Critical (Realist) Reflection on Policy and Management Research in Sport, Tourism and Sports Tourism[1]

Abstract

The paper revisits the ontological and epistemological grounding of economic, social science and management research in sport, tourism and sports tourism that has, as its motivation, a desire to inform policy and management. To inform policy and management requires an implicit assumption about the generality of insights and, moreover, access to enduring phenomena upon which policy levers can operate and upon which management decisions can be based. Yet these assumptions are not typically made transparent in applied work emanating from an economic or management perspective and much social science research rejects the concepts. In what sense, therefore, can research inform policy or management advice, or can policy and management failures be understood? This paper argues that critical realism can provide the philosophical framework from within which answers to these questions can be offered. Moreover, critical realism imposes some clear guidelines upon the nature of research design. As well as research design, the paper revisits concepts of cause, including agency and emergence. The arguments are illustrated with reference to applied research into Sports Tourism.

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Introduction

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)[2] benchmarks statements suggest that sports degree programmes in the UK inherently draw upon a number of disciplines ranging from the sciences, such as anatomy, physiology and psychology; to business, such as strategy, marketing, economics, and the humanities, such as history, sociology and philosophy. The key areas of study in which these disciplines are typically applied involve; exploring the human responses to sport and exercise, the monitoring and enhancement of sporting performance, the historical, social political economic and cultural distribution and impact of sport as well as sports policy planning and management.

Likewise, Tourism is typically taught within subject areas such as Tourism Management; Tourism Geography; Leisure and Tourism Management; and Tourism Studies but includes specific areas of study such as Sports Tourism; Rural Tourism and Sustainable Tourism. Broad concern is with activities and relationships that take place away from typical places of residence. Emphasis is upon private sector activity such as tour operators, airlines and hotels as well as a quasi-public sector including agencies such as the tourist boards and regional development agencies. In addition the nature, impacts and meanings of tourism are now of direct interest. As Davies and Downward (2001) and Downward and Mearman (2004a) argue, the academic analysis of tourism has eclectic origins.

In general, this raises quite fundamental philosophical challenges for the researcher seeking to understand and to inform policy and management debates in sport, tourism

and sports tourism. Likewise, these challenges are relevant for policy makers in having to digest different research findings. If one considers the interface between these two areas, then matters are clearly more complicated. This is made clear by Weed and Bull (2004) who, whilst arguing that sports tourism research needs to be more than a conflagration of issues traditionally associated with sport and tourism, cite Gibson's argument that,

> "…the field suffers from a lack of integration in the realms of policy research and education. At a policy level, there needs to be a better coordination among agencies responsible for sport and those responsible for tourism. At a research level, more multidisciplinary research is needed, particularly research which builds upon existing knowledge bases in both sport and tourism. In the realm of education, territorial contests between departments claiming tourism expertise and those claiming sport expertise needs to be overcome." (Gibson, 1998, p45).

In this paper two main related issues are addressed within the context of sports tourism. The first is to explore the basis upon which insights from different disciplines can be combined to inform research and policy, the second is to discuss what this implies about the conduct of research. To address these issues, the next section offers a brief restatement of some characteristics of the academic study of sport and tourism, before focussing on one branch of study; policy, planning and management, to reveal some implicit realist assumptions within the approach. The following sections then review some features of social science research methods, before exploring the constraints and possibilities of drawing upon different disciplines in research. It is

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[2] http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/benchmark/honours/hospitality.asp

argued that a critical realist ontology can be drawn upon to specify a coherent interdisciplinary approach to sport and tourism research and, as such, motivate a clearer understanding of sports tourism as a branch of social science.[3] An illustration of the application of these ideas then follows, before conclusions are offered.

Some Features of Sports and Tourism Study

As implied earlier, QAA benchmark statements provide a synthetic audit of the scope and content of sports study in the UK. The following three features, extracted from these statements, are worth noting, in the current context, in more detail:

1. In programmes of study with sport in the title, sport refers to personal, social and cultural activity embraced within the participation, organisation, provision, and delivery of sporting activity, as defined by the Council of Europe.
2. Their currency and diversity is demonstrated by the orientation towards sport and exercise sciences, sports coaching, sport development and sport management.
3. Sport has emerged as an academic area with a developing body of knowledge. This is characterised by a balance of discipline-based knowledge and knowledge derived from the practice of sport. With programmes adopting a multi-disciplinary and/or inter-disciplinary approach, the study of sport has intrinsic intellectual value.

