, and satisfaction through an awareness of the academic capital being gained in the 'experiencing' of the leisure tourism pursuit. Doing these tasks enabled me to understand and reflect on the activities that the participants were undertaking and provided a further way to dissolve the boundaries between (my) self and 'others', something that, in relation to the influences of postmodernism on tourism research, Galani-Moutafi (2000:217) considers as 'an increasing reorientation of the ethnographer's gaze towards the self, as the appropriate place for interpreting cultural experience'. It also provided valuable insights into my own behaviours and significances of holiday experiences relative to those of the participants. This combination of textual information formed the basis for my autoethnographic interpretation.

Interpretation and Presentation

The conversations were structured only by the visual material that each individual had constructed, and in which narratives of personal experience were located. ‘Analysing’ texts that are rich in individuality and narrative through conventional methods of coding, categorising and grouping thematic material inevitably results in losing the context and the social connectivity inherent in the stories people tell (Glover 2003, Riessman 2000). The voices of the participants merge and become indistinguishable from each other, with the researcher voice overriding the individuality and shaping the interpretations. There is no such thing as ‘correct’ interpretation as it is invariably subject to the influences, perspectives and inter-subjectivities of those involved - self, the participants and the receiving audience (Padgett and Allen 1997, Patton 2002, Pritchard and Morgan 2004). While I recognise that researchers will always shape the text and make the ultimate decisions about whose voices will be heard (Reissman 1993, Denzin 1997, Coffey 1999), to minimise my influence and avoid fracturing and fragmenting the narratives and isolating aspects of their experiences, each individual’s narratives were presented separately with my interpretations included as a ‘discursive commentary’ (Holliday 2002:98).

Here I present brief extracts from the narratives of two participants, Dai and Audrey, in order to illustrate the depth and richness of material generated by ‘messy’ (Jamal and Hollinshead 2001:70) research. The personal narratives reflect the variegated, complex and situated nature of tourism experiences and reveal how the participants’ personalities, life experiences and aspirations combine to shape their expectations, perceptions and subsequent experiences. They also illustrate the significance of these experiences on the construction of self-identity. It is very doubtful that such intimate and personal insights would have been forthcoming without the use of the participant-active techniques.

Dai

Dai is a highly active man in his 60s. His consciousness of age and his defiance of aging emerged strongly in both his collage and his interviews. Here, he reflects on his awareness of ageing, and referring to his collage which is crammed with images of challenging sport and leisure activities associated with younger people, explains how wearing a particular brand of youth wear allows him access to a particular social group:

> *I suppose it's a scream for a long lost youth I suppose, I don't know, it must be something pretty deep in there that makes me want to put a stupid t-shirt on and wear ragged cut shorts and enjoy myself with guys who are only 20 or 30 and join in on the cycling and the rest of it so yes, I suppose they are illustrative of the fact that I try not to think I'm old. Basically my interests, to be serious for a second, are of someone generally speaking a lot younger than I am, I mean the fact that I go to the gym five days a week, I go cycling, I go to pop concerts, I go to tap dance lessons, they're not the normal things that someone of my age does, they're the sort of things that people younger than me do, I don't do it because I want to be younger, I do it because that's the way I am and I suppose really these illustrate what I think I am because there are two people, I think I've told you before, I'm sorry to harp on about the age thing but you will find that you end up there's two people; there's the person you think you are and the person you feel and then there's the person you see in the mirror and in photographs where you're not posing. And they are quite different from one another and it's quite shocking sometimes. So if you notice here, there's nothing to suggest age is there? This is what I mean, this could be enjoyed by a 20 year old, 30 year old, 40, 50, there's nothing there that …I mean, they probably think 'what a silly arse'. I mean it's not to impress them because this is what I mean ... there are two me's if you like, there's the person I think I am and I could wear that silly shirt and think I look a cool dude and yet they would look at me and think, what's that silly old fart doing dressed like that, so it's certainly not to impress them. I*

> *would feel more part of the scene than if I was wearing something more formal amongst all these kids enjoying themselves, that's all. It's so they don't turn around and think 'well he's out of place here'. They may think I look a fool but they wouldn't think I look out of place, there's a difference isn't there, a subtle difference.*

Dai is a frequent traveller both on business alone and for leisure when he is usually accompanied by his wife. While he never criticises her or gives the impression that he is dissatisfied in any way, he describes them as being '*a bit like Jack Sprat and his wife – what she likes I don't like and she doesn't like very much,* and the significance of the constraints soon emerges through the repeated referral to the things that his wife wouldn't and couldn't do. There was a marked difference in his behaviour in terms of the things he does and the places he visits during the business trips, his biking holidays and his very active imaginary holiday experiences and the holidays he takes when accompanied by his wife, which are much more sedentary and relaxed. Dai enjoys food and he derives great sensory pleasure in eating out, however his wife doesn't feel the same, so he makes the most of it when on business trips:

