

Tourism and Tourism Studies: 25 years of ‘Thinking-alike’, from Calgary to Tokyo

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Abstract: This paper aims at celebrating Professor Kazuo Murakami’s retirement by reflecting on some of the key research themes that during his career he has shared with the author. Writing in a deliberately biographical mode, the article recalls some of the key passages of their collaboration and put them in relation to the development of their respective research interest. From the early conversations in Calgary about Banff, to the most recent encounters in the Netherlands, this brief essay discusses how the engagement with tourism as a source of social transformation and as an analytical framework to interpret broader cultural change may be identified as the red thread accompanying 25 years of fruitful and exciting collaboration.

Key words: tourism studies, Kazuo Murakami, tourism and social change, biography and research

- I Introduction
- II Banff
- III Venice
- IV Japan
- V London
- VI Wageningen
- VII The Future of Tourism

I Introduction

The opening chapter of the volume *Travels in Paradox: Remapping Tourism*, that I co-edited with Tim Oakes some time ago, discusses extensively the condition of tourism scholars living and working in a mass tourism destination like Venice where I was a resident at that time (see Minca and Oakes, 1996). On that occasion, Tim and I reflected at length on several key questions related to such condition and its somewhat

paradoxical implications. First, how difficult it is for tourism scholars to have a ‘normal’ life when they happen to live in cities constantly populated by tourists; that is, an everyday life devoid of direct or indirect implications with their work. Second, how to deal with the fact that, as researchers, we visit tourist sites and we share many spaces and activities with tourists? In other words, how different and how similar are tourist scholars from the people and the set of practices that they study? Third, how can one distinguish ‘authentic’ spaces of everyday life from those populated by the ever more pervading tourist crowds in a city like Venice (but the same question may apply to many other global destinations)? These are important questions, we concluded, to appreciate not only the deeper personal implications of becoming a scholar focused on such a massive social phenomenon,

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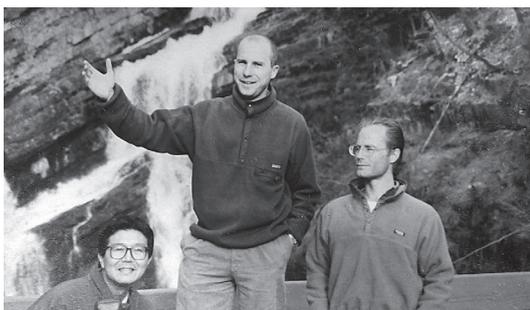
but also to investigate how tourism is increasingly penetrating many people's everyday spatialities and how it cannot—and should not—be studied in isolation, as an economic sector set apart. And this is one key lesson that I learned also from my colleague Professor Kazuo Murakami: tourism is tightly entangled in the reproduction of the social fabric and must therefore be analysed as a key manifestation of the broader cultural change experienced by many societies today (see John Urry's [1990] path-breaking work on this, among the many interventions that followed the publication of his *The Tourist Gaze*). The co-implication of tourism and the everyday is in fact not a concern for the tourism scholar alone; it is a major process involving an increasing number of social interactions and of places and impacting, in a decisive way, on the lives of many local residents. Kazuo and I, in 25 years of collaboration and common research and intellectual interest, have in fact shared the preoccupation for the social transformations that such co-implication between tourism and the everyday may originate. We have also shared our fascination for the ways in which tourism may be seen as an extraordinary analytical framework to understand societal change and to anticipate the emergence of cultural change: in Italy, in Japan, but also more broadly in Europe and in Asia. If I have to identify a red thread linking (and making sense of) decades of conversations, travels, seminars, teaching and wonderful (Japanese and Italian) dinners that I have had with Professor Murakami, this thread can be possibly identified in our conviction that by studying tourism we can learn so much about our broader societies and their related political economies. What we have also shared, I trust, is the realisation that our own professional and personal lives have been significantly influenced by what we learned from tourism, both as tourists and as tourism scholars.

