TOURISM, MIGRATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS AT THE INTERSECTION OF FLOWS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper starts from two propositions relating to tourism-migration relationships, and knowledge transfer. First, there has been considerable interest in recent years in ideas relating to ‘tourist-migrant’ workers, that is, in the complex inter-relationships between economic and cultural/tourism motivations, particularly amongst young people. However, this represents only one of the many economic relationships between tourism and migration, two phenomena that often have been studied in isolation (Williams and Hall, 2002). There is a need for a better understanding of how these are entwined in an economy of flows (Hudson 2004), shaping economic outcomes in the tourism sector. Secondly, there has also been a neglect of the role of labour mobility in knowledge transfer, innovation, and competitiveness – and this is particularly notable in an industry such as tourism, where demand and, in part, production, are essentially based on mobility. International tourists seek out experiences and services beyond their usual countries of residence, and the resulting demand for knowledge in the labour force that provides these creates a potentially significant role of migrant workers. This paper brings these themes together, in order to explore the role of migration in the creation and transfer of knowledge and skills in tourism.

The paper is divided into four sections. First, it briefly reviews some salient features of research on labour in tourism production, that provide insights into migration and knowledge. Secondly, it reviews some of the generic theories relating to the nature of knowledge, and knowledge transfer, and notes that these have largely been absent from research on the tourism sector. Thirdly, it considers the specific role of migration in knowledge creation and transfer. In particular, it critiques some of the limiting assumptions of previous research on migration and human capital. Instead, there is a need to identify different types of knowledge, and how
these are acquired and transferred by migrants under different conditions. Finally, it explores some of the ways in which the knowledge, created and transferred by migrants, contributes to tourism production. There is still limited direct research on this topic, but the paper is able to draw on some emerging, if fragmented, insights in diverse research areas. As such the paper seeks to map out an agenda for future research that will bring new perspectives to studies of tourism production, while constructing bridges to different research arenas.

LABOUR AND TOURISM PRODUCTION

There is still surprisingly little research on the role of labour in the production of tourism services, given the importance of labour costs in most segments of the tourism industry, let alone on labour migration. Some of the key features of this research, in relation to migration and knowledge transfer, are summarised below, drawing on Shaw and Williams (2004: chapter three).

First, given the importance of labour costs in tourism, and a reputation for paying relatively low wages (especially, in developed economies), there has been considerable interest in how downwards pressures are exerted on these. Riley et al (2002: 59-69) provide an exhaustive review of this issue, and identify three main sets of factors, that can be related to migration:

- Job attributes of attractiveness, acquisition of transferable skills and ease of learning. These contribute to a large potential labour market, high levels of mobility and the detachment of productivity from skill levels. As a result, managers take a short-term view of employment and training, whilst years of service are also poorly rewarded in the determination of wages. Migration is encouraged by these job attributes, but also contributes to lower wages.
• *Industrial structure and economic factors.* Fluctuations in tourism demand require employment flexibility in the labour force. Migration usually facilitates flexibility in the destination country. The small scale of most tourism enterprises also means there are only limited opportunities for advancement within firms, and weak occupational hierarchies. Therefore, internal labour markets tend to be relatively weak compared to external ones. This means that intra-company labour migration is limited, compared to so-called ‘free agent’ labour migrants (Kanter 1995).

• *Psychological issues.* Employees obtain non-material job satisfaction from employment as well as wages, so are more tolerant of low pay. This relates to the complex motivations of tourism-migrant workers, discussed later, where non-material rewards may outweigh material ones.

The research in this area offers mixed implications for understanding the role of knowledge transfer via migration. However, we can conclude that the factors which condition low wages in tourism, also facilitate selective types of migration flows and employment opportunities for migrants. As a result, the detachment of skills from productivity, weak internal labour markets, and the importance of non-material rewards all contribute to highly selective opportunities for knowledge transfer.

