CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH IN TOURISM

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Abstract: Whilst quantitative and qualitative research methods have been comprehensively discussed in the literature there remains a notable absence of discussion about conceptual research. This study addresses this gap and provides an original contribution through a rigorous analysis of conceptual research in tourism. It distinguishes between conceptual and other types of research and provides a detailed definition and evaluation of the concept. Quantitative and qualitative content analysis of published journal articles generates three significant outcomes. First, conceptual research, whilst increasing in popularity, is seen to be relatively marginal in tourism research. Second a typology of conceptual research issues is constructed. Third a new definition is proposed. Finally an analysis of five examples provides a more holistic understanding of conceptual research and its processes and products.

Keywords: research methods, conceptual research, empirical research, epistemology

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is growing rapidly both as an activity and as an academic subject and the latter has spawned a steady growth in the literature on its research methods (Cukier, 2006). Various research classification systems have been developed within the social sciences (Bryman, 2008; Corbetta, 2003; Gray, 2009) and tourism research is commonly labelled as quantitative, qualitative or mixed. In its early phase, research was dominated by quantitative methods (Walle, 1997) but qualitative research is now increasingly popular (Goodson and Philimore, 2004). Whilst researchers have comprehensively examined the procedures of quantitative and qualitative research, a notable gap in the literature remains - that of conceptual research - where meanings and methods are less well understood. This is not to say that conceptual research doesn't exist in tourism. Tribe, Xiao and Chambers (2012) point to a 15% contribution of conceptual/review articles to *Annals of Tourism Research* in 2011-2012. Similarly a number of tourism concepts roll readily off the tongue, including mobilities, dark tourism and authenticity.

There also appear to be types of broad conceptual questions that cannot be approached empirically without losing their essence. These questions are being addressed in an effective way in the literature using something other than qualitative or quantitative research in the scientific tradition. This conceptual research stream deserves to be analysed in the tourism epistemology literature and this article addresses this significant research gap. Its aim, to clarify and better understand conceptual research, is structured around three objectives. First the literature is interrogated to clarify the concept, to provide an epistemological grounding and discuss its value. The second objective, to discover the extent of conceptual research, is achieved through an indicative quantitative content analysis of published journal articles. The third objective, to analyse the key issues and approaches of conceptual research and construct a typology of these, uses qualitative content analysis and specific examples. Finally a concluding section summarises key findings, presents a definition of conceptual research in tourism, as well as limitations and future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a Concept?

According to Cambridge Dictionaries Online (n.d.) a concept is simply “a principle or idea”. But for Locke (1847) a concept is more than an idea. It is a general idea. It is formed through abstraction and the discarding of uncommon characteristics from individual ideas and collecting those ideas with common characteristics. Nietzsche (1954, p. 46) further explains how concepts originate “through our equating what is unequal. No leaf ever wholly equals another, and the concept 'leaf' is formed through an arbitrary abstraction from these individual differences, through forgetting the distinctions”. We could say the same about the concept of a tourist. Kant (1974 (orig. 1800)) adds that concept formation is enabled through the processes of comparison, reflection and abstraction and also stressed the importance of finding similarities in constituent cases that comprise an overarching concept. Beaney (2003) explains that conceptual analysis can also involve breaking down concepts into their constituent parts in order to improve understanding.

The way a term is used can also help to understand meaning. So for example Butler (1980, p. 5) writes about the “concept of a tourism area life cycle of evolution”, Cazes (1989) reflects on the concept of alternative tourism and Olsen (2002, p. 1) discusses “authenticity as a concept in tourism research”. A thesaurus search for the word concept generates synonyms such as notion, thought, model, idea and belief. Similarly distinguishing a term from competing terms can lead to greater clarity. So the term theory, while it bears a family

resemblance to concept, seems to do different work. A theory is more about cause and effect and offers more predictive power. Hence we have the theory of gravity, the theory of the firm. Theories often emerge from hypotheses and seek to explain how things behave. Concepts describe and help us understand complex ideas (e.g. responsibility) and propose novel juxtapositions of ideas (e.g. responsible tourism).

Research on Conceptual Research

There is a dearth of research on conceptual research although a limited literature exists outside of tourism studies. For example part of Meredith's (1993) research in Operations & Production Management defines terms relevant to conceptual research methods and describes different conceptual classification schemes. Dreher (2000) devotes a book to conceptual research in psychoanalysis clarifying the term and explaining the importance of key Freudian clinical concepts such as transference, resistance and interpretation. She also explores the relationship between empirical and conceptual research. Elsewhere, conceptual research is found to be one of the three most used research methods in Information System Studies, but researchers report a lack of codified principles and procedures (Mora, Gelman, Paradise and Cervantes, 2008). Furthermore, Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann (2006) indicate that the quality criteria for conceptual research have not been clearly defined. Similarly, Squires, Estabrooks, Newburn-Cook and Gierl (2011) point to a lack of reliability and validity measures in conceptual research.

As for tourism, researchers could be forgiven for thinking that there are only two approaches to knowledge creation – quantitative and qualitative methods. An examination of key textbooks on tourism research confirms this view. The repertoire offered by Veal's (1997) text is limited to qualitative methods, questionnaire surveys, questionnaire design, survey analysis and statistical analysis. Texts from Finn, Elliott-White and Walton (2000) and Jennings (2001) only cover qualitative and quantitative research. None of these texts offer any insights into conceptual research. The only exception is a brief note in a paper by Mehmetoglu (2004) that distinguishes between conceptual and empirical research.

