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# Tourism's labour geographies: Bringing tourism into work and work into tourism

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## ABSTRACT

Geographers have certainly contributed actively to the extant scholarly literature relating to tourism work and workers. Nevertheless, with few notable exceptions, most of this research has been piecemeal and case-based demonstrating unawareness of broader theoretical discussions and debates within the emerging sub-field of labour geography. For this special issue, a total of eight papers have been selected, most of which deal to varying degrees with labour mobilities, a theme that mainstream labour geographers themselves have largely avoided in the past. Additionally, the thorny issue of setting the intellectual boundaries between what constitutes work and leisure in contexts such as volunteer tourism is taken up in some of the discussions. Our aim with this special issue is to encourage the development of closer intellectual connections between labour geography and the study of tourism work and workers and their everyday mobilities.

## 摘要

毫无疑问，地理学家对现有旅游工作及旅游业工人的学术文献做出了积极贡献。但是，鲜有例外，这个领域的绝大多数研究都比较零散，并且都是案例导向的，表明学界尚未意识到劳工地理学这个新学科中广泛的理论论述与争议。本期特刊选择的8篇文章，绝大多数都不同程度地涉及劳工移动性，该议题过去主流劳工地理学家很大程度上都没有涉及。另外，在本特刊的某些讨论中，在诸如志愿旅游的背景下设定所谓工作与休闲的知识边界是个棘手的问题。本期特刊，我们的目标是鼓励在劳工地理学和旅游工作、旅游工人及其日常移动性方面发展紧密的知识联系。

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## 关键词

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## Introduction

For decades, policy-makers have extolled the employment creation potential of tourism-related development, especially in situations where the traditional economy has experienced major restructuring. Tourism, the common narrative goes, is a quick fix for numerous communities worldwide to stem rising unemployment and/or target underemployment while inspiring wealth creation, especially since the sector is often praised for its supposed multiplier effects (Parsons, 1987; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). However, the existence of such positive rhetoric has done little to quash the criticism by many observers (among them

various academics), who regularly dismiss tourism-related jobs as 'bad', ones that are easy to obtain but also to lose, are poorly paid, and cater to lowly skilled individuals, many of whom are female and commonly immigrants from the global south. Indeed, it is not uncommon, especially in regions historically associated with extractive or manufacturing industries to view tourism-related work as an affront to a glorious past when tangible products such as steel, ships, cars and textiles were produced (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998).

To be sure, this critique derives mostly from researchers in advanced western economies (especially in North America and western Europe) reflecting that most studies on tourism employment have focused on these regions. It does not necessarily mirror prevailing attitudes towards or indeed the reality about tourism-related jobs in many other parts of the world where the sector happens to be a dominant part of the economy. For instance, on several islands especially in the world's middle latitudes, tourism is an economic mainstay and it is not unusual to encounter persons who have built their careers on this sector and take pride in what they do (Archer & Fletcher, 1996; Britton, 1982; Scheyvens, 2011).

The simplistic binary narrative of tourism-related work, where some see the sector as an economic saviour while others regard it as a band-aid approach to solving deeply ingrained societal problems does little to further our understanding of far deeper complexities, among which are those associated with the geographical dimensions of this employment and the persons who perform this (Jordhus-Lier & Underthun, 2015; Ladkin, 2014; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011). In this special issue of *Tourism Geographies*, our principle aim is to highlight the geographical dimensions of tourism-related work and workers. Who are these workers and where do they come from? What kind of experiences and skills do they have? What motivates them to enter the tourism labour market and what decisions and other actions do they then make as to whether to remain in the sector, seek a transfer or a promotion or to stop working? What are the everyday geographies of these individuals and how do these influence their various mobilities?

The purpose of this editorial is twofold. We begin by briefly highlighting the background that inspired the special issue, namely the field of labour geography (Herod, 1994, 1997; Tufts, 2006). Thus far, most discussions in human geography concerning tourism work and workers focus primarily on issues relating to migration and other aspects of mobility (e.g. Lundmark, 2006). The majority of these investigations are case-based and, as such, limit the opportunities for theory building.