Secondly, tourism employment has *distinctive psychological features*, notably in respect of work orientation. Goldthorpe et al (1968) developed the use of the term ‘work orientation’, emphasising that there are ‘holistic’ attitudes towards work: both materialistic and non-materialistic. Non-material rewards have several dimensions. Some are related to place association – most tourism jobs are, almost by definition, in attractive locations, which compensates for low material rewards. Other attractions for tourism employees may include the diverse tasks to be undertaken in a flexible environment (in other words, the avoidance of routines), and opportunities
for host-guest interactions. Work orientation has particular relevance for the complex relationships between tourism and migration, with migrants being motivated by both material and non material goals (especially place attraction). This is captured in the work of Uriely (2001: 6) who conceptualises migrant workers in terms of their engagement in tourism, and their tourism and place oriented motivations. The key question then is the ability of firms to capture the knowledge carried by employees with such work orientation.

Thirdly, there is considerable research on labour market flexibility. This has its roots in the work of Atkinson (1984) who differentiated between numerical and functional flexibility: the first implies changes in employment levels in response to demand fluctuations, whilst the second suggests the movement of workers between tasks within firms, in response to spatio-temporal changes in demand within the establishment. Shaw and Williams (1994) extended this conceptualisation to the tourism industry, when they classified the variety of employment ‘contracts’ in tourism - casualisation, temporary, seasonal, part time, homeworking under contract etc - in terms of four axes: regularity of working hours, functional versus numerical flexibility, employment security, and availability of material and fringe benefits. Lockwood and Guerrier (1989) have critiqued the Atkinson model in their analysis of major UK hotels. They observed relatively little functional flexibility in hotels and, while there was evidence of numerical flexibility strategies, the wages and benefits of part-time workers were not significantly different to those of ‘core’ workers. Similarly, Milne and Pohlmann (1998: 188) found that numerical flexibility was common in Montreal hotels. The confirmation of the importance of numerical flexibility reinforces the view that labour market mobility – including migration – is likely to be particularly important in the tourism industry. It is one readily available strategy for increasing or decreasing labour supply in response to the particularities
of demand (notably its temporal ‘lumpiness’). International migrant workers tend to be seen as disposable in employment strategies that are driven by numerical flexibility, as Nancy Folbre (2001: 187) comments:

‘The great advantage of temporary immigrants is their compatibility with last-minute methods of inventory control. If you don’t need them, you don’t order them. If you accidentally get too many, they can be returned’.

This poses questions about the effectiveness of knowledge transfer from workers to organizations in context of such labour market dynamics.

Fourthly, labour market segmentation, drawing on wider divisions in society, offers possibilities for employers to depress labour costs. The segmentation of workers (by race, age, gender etc) provides a basis for paying lower wages relative to the value of work to some (usually more weakly organised or vulnerable) social groups. The key to this is the social construction of job content, linked to the system of remuneration. Some jobs are constructed as ‘unskilled work’, simply because they are undertaken by particular social groups, and this is used to justify paying lower wages, irrespective of the real skill or knowledge content of these jobs. One of the major sources of labour market segmentation is migrant versus non-migrant status. The precise nature of such segmentation depends on national regulatory frameworks. For example, unregistered migrants are more likely to be found in more marginal jobs, whether in the formal or the informal economy. But arguably they also contribute to reducing absolute and relative labour costs: accepting lower wages and reducing labour shortages, thereby depressing overall wage levels.

Clearly labour migration is recognised in the literature on labour market segmentation in tourism, although perhaps less so than say gender segmentation. However, the implications for understanding the use, transfer and acquisition of skills have not really been explored in the tourism industry, even though the social
construction of jobs around migrant status has significant implications for the recognition of individuals as knowledgeable workers.

Fifthly, while labour costs are important, the role of labour can not be reduced to this simple economistic view. As Baldacchino (1997: 92) argues, ‘workers cannot be forced to work without a modicum of consent on their part; nor do workers agree to sell an exact quantity of labour’. The amount of work done, and how it is done, requires consent and active worker input. This applies particularly to ‘front line’ service employees who have to respond (perform) to the emotional needs and expectations of clients, as well as the requirements of managers. Therefore, managers may be more concerned with realising satisfying tourist-worker encounters than reducing labour costs, and may seek to increase rather than reduce labour inputs per tourist. Employers who take a long-term view seek to balance the two goals. In other words, as Hudson (2001: 109) argues in a broader context, ‘in the final analysis … companies are concerned about unit production costs, not nominal wages per se’. And this approach means that employers will be more attentive to the various types of knowledge possessed by workers.