Epistemological Issues

At the outset it should be noted that all research involves concepts and that these are developed more or less explicitly. But we wish to identify a special category of conceptual research so it is necessary to examine the relationship between conceptual and empirical research. Simon (1969) defines empirical research as "that which obtains knowledge from first-hand observations or experimentation as well as the re-examination of data collected by

others” (p.6). Some scholars consider conceptual research as opposite to empirical research (Bowen and Sparks, 1998; Gagnon, 1982; Schwab, 1999; Weibelzahl and Weber, 2002) whilst others hold different opinions (Dreher, 2000, 2003; Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2004; Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann, 2006). Of course concepts are central to each of the four major research paradigms - positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism and criticalism but for brevity we will clarify the epistemological and ontological issues of conceptual research in relation to the two main traditions of objectivism and subjectivism.

Objectivists believe that “experience is the foundation of all knowledge” (Bryant, 1985:1) so that we can only have knowledge of phenomena that are available to our senses. Objectivists thus assert that metaphysical phenomena have no validity as ‘knowledge’. Further, the “truth or falsity of scientific theories depends exclusively upon their logical relationships to the empirical data provided through observation” (Keat, 1981:2). Stegmuller (1978) asserts that “it is impossible to gain an insight about the real world and its laws by mere reflection and without empirical control”(p.346). In this view, conceptual research can only lead to valid knowledge if it is supported by empirical observation. Objectivism and its associated empiricism do not perceive conceptual work as autonomous research. Instead conceptual research is:

‘accorded no more than a heuristic meaning or preparatory role in the research process, if they are recognised at all. “Proper” research is said to concern itself with the collection, evaluation and interpretation of data, not with concepts’ (Dreher, 2000: 4).

Here conceptual research is not sui-generis but is rather often a preliminary stage in a wider research process, used to clarify research questions and hypotheses and as a reference point for interpreting empirical data. For objectivists, conceptual and empirical research are thus inextricably intertwined in the creation of knowledge. Although Kuhn (1970) destabilised the objectivist/positivist project and its focus on empiricism through his conceptualisation of paradigms, he nevertheless described science as a “two-directional process determined by the interaction of empirical observation and a priori ‘paradigmatic’ frameworks” (Alexander, 1982: 24). Kuhn also did not envisage that conceptualisation could be independent of empiricism in the creation of knowledge. Consequently under objectivism conceptualisation is seen as a tool for gaining knowledge about a subject rather than a concept being the subject of the research itself (Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann, 2006).

In contrast a subjectivist approach traces its history to the Kantian model of human rationality in which the process of knowing and the emergence of knowledge are based upon

an epistemology which transcends “the limits of empirical inquiry” (Hamilton, 1994:63).

Kant departed from the traditional Cartesian objectivism by arguing that:

‘human knowledge is ultimately based on understanding, an intellectual state that is more than just a consequence of experience. Thus for Kant, human claims about nature cannot be independent of inside-the-head processes of the knowing subject’ (Hamilton, 1994:63).

Subjectivists do not believe that there is an objective truth lying dormant waiting to be discovered. Meaning is not discovered, but is constructed. This suggests that different people may construct meaning in different ways even with regard to the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). The subject and the object of investigation are inextricably linked in the creation of knowledge thus collapsing the conventional distinction between epistemology and ontology (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). According to Schwandt (1994), the concern here is with issues of knowing and being rather than with issues of method. In this sense conceptual research, according to Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann (2006) “is not defined by a method but by a topic”(p.1375). Alexander’s argument for “theoretical methodology” further supports the case for conceptual research:

‘There is a logic at work in the scientific process that has been ignored by spokesmen for the positivist persuasion in social science. Science proceeds as surely by a generalizing or “theoretical logic” as it does by the empirical logic of experiment and the positivist decision to focus on the latter alone must ultimately prove as self-defeating ... If the nature of social science is to be properly understood ... the careful attention to methodological rules for induction from empirical observation must be matched by an effort to create a ‘theoretical methodology.’(1982:33).

Against the background of a subjectivist epistemology, it is axiomatic that there is a distinct form of research that can be deemed to be conceptual research which, while it may involve some empirical elements, is not limited by, or dependent upon empiricism. At this juncture it is important to reiterate why the word ‘concept’ is being used instead of ‘theory’ since according to Dreher (2000), the word theory conjures up thoughts of systems of scientific statements which are legitimated based on experience and this mirrors the objectivist approach.

So we position conceptual research as a particular research strategy that sits mainly in the subjectivist / interpretivist paradigm (with possibilities for critical engagement). As such it does not purport to offer hypotheses testing or theory development. But yet it is quite

different from other interpretivist strategies such as ethnography, interviews and focus groups since these depend largely on qualitative empirical data for their development and validation. Of course conceptual research cannot always escape some element of empirical engagement. This might be through prior observations of the researcher that were not originally driven by the research project in hand but are now recalled to forge new connections. Similarly conceptual research may build upon previous concepts that are themselves generated from empirical data collection. But a key characteristic of conceptual research is that it can progress without the need for immediate or specific empirical data to support its knowledge claim. Its outcomes are relativist. It allows for multiple mental constructions and these depend mainly on the persons that create them for their form.

