Indisciplined and Unsubstantiated : Reply to Leiper

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In his comment on *The Indiscipline of Tourism*, Neil Leiper steers his argument by way of an indisciplined scenic route, treating the reader to asides about the Royal Family, the tourism industry and even a journey to Austria with the economist Khan. His many asides serve often to obscure, rather than underpin, the conclusion that the discipline of tourism studies will probably continue to develop, (a conclusion which itself cannot resist a minor detour into tourism forecasting and the Asian economic downturn). Nevertheless, it is assumed that the substantive point the Leiper wishes to reassert is that tourism is a discipline. But as this reply will demonstrate, that is a belief which he fails to substantiate.

The title of the reply - indisciplined and unsubstantiated - is explained under a number of headings. Leiper's comment is shown to be to be unsubstantiated first by reference to the highly unusual definition ascribed by Leiper to the term 'discipline' and exposure of the misunderstanding implicit in it. Second, numerous errors and shortcomings in his argument are apparent, and third, the mounting of his argument as a comment rather than an article is highlighted. His comment is demonstrated to be indisciplined first by reference to his unnecessary asides and second by reference to his misreadings of the text of *The Indiscipline of Tourism*.

In order to better understand that Leiper's comment is unsubstantiated an initial analysis of how to distinguish between the belief and truth of Tribe's (1997) claim and Leiper's counter-claim is necessary. This exercise poses significant questions about the creation of tourism knowledge. Crucially, given the subject of this debate, the question of tourism truths and the resolution of this dispute cannot be resolved by reference to what Leiper wishes to refer to as the discipline of tourism. For if one looked in the putative toolbox of this would-be discipline one would find no rules or procedures that adequately helped resolve this dispute.

Rather, it is necessary to resort to a discipline external to tourism, and it is philosophy in general and a particular branch of philosophy - epistemology - that provides the tools for this particular job. Amongst the concerns of epistemology are issues of the validity and reliability of knowledge claims and the conditions under which a knower is justified in holding a proposition to be warranted. The proposition of *The Indiscipline of Tourism* is substantiated by a series of logical moves based upon the premise that a discipline must conform to a number of conditions. Since it is argued that tourism fulfils few if any of the conditions necessary for a discipline to exist, the proposition that tourism is not a discipline is held to be a warranted one. In order to falsify this proposition Leiper would have to mount a successful attack on the premise, or undermine the argument - either by demonstration of errors of logic or production of contrary empirical evidence.

One can begin by turning to Leiper's attack on the premise of the argument - the definition of a discipline. He asserts that the article fails precisely to say what is meant by a discipline. Reading of pp 643-4 of *The Indiscipline of Tourism* is suggested since both a definition and a set of defining characteristics of a discipline are laid out in considerable detail providing a framework against which the case of tourism is subsequently tested. It is interesting to note that there is considerable agreement about the basic requirements of a discipline in the literature alluded to in *The Indiscipline of Tourism*. What is extraordinary in Leiper's comment is his idiosyncratic and misguided definition of a discipline. This represents the most fundamental flaw in his comment. He states that "a discipline is, at heart, a body of knowledge that has been organized to some extent, ideally in a formally systematic manner, in a way that helps teaching, learning and research". This emphasis on teaching, that permeates Leiper's comment misses the important distinction between the production of tourism knowledge and the tourism curriculum. Leiper elides the terms discipline and curriculum. But they each perform totally different functions. A discipline is a distinctive body of knowledge and an organized set of rules and conceptual structure for advancing knowledge. A curriculum is the organization of knowledge for transmission in education. The former is about knowledge production and archiving. The latter about packaging knowledge for consumption. It is the former that is at the heart of the argument of *The Indiscipline of Tourism*. The conclusion is that tourism

studies itself has no unique or distinctive ways of knowledge production; rather, it falls back on a variety of other, mainly disciplinary, approaches to provide knowledge creation rules and knowledge quality control.

Attention focuses next on the grounds on which Leiper claims tourism studies to be a discipline. The first discernible argument is that Goeldner and Ryan recognize a discipline of tourism. This argument may be classified as one which rests on an appeal to an authority. It does not, however, provide warranted justification for the belief in question. The rejection of authority as a source of infallible truth was a notable advance secured by the age of Enlightenment.

Leiper alludes to two specific papers which he claims support his view that tourism is a discipline. Although Echtner and Jamal (1997) are quoted, examination of their article reveals them to be distinctly luke-warm about tourism as a discipline - "...while tourism studies could potentially develop into a discipline, it is concluded that there are many practical and philosophical reasons that hamper its evolution" (p.880). Cooper is also cited. Perhaps he has changed his mind because in 1998 he was party to the statement that tourism "lacks the theoretical underpinning which would allow it to become a discipline" (Cooper *et al.*, 1998:3). These witnesses who are summoned to support Leiper's case turn out under cross-examination to uphold the case for *The Indiscipline of Tourism*.