> *For instance she doesn't like Chinese food, or Thai food, or food that's been 'mucked about' as she would say – she likes everything plain, so going out – you know, the eating experience - is not very stimulating back at home so when I go over there I make sure that I eat in places I wouldn't go with her – I trawl the best eating places.*

Leisure consumption is an increasingly important element in the lives of contemporary consumers (Firat and Venkatesh 1995:244) who increasingly seek products to 'delight and excite the senses' and indulge in awareness of choice. Dai's use of emotive and descriptive vocabulary – he recalls a dish of prawns and noodles as being '*absolutely stunning'* and the emphasis on the taste and quality of the food is further demonstration of his pleasure, even to the extent of taking several photographs of the exterior of restaurants and plates of his food. Other photographs illustrate the way he indulges in

consumption choices, for example the array of sweets on sale at the airport (which he always browses but doesn't always buy) and his talismanic purchase of the magazine Private Eye, '*I ALWAYS buy Private Eye – nothing else will do'* indicate the significance of ritual, sensory pleasure and anticipation in his airport behaviour.

Audrey

Audrey is very literate, is creative, artistic and conscious of style and form, all which carries through to her lifestyle, and is evidenced in the way she dresses and decorates her home. Aged 26 at the time of the conversations, she was quite recently married without children. In our earlier conversations, the focus was very much on her as part of a collective, family unit including her husband, parents and younger sister. While she is strong willed and determined, she seemed perfectly acquiescent and contented with the choices and styles of holiday that she engages with. However, when talking about her idealised holiday and her collage she revealed a different side to herself, through distinct contrasts between current experiences and aspirational experiences. Audrey's collage is a complex myriad of juxtaposed images in which brands feature prominently. In her narrative she reflects on the importance of fluidity and freedom from time and social constraints, which are represented in the collage by a range of diverse destinations and representations of style. The most surprising aspect is that linked to her theme of fluidity is her choice of travelling companion. She remarks that while she gave careful consideration to the choice of companion, rather than choose a '*real*' person to accompany her on the journeys, instead she chose a strongly branded car: '*I decided that my companion would be a Mini Cooper'*. The fit between the personality of the brand and the self concept of the consumer is a key aspect in the engagement with a particular brand (Lannon and Cooper 1983, McCracken 1990, Aaker 1996, 1997, 1999). Physically, Audrey is conventionally very attractive, petite, neat and stylish and she identifies with things British, artistic and avant-garde. These are similar to the personality characteristics that she ascribes to the now 'retro' Mini Cooper which has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity since its re-launch. Britishness is a recurrent theme throughout her narratives and it is clear that she has strong affinity with her nationality and its symbolic icons. In her narratives, 'Audrey' reveals how holidays enable her to step out

of her everyday self into another role (Restall and Gordon 1993). Her pleasure in these experiences is heightened by her awareness of their transient nature, and of her own role in their creation. Aware of the fragility and temporality of the moment she immerses herself into a variety of 'experiential moments' (Firat and Schultz 2001:5), consciously playing with signs, roles and identities, using brands and consumption goods to enhance and enrich her experiences (Feifer 1985, Urry 2002). The following excerpt also illustrates the sensory aspects of consumption relationships:

> *And then this is a camera, this is our aspirational camera which we cannot afford, but we would love a Leica just because they are beautifully made, they just look very stylish and they produce a nice clunk click and they are just great, so in an ideal world I would have a Leica and I love their red ... blob thing. And then ... I just love Chanel as a label anyway, and it represents sort of continental sophistication and kind of glamour and that's quite cool as well, that sort of cardigan over a bikini so that's very holiday-ish sort of wear obviously ... you know, you could feasibly wear that for lunch on holiday, obviously you wouldn't do that anywhere else. So I just wanted that there just for the whole feeling of almost like a role play for me - this whole holiday thing is just to be somebody I couldn't afford to be here and just my lifestyle ... going to lunch in Chanel would be part of it. And I suppose the whole idea of having a lovely swimsuit to go away, to take away, you know, the towel and the bag ... I mean ... you see people, often continental women, who just look all very tidy, kind of, smart and British people, well my impression of British people anyway is that they often have hundreds of bags, which is what I am like in real life but I'd love to be that person who just trips down to the pool with a book and a towel and everything is all very chic so with those matching swimsuits, that kind of thing ... l love cocktails, they're so camp and such impractical drinks, that sort of represents being somewhere different and a different personality for me, and it's decadent as well because you know with cocktails you have to buy a huge bottle of*

> *something just to use a dash of it in a cocktail so that whole thing of being, money is no object ... Margaritas [are] always lovely. But you know I quite like a cocktail in a Martini glass ... to have somewhere - sitting by a pool or something - that feels very holiday-ish because it is quite a spindly glass, it's quite fragile, you know, it's not something like a heavy pint or something like that so that gives a whole different way to holding it, a different feel. I quite like rum cocktails too because that feels very Caribbean.*