Quality Issues

Its subjectivist epistemology does not mean that anything goes in conceptual research. Of course the results of conceptual research cannot be proven or disproven by an appeal to empirical data. They are non-falsifiable (Popper, 1959) and so for adherents to strict objectivism/ scientism they have no worth. But it was Albert Einstein who exposed the limitations of such a view by commenting that not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted. If conceptual research that counts cannot be validated by counting it is at least possible to discuss its grounds for warranted knowing. Quality control is predicated on a number of protocols. The first is good scholarship and this entails the ability to execute a comprehensive and rigorous literature review and to weigh and sift evidence.

Second, is the need for what might be termed soft falsification or concept scepticism. This requires that counter evidence should be sought and systematically evaluated as well as supporting evidence in an attempt to refine a concept. This draws an important distinction between conceptual research and polemic since the latter represents a firmly committed, sometimes dogmatic belief and a much more one-sided attempt to establish its position by the refutation, even ridicule, of counter beliefs. The two important traditions of Socratic method and dialectics are also significant. Socratic method entails a persistent desire to refine a proposition by sceptical questioning. Dialectics is a related process by which a thesis gives rise to a contradictory anti-thesis with a view to achieving acceptable synthesis.

Third, rhetoric is crucial and this requires attention to structure, logic and plausibility of the argument presented. Fourth, triangulation and proximity require that the conceptual contribution relates to and maps against established neighbouring concepts. Fifth, validity here means that the results are consistent with the problem that initiated the research. Sixth,

transparency requires that the process by which the results were obtained is clear and carefully documented. Seventh, usefulness means that the results add to human understanding. Eighth, the requirements of additionality and revelation demand that the results of conceptual research make something visible that was previously not so. Ninth, given the subjectivist nature of conceptual research, an element of reflexivity, to understand the influence of the self on knowledge construction, is necessary. These protocols can be summed up as a commitment to academic openness, good scholarship and judgement.

The Concept and Classification of Conceptual Research

Bowen and Sparks (1998) depict conceptual research as an opposite term to 'empirical research' covering all 'non-empirical research'. Mehmetoglu (2004) classifies tourism and hospitality articles into either conceptual or empirical by applying the Bowen and Sparks test finding that 40% can be classified as conceptual research whilst the rest are empirical. But is all non-empirical research conceptual research? The answer is no since non-empirical research is broader than just conceptual research and can include literary research, historical research, philosophical research and so on. Historical research makes use of historical sources to study the past, including the ideas of individuals and groups (Kothari, 2008). Since historical research often reviews past social ideas, attitudes, beliefs, or understandings of a particular issue and analyses how these have changed over time, it is sometimes classified as conceptual research.

However, conceptual research not only attempts to review historical issues of concept(s), but seeks to undertake a logical clarification of concepts and analysis of the use of a concept. So historical research may sometimes have a conceptual element but at other times be non-conceptual. The relationship between philosophical research and conceptual research though, is much closer particularly in the analytic tradition where the major focus is on the analysis of concepts. Can research be both conceptual and empirical? The answer is yes as illustrated in the section on objectivism. What kind of research falls under our use of the term 'conceptual research'? Conceptual research is a form of research that is essential to the analytical process (Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2004). It includes attempts to formally and systematically reason about analytic statements regarding reality as well as the analytic practice and the practical ideas that have emerged from it.

Young (1995) proposes that an important defining parameter of conceptual research is its attempt to systematically clarify concepts. It is generally used to develop new concepts or to reinterpret existing ones (Kothari, 2008; Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann, 2006). That means conceptual research makes the concepts themselves the objects of the research,

investigating the origin, meaning and use of concepts as well as their evolution over time or in other contexts (Wallerstein, 2009). Dreher (2003) also suggests that conceptual research encourages systematic review of relevant knowledge and explains conceptual research in psychoanalysis as:

‘a class of activities, the focus of which lies in the systematic clarification of [psychological] concepts ... research is both about the history of concepts, so as to trace a concept’s origin and development, and equally about the current use of a concept, its clarification and its differentiation’ (2000, pp. 3-4) (brackets added by authors).

We will use this as our initial working definition, adding that conceptual research is neither an opposite term to empirical research nor necessarily synonymous with non-empirical research. Further, review papers, meta-analyses and knowledge syntheses may represent conceptual research if they meet the conditions of the above definition.

*** insert figure 1 about here

Figure 1 shows how conceptual research may be informed by empirical research (flow a) or philosophical analysis (flow b) or a combination of the two. It may provide a point of reference for further philosophical analysis (flow c) or empirical research (flow d). The flow b to d is illustrated by Kim, Wang and Mattila (2010) who proposes a conceptual framework of consumers’ complaint handling processes for hospitality institutions. They indicate that the model needs to be tested by systematic empirical research, thus advocating a more objectivist epistemological approach. A circular flow around b and c is illustrated by Tribe’s (1997) paper on The Indiscipline of Tourism, Leiper’s (2000) critical commentary and Tribe’s (2000) subsequent rejoinder. Conceptual research can further be classified into two types: pure conceptual research and partial conceptual research. Pure conceptual research is research that only involves the analysis of concept(s) in terms of the above definition without recourse to empirical data collection. Here, Diamantis (1999) provides a good example in his clarification of the concept of ecotourism.

