GeoJournal 9.1 091-095
© 1984 by D. Reidel Publishing Company
0343-2521/84/091-0091/$0.75

Geography, Tourism and Recreation in the Antipodes

Pearce, Douglas G., Dr., Department of Geography, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand
and
Mings, Robert C., Prof. Dr., Department of Geography, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85281, USA

As in other parts of the world, the past decade has seen a marked increase in tourism and recreation research by geographers in the South Pacific. This developing interest is reflected in the emergence of a diverse range of publications, a variety of meetings and conferences devoted to tourism and recreation issues and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of university courses or papers in this field. To date, however, most of this activity and research has come from a comparatively small group of fairly productive geographers with a sustained interest in this field. Consequently, any attempt to present an overview of the geography of tourism and recreation in the South Pacific, is involved less with identifying a particularly Antipodean approach to the subject than with reviewing a wide-ranging collection of individual interests. Examples can be found from throughout the region of most aspects of the geography of tourism and recreation which exist in the international literature. Nevertheless, certain clusters of interest do occur, some of which have a regional flavour or reflect more general characteristics of geography in this part of the world. It is with these clusters of interest and distinctive approaches, as reflected in the published work by university geographers from Australia, Fiji, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, that this paper is primarily concerned.

Although the terms leisure, recreation and tourism are fraught with semantic difficulties, a range of leisure activities can perhaps be identified, from urban-based recreation through outdoor recreation and domestic tourism to international tourism. Australian researchers have tended more towards the study of recreation and domestic tourism (for example, Mercer 1977a; Mercer and Hamilton-Smith, 1980; Pigram 1982) whereas those working in the smaller islands of the Pacific have concentrated almost exclusively on international tourism (for example Rajotte, 1980; Britton, 1982). Much New Zealand research has involved both domestic and international tourism (for example Pearce and Cant, 1981; Pearce and Elliott, 1983). While some of these differences in emphasis are due to variations in the interests of individual researchers, others reflect differing circumstances. Studies of beach usage around Australia’s metropolitan centres, for example, reflect one set of regional realities, while research on international tourism based on the reefs and lagoons of Fiji or the Cook Islands mirrors another.

Within this broad field three general themes emerge and are reviewed here: the spatial organisation of tourism, impact studies and travel patterns. Consideration is then given to the applied nature of much of this research and to a concern with issues of a more general nature. Finally, the direction research might take in future years is explored.

The Spatial Organisation of Tourism

An early and continuing interest of Antipodean geographers has been the spatial organisation of tourism and recreation. In particular, a variety of different indices have been used to differentiate spatially the importance of specific types of tourism. In two of the earliest studies of coastal tourism in Australia, Ryan (1965) developed an “index of tourist ascendancy” using dwelling occupancy rates while Marsden (1969) derived “holiday homescape indices” for the Gold Coast based on the number, proportion and density of unoccupied dwellings. Pearce (1979) has examined spatial variations in the distribution of different types of accommodation in New Zealand and derived Defert’s tourist function index for each of the country’s tourist regions. Similarly, but on a larger scale, Rajotte (1977) has mapped the number of tourist days recorded in the Pacific Islands.
in relation to the size of the local population and the area of each destination.

At the local level, attempts have been made in New Zealand to measure the function of different centres by means of a Trip Index (TI) which relates the nights spent at the study destination (Dn) to the total number of nights spent on the trip (Tn) according to the formula:

\[
TI = \frac{Dn}{Tn} \times 100
\]

Low TIs, as in the case of Westland National Park, indicate the centre is but one stop on a given trip, a common feature in New Zealand where much international tourism is characterised by a number of stop-overs along an essentially scenic circuit. In larger centres, such as Christchurch, the Trip Index also proved useful in segmenting different markets (Pearce and Elliott 1983).

Attempts have also been made to measure more directly spatial variations in the economic impact of tourism. In Australia, Cooper (1980) examined regional variations in tourism dependency by means of two economic indices, a Tourism Impact Factor and a Tourism Proportion Factor. The first factor is derived by dividing per capita traveller expenditure by per capita personal income, while the second involves the division of total traveller expenditure by gross state product, the quotients in each case being multiplied by 100. In a more detailed analysis in Fiji, Britton (1980) used turnover figures to show certain sectors of the tourist industry were more concentrated geographically than others. However the general concentration of the industry in a limited number of areas on Viti Levu led him to conclude that "tourism has substantially reinforced the externally orientated territorial structure which evolved to serve foreign colonial interests".

While it is tempting to see these studies as constituting a concerted and coherent concern with the spatial structure of tourism, closer examination reveals that they have virtually been carried out independently of one another. No attempt appears to have been made as yet to evaluate the merits and shortcomings of each index so as to determine which is the most appropriate for a given analysis or to meet a specific objective. What is clear is that these different indices have shown considerable spatial variation in the structure and importance of tourism and the need for further geographical investigation of the phenomenon throughout the region.

The Impact of Tourism and Recreation

Geographers in the South Pacific, like their counterparts elsewhere, have been particularly concerned with the impact of tourism and recreation. Indeed, impact studies probably represent the single largest body of tourism research in the region. This research has been wide-ranging, covering the full gamut of possible impacts, from the economic (Pigram and Cooper 1977; Smith and Wilde 1977; Ranck 1980; Britton 1981, 1982; Pearce 1982a) to the environmental (Crozier et al. 1978; Pearce 1978; Pigram 1980), to the social and cultural (Rajotte 1980; Walmsley et al. 1981) to attempts to assess the composite effects of tourism (Rajotte 1980b; Pearce and Cant 1981). As elsewhere, the effects of tourist development have been found to vary significantly from place to place and from study to study. Overall, however, the economic benefits do not seem to be as far-reaching as earlier studies in the literature suggest nor do the environmental or social consequences yet appear to be as insidious or pervasive as some critics may claim. In part this may be attributed, at least in Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea, to the relative unimportance of the tourist industry.

But perhaps of greater significance than the specific consequences of tourist development in the Pacific, is the concern shown by these writers for the ways in which these impacts are measured. Pigram and Cooper (1980), for example, have examined some of the technical aspects of multiplier studies while Pearce (1981a) has critically appraised techniques for estimating visitor expenditure. Pearce (1980b) has also reviewed a framework for assessing the environmental impact of tourism while Rajotte (1978) has developed a more general matrix for impact assessment. Pearce and Cant (1981), in their study of Queenstown, New Zealand, stress the importance of relating specific impacts to the particular process of development, a theme developed in Pearce's (1981b) more general text on tourist development.

One of the more distinctive contributions in this area has come from Britton (1981, 1982). He has attempted to set the study of Third World tourism, illustrated by examples from the Pacific, more squarely in the context of development and dependency theory arguing (1982, p. 332): "Debate on the advantages and disadvantages of tourism is conducted without regard to those theories of political economy concerned with persistent poverty and the causes of increasing inequality between and within nations." He contends that only by adopting a broader structural approach can the historical, economical and political factors governing the variable impacts of tourism in Third World countries be identified and explained fully. While many of the individual points made by Britton have emerged from other impact studies, the more holistic approach he adopts brings a fresh perspective to the problem. What is less clear is how alternative types of tourism less dependent on metropolitan capital might be fostered and made to contribute to regional prosperity.

Travel Patterns

Australasian geographers have examined recreational and tourist travel at a range of scales. Bayley-Jones (1982) and