Whilst some positivists and post-positivists may argue that the very nature of 'story telling' is based on exaggeration and recall, and thus query its validity, narrative analysts (e.g. Riessman 2000, Glover 2003) argue that while the 'truths' in the stories are not necessarily objective truths, they contribute significantly to the understanding of human behaviour and reasoning. The levels of participant control and voice address issues of 'validity' and 'reliability' but in a way that is commensurate with the nature of the research rather than with those proposed by a more scientific approach (Lincoln and Guba 1986, Sparkes 2000, 2002, Pritchard and Morgan 2004). Terms such as consistent, generalizable, predictable, accurate cannot be applied to interpretative methods, the very strength of which lies in their flexibility, unpredictability and idiosyncrasies (Kreiger 1991). Studies which adopt interpretive enquiry should be judged on such considerations as the level of transparency and success (Holliday 2002), and the rapport the researcher achieves with the participants combined with their activity and involvement in the process. In addition (and as they were in this study), the participants should be given the opportunity to read and comment on the researcher's analysis before this is finally presented, in order to increase their sense of control over the process and the conversations, whilst enabling researchers to reflect on what they had said, to reiterate and seek clarification and expansion of topics if deemed necessary. Indeed, just as Sparkes (2000, 2002) advocates a different set of criteria for judging contemporary qualitative research, it is vital to recognise the implications of the difference between traditional and modernist, scientifically based qualitative inquiry and more contemporary, inductive approaches for making judgements of credibility (Lincoln and Guba 1985,

Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Pritchard and Morgan 2004). These writers argue that perspectives such as interpretivism demand other judgement criteria which are empathetic to the nature of the research philosophy. They advocate that judgement should be based on dependability (presenting a clearly articulated pattern of enquiry and interpretation) and authenticity (reflexive awareness of yourself as the researcher, and appreciation and understanding of the position and perspective of others – the researched, the participants and the reader).

This equally applies to the analysis of qualitative information - Wolcott (2001:33) equates the term 'analysis' with positivist, standardised, systematic procedures, asserting that reliability stems from this standardisation rather than from the appropriateness of the procedures. Describing interpretation as a 'freewheeling activity' he states that:

> Interpretation, by contrast, is not derived from rigorous, agreed-upon, carefully selected procedures, but from our efforts at sense-making, a human activity that includes intuition, past experience, emotion – personal attributes of human researchers that can be argued endlessly but neither proved nor disproved to the satisfaction of all. Interpretation invites the examination, the "pondering", of data in terms of what people make of it.

For Denzin (1994), the facts never speak for themselves in social science research: there is only ever a researcher's interpretation. For him and researchers like him, we can never achieve or aspire to 'objective' knowledge for 'knowledge is not a matter of getting a true or objective picture of reality but of creating tools with which to cope with the world' (Barker and Galasinski 2001:46). More important in the new interpretivist and postmodern ways of knowing are the researchers' abilities to gauge the results of the research against their own objectives, rather than some external 'reality'; in this, they must be open to the notion that there may be multiple, competing and conflicting interpretations of their analysis (Jamal and Hollinshead 2001). Ultimately, evaluation of the adequacy of an interpretive study will be pragmatic and it will be judged on the extent

to which it ‘makes possible new and meaningful interpretations of the social and political phenomena it investigates (Howarth 2000: 130).

Conclusion

I have drawn on a study that, while challenging, rewarding and exciting, was not without risk – within tourism there remain issues regarding what is considered to be ‘appropriate’ and ‘legitimate’ in terms of sound research, and thus a reluctance to embrace progressive stances which are employed and considered ‘safe’ in other disciplines concerned with understanding meaning and behaviour. I have drawn attention to the dominance of orthodoxy and the underlying networks of power in the tourism academy, particularly the gatekeeping institutions in publishing, who are critical to the direction of academic discourse (Morley and Walsh 1995). The research methodologies and techniques which I have used foreground the ‘situated researcher’ and encourage greater participant involvement and reflexivity. Presenting participants’ stories as narratives privileges their positionality and subjectivity (Riessman 2000). When combined with methods such as auto-driving, photo-elicitation and visual texts, narrative approaches are an even more powerful platform, and have the capacity to offer unique insights into the meanings people ascribe to tourism experiences, practices and performances.

In both the design of the research programme, and more significantly in the criteria for judging research, there is a need for the tourism academy to acknowledge that legitimate social science research includes progressive paradigms which are vital for the advancement of academic theorizing. There are manifold opportunities in embracing variety and innovation in the way that research is conducted, interpreted and written, and its scholars would do well to recognise that investigating ‘the ontologies of being, meaning and identity in the contemporary age is frequently a messy matter of infinite interpretive possibilities’ (Hollinshead 2004: 63).

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