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BASED RESEARCH

Revolutionary arts-based research approaches to transform our 'way of knowing' in the  
tourism industry

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## PUSHING DEEPER INTO OTHER WAYS OF KNOWING USING ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

### Abstract

This paper aims to introduce the revolutionary method of participatory arts-based research (ABR) as a legitimate ‘way of knowing’ to push the boundaries of how tourism researchers view and build the transformative knowledge processes in the tourism field. The goal of this paper is not to naively advocate for tourism scholars to embrace arts-based methodologies as being the panacea for solving world injustice, rather to build an excitement for ‘rogue’ scholars to boldly and brazenly step forward to be pioneering architects on the ground floor of building the ABR approach. The author argues that new ways of knowing need to be explored in tourism research to better our understanding of how and if the field is ready to make another shift toward the unknown in order to have a deeper and richer understanding of the human experience in relation to place, community, travel, tourism, and development.

*Keywords:* critical perspective; paradigms; power; social justice; advocacy; arts-based research; art, visual methods; participatory methodologies

As noted by Morgan and Ateljevic (2011), the tourism industry is becoming increasingly diverse and even fragmented due not only to growth in the industry and tourism research but also tourism education marked by the growth of tourism programs. As with any field of research, the tourism research field cannot be generalized as one homogeneous community. Some researchers suggest the field may be viewed as those that lean towards a “business management approach”, a “social sciences” approach or more recently a “critical” approach (Ren et. al, 2010, p. 888; Tribe, 2006, p. 373). The early focus on tourism as an economic growth and development strategy is still a key factor in tourism research but it is now more framed within the context of sustainable tourism (Xiao and Smith, 2006). The term sustainable tourism implies a more varied and holistic approach but in actuality is still dominated by a “technical, rational, and scientific” paradigm (Tribe, 2006, p. 367). As noted by Higgins-Desbiolles (2006), “the ability of tourism to contribute to important social aims was recognized at the birth of the modern tourism phenomenon” (p. 1193). The problem, as noted by Franklin and Crang (2001), is “our understanding of tourism has become fetishized as a thing, a product, a behavior--but in particular an economic thing” (p. 6). The continued economic focus in tourism research, underpinned by the neo-liberal values of “performativity, consumerism, and profitability”, has been partly attributed to tourism researchers being situated in schools focused on business or management (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006; Tribe, 2009; Ren et al., 2010). This predominately management/social sciences dichotomy has led to a growing call for researchers to engage in a dialogue to foster a more holistic approach based on cooperation, collaboration and valuing both the management as well as the social sciences approach that would welcome “both/and” rather than “either/or” (Ren et al., 2010, p. 901).

Over the past forty years tourism research has seen phenomenal growth that has spurred

further examination of the dynamic and ever shifting global industry of tourism studies, however the dominant paradigm is still rooted in positivism (Riley and Love, 2000) with the “power of qualitative enquiry remain[ing] underserved” (Sedgley et al., 2011, p. 422; Willson and McIntosh, 2010). In the past decade, the process of exactly how tourism research knowledge was viewed, produced, disseminated and controlled came under scrutiny (Ren et al., 2010). Some modern scholars contend tourism research has been governed through parochialism and power dynamics allowing ‘gatekeepers’ to guard the production and dissemination of what is considered ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’. This “overwhelming patriarchal power at work”, rooted in ethnocentric research traditions, has historically led to a narrow view of accepted and legitimate research and research methods (Ren et al., 2011; Tribe, 2006, p. 364). The dominant ideology dictates the “do-able research [thus] legitimizing certain views while obscuring others” (Tribe, 2006, p. 361).

Although the positivist paradigm still dominates, there is a noticeable shift being made to at least explore the contribution that could be made by the interpretive paradigm and/or critical paradigm, which represents a paradigm shift within the tourism research field (Xiao and Smith, 2006; Pritchard et al 2011; Tribe 2005, Tribe 2006; Jamal and Hollinshead 2001). Some tourism researchers in recent years have spoken to the ‘maturity’ of the field as ready to “advance beyond its applied business research base to embrace reflective and critical academic inquiry” (Pritchard, et al., 2011; Tribe, 2006, p. 376).