(accessed 25/4/05)

[3] These arguments draw heavily on previously published researched that explore these issues in the context of economics and Tourism and Hospitality (Downward 2003; Downward and Mearman 2004a). This paper is an attempt to extend these ideas to cover sports and their combination to tourism.

The first of these points suggests that the unit of analysis can range from the individual to more aggregated concepts. The second point suggests that different areas of study, within which specific disciplinary and substantive contributions reside, can contribute to this analysis. In this regard a distinction is drawn between 'scientific' disciplines, 'sports practitioner' contributions and those from management and policy studies. One should note here that there is often a distinction drawn between 'sports management' and 'sports studies', with the former drawing upon economics, and the study of business functions, and the latter sociology, philosophy and history etc. This is illustrated in drawing distinctions between journals such as European Sports Management Quarterly, The Journal of Sports Management and Managing Leisure with journals such as Leisure Studies, Sociology of Sport and the Journal of Sports and Social Issues. Both of these are contrasted with an experimental science approach, implied, for example in physiology, biomechanics and psychology. [4]
Notwithstanding this distinction, point three emphasises that a pragmatic view is taken upon disciplinary combination.

In the case of Tourism, the following issues are worth noting in relation to the disciplinary context of the subject,

1. Of the programmes with management in the title many focus particularly on business management.

[4] The implication of the current discussion for this broader context, as well as reflective practice in the action-based research of sports education and pedagogy is discussed in Downward (2005).

2. Others are more concerned with the management of scarce resources in the community through concepts of planning and public policy.
3. Typical subject areas might include: accommodation for tourists, destination planning and development, geography of tourism, impacts of tourism, international tourism, operation of the tourism industry, passenger transportation, research methods, technology in travel and tourism, tourism and the environment, tourism economics, tourism marketing, tourism policy, tourism management, sustainable tourism.

These suggest an emphasis upon management and resource allocation specifically, but again within an eclectic approach to disciplinary context (see also Tribe 1997). As with sports research there are distinctions within the literature. For example, at one extreme Tourism Economics draws upon the economic, business and financial disciplines, whilst a journal such as Tourist Studies is populated by papers drawing upon post-modernist and post-structuralist themes. Commensurate with the eclectic development of tourism and hospitality, journals such as Annals of Tourism Research and Tourism Management are populated with papers drawing upon a wide ranging set of analytical approaches. It is here that the first issue of this paper, concerned with exploring the logical basis upon which such disciplinary insights are combined, is raised.

In relation to sports tourism, Weed and Bull's (2004) recent analysis briefly discusses impacts, with which most other sports tourism texts are largely concerned (eg Standeven and DeKnop, 1999; Hudson, 2003) before a substantive examination of sports tourism participants, policy-makers and providers. Clearly, the study of these

four areas is underpinned by a range of different disciplines, and Weed and Bull (2004, p.205) cite psychology, geography, sociology, policy studies, marketing and management, along with the use of grounded theory, as perspectives that inform their analysis. This, along with the above discussions of QAA benchmarks, partly informs the scope of the analysis in relation to the second concern of this paper, the actual conduct of research. Here, attention is focused upon policy and management for sport, tourism and sports tourism as deriving insights from the economics, policy and management literatures. Policy and management are clearly distinguishable areas of study within both sport and tourism, and Weed and Bull's analysis identifies them as key contributers to an understanding of sports tourism, particularly sports tourism policy-making and provision. Furthermore, the focus of this journal on management issues means a focus on policy and management research and practice is clearly an appropriate way to circumscribe the discussion.[5] However there is no clear and unitary definition of the terms management and policy. In this context any specific conceptual view upon the research methods employed to generate insights within the sport, tourism and sports tourism literatures must be predicated upon that which emanates from the originating disciplinary theory or research approach. What *can* be said, in a general sense however, is that by construction policy and management insights presuppose a realist perspective.

In its most general sense, realism is an ontological position in which 'we perceive objects whose existence and nature are independent of our perceptions' (Oxford Companion to Philosophy, 1995, p746). However, as discussed later in the paper there

[5] Discussion of the broader 'studies' literature would involve encapsulating non-realist, constructivist accounts. Elements of this are discussed below. For further discussion see Downward and Mearman (2004a).

are different variants of this position. For now, though, what matters is that the existence of objects is not simply confined to perception.

One can justify the claim that policy and management for sport, tourism and sports tourism has a realist foundation by way of a form of transcendental argument that involves answering the question, ‘what must the world be like in order to make possible the existence of institutions like sports and tourism organisations and their related management systems, or policy bodies and their prescriptions?’