In general, formal and technical skills and training are relatively low in the tourism industry, as Riley et al (2002) argue, although there are exceptions such as airline pilots, or top chefs. However, the effective performance of many tourism jobs also requires other less formal skills such as personal interaction or self-presentation skills, or close familiarity with and knowledge of the needs and tastes of a regular international client group. This underlines two points. First, these encultured and embodied types of knowledge (discussed later) tend to be embedded in individuals, and in many tourist jobs are not easily codified into knowledge at the organizational level. Once such workers are lost, they will not
easily be replaced, so that firms which are focussed on quality issues or on unit costs, have to prioritise retaining the individuals who possess these forms of knowledge. Secondly, this poses questions about the transferability of many of the forms of knowledge embedded in migrant workers. At first sight, international migrant workers may not possess the culturally specific knowledge required for front of house jobs in tourism. But, if the dominant client groups are international tourists, then the migrant workers may possess highly valorised knowledge.

This brief review serves to underline the argument that, when focussing on individual migrant workers, there are specific conditions in the tourism industry that mediate their economic role: the above discussion focussed on downwards pressures on costs, psychological orientation, flexibility, segmentation, and the notion of total unit costs. These all mediate the role of workers – including migrants - in knowledge creation and transfer. This is critical because of the emphasis placed on knowledge as the key to competitiveness. Drucker (1993: 38) expressed this forcefully when writing that ‘Knowledge is the only meaningful resource today. The traditional ‘factors of production’ …. have become secondary’. Although this overstates the argument, the need to understand the complexity of knowledge transfers is paramount.

FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

There is a vast literature on inter- and intra-firm knowledge transfer, and more generally on knowledge creation (see for example, Easterby-Smith and Lyles 2003, and Dierkes et al 2001). However, given the specific focus in this paper on the relationship between migration and knowledge transfer, we focus on two themes: different forms of knowledge at the level of the individual, and different
generic models of knowledge transfer. Consequently, this paper does not engage with the substantial research on organizational practices and ‘organizational knowledge’, amongst many other topics. The focus on individual knowledge can be defended on theoretical grounds, related to the role of cognition. For example, Huber (1991) argues that knowledge can only reside at the individual level, although others (eg Nelson and Winter 1982) contend that there are organizational routines that persist independently of individuals (Empson 2001). Following Lam (2000), this paper understands individual knowledge as all the knowledge possessed by an individual that can be applied independently to particular tasks.

A considerable body of theory has grown up around the notion of individual knowledge. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), in their seminal work *The Knowledge Creating Company*, argue that knowledge is created through interaction between individuals at various levels within an organization. And organizations are unable to create knowledge unless this is shared with others. An earlier, and perhaps the best known, starting point is Polanyi’s (1966) famous distinction between tacit and codified knowledge. They are of course inter-dependent, and tacit knowledge is required for effective use of explicit or codified knowledge. Tacit knowledge exists in the background of consciousness, which Poanyi famously expressed as ‘we can know more than we can tell’. To some extent it can be transferred via electronic means, such as video conferencing. However, some forms of knowledge are only, or at least more effectively, transferable through the copresence of individuals. Migration is, of course, one means for bringing about co-presence, and we return to this later in the paper.
Since Polanyi’s pioneering work, there have been a number of attempts to refine the understanding of individual knowledge, and these are summarised by Venzin et al. (1998):

- Tacit knowledge: a person knows more than he can express in words (Polanyi 1966).
- Embodied knowledge: results from the experiences of physical presence (eg from participating in a particular project) (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).
- Embrained knowledge: depends on cognitive abilities that allow recognition of underlying patterns or reflection on basic assumptions (Blackler 1995).
- Embedded knowledge: knowledge is embedded in a variety of contextual factors. For example, shared knowledge is generated in different language systems, or organizational cultures. (Brown and Duguid 1991).