Additionally, critiques have come from scholars calling for more innovative qualitative methodology. Even though tourism research has evolved and expanded over the past forty years, diverse qualitative methods have not been legitimized that can “do justice to the inter-disciplinary domain of tourism studies” (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001, p. 78). As many tourism

scholars have echoed over the past decade, the potential power of qualitative research has yet to truly be explored within the constructs of tourism research (Tribe, 2006, 2008; Jamal & Hollinshead 2001; Sedgley et al., 2011; Willson & McIntosh, 2010). Tribe (2008) calls for these innovative methods to “move towards multi-media to investigate areas that were previously off-limits” (p. 926). Modern critical scholars are increasingly calling for ‘innovative visual methodologies’ to be more fully explored beyond the occasional study using visuals or text to add to quantitative data analysis.

There has been a more recent shift in tourism research to move towards the exploration of qualitative methods, however the methods employed still “tend to be conventional methods such as focus groups and interviews” (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 283). As an example of more exploratory qualitative methods, Tribe (2008) proposes the use of visual art representation methods stating, “texts are works of art and virtual curating elaborates and evaluates a method for using these works to understand tourism” (p. 924). As an “alternative to word-and-number based research” visual representations have been utilized across multiple disciplines to gain a deeper and more multifaceted understanding of a phenomena; participants convey meaning through visuals in a way that words and numbers may not be able to fully express on their own (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 284).

#### *Pushing Deeper Into Other ‘Ways of Knowing’ Using Arts-Based Research (ABR)*

This paper suggests the approach of participatory arts-based research (ABR) as a potential avenue for continued exploration, to push the boundaries of how the tourism research field views and conducts research. These new ways of knowing need to be explored to better understanding how and if the field is ready to make another shift toward the unknown in order to

have a deeper and richer understanding of the human experience in relation to place, community, travel, tourism, and development.

ABR assists in the exploration of thoughts, emotions, perceptions, and meanings tied to experiences and multi-faceted versions of truth in a unique way as the research is explored, interpreted and communicated directly by the individuals using art as the tool. The approach of ABR utilizes many artistic approaches when collecting, analyzing and presenting data. Some of these approaches include collage, painting, music, film, photography, poetry, narrative writing, theater and dance, among others (Rydzik et al., 2013). At the core of ABR is a radical statement about social justice and control over the production of what is considered knowledge as well as its production and dissemination. “By calling on artful ways of knowing and being in the world, arts-based researchers make a rather audacious challenge to the dominant, entrenched academic community and its claims to scientific ways of knowing” (Finley, 2008, p. 72). The power of ABR is found in its transformative and participatory process. This creative, expressive and reflective process along with the attention to the process of knowledge creation (Osei-Kofi, 2013) “allows research questions to be posed in new ways, entirely new questions to be asked, and new nonacademic audiences to be reached” (Leavy, 2009, p. 12). The potential of ABR is described by Finley (2008) as “uniquely positioned as a methodology for radical, ethical, and revolutionary research that is futuristic, socially responsible, and useful in addressing social inequities” (p. 71).

ABR as defined by the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research* is “the systematic use of artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (McNiff, 2008, p. 29). Veroff (2002) views ABR approaches

as “a method that uses art as data that becomes both the means and ends of the process” and as a “perfect example of praxis as the how to do and the doing become incorporated into concretizations that make both spectators and actors out of all of us” (p. 1279). The objective of participatory arts research is to offer “symbolic, emotional or aesthetic responses to questions about identity, culture, learning, change, and power” (Veroff, 2002, p. 1280).