This is why I believe it may be fruitful to celebrate Professor Murakami's retirement with a brief biographical intervention that reflects on tourism and cultural change by recalling directly a few key moments of our respective careers in which some of the issues described above were the source of ever-new venues of investigation that we shared with genuine intellectual enthusiasm and academic dedication.

II Banff

In 1992, I spent 6 months as a visiting scholar at the World Tourism Education & Research Centre of the University of Calgary (WTERC), Canada. I was at the very beginning of my academic career and working in such an international environment was at same time exciting and intimidating. During those months, I had the privilege to meet Kazuo Murakami, then Associate Professor at Yokohama College of Commerce, who was spending his sabbatical in the same institution. We soon became acquaintances and began spending time together either while hiking the Rocky Mountains or while discussing tourism issues (often the two things at the same time). Both Kazuo and I were there to study the tourist development of Banff National Park. His work being largely focused on the then significant impact of Japanese tourists in Banff (see, among other publications, Murakami and Go, 1990), while my work was concerned with questions of destination image and the conflict between tourist development, nature preservation and urban development (see Minca and Draper, 1996). It was a time in which the Banff Spring Hotel and Lake Louise were major iconic landscapes for a new and wealthy generation of Japanese tourists who were benefitting from the far-reaching consequences of a long economic growth and a strong currency. Those months in Calgary have left an indelible mark on my career path, giving me access to the

key international literature in tourism studies and offering me the opportunity to get in contact with an international group of like-minded scholars. Kazuo therefore soon became an important source of intellectual inspiration with whom I reflected at length on the intersections between the fields of tourism management (relatively dominant at WTERC's) and the emerging field of tourism studies. Kazuo was already a well-established scholar in the networks of what we may broadly describe as Tourism Management, in particular in relation to his collaboration with Brent Ritchie and Frank Go who both worked at WTERC's back then. However, Kazuo also had a background in sociology and a genuine interest for the cultural dimension of global tourism (and Japanese international tourists more specifically), something that facilitated our collaboration and our understanding of tourism as a major contemporary social and cultural phenomenon. What we did not know in those early days is that the pleasant conversations in Calgary and Banff would become the foundational pillars of a long-term friendship and fruitful academic collaboration. When I look at the pictures of those days – mostly taken in the Rockies with our hiking attires – a crowd of wonderful memories comes back to me as representative of one of the most serene and productive moments of my career.



Professor Murakami (left), the author (in the middle), and our common friend Troy Sherdall (right) in the Rockies in 1992

III Venice

About a decade later, I was working as a geographer at the University of Venice, back in Italy. This was the time in which my tourism research began being focused on questions of modernity and authenticity (Minca and Oakes, 1996). Living in the historical centre of a city populated by little more than 50,000 residents while being visited every year by over 12 million tourists was a sea-change experience for my academic interest. The paradoxes and the tension related to the massive and constant presence of tourism on each and every corner of the city emerged in many aspects of my daily life, from being photographed as a 'local resident' while at a supermarket, to being blocked by the tourist (walking) traffic jam on the Rialto Bridge on my way to the office. As a resident, I was all too often asked by visiting friends to reveal where was the 'authentic Venice', the Venice not experience by the tourist but exclusively by 'the locals'. The problem was that the Venice experienced by the local residents was crowded with tourists. Familiar with the local dialect, I was normally treated like a Venetian in the stores and the restaurants of that most extraordinary city on the water. However, as soon as I was accompanied by a non-Venetian, I was immediately treated like a tourist, with the unpleasant feeling to be constantly out of place and moderately harassed by young men asking me to enter their restaurant or their shop. During those years, I learned a great deal about the power of tourism, that is, the formidable capacity of tourist development to determine the present and the future of a historical city like Venice. Taking my geography students in the Venetian 'campi' (the Venetian squares) to study mass cultural tourism was incredibly easy, but at the same complicated by the very pervasiveness of the phenomenon and the related transformation of the local scene (for

example, with the disappearance, in many areas, of cinemas and 'normal' food stores to be replaced by souvenir shops). Like a fisherman in an aquarium, the tourist-scholar-in-me was at the same time excited and disturbed by such an extraordinary setting. After all, Venice was also my home, and the tourist presence was affecting my daily life in a decisive way (for example in relation to the rental cost of my flat, food and other goods, to my mobility due to crowded ferry boats, etc.).