To answer this question one must view the application of management and the achievement or pursuit of policy objectives in the context of their being connected with, and deriving from, various specific institutional formations. These exist in a number of domains, such as the public or private sector. However, it remains that they are structured entities comprising internally related positions and governed in various degrees by rules, norms and trust in which obligations to act persist. In this sense whether defined in terms of customers and sports centre service providers or tourism attractions, or policy funding and implementing bodies such as UK Sport andSport England or Visit Britain and the Scottish and Wales Tourist Boards, the processes involved are not reducible to the unique individual *per se* but can be viewed as comprising persistent relationships that transcend the specific individual’s experience and which are constituted in relation to other objects (see, for example, Lewis 2004). In this respect relationships and processes must, by this argument, exist independently of specific individual consciousness, that is have a realist basis.

Of course, this is one form of question about reality. In this sense it produces a particular view of the nature of reality. Consequently the argument also carries with it some constraints about the presupposed nature of the world so conceived. It implies that the world is structured, potentially hierarchical and has both individual and social features. This is a social ontology in which relationships between these constituent features are causal in bringing about outcomes. The variety of units of analysis associated, for example, with the study of sports presented in point 1 above suggest that this approach is of potential usefulness.[6]

Realism does not need to rely on such a view, however. To extend the basic definition of realism above, to the ideas that policy and management are causal processes simply requires a conception that the implied causal forces associated with policy or management decisions are, at least partially, independent of those conceptualising or implementing the policy. Such a more limited view, to be distinct from the account above, is conceivable in an approach in which the individual is the sole unit of analysis, which can be referred to as methodological individualism, or in which the broader identified grouping is the sole unit of analysis, which can be referred to as methodological collectivism. In this respect once again, both the individual and more collective units of analysis for sport,tourism and sports tourism, though not the combination of such units, are relevant for this perspective.

It is clear, then, that debate about the nature of realism, in connection with the nature of cause and the ways in which we can understand it, that is epistemological issues associated with research methods, is important in understanding policy and

[6] An important feature of realism is a commitment to causal explanation.

management for sport, tourism and sports tourism. The next section begins the exploration of these issues in more detail by reviewing some broad features of research in social science.

Some features of Social Science Research and its Disciplinary Combination

The conception of policy and management for sport,tourism and sports tourism discussed above, as distinct from, say, the experimental and practitioner research that also populates the study of sport, is implicitly presented as social science. It follows that exploring some of the main methodological issues associated with social science research can help to refine the understanding of realism just discussed, as well as to provide a basis upon which one can assess how insights from different disciplines can be combined in management and policy decisions.

A useful starting point is to note that combining insights from different perspectives is typically referred to as triangulation (Denzin, 1970). Table 1 summarises an non-exhaustive, and non mutually-exclusive list of perspectives on triangulation.

Table 1: A Taxonomy of Triangulation

Form of Triangulation	Description
1. Data Triangulation	Involves gathering data at different times and situations, from different subjects. Surveying relevant stakeholders about the impact of a policy intervention would be an example. An alternative would be address concerns about the inadequacy of available data.
2. Investigator Triangulation	Involves using more than one field researcher to collect and analyse

	the data relevant to a specific research object. Asking scientific experimenters to attempt to replicate each other's work is another example.
3. Theoretical Triangulation	Involves making explicit references to more than one theoretical tradition to analyse data. This is intrinsically a method that allows for different disciplinary perspectives upon an issue. This could also be called *pluralist or multi-disciplinary* triangulation.[7]
4. Methodological Triangulation	Involves the combination of different research methods. For Denzin, there are two forms of methodological triangulation. *Within method* triangulation, involves making use of different varieties of the same method. Thus, in economics, making use of alternative econometric estimators would be an example. *Between method* triangulation involves making use of different methods, such as 'quantatitative' and 'qualitative' methods in combination. It is here that the most interesting issues arise as discussed below in detail.