Although there are overlaps between these categories, there are also significant differences. The concept of ‘embedded knowledge’, in particular, poses questions about context and or place, and therefore about the role of mobility versus the situational contingencies (whether place or organizational specific) of knowledge transfer. What types of knowledge can only be held by individuals, and imparted through direct inter-personal relations, and what are the constraints on such transfers? These are key questions in relation to the role of migration in the tourism industry.

Before the last question can be addressed, however, there is a need to consider a second theme: the principal modes by which knowledge transfers are effected
between firms. Much of the literature originating from the management literature seems to assume that most knowledge is transferred within (transnational) companies, either via discrete codified parcels (manuals, data bases, reports etc), or via intra-company labour mobility of various types (Salt 1988; but also see Mahroum 2001 on this limiting assumption). However, knowledge transfer also occurs beyond the boundaries of individual firms.

Gertler (2003) identifies three, what can be termed, formats for inter-firm knowledge transfer, which bring together research strands from management and economic geography: learning regions, communities of association, and knowledge enablers.

Learning regions. This literature (Maskell and Malmberg 1999) starts from the logical premise that tacit knowledge is most effectively shared, face to face, by individuals who share some key features: the same language, shared norms, and personal knowledge of each other through previous collaboration or interaction, which has facilitated mutual trust. The emphasis on face-to-face contacts, and locally grounded trust, leads to the conclusion that geographical clustering facilitates tacit knowledge transfers. However, Allen et al (2000), amongst others, considers that the importance of geographical clustering, and locally grounded relationships, has been overstated. Instead, he argues that ‘ the translation of ideas and practices …. (is) likely to involve people moving to and through local contexts, to which they bring their own blend of tacit and codified knowledges’ (p28). In other words, he implicitly recognises the importance of human mobility.
Communities of practice. This is probably the best known of the literatures in this field. It argues that groups of workers are informally bound together by shared expertise and experience, and over time their collaboration in problem-solving, storytelling etc, facilitates tacit knowledge transfers (Wenger 1998). Individuals are bound together by shared understandings, developed through effective networking. In this view, organizational and relational proximity are far more important than geographical proximity. Knowledge transfers may occur locally within organizations, or they may be across regional or even national boundaries, within or beyond companies. Brown and Duguid (1991) contend that close-knit communities of practice are usually constituted as face to face communities. This does not imply localized proximity, only that there are opportunities for frequent face to face contacts (at professional association meetings etc). The role of migration in this schema is ambiguous.

Knowledge enablers. In this conceptualization, a key role is played in knowledge transfer by ‘knowledge activists’; they are ‘boundary spanners’, who are critical in disseminating or sharing information (van Krogh et al 2000). There are micro-communities (small in number, say fiver to seven individuals) who have worked together in the past, and this facilitates direct, face to face interaction, allowing knowledge transfer across boundaries to other work communities. If international borders constitute significant boundaries, then international migrants have significant, and distinctive, potential to act as boundary spanners.

One of the key differences between these theories is the importance they attach to knowledge transfer via geographically localized, as opposed to distanciated, relationships. However, framing the debate in this way creates a false polarization. Instead, it is more useful to follow Oinas (2000) who, writing about
competencies rather than knowledge, emphasises that both local and non-local ties are formative influences, and the balance between them is essentially an empirical not a theoretical question. This raises questions about the precise mechanisms that facilitate either local or distanciated ties and interactions. In the next section, we focus on one such mechanism – migration.

MIGRATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

A number of implications follow from the assertion that tacit knowledge can only be transferred, effectively, amongst individuals who share a common social context. Gertler (2003) argues that tacit knowledge is most effectively acquired experientially, hence spatial distance is an obstacle. The last point is also emphasized by Nonaka et al (2000: 5): ‘tacit knowledge is non-transferable without the exchange of key personnel and all the systems that support them’. Migration is one means for effecting an exchange of key personnel, and – as the work of Saxenian (2000) on Silicon Valley demonstrates – a critically important one in many economically dynamic regions. However, given that knowledge is most effectively transferred between those with shared social contexts, there are limits to the extent to which some types of knowledge are transferable between different settings. Hence, the conditions which facilitate knowledge transfer in, say, high tech regions (e.g. shared understandings of scientific working practices, and knowledge), may not hold in other sectors such as the media or tourism industries.