Given these premises, one can only imagine the impact of having Kazuo visiting Venice for six months during his new sabbatical year. Those were vibrant months, and Kazuo's visit made my daily routine of Venice even more unique. Walking around town and entering a store with a Japanese looking colleague was, again, a revealing experience. In every single place, we were identified – and accordingly addressed by the Venetians – as tourists, since it was unthinkable for the people working in the local stores or restaurants that a Japanese would be a resident (despite Venice being the home of a significant community of expats from all over the world). While sometimes unpleasant, this experience of being a 'permanent tourist' in the city where I lived soon became a sort of experimental laboratory for my (and our) tourism research. The positioning of the local residents towards the tourist, and in particular the Japanese tourist (in this case, Kazuo), was like conducting full time fieldwork, something that has allowed me (and I trust also Kazuo) to open new spaces of reflections on the urban geographies of tourism and on new fields of investigations. The 'secret Venice', so much wanted (at least in theory) by many tourists, and so much promised by many alternative guidebooks to the city, was never found in those months of joint exploration, not because we were unable to unveil the backstage (on the tourist backstage see,

among others, MacCannell, 1990) of the grand venetian tourist performance, but rather because the real Venice was indeed the tourist Venice that we experienced every day by simply leaving home and walking to the office....

IV Japan

Thanks to my long-standing collaboration with Kazuo, in the last decade and half I have had the opportunity of spending a very significant amount of time in Japan. First having been awarded an international visiting professor scholarship in 2004, and then becoming a regular visiting professor at Rikkyo University, I have been visiting Tokyo almost every year since 2005 to teach a course on Postmodern Tourism. I am incredibly grateful to Rikkyo University for having offered me such a wonderful possibility of getting in touch with students and colleagues at their institution. At the time of my first academic visit, in 2004, I had just started my international career in the UK, where I worked first at Newcastle University and then at Royal Holloway College, part of the University of London. During that period, Kazuo's research on tourism had moved towards a new humanistic attention for the ways in which literature was affecting the choices of Japanese tourists and their related expectations when at a destination. The emphasis that he placed in his work on 'the subjective' and on the cultural relationship between the tourist and a specific experience and/or site coincided with a moment in which my work on tourism was also increasingly influenced by my role as cultural geographer in the UK (see, for example, my reflection on the "The Tourist Landscape Paradox" in Minca, 2007). Arguably, my interest in visiting Japan kept on growing after having realised how tourism in that country had taken a sort of 'ante litteram' postmodern turn – unlike Europe, where the quest for authentic experiences

of the past through tourism was still presented in the form of essentialised cultural values. In Japan, the 'tourist performance' appeared to me as a sort of game imbued with an injection of irony and self-irony: from the selfies to the joyful conspicuous consumption when abroad, it appeared as a sophisticated manifestation of the fact that tourism-is-about-tourist-things, and not about presumed authentic and secret corners of local culture to be unveiled. It soon became another excellent (but very different) laboratory and learning experience after having lived for years surrounded by the tourist madness of Venice. At the same time, Kazuo's interest for the role of literature began to move him to search in Europe new sources of inspiration in order to explore how collective forms of subjective behaviour were manifested in the choices of the ordinary tourist. These two new directions taken by our respective approaches to the study of tourism have proven particularly generous in terms of offering new spaces for common reflection and new speculations about the possible future of tourism. The time spent in Japan also provided us with two new important and concrete opportunities for collaboration, as individual academics, but also involving our respective institutions. The first was the joint supervision of a Japanese student, who would obtain first her Masters degree in Newcastle and then her PhD at Royal Holloway, University of London. The second was the organisation of three international workshops as part of a project funded by the Japanese government. It is thus time to move back to Europe and reflect on the 'London Years' of our shared academic trajectory.