(Source: Downward and Mearman, 2004b)

As Downward and Mearman (2004b) note, there are two main arguments put forward to justify triangulation. The first is that triangulation increases the 'persuasiveness' of evidence either through enhancing the empirical reliability of quantitative measures (Campbell and Fiske, 1959) or more generally enhancing the 'validity' or completeness of insights (Shih, 1998, Jick 1979). This may involve the uses of quantitative analysis to 'test' the validity of qualitative insights, or to use qualitative

[7] As discussed below, a key argument of this paper is that such pluralism, and that implied by other forms of triangulation, can be underpinned by a coherent ontological or epistemological position.

work as preparation for quantitative work, and to elucidate a phenomenon in as much detail as possible (Danermark, *et al* 2002: 153). However, there is clearly an implicit argument that the data or investigations undertaken are inherently compatible. It can be shown that important philosophical issues arise here. These equally apply to the second argument for triangulation, for example, put forward by Creswell (1995), Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) and Bryman (2001) is that one should combine methods on typically pragmatic grounds. This can be viewed as an instrumentalist (methodological) position which focuses upon the use of theories for practical purposes, such as prediction of outcome, but does not embrace concepts of truth. As such it rejects realism.[8]

Are there adequate philosophical grounds upon which to justify triangulation? To begin with, some social research texts, for example, Silverman (1993) argue that quantitative methods retain a positivist perspective in which data essentially captures objective entities. In contrast, qualitative methods can be viewed as 'interactionist' or 'constructionist' as the interviewer, interview context and the interviewee mutually create research objects. In this respect research is inherently subjective. It follows that under this perspective realism is rejected and there is no legitimacy for triangulation.[9] However, positivism remains influential in social science as revealed in work such as

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[8] This approach arguably began in economics (see Friedman, 1953), with an emphasis upon prediction. There is an echo of positivism in the approach, in which data provides the arbiter in assessing the usefulness of theories. At the very least the approach is inductive, yet this does not imply necessarily a quest for objective truth.

[9] Interactionism or constructivism so defined embraces a wide range of specific methods, such as content analysis, discourse analysis, grounded theory, ethnography as well as methodological positions including postmodernism, post-structuralism, hermeneutics and phenomenology. But, in general interactionism recognises hermeneutic concerns that social phenomena are intrinsically meaningful; that meanings must be understood; and that the interpretation of an object or event is affected by its context (Sayer 1992, 2000).

Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2000).[10] Here, the stress is upon quantitative data to seek to avoid (if not eliminate) subjective values entering analysis. There is scope for triangulation under this positivist perspective, particularly where different quantitative methods are to be used (triangulation of method) and for different quantitative measures to be combined (data triangulation). Here a form of realism is embraced as both data and enquiry are conceptualised as having an existence that is independent of the researcher and which transcends the context and method of investigation.

In summary, therefore, the literature suggests that instrumentalism embraces triangulation on the basis of pragmatism, which essentially sidesteps philosophical issues. Second, from a positivist-realist perspective, if the same sort of data is triangulated, then triangulation is legitimate. However, from an interactionist perspective, triangulation must be rejected. In what sense do these approaches offer different recommendations? The answer lies in the different ontological bases of the approaches. Interactionist approaches emphasise the subject of analysis, that the world cannot be independent of our understanding of it. It is a constructivist ontology. In contrast positivist approaches emphasise the independence of our understanding of the world from the objects analysed. This is a realist ontology. This dispute over ontology must, therefore, be key to understanding if and how research insights can be combined. Moreover, it follows that it provides a basis to understanding, in more detail, how this might apply to alternative accounts of realism.

[10] For a discussion of the changing conception of positivism in sociology see Halfpenny

Concepts of Realism and Ontological Constraints on Research

The previous section argued that a potential realist account can be constructed through reference to positivism. Yet, despite its persistence, the approach has been historically and widely criticised. The induction problem applies to enumerative forms of positivism, in which repeated observation of a phenomenon is asserted to reveal aspects of causes. Likewise, the idea that value free observation is possible has been widely challenged (For a discussion in the context of sport see Parry, 2005).

An alternative empirical approach has evolved from Popper (1972) whose falsifiability criterion bypassed these problems. This criterion argues for the *logical* demonstration of falsehood (of value-driven hypotheses) with reference to a *particular* set of (crucial) observations.[11] Amongst other contributions , Popper's work can thus be seen to be one of the underpinnings of the hypothetico-deductive approach (Blaug, 1980).[12] Crucially, it is here that positivism and deductive logic become enmeshed as deduced consequences, from statements of initial conditions and assumptions, are assessed empirically as predictions. Deduction is the process of establishing the logically correct conclusions from the components of an argument. In itself, deduction does not rely upon empirical references.

Though having distinct specific emphases, and being realist in form, the positivist and hypothetico-deductive approaches share an essential logic: explanations are presented

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(1982). For a discussion in economics see Walters and Young (2001).

[11] Lakatos's (1970) concept of scientific research programmes in which sophisticated falsification is required in the absence of crucial experiments is, in this regard, an extension of detail and aspiration than difference in logical position.