It is surprising, that migration research has paid relatively little attention to the transfer of knowledge per se (but see Williams 1996). There is, of course, a considerable literature about the transfer of skills (which implicitly includes knowledge), based on the notion of human capital. Due to the difficulties of
quantifying many skills and competencies, researchers have mostly focussed on qualifications, income and occupational positions, all of which are easier to measure than say social or personal skills.

Similarly, the human capital literature does not address broader issues relating to the different forms of tacit knowledge, as set out above. This was recognized by Li et al (1996) who called for research on what they termed ‘total human capital’. One of the main implications of this approach is that it questions the assumption that skilled workers who take unskilled jobs abroad – perhaps in tourism - constitute human capital brain waste or brain loss. They may not be in jobs which require high level qualifications, but there may be opportunities to use particular types of knowledge (e.g. of particular national groups of tourists). Similarly, this perspective questions the view that ‘unskilled’ migrants do not effect knowledge transfers – which is implicit in the way that the human capital and the skills literatures tend to focus on highly skilled workers and managers. Rather, there is a need to question what is understood by knowledge. In reality, unskilled workers may acquire non-occupationally specific competences, such as language or communication skills, which can be valorised, either abroad or through return migration. And they bring new perspective to both the performance of particular tasks, as well as the organization of work – if they are listened to.

There is therefore a need to examine in more detail how ‘total human capital’ is constituted. Reich (1992) identifies three types of skills: technical (involving high levels of symbolic manipulation), routine skills (repetitive work), and social skills (which facilitate communication and social interaction). Given the emphasis on quantitative indicators, most research has focussed on technical and routine skills (as measured in terms of qualifications and occupations), while social skills have
been neglected. Evans (2002) provides a more detailed analysis of what he terms ‘the competencies’ which can be acquired through learning (by all workers), identifying five main types in his ‘starfish’ model:

- Content related and practical competences (e.g. willingness to carry out a variety of duties);
- Competences related to attitudes and values (e.g. responsibility, or reliability);
- Learning competences (e.g. openness to learning, or perceptiveness);
- Methodological competences (e.g. networking skills or ability to handle multiple tasks); and
- Social and interpersonal competences (e.g. communication skills or awareness of others’ viewpoints).

Research on migration has persistently neglected many of these competencies. Even where individual migrants hold, what are socially constructed as, unskilled jobs, these can provide opportunities to acquire a range of competencies. This reinforces the importance of adopting a more rounded perspective on knowledge and migration. Openness to learning, perceptiveness, networking, communication skills and social awareness are particular important competences that migrants may acquire in a range of jobs in tourism.

Foreign language competence is one very specific but important form of communication skill that can be acquired by international migrants. Human capital theories have addressed this, not least because it is relatively easily measurable. This has been conceptualised as ‘language capital’ (Dustmann, 1999). At one level, foreign language skills provide individuals with the communication skills necessary to achieve social recognition whilst working abroad, or in particular circumstances
after return migration (for example, securing jobs with foreign owned companies). But language skills can also be commodified more directly, as a particular form of professional expertise; for example, being able to work with foreign language documents, or liaising with foreign clients. The economic value of foreign language skills to migrants, in realising the benefits of investment in education through higher wages, has been empirically verified (for example, Dustmann, 1994).

Globalisation gives a particular twist to the valorisation of ‘language capital’, which increasingly need not be country specific. Some languages (notably English) constitute ‘the ground floor’ of the world hierarchy of languages (van Parijs, 2000). This leads simultaneously to regionalisation and globalisation. Migrants are attracted to particular countries (such as the UK, USA, Ireland, Australia, Canada and New Zealand) in order to acquire English language capital. But this opens up global employment prospects, because of the prevalence of English as the language of international business, and of the internet. This has particular resonance for international tourism in two parallel ways: first acquiring or possessing country specific language skills, such as Japanese or Korean, and, secondly, the value of English as a ‘ground-floor language’ constituting the everyday ‘transaction language’ of global tourism.