V London

In 2006, I moved to London where I remained for about 4 years. During this period Kazuo and I shared two equally important projects, with

significant institutional implications. Dr. Eriko Yasue, former graduate of Rikkyo University, was admitted to a PhD program under my supervision at the University of London. Her dissertation was focussed on the role of landscape in influencing the tourist behaviour in Asuke. Kazuo, as her former supervisor and as her Japanese mentor during the four years of her doctoral work, was deeply involved in this project. On multiple occasions, the three of us have discussed her project, together with the potential reception of her work in Japanese academia. Her investigation was particularly challenging and interesting precisely because it tried to bridge western geographical theory on landscape with the unique tradition of Japanese tourist practices. The concept of landscape in particular was discussed by Dr. Yasue taking into consideration both traditions and their historical links (see Yasue 2012). Having positively completed her dissertation in the mandatory 4 years in London, Dr. Yasue then returned to Japan to start her successful academic career. This project, however, was not merely an isolated achievement of our academic collaboration. The idea of bridging the Western academic tradition in tourism studies and the equivalent, but different, Japanese tradition in the same field became the focus on another important collaboration of the 'London years'.

Having received substantial funding by the government to pursue a very large project aimed at realising at Rikkyo University a Rikkyo Amusement Research Centre (hereafter RARC), Kazuo asked me to become the academic coordinator of three international workshop on the future of tourism and tourism studies to be held in London (2007), Vientiane (2008) and Tokyo (2009). Those were years of intense and frequent visits to London on the part of Kazuo and some of its closest collaborators in RARC, in order to organise the workshops and discuss their

content and logistical details. These international workshops have produced perhaps the three most tangible results of our long-standing academic collaboration. First, they became an experimental attempt to put together very established scholars in tourism studies (and in geography) coming from both Western and Asian academia, UK and Japan in particular. We thought that, if the future of tourism was going to be crucially influenced by tourist developments in Asia, it would be very productive to engage with the idea that tourism studies as a whole should incorporate the possibility of 'learning from Asia'. Secondly, the workshops became an opportunity for scholars in tourism to discuss in different context, and accordingly in different ways, the future of our field of study. The workshop in London resulted into a very different learning experience compared to the one hosted by the National University of Laos, and also to the final one held in Tokyo, despite the fact that some of the speakers were involved in the whole series of events. Knowledge and its production are always context-based, as we all know, and our theoretical speculations of the future of this mass phenomenon took a very different twist when confronted with the unique tourist settings and practices of a country like Laos, or even an audience of Japanese tourism scholars and students in Tokyo. The third result was a book that I co-edited by Tim Oakes, entitled *Real Tourism* (2011), where some of the best contributions of the workshops were published, including an excellent chapter on landscape and tourism performance co-authored by Dr. Yasue and Professor Murakami (Yasue and Murakami, 2011). The London years, which could also be described—from Kazuo's perspective—the 'RARC years', have been an extremely productive and also enjoyable period, since I remember them as a time in which, along the London-Tokyo line of our collaboration, we experienced an intense and

prolific traffic of ideas, debates and rewarding scholarly work.