Benefits and limitations of Conceptual Research

Some benefits of conceptual research stem from the limitations of empirical research. For example conceptual analysis can help to answer big, holistic questions that are not amenable to empirical analysis, the latter necessitating the creation of small researchable packets so that the broad spirit of the inquiry can get lost. Similarly Mayr (1997) notes that

“the strong empiricism of the Scientific Revolution led to a heavy emphasis on the discovery of new facts, while curiously little reference was made to the important role that the development of new concepts plays in the advancement of science” (p.26). Dreher (2000) makes a similar point that “scientific progress depends on the expansion of empirical findings *and* on new or altered concepts” (p.3). From the view of resources, empirical research is sometimes criticised in terms of time, manpower, and cost. Also it may not be possible to gain access to data needed for its studies.

Empirical research is often less good at suggesting new approaches. Empirical researchers often focus on suitable procedures for testing hypotheses empirically, but can neglect any examination of logical form (Dreher, 2000) or philosophical issues. Further, empirical research can be constrained by focusing on “what is” rather than “what could be” and may be blind to the “invisibility of the obvious” (Kenway and Fahey, 2009). In contrast conceptual research can provide those imaginative, creative and innovative leaps that give research its life (Gray, Williamson and Karp, 2007). Tribe’s (2002) conceptual article on the Philosophic Practitioner makes this point clearly:

“... the method adopted consciously avoids the empirical on the grounds that it may restrict the field of vision to only what already exists. Rather this article seeks to discover what might be” (p. 340)

Creativity can be unleashed enabling both innovation (Carayannis and Gonzalez, 2003; Hall and Williams, 2008) and the developing and expressing of novel ideas (Harvard Business Essentials, 2003).

Creative conceptual research develops new concepts and reinterprets existing ones (Kothari, 2008). It can add new insights to traditional problems, reveal new research tracks, or make conceptual bridges to neighbouring disciplines (Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann, 2006). We may also question the outcomes of empirical research. Are its results universal or only valid for a small group of people? Do they make sense in other settings, especially for people holding different cultural values? Do they challenge existing concepts, or enrich and renew them? Are they reflexive? Conceptual research being more philosophical can address such questions and enlighten empirical science and society through attention to ideology and methodology (Young, 1995). It is often linked to the philosophy of science and can reveal sociological considerations which originate in a specific context (Leuzinger-Bohleber and Fischmann, 2006).

However, conceptual research does have its limitations, chief amongst which is that the quality criteria for conceptual research lack precision (Leuzinger-Bohleber and

Fischmann, 2006). Although Dreher (2003) proposed some defining parameters of conceptual research, she notes that there is no standardised procedure. Also, in order to be legitimised, insights gained by conceptual reflections often have to be ‘translated’ to the empirical situation. However, deviations may occur in the translation process. This is illustrated in the field of psychoanalysis by Dreher (2003) who asks: “How is one to reconcile the various usages of the concept of ‘transference’ in such diversity of contexts?” (p.104). Conceptual researchers should also note that analytical concepts are not always informed by a precise coding and can sometimes be uncertain and vague.

METHOD

The next part of this study investigates both the significance and the nature of conceptual research in tourism although this is limited to journal articles in English. Content analysis is selected as the research method. As Smith (2010) notes, journal articles can be the source of text and used as data for content analysis. Following Tribe (2008) the CABABS (www.leisuretourism.com) database is sourced for data mining. To fulfil aims two and three of this paper the method is divided into two parts. The quantitative part analyses articles to estimate the amount of, and trends in, conceptual research. The qualitative part develops a typology of popular themes presented in conceptual research by in-depth analysis of conceptual research articles.

The CABABS abstracts database captures tourism research from 1974 and for the quantitative study the process of data collection was as follows. First, the search code UU700 was applied to the database as a filter to narrow the search to the tourism realm. Then a variety of different proxy terms which might indicate the presence of conceptual research were used as key search words in CABABS to generate data. Two equal periods of 15 years, spanning 1981-1995 and 1996-2010 were chosen to identify the total amounts of conceptual research and the trend. The year 1981 was chosen because although the abstracts were first fully compiled in 1974 only a few articles were collected between 1974 and 1980.

*** insert Table 1 about here

The proxy terms are listed in the first column of Table 1 and the “wild symbol” of an asterisk is used in the search string in order to pick up different forms of the term (Tribe, 2008). So for example “Concept*” enabled the various forms such as concept, conceptual and conceptualise to be captured. “Notion” and “Idea” were chosen as potential synonyms. Conceptual research sometimes overlaps with philosophical and historical research, therefore

“Philosoph*” (to encompass philosophy and philosophical) and “Histor*” (to encompass history and historical) were also selected as proxy terms. Since conceptual research often involves a review of definitions “Review” was added as a proxy term. Finally conceptual research is often associated with reflexivity and deep questioning so “Refle*” (in order to pick up reflect, reflection, reflective, reflexive and reflexivity) was also used as a search term.

As illustrated in Table 1, the total number of articles that contain the proxy terms is 18,742. However a lot of ‘noise’ exists in this wide population. Noise refers to those articles that contain the proxy terms but which are not conceptual research papers. So the titles, abstracts and sometimes the main body of the articles were carefully checked to judge whether they were pure or partial conceptual research or noise. Because it would have been impractical to assess all 18,742 articles, stratified random sampling was used and the population was divided into seven strata proportionally according to the proxy terms. Four hundred and seventy one articles were selected offering a sample size that is big enough to evaluate the population with an acceptable error value (5%) yet small enough to make analysis feasible.