In one of the few detailed studies of the non-technical competences acquired by migrants, Williams and Balaz. (2005) analysed knowledge acquisition and transfer amongst returned migrants to Slovakia from the UK. They interviewed almost 200 return migrants, comparing those who had worked abroad in professional and managerial occupations, and those who had migrated as au pairs (live-in domestic helpers, who are also seen partly as engaging in cultural tourism). They found surprising similarities in how different migrants evaluated their
experiences. Most au pairs and professional/managerial migrants were strongly positive in their self evaluation of the impact of migration on their income and status. This was mainly because what they valued most were the acquisition of English language competence, followed by self confidence, enhanced networking capacity, and self presentation skills. In different ways, these enabled many returned migrants to acquire better paid or different jobs on their return to Slovakia. In other words, we need to rethink which migrants are involved in knowledge transfer: it is not the preserve of professionals and managers. In this, we agree with Coe and Bunnell (2003: 438-9) that “we use the term ‘knowledgeable’ migrants/individuals to denote people who embody any form of knowledge …. that is of economic value to others, and can enact knowledge transfer by moving across space.” In the next section, we consider the implications of this perspective for understanding the tourism industry.

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF MIGRATION IN TOURISM LABOUR

Labour mobility is of course a significant feature of the tourism industry, as recognised by Riley (2004: 135):

‘The basic components of most mobility studies are movement, motives and effects, and these can be applied at all levels of abstraction in relation to the phenomenon. In this respect the literature uses a range of frameworks that runs from, at the macro-level, trans-national migration through to, at the micro-level, individual job change, whilst taking-in inter-sector, geographic, inter-organisational, and occupational mobility. It is worth noting that tourism employment, somewhat unusually, involves significant mobility in all these categories’.
However, research on the role of migration in the production of tourism services has been limited. One of the main lines of investigation has been seeking to understand the high levels of mobility in tourism, and Riley (2004) provides a theoretical approach to this issue. The majority of tourism jobs involve skills that can be acquired relatively quickly through short periods of training or practice. They are part of a secondary labour market, characterised by diverse and accessible job opportunities that, in turn, encourages mobility. But he also argues the need to consider motivations and personality factors, and how these interact with structural factors: ‘Indeed the very fact that mobility is possible is part of the attractiveness of the industry in the first place, so structure and motive go hand in hand’ (p 137).

Szivas and Riley (1999) also considered mobility in relation to personal orientations to working in tourism. They identified five such orientations:

- instrumental utility: an easy and convenient industry to earn a living;
- entrepreneurial outlook; interest in developing a small business with attached life-style;
- positive orientation: enjoying tourism jobs for their own sake;
- refugee mentality: flight from problems faced in other sectors; and
- uncommitted wanderer orientation: travelling more important than the job.

The second and fifth orientations signal the importance of non-economic motives in tourism-related migration. This needs to be seen in context of a range of consumption- and production-related tourism-migration links (Williams and Hall 2002). For many migrants, working in a tourism is not necessarily a preferred option, but the outcome of the strong external and weak internal labour markets in this sector, compared to other industries. However, for many migrants, there are positive associations of working tourism, and here we focus on this group. More
specifically, this directs attention to Uriely’s (2001) useful typology of tourism-migration:

- **Travelling professional workers**: mainly work related, and engage in tourism activities as a by product of travelling
- **Migrant tourism workers**: travel in order to make a living, but only amongst tourism places given their pleasure orientation
- **Non-institutionalised working tourists**: work while travelling to support their trip
- **Working-holiday tourists**: work is part of their tourism experience e.g. volunteer conservation workers

The first type are migrants, with dominantly materialistic motives, who work in tourism mainly because of the employment opportunities that are available. The second type, the migrant tourism worker, has mixed economic and tourist motivations. He or she is attracted to a particular tourism destination because of its tourism attractions, and they work in order to support their visit (often seasonally). The attraction may be a specific place (eg Paris), or - more generically - a type of tourism destination (eg ski resorts). For the third type, the primary motivation is the experience of travelling abroad, and for some this may be a form of adventure tourism, with elements of self-discovery. Work (in any sector) is instrumental in supporting their tourism objectives. Finally, there are those for whom work is part of their tourist experience, notably those working on conservation projects in attractive or challenging locations. There are, then, several forms of tourism-labour migration (let alone the migrants who work in tourism as a last resort), but the implications for knowledge transfer remain poorly understood. The picture is further complicated if a temporal horizon is entered into the analysis to allow for the migration cycle (King 2002), or cycles of departure and return: migrants may not be listened to as
knowledgeable in the tourism industry while working abroad, but they may acquire knowledge which is valued on return to their country of origin (or, indeed, to a third country).