Next, Leiper refers to an official document - *Australian Standard Research Classifications* – that lists tourism as a discipline. There is no reason to doubt this statement, but every justification to reject it as admissible evidence in the prosecution of Leiper's case. For without further elaboration (e.g. a scholarly account that justifies use of the term) the status of this evidence is again merely that of "authority". The fact that it is an official document, or a printed document carries no special weight. Indeed one might suspect that the classification is no more than a bureaucratic or clerical convenience.

Other justifications for the existence of a discipline of tourism rest on little more than emotivism. In an earlier work (1981), Leiper articulated why a discipline was *needed*.

Leiper's passion for his cause has not abated. In his current comment he states that "there is room and *need* for an emerging discipline of tourism studies" (emphasis added). Given the comprehensive epistemology of tourism described in *The Indiscipline of Tourism*, in table 1 (Tribe 1997: 654), this need is doubted. Multidisciplinarity, general and business interdisciplinarity and extra-disciplinarity provide a comprehensive set of approaches to the fields of tourism. But, in any case, need, whether it is perceived or real, does not of itself cause need-gratification. There is no logical reason why a need for a discipline will cause tourism studies to develop as one.

The final argument under the heading of 'unsubstantiated' rests on the vehicle used by Leiper in prosecuting his case. Academic journals are a prime site of knowledge advancement. They offer knowledge quality control by way of their rigorous process of peer review. A paper that is published in *Annals* for example has to satisfy three peers who are experts in the field. Does this process thereby weed out truths from untruths? Hardly, but it does at least force up the threshold of the quality of emerging knowledge. But of course there are exceptions to this observation. The comment and the reply are not subject to rigorous peer review and this prompts a further criticism of Leiper's comment. A serious assertion that tourism is a discipline should be robust enough to subject itself to full peer review.

The case that Leiper's comment is unsubstantiated is thus concluded, but the indisciplined nature of the comment does invite a further response. For example, the problem of asides considerably weakens Leiper's comment. Had the comment been peer-reviewed the reader would have been spared a number of diversions from the main argument. In the first of these, a kind of anthropomorphism is displayed where disciplines are compared to humans. This kind of folksy argument does not constitute warranted grounds for falsifying a proposition, and is therefore dismissed. The same comment applies to the homily about the British Royal family. With regard to Leiper's excursion with Khan to Austria, the point is actually made in favor of *The Indiscipline of Tourism*. For it illustrates that Khan threw his (economics) disciplinary gaze at the field of tourism to conceive the concept of the multiplier. This is precisely the kind of knowledge creation that is described in "band k" of figure 2 (Tribe 1997: 650). But the

more substantive point is that the development of the multiplier concept has been nurtured in the discipline of economics. The language of the tourism multiplier is the language of economics - not the language of an independent tourism discipline. Reference to a typical tourism economic impacts article such as Archer and Fletcher (1996: 36) confirms this. Here the multiplier they use is expressed as $(\Delta X^*_{n+1} + \Delta p^*_m) / (i\Delta T_i)$. Few members of the tourism academic community talk this language.

Lastly, there are the misreadings that permeate Leiper's comment and underline its indisciplined approach. All authors dispatch their texts into a world of multi - interpretations. No matter how carefully words are chosen and sentences crafted, the finished text of an article is abandoned by its writer in the act of publication only to be adopted by its reader who subjects it to all sorts of unforeseen con-texts and sub-texts. Comments and replies can help to clarify intended meanings and build bridges between readers and the author. But comments should not be used for the serendipitous musings of commenting authors especially when these asides attempt a subtle misrepresentation of the meanings in the original text by sleight of pen. For example Leiper's discussion about "a 'second seven' set of disciplines" is misleading. No such strictures are advocated. Discipline 'n' in figure 2 (Tribe 1997: 650) is clearly explained as representing the disciplines that cannot be fitted in the simplified diagram. Disciplines such as anthropology, and environmental science would be examples here. So, rather than seeking to impose straightjacket, figure 2 opens up tourism to all the disciplines that care to examine it. Similarly, it is nowhere asserted that "disciplines have no beginning(s)."

In conclusion, despite Leiper's comment, the conditions continue to exist whereby the proposition of *The Indiscipline of Tourism* is a warranted one. The proposition is upheld in the article by conceptual development which uses logical argument to compare the case of tourism against a number of definitional characteristics of a discipline outlined in the premise of the article. These definitional characteristics are held in common by a number of writers (excepting Leiper). A successful challenge to the concept of *The Indiscipline of Tourism* on empirical grounds would need evidence to demonstrate that tourism studies displayed a significant number of disciplinary characteristics. Leiper has not mounted a successful challenge. Indeed empirical

evidence in substantive papers is beginning to emerge in recent publications which supports the findings of *The Indiscipline of Tourism*. For example Airey and Johnson (1999: 234) conclude that:

"In many ways the findings of this study tend to support ...the suggestions made by Tribe that while one part of tourism studies tends to be crystallising around the 'business interdisciplinary approach' the other part (the non-business field) does not have a unifying element".

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