[12] The deductive-nomological and inductive-statistical models of Carl Hempel (1965) can be viewed likewise as extensions of a simplistic view of positivism.

in the form of ‘covering laws’, that is relationships between variables that transcend space or time of the form ‘whenever event X then event Y’. Lawson (1997, 2003) and Sayer, (2000) describe the approach as ‘Humean’ because causality is associated with the succession of events, as ‘correlations of a causal-sequence sort’ (Lawson, 2003, p.25). Ontologically speaking a closed-system is assumed such that causes act in a consistent manner (the ‘Intrinsic Condition of Closure’ (ICC)) isolated from other causes (the Extrinsic Condition of Closure (ECC)). In such circumstances, events, our empirical description of them, and the causes of the events are conflated. Revisiting the discussion of realism above, such a perspective is entirely consistent with both methodological individualist or methodological collectivist accounts, in which, say, policy or management decision ‘X’ purports to bring about management or policy outcome ‘Y’ . The unit of analysis of itself is not central to the structure of explanation.

In contrast critical realists would describe such (positivist) approaches as naïve, simple or empirical realism which commit an ‘epistemic fallacy’ through conflating the subject and object of analysis. As a consequence, knowledge of phenomena is treated as logically equivalent to the phenomena. Moreover, in drawing upon a closed-system form of reasoning, the explanations offered involve the assumption that premises fully entail conclusions. Lawson (1997, 2003) describes this as deductivism, thus generalising the concept of deductive reasoning to be the organising principle of any arguments that invoke covering laws, whether they are presented as part of a specifically deductive, inductive, or hypothetico-deductive view. It is because deductive reasoning is directly concerned with, and thus can only cope with,

knowledge that already exists or has been acquired, that it promotes the epistemic conflation.

The same argument can be made of interactionist and instrumental approaches. In the former case, this is naturally because the subject *is* conceived of as the object of analysis. In the instrumentalist case this follows because whichever insight is drawn upon, there is the presumption that it captures the relevant object. Table 2 summarises this argument where each column identifies a methodological position. The first row then indicates the focus of analysis and the last row, the direction of the subject-object conflation.

Table 2: Subject-Object Conflations

Methodological Position	**Deduction**	**Interactionism**	**Instrumentalism**	**Hypothetico-deductive**	**Positivism**
Structure of Explanation	Internally consistent sequence of events	Relations between texts	Relations between texts and/or events	Sequence of deduced events empirically explored	Explore empirical sequence of events
Form of conflation	Subject→Object	Subject→Object	Subject→Object	Subject↔Object	Subject←Object

(Source: Downward and Mearman, 2004b)

In contrast, critical realists (Lawson 1997, 2003; Sayer 2000) embrace the alternative form of realism discussed earlier, which invokes a social ontology whereby the world is structured and in which relationships between its constituent features are causal in

bringing about outcomes. Critical realists argue that reality is a structured open system in which the real, the actual and the empirical domains are organically related. The real refers to the intransitive dimensions of knowledge, which exist independently of our understanding of the world, and in which actual causes, structures and powers to make things happen exist. The actual domain refers to what happens if powers and causes act. In contrast the empirical realm is where the transitive dimensions of knowledge reside because this is where the real and actual are observed, albeit filtered through the hermeneutic process and because causes act *transfactually* in the face of countervailing influences in a non-experimental context.[13] Critical realism thus combines ontological realism with epistemological fallibility.

From this point of view explanations of cause require ontic depth, that is moving beyond the level of events and/or texts towards an understanding of the processes that produce them. Importantly, the concept of cause is not linked to the succession of events but rather an evolutionary or transformational concept of emergence in which agency and institutions combine to bring about effects. Individuals are thus borne into a world of pre-existing structures and norms which help to mould but do not determine their behaviour, which is intentional and has the potential for spontaneous change (Lewis, 2000; Archer, 1995).