We consider each of Urieley’s first three types of migrants in turn (the last is a relatively minor category of workers), and explore further their economic relationships, especially in terms of knowledge creation and transfer.

_Travelling professional workers._ This is the group that is most commonly referenced in the general labour migration literature (Beaverstock 2002). They are a group of managers and professionals who develop their careers through migration. This can be self-organized (the free agents or free movers referred to earlier), or can constitute managed intra-company mobility. Both have implications for knowledge transfer.

In the case of intra-company transnational moves, there are two competing models. Morgan (2001) distinguishes between the multinational and the global company. The multinational company is hierarchical, and communication is focussed on the home country HQ. Managers’ careers are centred on this, and they will move down to branch plants, for postings, but will always remain focussed on the home base. In contrast, the global company (Morgan 2001, p22) has ‘a thick web of communications possibilities, vertically and horizontally. Managers’ careers would be varied and would involve movement across different subsidiaries, as well as into head office. Senior management would reflect a wider group of nationalities and experiences than in the multinational
enterprise. Learning would be dispersed, often disorganised but usually multi-directional in terms of its effects’.

In this case, migration is a key mechanism, indeed an inherent component, of company strategies for the management of knowledge transfer. Classically, it is most likely to be found in those two tourism sectors with the highest levels of transnational ownership: hotels, and airlines. Migration may become an essential part of the career development strategies of many managers. Gunz (1998) sees this in terms of managers deliberately accumulating human capital (knowledge) through a sequence of jobs. However, a note of caution is required here, for Ladkin and Riley (1996) contend that the hierarchical, intra-company model of careers is not characteristic of hotel managers. Rather, they argue that inter-organisational mobility not intra-organisational mobility is dominant, that is inter-company not intra-company moves.

The knowledge transfers effected by intra-company mobility are likely to be highly structured, being managed by companies to achieve particular ends such as the dispersion of company practices or organizational contacts, providing opportunities to acquire knowledge of local markets, and to develop social networks. However, the possibility of unforeseen outcomes in knowledge transfer in this context should not be underestimated. In contrast, inter-company moves have less predictable impacts, although they will be structured by the work culture and organisational framework of the destination company.

We turn now to the other two migrant categories. Migrant tourism workers travel in order to make a living, but only amongst those places with particular tourism environments. They are typified by ski or surfing instructors who may move
seasonally between work locations, but also include more universally transferable
types of tourism occupations, such as chefs or receptionists. And non-
institutionalised working tourists work while abroad to fund their travels, and include
for example a large proportion of young tourists on gap years between school,
university and permanent work, or who take time out from permanent employment.
At first glance, and examining the types of jobs involved, the knowledge transfers
associated with these categories, especially the latter, appear limited. However, if
the social skills identified by Reich (1992) are considered, these migrants can be
seen to have a far greater role to play in knowledge transfer.

The last argument is exemplified by employer surveys. For example, ‘foreign
skills’ (linguistic and cultural knowledge) are valued by many prospective
employers. Dawkins et al (1995) found that the ‘foreign skills’ most valued by
employers were foreign language proficiency, experience of contacts with foreign
people, having lived or worked in a foreign country, specific cultural knowledge,
knowledge of foreign business ethics and practice, and formal study of a foreign
country. This is broadly confirmed by Aitken and Hall’s (2000) findings that in New
Zealand the most important ‘foreign skills’ for tourism firms were specific cultural
knowledge (eg of the service expected by particular key national market segments),
followed by extensive contacts with foreign people, and knowledge of foreign
business practices and ethics. These skills are likely to be particularly important in
nationally-segmented niche markets. For example, many Koreans and Japanese
are employed in hotels and restaurants in Australia and New Zealand, where there
are significant numbers of Korean or Japanese tourists. In terms of types of
knowledge, these are classically examples of embodied knowledge (language
skills). However, they also include embedded knowledge (for example, in response
to tourists who seek service delivery that is similar to that in their own country). In
other words, while such embedded knowledge is necessarily context dependent, because it is shaped by situational factors and shared meanings, these tourism firms seek to create hybrid versions of this knowledge in the tourism destinations.