Simultaneously, the vast majority of researchers describing themselves as labour geographers have shied away from exploring the labour dimensions of tourism and related services (Ioannides & Debbage, 2014; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011). Subsequently, following a discussion relating to the interconnection of labour geography and tourism, we briefly introduce each of the contributions that make up this special issue. In all, following a call for papers, which we initiated in the Fall of 2016 we accepted for publication, after a thorough review process, five contributions. These appear in the first part of the special issue. The second section focuses on a further selection of three papers that were independently submitted by their authors but were deemed by the journal's editor in discussion with us to have relevance to the overall theme of this special issue.

## **Labour geography and tourism: from precarity to beyond**

Coined initially by Andrew Herod (1994, 1997), the term *labour geography* offers an alternative viewpoint of work and workers' agency within economic geography than

traditional ones deriving either from behavioural and neoclassical perspectives or from Marxist insights. Early on, neoclassical observers (e.g. Lösch, 1954; Weber, 1929) regarded labour costs as one of the key factors of production influencing the location decisions of entrepreneurs, the others being land, capital and entrepreneurship. By the 1970s, geographers with (neo)Marxist proclivities sought to explain the shape of the economic landscape through capital's constant pursuit for profit accumulation (e.g. Harvey, 1982; Massey, 1984; Storper & Walker, 1989) and, as such, these interpretations relegated workers to a passive player status whose actions have limited if any effect on how the geography of capitalism plays out (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010).

According to Herod, these more traditional interpretations come under the umbrella term *the geography of labour*. As an alternative, he calls for the emergence of *labour geography*, an approach recognizing that, in fact, workers are themselves important agents in producing, shaping and reshaping their everyday geographies. In Herod's mind, these workers influence the geography of capitalism and are active co-authors of uneven development. To illustrate this situation, for instance, consider that the self-reproduction of the workers occurs in spaces where they live:

Given this fact, it becomes clear that workers are likely to want to shape the economic landscape in ways that facilitate this self-reproduction. Struggles over the location of work, new or continued investment (public or private), access to housing and transport, all can play important roles in allowing working class people to reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis. (Herod, 1997, p. 16)

Herod's contribution has been vital in that by now, labour geography has emerged as one of human geography's key sub-disciplines. Regardless, Castree (2007) warns that we have only begun scratching the surface in terms of developing robust theoretical thinking concerning workers' agency. His critique rests primarily on the fact that too much of the extant research in the field has been uncoordinated, a problem he attributes to the novelty of the research field. Castree views that, first of all, what is meant by the term 'worker agency' is not yet theoretically clear to an extent because too many studies are case-based and lack comparative focus. This is a point that Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2010) pick up on when arguing for the necessity to develop a strong conceptual framework as to the meaning of worker agency because only then can we start to comprehend the effect these individuals have on change within the economic landscape.

Additionally, Castree laments the absence of any serious discussion regarding the role of the state in many studies, something he admits is surprising given that most economic geographers who contribute their thoughts on labour-related issues do so from a critical perspective. Further, he contends that the subject of migration within labour geography itself has surprisingly been under-studied with only a handful of researchers paying any attention to this theme. His argument is that 'the challenge is not only to understand labour migrations in their own right, but to integrate their analysis into those of other labour geographies given that migration is never about migrants alone' (p. 859).

Yet another critique Castree raises is that most labour geographers fail to examine workers themselves as the central study objective. Drawing from Mitchell's (2005) earlier commentary, he laments that the focus of labour geography tends to be on the actual work of persons who perform it as if this 'can be separated analytically and ontologically from their wider existence' (p. 859). Castree's point is that by doing this, the majority of

labour geographers miss a more comprehensive view of who the workers actually are in terms of how they balance, for example, their reproductive functions with their working life but also, in general, what they do throughout their daily lives and what they aspire towards.