As Danermark *et al* (2002) argue, in contrast to the deductivist approach to explanation, critical realism advocates retroduction, which is a conceptual process of moving between knowledge of one thing to another, for example, from empirical

[13] In social science the researcher shares the hermeneutic moment of the objects of study Bhaskar (1978). Indeed, Sayer (2000) argues that the social researcher operates in a double

phenomena expressed as events to their causes. The key is that the researcher moves beyond a specific ontic context to another, hence generating an explanation that embraces ontological depth. The process of abduction, whereby specific phenomena are recontextualised as more general phenomena can be a part of this process.[14]

The literature does, however, debate the substantive application of retroduction. As Downward (forthcoming) argues, for Lawson (1997) a mixture of forms of descriptive statistical analysis coupled with historical and case-study narrative are deemed appropriate because of the excessive closure assumptions implied by inferential statistical work. Quantitative methods presuppose degrees of closure. Numeric representations assume intrinsic closure and probability distributions assume extrinsic closure. This is suggestive of a limited triangulated research strategy. A less restrictive approach is broadly advocated by both Sayer (2002) and Danermark *et al* (2002) who argue that critical realism is compatible with a wide range of methods, with the key issue being that analysis is matched to the appropriate level of abstraction and the material under investigation. Sayer (2000) distinguishes between intensive and extensive research designs. The former is what is typically thought of as social science, i.e. qualitative research, in that it begins with the unit of analysis and explores its contextual relations as opposed to emphasising the formal relations of similarity between them, that is producing taxonomic descriptions of variables as is the case in the latter, i.e. quantitative design. It is argued that the causal insights from extensive research will be less and it is argued that the validity of the (qualitative) analysis of cases does not rely upon quantitative evidence.

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hermeneutic of both the scientific and objects-of-study communities. Logically speaking, a triple hermeneutic applies to policy makers synthesising and acting upon research findings.

[14] Generality here refers to essential constituents rather than, say, statistical generalisation.

In contrast, Downward and Mearman (2002; 2003) argue that combining methods is *central* to retroductive activity as different methods will be necessary to reveal aspects of the constituency of phenomena, that is their ontic character, as well as structural, that is cause and effect, relations more broadly. In this regard the motivational (or otherwise) dimension of agency needs to be elaborated, as well as the mechanisms that facilitate action, or behaviour, coupled with the relational context of that behaviour. In addition, it can be argued that specific research methods within intensive and extensive designs differ more in emphasis than in kind through invoking degrees of closure. For example even 'qualitative' methods, in collating insights and offering stylised interpretations, assume qualitative invariance or intrinsic closure; quantitative methods can also refer to different aspects of the *same* research object as qualitative methods and thus are not wedded to particular and different ontological presumptions; and finally their combination helps to raise rational belief in a set of (partial but) mutually supported propositions. In this regard statistical inference can still play a role in analysis (see also Ron, 2002).[15] Broadly speaking, thus, quantitative methods can identify partial regularities as outcomes of causal processes from which qualitative methods can investigate their causes.

[15] One can view statistical induction as a process of 'hypothetical' triangulation. Here validity is sought from hypothetical repeated sampling, with ontological assumptions about the nature of probabilities being required to facilitate this. The usual arguments presented are that probabilities can act as summary indicators of the outcomes of complex covariation not specifically of interest to a particular study or policy outcome, for example as the errors of a regression model, or they can be viewed as a literal feature of reality (independently of their purported objectivity or subjectivity). It is clear that such a limited view of triangulation or validity requires the persistence of the ontological closure required to define probabilities. Whilst this might be useful as a vehicle for generating possible scenarios, for example if one argues that current structures persist, clearly it implies a potentially fragile basis, in isolation, for inferences outside such conditions and, in particular if one rejects the concept of universal relationships because of the likelihood of changes to structures and behaviours in an open system.

There are two important features of this analysis worth noting here. The first is that critical realism provides an ontological justification for triangulation, that is mixed methods. Units of analysis can thus vary as one attempts to unpick complex structured phenomena. The second point is that such combination of methods can transcend specific disciplines in as much that specific methods of analysis are often tied to specific disciplines. In this regard genuine interdisciplinary, as opposed to multidisciplinary analysis with ontological clashes, can be constructed. It follows that sport and tourism can easily unite as 'sports tourism' from this perspective, with no necessary inconsistency of emphasis, implied pejorative connotation, or subordination of one to the other. Furthermore, if the focus is on disciplines or research insights rather than subject areas, it reinforces the perspective of Weed and Bull (2004), that,

> "…sports tourism is a unique area of study derived from the interaction of activity, people and place,…[and]…a dependence on the social institution of sport to characterise the area would be somewhat incongruous." (Weed and Bull, 2004, pxv)

Weed and Bull's concern here is that a full understanding of sports tourism requires a recognition that it is more than the sum of its parts, and as such cannot simply be understood as a tourism market niche or a subset of sport management. In this respect, Weed and Bull see any definition of sports tourism that is dependent on definitions of the 'parent' subjects (cf Standeven & DeKnop, 1999) as restricting the 'ontic depth' required for a full understanding of the phenomenon. This is not to say that insights will not be partial. Partiality is a function of the need for abstraction in

the light of specific enquiry, some of which is couched in terms of specific questions and conceptualisations. The emphasis upon sport or tourism, however, now becomes almost redundant, as the focus is on the combined but expanded area of sports tourism, with (partial) insights being provided by a range of disciplines, both unitarily and in combination, with the need for and extent of such combinations being a matter of (equally valid, but contingent) emphasis rather than distinction.