The percentage of genuine conceptual research articles in the sample of 471 articles was then determined in order to estimate the situation for the whole population. Using the understanding of conceptual research outlined previously a careful inspection was made of the 471 articles one by one to judge which were pure conceptual research. The process proceeded as follows. Each article was scrutinised to first determine whether its title suggested conceptual research and if so the abstract was examined followed by the full paper. For example, the title of Wang and Wang’s (2009) article, *The unified concept of eco-agricultural tourism* suggests conceptual research. A reading of the abstract and the full article indicates that it represents pure conceptual research. It discusses the origins of the “eco agricultural tourism” concept, establishes differences from similar concepts and proposes a unified concept. As another example Ali and Frew (2010) consider how Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be applied to sustainable tourism development. They do not analyse the issues of concept(s) and only occasionally mention the word ‘conceptual’ as in the sentence “This paper discusses and presents a conceptual version of...” Therefore, it was categorised as noise.

A third example scrutinised was *Chasing a myth? Searching for 'self' through lifestyle travel* by Cohen (2010). This hints at conceptual research referring to the concepts of ‘self’ and ‘lifestyle travel’. So the abstract was examined. The first sentence of the abstract: “This paper problematizes the concept of searching for self in the context of lifestyle

travellers.....” suggests conceptual research. A full reading of the paper found that it clarified the meaning of the concept of searching for self in a particular context—lifestyle travellers. The next step was to establish whether it was pure or partial conceptual research. Cohen undertook qualitative empirical work involving 25 interviews with lifestyle travellers to test his assumption that lifestyle travellers seek a core or ‘true inner self’. Therefore, this is not pure conceptual research but partial. All the 471 articles were interrogated in this way and the results are presented in Table 2.

Three limitations to this method were identified by Tribe (2008). First, articles having the search terms only in the main body of their texts may be missed because only titles, keywords and abstracts were initially interrogated. Second, the search terms may miss some potential articles since some articles which do not include these terms may nevertheless be conceptual research. Third, CABABS only abstracts literature classified in the tourism and travel domain so that literatures classified under other social science disciplines are overlooked. A further two limitations were identified. Fourth, non-English publications were excluded from the scope of analysis. Fifth, the recorded number of articles with these proxy terms is higher than the actual total because of double counting where articles contain multiple terms.

*** insert table 2

The qualitative analysis had the objective to ascertain what kinds of issues and approaches are common in conceptual research. To realise this objective we reviewed articles that were purely conceptual. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was deployed and the articles were carefully read and re-read one by one and comprehensive notes were taken. The notes detailed how conceptual research is carried out, common issues and approaches. The notes were then coded and categorised into memos prompted by points raised from the literature review, the working definition and new ideas emerging from the data. For example, “...the systematic clarification of concepts...” (Dreher, 2000, pp.3-4) in the initial working definition formed the basis for one memo. This process was repeated until no more new memos were uncovered – or in other words until theoretical saturation of the data was achieved. The memos were synthesised and ordered into themes and the themes were reviewed and refined by three researchers. As a result forty six pure conceptual research articles were analysed in detail and twelve themes emerged.

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Quantitative aspects: Volume and Trends

It was found that pure conceptual research accounts for only 4.03% of the sampled works. The estimate of the total number of pure conceptual papers is therefore approximately 756 ($18,742 \times 4.03\%$) between 1981 and 2010. Since there are a total of 50,598 articles under the code UU700 Tourism and Travel, conceptual research only accounts for 1.49% ($756/50,598$) of this total, demonstrating that conceptual research is somewhat overlooked in tourism research. From the results presented in Tables 1 and 2, it can be deduced that approximately 157 ($6,407 \times 2.45\%$) pure conceptual research articles were recorded during the period 1981-1995. During the later period, 1996-2010, there were 601 such articles ($12,335 \times 4.87\%$). Additionally whilst the total number of tourism articles increased from 18,985 to 31,610 the percentage of pure conceptual research increased from 0.83% ($157/18,589$) during the period 1981 to 1995 to 1.90% ($601/31,610$) during the period 1996 to 2010. It can therefore be seen that conceptual research became more common in the recent period.

Qualitative Aspects: Typology of Themes in Conceptual Research

This section discusses the themes that capture the main elements of conceptual research and constitute a twelve part typology. Since there is sometimes overlap between the themes it should be considered as a fuzzy typology. The first theme - *Defining Concepts* - is the most common issue discussed. For example sometimes conceptual research lists different definitions of a concept followed by critique, evaluation and synthesis. Ahmad, Hussein and Abdul (2010) provide a good illustration of this. Starting from an observation that an existing “definition is not useful from the marketing perspective ...” (p. 151), they list several definitions of non-urban tourism and then discuss their differences as well as issues of context. The second theme, *Comparing Concepts*, suggests that after a definition is proposed, conceptual research often proceeds with the distinction of concepts, sometimes the comparison of similar concepts and sometimes the contrast of different ones. This can be found in Tribe’s (2008) article which clarifies the concept of critical theory by distinguishing it from positivism, interpretivism and constructionism. Other articles compare the definitions of a concept from different perspectives. Elsewhere, Tribe (1997) critically distinguishes the concept of tourism from three different perspectives: the phenomenon, the study and the education and training perspective.