The importance of migrants’ embodied knowledge should not be underestimated. Crang’s (1994) study of waiters in themed restaurants provides one of the most detailed case studies of performance in the hospitality industry. Customers expect certain performances from waiters and waitresses, whilst also actively contributing to these performances. More generally, Crang (1997: 139) argues that tourism products are experiential and interactional (involving employees and tourists), whilst ‘tourist places are not just imagined places, they are also performed places; and tourism employees are not just actors on a stage, they have to act out that stage’. (p. 147). This means not only that the labour process can not be predetermined by managers, but also that managers need to attract and retain the staff who have valued embodied knowledge. Migrants represent the mobility of embodied knowledge which can be critical in those work performances which require culturally-specific and linguistic knowledge. The very process of the internationalisation of tourism therefore reinforces the value of international migrant labour, in respect of both embodied and embedded skills. Moreover, many of these skills can be acquired outside of the tourism work place. Therefore, tourism firms potentially can tap into a wide range of migration and return migration flows, all of which transport various types of knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH AGENDA

The central argument which emerges in this paper is that tourism firms, in effect, are located amidst multiple flows of different types of knowledge. Some of
these are highly structured, as within firms, while others flow around them more autonomously, as epitomised by ‘free mover labour migrants’. Not all of these involve corporeal mobility, let alone migration, and it is important to recognise the importance of communities of association, and learning regions, as alternative channels for tacit knowledge transfer, as well as the more obvious role of codified knowledge in the form of training manuals, web sites etc. In many ways, the tourism industry is no different to any other industry in respect to the role of migration in knowledge transfer.

However, the very nature of international tourism, involving the (international) mobility of demand poses particular needs in respect of embodied, and – almost contradictorily – embedded, knowledge transfers through labour migration. Of course, many of the migrants who work in tourism do so by default or for serendipitous reasons. But the nature of the international tourism experience means there are some highly specific and targeted tourism-related labour flows (Uriely 2001; Williams and Hall 2003). Tourism firms do require workers who have embedded knowledge of the country of origin of the tourists, and of particular foreign languages. It is this particular conjunction of the mobility of tourists and (potential) tourism workers that lies at the heart of distinctive knowledge creation and transfer processes in tourism.

Of course, the role of labour migration in respect of knowledge should not be over-estimated. In practice, there can be considerable barriers to firms utilising migrants’ skills and knowledge. First, there are limits to the extent to which individual migrants can transfer tacit knowledge to other workers. By its very nature, tacit knowledge can not always be articulated. Second, if knowledge is deeply embedded within and inseparable from the practices and activities that people
undertake, it cannot exist independently of them, ie it is context dependent. Hence while migrant workers may have advantages in terms of dealing with groups of tourists of their own nationality, their knowledge is constrained by the cultural and other specificities of dealing with them in different locales. Thirdly, individuals may be unwilling to share knowledge: knowledge hoarding may manifest itself at the individual level, or at a group level, being influenced by the development of sub-cultures within an organization (Alvesson and Karremen 2001). Fourthly, there are issues about the receptiveness of individuals to knowledge transfers from those who can be ‘othered’, such as migrants: sources of resistance lie in issues of positionality (especially focusing on race and ethnicity), transcultural communication and social identities.

Turning to the future, this paper points to three significant areas of tourism research. First, there is a need for empirical studies to identify the types of knowledge transfer which can be articulated through migration, and to explore the differences which exist between tourism sub-sectors, organizational types, and places. Second, there is a need for ethnographic research, exemplified by detailed case studies of particular firms, that will allow exploration of how migrants engender flows of knowledge within firms, and how these are translated into work and organizational practices, but also how and why they are resisted. And finally, further work on reconceptualising tourism as constituted of flows of workers, tourists, capital and knowledge will open up new perspectives on competitiveness, innovation and productivity in the sector.
REFERENCES