ABR could be transformational for the field of tourism research, the individual participant, as well as the researcher. Using ABR to make “public what had been rendered invisible engages the whole person in a process of discovery of self and of culture” (Veroff, 2002, p. 1279). According to a participatory ABR study done by Veroff (2002) with young Inuit adults,

The objective of the research was to create artistic manifestations that offered symbolic, emotional, or aesthetic responses to questions about identity, culture, learning, change, and power. Through the media of drawing, photography, printmaking, and video, students observed themselves and others, took in the world around them, constructed new realities, documented ongoing life, and explored the dimensions of form, texture, color, light, time, and space...Culture is the pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms, including actions, utterances, and meaningful objects of various kinds, by virtue of which individuals communicate with one another and share their experiences, conceptions, and beliefs. For the observer/interpreter, this implies a hermeneutical approach with great sensitivity to validate and render understandable a way of life that has meaning for the people doing it. Here, no one tries to hide the fact that interpretation exists; it becomes the method (p. 1280-1281)

Finley (2003) notes the promise for ABR as research as “some forms of art demonstrate tremendous capacity for realizing...[a] vision of [a] new paradigm based as it is in community, with considerations of participatory voice, reflexivity, and reciprocity...that serves people in locations where violence, poverty, and other social injustices divide communities along racial, ethnic, gender, residential, age, and class lines” (p. 283). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) note the



promise for arts-based research as research that joins “ethics, aesthetics, political praxis, and epistemology” (p. 258). ABR is a powerful tool that can be harnessed to expand current practices in the field of tourism research. A benefit of developing more in-depth and expressive knowledge is the ability to better understand tourists’ needs, expectations and experiences. ABR also provides a platform to better understand what local residents envision for their communities and how cultural and natural resources being developed, communicated and shared with tourists.

The visual ABR methods, specifically photo-elicitation and photovoice, are especially well suited for tourism research. Photo-elicitation is used in research where the goal is to better understand meanings and experiences while photovoice is more participatory in nature and is used when the goal is to empower social transformation and/or action. Both of these methods, especially photo-elicitation, have a history being used by visual anthropologists and more modern researchers in multiple fields. Although still a novelty in the tourism industry, some studies have utilized visual methods (Rydzik et al, 2013, p. 286). However most of these studies used visuals (such as photographs) just as additional material for quantitative analysis or as researcher guided interview prompts. The goal of ABR, in the context of this paper, is truly participatory and co-collaborative in nature. The only example I have found of such an approach in tourism research comes from a study done by Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan, & Sedgley in 2013. The goal of the study was to illustrate the value of ABR through the process of artwork being created that reflected the journey and experiences of Central and Eastern European female migrant workers employed in the tourism industry. Much of the framework of this paper was influenced by this particular study along with the “hopeful tourism” perspective as outlined by Pritchard, Morgan, and Ateljevic (2011).

*Opportunities of Using ABR: Co-Collaborative, Participatory, Empowering*

Goals engrained in ABR include:

- Bringing both arts and social inquiry out of elitist institutions to relocate within the realm of local, personal, everyday places and events
- Providing a more inclusive platform for who can participate in research
- Empowering activism and action in giving voice to the powerless and silenced
- Balancing power dynamics between participant and researcher
- Fostering reciprocal relationships between research and lived experiences
- Enhancing emotions and depth of self-reflection
- Provoking expansive and shifting thoughts and questions for researchers and participants
- Providing (the possibility of) reducing certainty in deeply engrained beliefs thus opening up new possibilities for critical thinking and new ways of thinking about self and others
- Extending the influence of scholarship beyond the academic to the reaches of policymakers and the public  
(Kerry-Morgan, 2008, p. 498; Finley, 2008, p. 72; Rydzik, et al., 2013, p. 287)

There are multiple positive benefits to the participants as individuals including self-expression, empowerment, increased self-esteem and in some cases psychological benefits (Finley, 2008, p. 73). An ABR project can be structured to cumulate with the works produced during the study being displayed openly for public viewing. This reflection and action process can be an important personal step in the process of individual healing, empowerment and activism (Rydzik et al, 2013, p. 287).