In summary the above discussion suggests that alternative realist perspectives, (critical-transcendental or empirical) can provide a basis for sports, tourism and sports tourism management and policy. Each can embrace different units of analysis. Each can purport to offer causal insights, and each can purport to combine methods of analysis and disciplines (as defined by methods). The final section presents an example which, it argues, suggests that the transcendental route to realism is appropriate.

Critical Realism in Action in Sports Tourism Research

Weed and Bull (2004), along with most other academics in the area (eg, Hinch & Higham, 2004; Standeven & DeKnop, 1999; Turco, Riley & Swart, 2002) see sports tourism as embracing a wide range of active and passive, competitive and recreational, and formal and informal pursuits. As such, the substantial opportunities for active informal recreational activity that have been put in place through the National Cycle Network developed by SUSTRANS, which currently offers 9,500 miles of routes in the UK, are clearly of interest to sports tourism practitioners and researchers. The goal by the end of 2005 is to extend this network to 10,000 miles,

putting the majority of the UK population within two miles of the Network. A clear policy objective of the network is to provide leisure opportunities, as well as more utilitarian transport links between towns and within towns for schools and work. Consequently, drawing, again, on Weed and Bull's (2004) analysis of sports tourism stakeholders, the network can be considered as involving both sports tourism policy-makers and providers. Furthermore, within the context of this paper, it provides a clear illustration of many of the issues raised in relation to policy and management research and practice.

It would seem dubious to approach evaluating the success of such a policy initiative, which has a complex structure by drawing upon a simple law-like empirical conception of use *per se*. For example, Downward *et al* (2004) report a research project, which was a trial of an evaluation strategy assessing the direct economic impact of the route as well as profiling route users, and which drew upon ideas from critical realism to shape the research design.

Two key features of the research are particularly worth noting that reflected the principle of exploring different but important and related features of the same object.

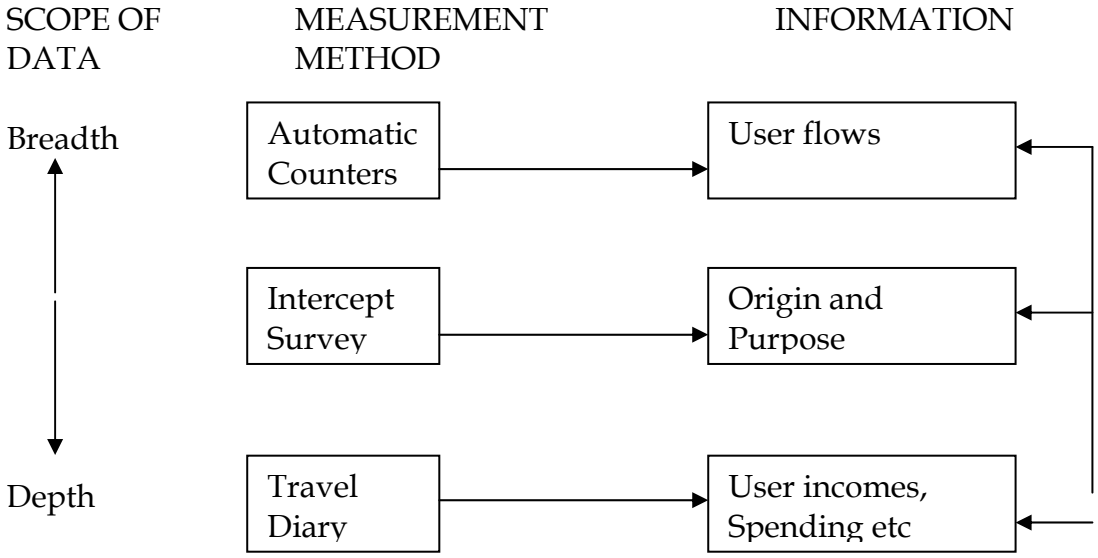
The first is that a triangulated research strategy was employed. Cycle counters were employed to measure aggregate route usage, that is the partial-regularities of cycle use. An intercept survey was then employed to capture implied causal features of these patterns. Information on numbers in user groups, ages and genders etc as well as cycling experience, purpose of journey and place of origin were investigated. The aim was clearly to identify aspects of the participants and the pattern and nature of their cycling activity. Finally, a travel diary was employed to probe in more detail

aspects of cyclist profiles in which potentially sensitive questions were asked, such as to enquire about income. The diary also enabled the recording of actual distances covered and actual spending en-route rather than prior estimation, which is often used in transport and tourism surveys despite reported limitations. Figure 1 below describes the research design.