Castree's critique is important within the context of this special issue because, as we shall see further down, some of the very aspects he raises, have been touched upon by at least some of the contributors. This is a topic we return to, but first, let us briefly remind the reader about the state of the art of labour-related research within tourism studies.

### **Research concerning tourism work and workers**

Investigations regarding tourism and hospitality work and workers have periodically, over the last 30 years, grabbed the attention of scholars, although it could be argued that the topic tends to be largely overlooked in mainstream tourism-related research. To be sure, issues such as how many jobs are created within a certain economy because of tourism and the issue of multipliers has been popular area topics examined in the past (e.g. Archer & Fletcher, 1996; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). This is despite considerable disagreement to this day as to what can be determined to be a tourism job in the first place (Leiper, 1999; Smith, 1998). There have also been discussions periodically as to the quality of the tourism-related jobs, with the sector often having, as we have already mentioned, an image of poorly paid work, which entices low-skill individuals (Ainsworth & Purss, 2009; Shaw & Williams, 2004). Thomas and Townsend (2001) view such a perception as simplistic since it is the employees themselves and their motivations, which ultimately define what it is they actually do within the sector. Thus, as we have argued elsewhere (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011), there is a major difference between the student who obtains a highly paid position at a fancy restaurant or an upscale hotel with an ultimate aim to gain some working-life experience but certainly not remain in the field and the destitute immigrant woman from the global south who does not speak her host country's language and is forced to take a cleaning job in order to survive.

In addition to the issue of motivations, other investigations concern *inter alia*: worker typologies; discussions as to seasonality's effects on labour migration; the role of gender; the manner in which technology affects the sector; the contingent nature of many jobs, especially in the hospitality sector; the division between peripheral numerically flexible and core functionally flexible employment (Adler & Adler, 1999; Ainsworth & Purss, 2009; Head & Lucas, 2004; Lai, Soltani, & Baum, 2008; Lundmark, 2006; Shaw & Williams, 2004). Many observers frequently mention the low status of tourism-related work despite the fact that this is a highly controversial issue (Baum, 1996, 2006, 2007). There are several explanations as to why this is the case (see Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011 for a more comprehensive overview). The bottom line is that this low status afforded to labour in the tourism and hospitality field ties directly to the growing casualization of work internationally (see Lambert & Herod, 2016; Lee, Hampton, & Jeyacheya, 2014). One reason is that employers take advantage of the unpredictable nature of many jobs within tourism (e.g. it is affected by variations on demand on a seasonal or even a day-to-day basis) by hiring minimally qualified workers for very low wages knowing there is always a large pool of other similarly lowly qualified individuals (e.g. students, immigrants) who can easily fill in any vacancies. Moreover, many workers in the sector themselves lend credence to the

low status of tourism-related employment by choosing to use jobs in the sector as short-term gap fillers in their employment needs (e.g. seasonal or weekend jobs for students) with no intention to remain there over the long term.

### ***Geographic investigations of tourism work and workers***

Geographers themselves are active when it comes to investigations concerning tourism labour and the workers who perform it. Indeed, several of the aforementioned studies have been conducted by geographers (e.g. Lundmark, 2006; Shaw & Williams, 2004; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011). Additional, important contributions offering a geographical perspective include but are not limited to: McDowell, Batnitzky, and Dyer (2007, 2008) discussion on the divisions and assemblages of labour whereby differently marked bodies, in terms of gender, class, age, nationality, skin colour, and so on become connected to or separated from certain professions and/or work tasks (see also McDowell, 2009); Duncan's (2008) study of the interrelationship of worker migration and seasonality in a mountain resort; the investigation of Church and Frost (2004) of welfare reforms and the manner in which they affect the London labour market; Terry's (2009) in-depth examination of the legal framework governing jobs of international (primarily Filipino cruise-ship) workers. McDowell (2009) also discussed how what was once considered to be reproductive labour, which was primarily performed for low pay within the household mostly by women, has now emerged within the tourism and hospitality sector as work that companies pay wages for. Such jobs are often performed by immigrants from the global south, many of whom find it hard to adjust to life within their host communities (Aguar & Herod, 2006).