As noted by Rydzik et al. (2013), ABR increases feelings of empowerment for participants as they are given the opportunity to maintain control over their own artwork and to choose aspects of their experiences that are personally significant instead of the process being controlled by what the researcher finds significant. The shifting balance of power dynamics in the research process is a key factor guiding ABR practices. By “participating in the creation, interpretation, and dissemination” of the art process participants shift from subjects being researched to dynamic and valuable co-collaborators (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 294). Researchers often find the creative process transformative as well through increased self-reflection and a deep

connection to the project. The on-going connection fosters relationships that are built on trust and openness, which “consequently addresses research-participant power relations” (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 297). ABR methods assist in putting the participants at ease and opening up more avenues for dialogue. As an example, in the visual based methods, images are used at the beginning of the interview as an “icebreaker to help break down the power differential...and to build bridges [in a more relaxed atmosphere] that could lead to cooperation and engagement” (Prosser and Burke, 1998, p. 409).

The ABR approach allows for a broader participant base as the arts provide a more inclusive platform that doesn't require a particular level of education, literacy, skill or socio-economic class. ABR allows for a broader audience to participate and has broader implications as it expands the academic view to potentially showcase the project to the general public in an easily understandable way that could be a strategy for education and/or activism on an issue or topic. Although varying levels of participation can be outlined when structuring a ABR study, a key goal of ABR is the participatory nature where the individuals/groups and the researcher are all are deeply involved together in the process thus providing the springboard to ‘inform, educate, challenge, empower, and lead to action’ (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 287). Through participatory research individuals are able to use multiple forms of expression, such as photography and film, to explore the questions to be examined, framing the study, analyzing results and even developing action steps for social change. (Barndt, 2008, p. 356)

As noted by Rydzik et al. (2013), ABR increases feelings of empowerment for participants as they are given the opportunity to maintain control over their own artwork and to choose aspects of their experiences that are personally significant instead of the process being controlled by what the researcher finds significant (p. 292). The shifting balance of power

dynamics in the research process is a key factor guiding ABR practices. By “participating in the creation, interpretation, and dissemination” of the art process participants shift from subjects being researched to dynamic and valuable co-collaborators (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 294). Researchers often find the creative process transformative as well through increased self-reflection and a deep connection to the project. The on-going connection fosters relationships that are built on trust and openness, which “consequently addresses research-participant power relations” (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 297). Utilizing creative methods also opens up more opportunities to put the participants at ease and to open up more avenues for dialogue. As an example, in the visual based methods, images are used at the beginning of the interview as an “icebreaker to help break down the power differential...and to build bridges [in a more relaxed atmosphere] that could lead to cooperation and engagement” (Prosser and Burke, 1998, p. 409).

ABR expands the ability for researchers to get in-depth feelings, emotions, and values behind a perceived reality of a situation. This process of holistic reflection allows participants to “challenge the dominant discourses and preconceptions” surrounding a topic (Rydzik et al., 2013, p. 293). The process provides the platform and the possibility of reducing certainty in deeply engrained beliefs thus opening up new possibilities for critical thinking and new ways of thinking about self and others. “Just as science assists arts-based research through its emphasis on systematic inquiry, art enhances the process of discover in science by its responsiveness to the unexpected” (McNiff, 2008, p. 39). The collaboration that results in relationships and the deep reflection garnered not only leads to more authentic answers but more importantly uncovers additional, potentially paradigm shifting questions for both the participant as well as the researcher (Finley 2003, Eisner 1997).

## *ABR Paradigm*

There is a transformative power in not only the questions asked, but the types of questions asked and how they are shifting. Finley (2008), drawing from Denzin & Lincoln (2005), argues that the questions of qualitative researchers such as “How should research stories be told?” are shifting to ask, more importantly, “How can research generate social change?” or “How do we move arts-based research to progressive social action, to theory, and method that connects politics, pedagogy, and ethics to action in the world?” (p. 74)

The rise of the critical research perspective has developed as “second or third generation scholars engage with the reflexive turn” and with increasing and interconnected local and global challenges of building a more sustainable and just future (Ren et al., 2010, p. 888). The discussion of ABR is timely as it has been argued the “dominant wisdom tradition”, marked by objectivity, certainty of knowledge, western/ethnocentric and masculine traditions, is now being deconstructed to make way for the restructuring and reinterpretation of alternate realities that include the marginalized, oppressed and previously invisible individuals and groups (Pritchard et al, 2011, p. 944). According to Finley:

By its integration of multiple methodologies used in the arts with post-modern ethics of participative, action-oriented, and politically situated perspectives for human social inquiry, [it] has the potential to facilitate critical race, indigenous, queer, feminist and broader theories and research methodologies. Such work exposes oppression, targets sights of resistance, and outlines possibilities for transformative praxis. (2009, p. 71)

Although ABR is a process of scientific inquiry it do not claim to be science, in fact it does not claim to be purely arts either (Finley, 2003). The arts and sciences, although different in their modes of approach, have a basic commonality in the way that “both arts based research and

science involve the use of systematic experimentation with the goal of gaining knowledge about life” (McNiff, 2008, p. 33).