The third theme is the *Historical Analysis of Concepts* which suggests that in order to understand a concept better and propose an adequate or new definition, a review of the origins, development, and evolution of a concept or several concepts can be helpful. For example Zehrer and Raich (2010) carried out a literature review of the development and evolution of the term 'network' by showing the four main clusters of theoretical traditions relating to networks and using this as a basis for defining 'networks'. Similarly, Hardy, Beeton and Pearson (2003) analyse the context within which sustainable tourism originated and assess its development. The fourth theme is *Constructing Conceptual Typologies*. Sometimes a concept can be divided into several categories. A typology can be helpful in understanding these components as well as the criteria to be used in any categorisation. An example is the work of Ahmad, Alhilal and Azizi (2008) who discuss the fact that case studies can be categorised in a number of different ways. The criteria proposed for categorisation are the primary disciplinary base, theoretical orientation or purpose of the study.

The fifth theme, *Mapping the Scope of Concepts*, includes what is associated with the concept, what is included, the range of the concept, what is excluded and consideration of any fixed or fuzzy boundaries. This theme is illustrated in an article by Sherlock (2001) which contrasts the two concepts of hosts and guests. After evaluating and discussing the definitions and debates surrounding the concepts, the distinction between, and scope of the terms host and guest is offered. The sixth theme is *Exploring the Purposes of Concepts*. Some research explores the purpose of a concept driven by the question 'why' to find out how to make it better. For example Strickland-Munro, Allison and Moore (2010) explore the purpose of resilience concepts and demonstrate that they can be utilised in investigating the impacts of protected area tourism on communities.

The seventh theme is *Deconstructing Concepts*. Sometimes conceptual research critiques a concept by examination of its cultural context or the influence of hidden value systems. An aim here may be to explain the cultural or philosophical bias of a concept or even to propose a more universal concept. For example Wearing and Wearing (1996) critique the male bias in the conceptualisation of the tourist as 'flâneur' and the tourist destination as 'image' in the tourist gaze, drawing on ideas from interactionist and post structural feminist theories. The eighth theme is *Applying Concepts to Practice*. As an illustration, Jung (2008) offers recommendations on how to apply the concept of the Du Pont Ratio for operators with the purpose of understanding the precise value drivers along with the use of the weighted

average cost of capital (WACC) as a benchmark for performance. Similarly Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin (2000) propose several policy implications to make tourism more Pro-Poor.

The ninth theme is *Synthesising Concepts*. Integrating or synthesising existing concepts often proceeds by use of a literature review. Kim, Wang and Mattila (2010) provide a synthesis of the separate literatures related to customer complaint behaviour and service recovery. They propose a conceptual model which integrates the two concepts under a single framework. Conceptual research may also bring ideas together in new ways that have never previously been linked to each other. An example is Zehrer and Raich (2010) where network research is linked to the destination life cycle concept to assist tourism organisations to cope with operational challenges. The tenth theme, *Translating Concepts to New Contexts*, may involve stretching a concept to a new context of application. See here Jung (2008) who stretches the concept of economic value into two new tiers of business organisation—operations and top management. It is also possible to find conceptual research that transforms existing knowledge to a new context that might be a new realm, a new industry, a new cultural society or a new field or discipline. For example Cooper (2006) observed that although knowledge management had attracted researchers' interests since the 1990s it had not been linked to tourism. He bridged this gap by adopting the knowledge management approach for tourism.

Similarly, Baggio and Cooper (2010) transfer epidemic diffusion models to destination networks and illustrate how they can be optimised using policy intervention to deliver innovative and competitive destinations. The eleventh theme is *Finding Conceptual Gaps*. Often idea gaps are found through a creative review of relevant literatures. For example, Laing and Frost (2010) reviewed the literature and found that there was a lack of academic research focused on green events. They directed their research to explore the meaning, challenges and opportunities of green events. The twelfth theme is *Proposing a New Concept / Reconceptualisation*. As an illustration Russo and Segre (2009) compare property regimes in an analytic framework using two destination models based on a different allocation of property rights. They then propose a novel third model resulting from the comparison. Similarly Reisinger and Steiner (2006) argue for the reconceptualisation of the concept of interpretation by adopting the philosophy of Heidegger and promoting the underlying ideas of authenticity and tourism experiences.

Qualitative Aspects: Five Exemplar Concepts in Tourism

Whilst the analysis thus far has provided an atomised breakdown of conceptual research, this section offers more in-depth examination of five examples of concepts

developed in tourism to provide more holistic illustrations of the processes and products of conceptual research, linking them to the typology and previous discussions. It is evident that each of these papers encompasses multiple themes emphasising the fuzzy nature of the typology.

Authenticity: The concept of authenticity is germane to tourism studies and there have been several efforts to clarify and to reconceptualise it. For example Wang's (1999) paper '*Rethinking authenticity in tourist experiences*' sought to reconceptualise (theme twelve) the concept of authenticity by recognising the subjective and constructed nature of the term, thus rejecting objectivist accounts of the concept which saw authenticity as capable of being objectively measured and determined. Borrowing from Berger (1973) Wang explains that existential authenticity in the context of tourism (theme ten) "denotes a special state of Being in which one is true to oneself and acts as a counterdose to the loss of 'true self' in public roles and publicity spheres in modern Western society" (p. 358). For Wang, this existential authenticity is manifested in the activities of tourists and as such he sought to create a conceptual typology (theme four) of authenticity by dividing it into two broad categories each of which is subdivided into smaller categories.