VI Wageningen

The last stop of this brief biographical journey broadly corresponds to my move to the Netherlands in 2010 where I started a new position at Wageningen University. Kazuo was already familiar with the Dutch academic context, since Rotterdam is where he spent half of his 2001 sabbatical (the other half in Venice, as mentioned above). Rotterdam is also where he had established another long-term academic relationship with Professor Frank Go, who sadly passed away recently. After my move, Kazuo visited Wageningen University on several occasions: at times to discuss future projects with me, other times taking his Rikkyo University students on an exciting fieldtrip. I would like to recall here two instances linked to these visits, among many others encounters and events that marked this stage of our collaboration. The first one was a memorable talk that Kazuo gave in 2011 when, two hours after landing at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, he managed to enthusiastically lecture our students for about three hours with no breaks! I vividly remember that lecture, since it was the first time in which I heard Kazuo discussing the subject of his new academic interest: the question of Japanisation of tourism consumption and tourism practice outside of Japan, in many Asian countries, but also in other parts of the world. An extremely fascinating topic that was, once again, easily in tune with my interest in tourist mundane practices and some of their paradoxes. The lecture was supported by a vast amount of images and clips, some of which left a lasting impression on our students. This was possibly one of the best, if not the best, among the many academic performances offered by Kazuo that I witnessed in the long years of our

work together.

The second aspect that I wish to recall was the fact that, during his visits to the Netherlands, Kazuo normally used to stay at the famous Amsterdam Lloyd Hotel. The Lloyd Hotel is a former refugee camp and prison, beautifully transformed in a multi-star hotel and 'cultural embassy'. In this hotel, guests can also stay in a one star room, experiencing the somewhat adapted legacy of the cells. Perhaps it was a coincidence—I did not have an active part in his decision to stay there—but that was also a time in which, together with my colleagues Chin Ee Ong and Martijn Felder, I was working on project on the Lloyd Hotel and its complicated heritage (Ong et al., 2015). I am saying this because one of the main objectives of the present reconstruction of our collaboration is to reflect on how such an intellectual proximity, which materialised for the first time in Calgary, has been the common ground of many of the moments of work together described above. My point is that when biographical and academic trajectories walk in parallel for such a long time, like in our fortunate case, the dialogue between our respective research agendas was not only explicit and formal—for instance, when we were involved in RARC, or in supervising Dr. Yasue—but also implicit and somehow silent, to emerge almost spontaneously during our meetings and respective visits. This coincidence of unplanned scholarly interest for the Lloyd Hotel is just one out of many examples that I can mention to support this intriguing idea of deep intellectual proximity.

VII The Future of Tourism

While rereading this brief intervention, I have realised how biographical, and in many ways even too autobiographical, it has become. I sincerely hope that the readers will forgive some

of my concessions to 'the personal' that mark this account. This is indeed a story of genuine scholarly collaboration but also of sincere friendship. For this reason, the notes on our respective research trajectories that I have tried to recall here have become inevitably biographical, unintentionally confirming how for many academics their research is often entangled with their personal sphere.

Tourism, for both of us, is important. It is important not only because it represents a powerful mass phenomenon that mobilizes millions of people around the world every year and transforms many cities, villages, landscapes of any kind, at times entire countries. It is important because we are both convinced that tourism is an analytics that may help in better understanding broader societal and cultural change. Studying tourism thus has never been for us only about tourism. It has always been much more. It has become an opportunity to adopt the analytical lenses used to investigate this extraordinary phenomenon in order to appreciate the overall social transformations of a place, of a labour market, of a cultural region, etc. One recent example of this, among many possible others, is the rapid and powerful emergence of Airbnb as a platform for the sharing economies of tourism. Feeding into the tourists' desires 'to be a local', the platform has become a regulator of urban change, including the appropriation of many spaces no longer available for many residents (see Roelofsen, 2018). Another example would be the role of the social media in shaping the contemporary tourist experience, especially but not exclusively for the younger generations. And this latter seems definitely to be a case in which tourism studies can 'learn from Asia' important lessons. What I am trying to say is that on several occasions in the past 25 years Kazuo and I have shared the conviction that studying

tourism may also help anticipating future or emerging cultural trends in the broader society. From this shared realisation, I trust, has emerged the common enthusiasm for tourism and its endlessly mutable formations.

I would like to conclude by saying that Professor Murakami has been and remains for me a true friend, a wonderful host, and an inspiring colleague, always enthusiastic, never tired of asking new questions, new afraid of going beyond the surface and explore the new secret spaces that tourism has endlessly opened up to our (academic) gaze. Thanks Kazuo for all this!

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