Figure 1. Investigating the Impact and Use of Cycle Routes

(Source Downward *et al* 2004)

below



The second point refers to the sites chosen for data collection. The study area, in essence, reflected a ‘necklace’ of centres of gravity of different urban or locational settings. Whilst the centres of population vary in size they can be broadly characterised as large urban, small urban and smaller rural settings. It was at points of

access to and egress from such sites that counters were located and surveying etc took place. Again, features of the object of enquiry shaped the research.

The importance of considering such ontological features of the research are important. For example, consider a simplified, but extremely typical approach to visitor spending surveys. These adopt a methodologically individualist approach and aggregate spending projections on a per-capita basis. The potential problems of this approach are profound. For example, on one particular segment of the route it was established that the average spend per 'respondent' was £40.47. Data counters indicated that 1992 users had been along the route over the particular time period of review. It might easily be forecast, then, that approximately £80,617 income could have been generated. However, if one recognises that the respondent is typically part of a family group of just over 2 people, and that the spending is *de facto* associated with the respondent group because the structure of demand reflects family activity then the forecast might be £37,135. The possibility of considerable error is clear. Likewise the implications for future sports tourism development. [16]

Of course, these are relatively simple calculations, but they illustrate the main point which is the dangers of relying on a methodologically individualist approach and simple event regularities. This is not to say that statistical projections are of no use. The point is that their reliability can be enhanced by being constructed upon an

[16] It is worth noting at this point that there is a literature addressing concern with the conceptual measurement of economic impacts (see, for example, Crompton (1995, 2004) and Hudson (2001)). These papers focus on the technicalities of arithmetic and what to include or exclude in a calculation of the multiplier effect stemming from initial direct spending activity, as was the case in the study above. The issue being discussed in this paper concerns the logically prior question of what constitutes the nature of visitation or use of a resource, in other words the structure of demand. It is clear that a similar exercise should apply to the derived demands that form the basis of multiplier effects.

explicit consideration of the structures that underpin behaviour. This raises the issue of whether or not complex or stratified/clustered sampling coupled with multivariate analysis are, of themselves, sufficient, say, to capture the intent of critical-realist inference. The answer is clearly that they can be of more use than simple naïve empirical work when both are employed in isolation. However, caution should be emphasised here. On the one hand regression-type analysis and associated statistical inference tends to emphasise analytical focus upon regression to the mean – as a stylisation – and also the generality and robustness of the characteristics of a complex population. This can lead to an emphasis on producing 'law-like' statements. In contrast policy scenarios and segmented analysis is essential for complex objects, in which there is recognition that the constituent parts may change and evolve differentially. In this respect and, on the other hand, the nature of the structures do need some explicit investigation. The main point, therefore, is that emphasis should be upon an exploratory approach to understand the structure of a phenomena as, for example, implied by Byrne (2003).

Conclusions

This paper has addressed two related issues: How insights from different disciplines can be combined to inform sport, tourism and sports tourism research, policy and management; and the implications this has for both the conduct of research, and establishing the relationship between sport and tourism and the area of sports tourism. The establishment of sports tourism as a research area in its own right is not merely a synthesis of sport and tourism. Sports tourism is clearly a synergistic phenomenon that benefits from a focus on disciplines rather than subject areas, and is most usefully thought of, as proposed by Weed and Bull (2004), as being derived from the unique

interaction of activity, people and place. In seeking to inform aspects of sports tourism research, this paper has argued that policy and management is intrinsically a realist endeavour. Two varieties of realism have been contrasted as a basis for informing the issues above. The first is an empirical realism, that draws upon positivism and deductivism, and which emphasises the understanding of causes through law like expressions of covarying empirical events for a given unit of analysis. The other is critical realism that comprises a transcendental approach to understanding a structured reality, in which the triangulation of methods is required to capture a concept of cause associated with emergence out of agency and structures. Whilst ultimately the choice between these approaches is necessarily one of ontological commitment, the paper has illustrated how critical realism can be used to inform policy and management decisions in sports tourism.

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