The two broad categories are intra personal authenticity and inter personal authenticity. Intra personal authenticity is subdivided into bodily feelings and self-making. The former involves several dimensions including relaxation, rehabilitation, and sensual pleasures. In the latter, tourists seek to achieve a sort of self-actualisation previously unobtainable in everyday mundane life. Inter personal authenticity is subdivided into family ties (which seeks to strengthen family bonds) and touristic *communitas* (experienced through interaction with other tourists and the resultant community spirit created). This reconceptualisation (theme 12) of authenticity reflects a constructivist perspective (see earlier epistemological section) as it claims that existential authenticity is divorced from any inherent quality of the toured objects or cultures, a point which had been made previously by Bruner (1994) who claimed that authenticity should no longer be seen as a "property inherent in an object" (p. 408). Wang's reconceptualisation of authenticity has spawned a plethora of further debate and reconceptualisations of the concept including that by Reisinger and Steiner (2006) who argue that for many tourists authenticity is irrelevant as they do not value it, are suspicious of it, or are "complicit in its cynical construction for commercial purposes" (p.66).

Embodiment: This concept was adapted within the context of tourism studies to address a conceptual gap (theme eleven) in Urry's original (1990) thesis on the tourist gaze. This gap concerned the occularcentric nature of the tourist gaze which failed to recognise the

role of the body in the tourist experience. Embodiment was seen as a concept that could be used to fill this gap. Embodiment, according to Crouch (2000), (theme one), “denotes the ways in which the individual grasps the world around her/him and makes sense of it in ways that engage both mind and body” (p.63). Indeed, embodiment disrupted the traditional Cartesian binary opposition between mind and body where the mind was endowed with supremacy over the body. Veijola and Jokinen’s (1994) paper *‘The Body in Tourism’* focusing on the centrality of the body, represented an engaging critical reflection on Urry’s original (1990) concept of the tourist gaze.

Veijola and Jokinen collapse the distinction between mind and body in the tourism experience (theme nine) and claim that in tourism “it is our *conscious* bodies that are temporarily united in an utterly physical ritual” (p. 133) (our emphasis). They go on to argue for the ‘sexing’ of the tourist body in recognition of the distinctive nature of the female body within tourism and query whether the gaze can be seen as distinct from the eye, “the eye from the body, the body from the situation?” (p. 136). This use of embodiment has spawned several subsequent reconceptualisations (theme twelve) of the tourist experience. According to Rakic and Chambers (2012) “embodiment has been used as a critical approach to problematize the objectification of the body within tourism and leisure, including the female body, the homosexual body and the disabled body” (p.1617).

Tourist Area Life Cycle (TALC): This is one of the most famous concepts in tourism research proposed by Butler (1980) in his article titled *The concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources*. This starts from the observation that tourist areas evolve and change over time. Butler critically reviews the previous research (theme three) on this process with respect to different types of tourists and areas which provides the evidence that underpins the concept. By reference to the Product Life Cycle concept, he systematically proposed a hypothetical cycle of area evolution, which transformed an existing concept (Product Life Cycle) to a new context (tourism) (theme ten). The concept is then unpacked in detail and the stages of evolution - Exploration, Involvement, Development, Consolidation and Stagnation - are explained along with their causes.

After Stagnation, he proposes the two possibilities of Decline or Rejuvenation. Butler thus defines the concept of a Tourist Area Life Cycle (theme one), maps the scope of it (theme five) and also considers the implications for practitioners (theme eight). Differences between different areas experiencing the stages of the cycle are critically emphasised to illustrate that the concept should be applied according to circumstances. Butler makes suggestions for tourist area planners and managers on how to protect and preserve tourist

attractions in consideration of finite resources and the life cycle, and more importantly suggests different strategies in different stages in order to extend the life cycle as much as possible.

Tourism Mobilities: The editorial introduction to the journal *Mobilities* (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006) offers a definition of this concept (theme one) describing *mobilities* as “encompassing both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life” (p. 1). Multiple mobilities are then listed (theme four) including illicit ones and their security risks to demonstrate the importance of the concept. The authors also review how mobilities have evolved (theme three) with the development of a ‘networked’ patterning of economic and social life. Further, they explain how changes in mobilities affect nature, families, communities and even the nation (theme six). Recent developments in transformation and communications leading to new technological, social and cultural practices of mobility are deemed as ‘new mobilities’ or the ‘mobility turn’ (theme three).

The authors also define the scope of mobilities (theme five) in relation to spatial, infrastructural and institutional moorings, power geometries and Internet and mobile telephony. They propose alternative issues and approaches for studies of mobilities including finding conceptual gaps (theme eleven). The paper uses airport and city disasters as practical examples to build an intuitive interpretation of mobilities (theme eight). The section *An Agenda for Mobilities Research* is a mix of themes four and five. This indication of what is associated with and included in mobilities represents a mapping of the scope of the concept. The foremost issue is the relationship between mobilities and tourism. Whilst tourism has always included the important aspect of mobility that involves movement of people between places, this approach situates it within the wider concept of mobilities. Therefore the concept of tourism mobilities can be understood as including all those mobilities that are generated by the actions of tourists (theme twelve).