**Table 1. Comparing Dominant Positivist Paradigm and Emerging Arts-Based Research Paradigm**

Positivist Approach	Participatory Arts-Based Research Approach
Systematic	Creative
Western/Anglocentric traditions	Multiple ways of knowing
A truth that can be measured and known	Exploration of multi-layered meanings
Generalizable data to predict behavior	Uncovering meaning and depth to better understand
Detached science	Co-transformative learning
Requires objectivity	Embraces subjectivity, transformative
Growth and expansion	Mindful sustainability
Reductionist	Holism
Neoliberal competition	Syncretic co-creation
Focus of market /economic analysis	Focus of sensitive or complex topics, social justice
Masculinist	Partnership
Either/or	Both/and
Hierarchical	Participatory
Separation between emotion and knowledge	Seeks to illicit emotion in knowledge development
Ethics are extrinsic	Ethics are intrinsic
Instrumental and performance-led	Empowering
Self/Other	I/we
Linear	Circularity, spiral discourse

Dominant perspective

Emerging perspective

(Modified from a Hopeful Tourism model created by Pritchard, Morgan, and Ateljevic, 2011, p. 951)

“Arts-based researchers are not discovering new research tools they are *carving* them. And with the tools they sculpt, so too a space opens within the research community where passion and rigor boldly intersect *out in the open*” (Leavy, 2009, p. 1). Scholars in the burgeoning field of critical or ‘hopeful’ (Pritchard et al., 2011) tourism research have both an amazing opportunity as well as an overwhelming challenge when exploring “efforts to a map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life” (Behar, 2006, p. 174).

ABR can provide a more perceptive lens for viewing individual and collective experiences touched by the phenomena of tourism. Art extends our insights beyond the literal and more easily allows the emotional, “symbolic, the impressionistic, the imaginative, the ironic and the surreal to challenge and extend our thinking” (Tribe, 2008, p. 941). ABR could reveal a “potential canvas of tourism truth” that is beyond the reach of using numbers or words alone (Tribe, 2006, p. 369). Although pioneering researchers in the fields of sociology, anthropology and art education have contributed greatly to developing methodologies surrounding ABR, the tourism industry has yet to explore ABR as a valid tool aside from a cursory dabbling in visual methods. As with any burgeoning field of inquiry, the ABR field is a “field in flux” still striving to find a balance between art and science (Kerry-Moran, 2008, p. 500). As with all other research approaches, ABR doesn’t fit all research goals.

The goal of this paper is not to naively advocate for tourism researchers to embrace participatory arts-based methodologies as being the panacea for solving world injustice, rather to

build an excitement for researchers to boldly and brazenly stepping forward to be pioneering architects on the ground floor of building the ABR approach in the field of tourism research. This paper aims to encourage tourism researchers to push past the dominant paradigm boundaries of what is considered 'legitimate' knowledge to explore additional ways to understand "self and others" in order to "speak truth *of* power and facilitate the speech of the powerless" (Tribe, 2006, p. 376-377). Tribe (2006) predicts "this new generation of [tourism research] scholars is committed not just to describing the world but also to changing it. The next moment in qualitative inquiry will be one at which the practices of qualitative research finally move, without hesitation or encumbrance from the personal to the political" (p. 375). The emergence of 'revolutionary' ABR methods marks the beginning of an exciting process of development as scholars begin to explore this new 'way of knowing'. The transformative opportunities that arise with ABR could be in perpetual evolutionary motion for years to come (Knowles and Cole, 2008).



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