The Philosophic Practitioner: In this paper Tribe (2002) initially deconstructs (theme seven) the term curriculum which:

“...may demonstrate such a narrow conception that the problem of ideology emerges. Indeed some key curriculum terms ... demonstrate the operation of an ideology [including] operationalist (Barnett 1994), technicist (Apple 1990), vocationalist (Tapper and Salter 1978), idealist and liberalist” (p.345).

He also notes that (and of relevance to the earlier discussion of epistemology):

“...the curriculum world differs from Popper’s (1959, 1975) scientific world of naturally occurring phenomena, making any solely scientific-empirical method inappropriate. A model curriculum cannot be defined just by testing and measuring because it exists in the social rather than natural world, where curricula, as Young noted, “are no less social inventions than political parties or new towns” (1971:24). Ontologically speaking, a curriculum is not a natural phenomenon which exists independently of human thought, just waiting to be discovered like a new planet or star. Thus developing one is not just a matter of applying good observational skills or of devising the right instruments for its detection” (p.339).

The paper does not mobilise direct empirical evidence (see epistemology discussion) but a curriculum for mere vocational action is exposed as an excessively narrow framing. Philosophic Practice is offered as a more comprehensive frame, building on a critique of Schön’s (1983) idea of the Reflective Practitioner. Schön stressed the importance of adding reflection in and on action to professional education so as to develop what he termed professional artistry. Tribe argued that Schön’s framing was incomplete (theme eleven) and did not challenge the curriculum to engage with the wider world in which professionals practice. So whilst Reflective Practice focuses on effective vocational action informed by continual reflection, Philosophic Practice adds the new dimensions of liberal reflection and liberal action. Liberal reflection encourages professionals to be sceptical about given truths, sensitive to hidden ideology and power, and to reflect about what constitutes “the good life” in the wider world affected by their work. Liberal action is putting the ideas of liberal reflection into practice. Philosophic Practitioners are conceptualised as (theme twelve) those who not only demonstrate professional competence in their careers in tourism but are also able to take responsibility for stewardship and the ethical and aesthetic development of the wider world of tourism.

CONCLUSION

This study has uncovered a notable gap in the tourism and wider literature concerning conceptual research. It addresses this gap and offers a number of original contributions to knowledge. First it offers systematic clarification, classification and evaluation of conceptual research and this is used to revise Dreher’s (2003) definition such that conceptual research in tourism is conceived as:

“a set of activities that focus on the systematic analysis and profound understanding of tourism concepts. Research can cover the antecedents, origin, history and development of the concept as well as its current use, facets, controversies, applications, characteristics and idiosyncrasies, points of differentiation, discourse and ideological analysis and deconstruction. Its major outcomes include the clarification of a concept, the proposing of a new concept, the modification of an existing one (reconceptualisation) or ideological or other critique.”

It is deemed to be research rather than just scholarship since it complies with the Frascati definition (OECD, 1993) where:

“Research...comprise[s] creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society ...”

Second, guidance is offered on quality in conceptual research and here nine criteria are proposed. Third, through the quantitative analysis, it was found that although conceptual research exists in tourism research it accounts for a low percentage of total tourism research. The analysis also points to an increase in such research over the most recent period 1996-2010. Fourth, the qualitative analysis in this paper resulted in the formation of twelve themes that illustrate the activity of conceptual research enabling the construction of a fuzzy typology of its popular issues and approaches. Fifth, a further analysis of five examples of conceptual research offered a deeper and more holistic illustration of both the concept and approaches.

Apart from the limitations listed in the methodology, this study did not undertake a detailed discussion of the methods for conceptual research. Also since the data used was sourced from journals it excluded conceptual research published in books, such as the seminal concept of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990). Future research directions might therefore wish to consider in more detail the research methods for conceptual research and to take account of conceptual research published in books. Finally the power of conceptual research in tourism is evident from its impact on both the world of thought (e.g. embodiment, tourist mobilities, authenticity) and the world of practice (e.g. tourism area life cycle, pro-poor tourism, responsible tourism). Given its theoretical inadequacies, the tourism canon relies heavily on the development of its concepts. The systematic study of these is long overdue.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1 Conceptual Research

Table 1 Frequency of Conceptual Terms in CABABS Titles and Abstracts

Term	1981– 1995	1996–2010	1981–2010
Concept*	1,464	3,288	4,752
Philosoph*	190	234	424
Refle*	510	1,175	1,685
Histor*	1,730	2,685	4,415
Review	2,026	3,895	5,921
Notion	115	420	535
Idea	372	638	1,010
Total of above Terms ^x	6,407	12,335	18,742
Total Tourism Articles	18,985	31,610	50,598

^x Note: the total may include double counting of some articles.

Table 2 Frequency of Pure Conceptual Research in Selected Articles

	1981-1995	1996-2010	1981-2010
Pure conceptual research (x)	4	15	19
Total in selected sample (y)	163	308	471
Percentage of conceptual research in sample (x/y)	2.45%	4.87%	4.03%

Notes:

x = frequency of pure conceptual research in the sample

y = the total number of papers in the sample