Despite these contributions, however, there remains much we do not know, for instance, regarding issues such as the non-economic motivations that influence workers in the tourism labour market (e.g. Baum, 2006; Ladkin, 2014). Additionally, we have cautioned elsewhere (Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011) that much of the existing research on tourism work and workers is case-based, thus limiting a maturation of our theoretical understanding. Further, the political economy perspective advocated by observers such as Britton (1991), Ioannides and Debbage (1998), Bianchi (2009) and Gibson (2009), especially when it comes to issues such as workers' identities and their daily and longer-term mobilities, is still lacking in much mainstream scholarship.

Steven Tufts (1998, 2004, 2006) offers what is perhaps the most valuable perspective to date, setting tourism work and workers within the overall theme of labour geography. Until quite recently, he appeared to be the lone voice when it came to discussions as to how hospitality workers, for instance, set their own agenda in seeking to influence the manner in which urban boosterist strategies play out. More recently, Jordhus-Lier and Underthun (2015) have reminded us of the importance of shifting away from stereotypes and other misconceptions in attempting to gain a better handle of the geographies of tourism workers. They focus narrowly on one aspect of the broader tourism industry, namely hospitality, since this is often associated with being its clearest – at least statistically speaking – component (Joppe, 2012; Zampoukos & Ioannides, 2011). Jordhus-Lier and Underthun promise to set tourism geography and specifically examinations relating to tourism work and workers within the broader context of labour geography. We see this collection of articles for the special issue in *Tourism Geographies* as building on the scholarship of Jordhus-Lier and Underthun as well as that of Stephen Tufts and moving

explorations of tourism-related work and workers to the centre-stage of labour geography. In the rest of this editorial, we briefly summarize the contents of this special issue.

## Weaving in mobilities

The five articles, which were submitted and accepted for this special issue all concern in one way or another the topic of labour mobility. This definition of mobility extends far beyond encompassing geographical issues (e.g. migration and commuting) alone since it also refers to inter-sectoral but also intra-sectoral mobilities. The issue of mobility is one of the key themes that Castree (2007) (whom we referred to earlier) mentions has not been well developed from a theoretical standpoint within the overall topic of labour geography. Thus, we believe that these contributions are significant not only because they provide valuable insights that could strengthen our conceptual understanding of tourism workers' mobility but also because they could further contribute to solidifying the theoretical underpinnings of labour geography itself.

Given their own significant agenda aimed at interweaving tourism with labour geography, we think it appropriate to kick off this special issue with Underthun's and Jordhus-Lier's contribution. Based on their own research on hotel workers in Norway, these authors examine the challenges encountered by organized labour in times of increased mobility and flexibility. Through the concept of 'liminality' they propose that the hotel may be imagined as a liminal space for transitional workers or 'liminal subjects'. However, the presence of a highly diverse group of mobile workers whose motives and attachment towards the workplace and overall Norwegian labour market vary considerably, fragments and destabilizes the workplace as an arena for building worker solidarity. When faced with a fluid and flexible workforce such as the one under scrutiny here, traditional, class-based and employment-related understandings of the worker collective must give way to, or at least be supplemented by other understandings, and less bureaucratic strategies from the part of the trade unions.

Heldt Cassel et al. investigate career paths, a matter which they argue has not been well-conceptualized thus far. Their investigation focuses on the Swedish hospitality sector and looks both at career decisions of hotel managers and also those that guide seasonal workers in the sector. The authors believe that career paths within the hospitality sector are influenced by two normative and discursively produced 'truths', namely the importance of internal knowledge transfer and that of high mobility. These truths impose expectations on individuals to be mobile, to change jobs frequently and to work their way from the bottom up within the industry, and are based on a presumption of a diversified and dense hospitality labour market, likely to be found only in larger urban areas. Consequently, the authors argue that career paths in the Swedish hospitality sector are shaped by what they term an 'urban norm'.

Meanwhile, Zampoukos examines what she terms the 'mobility agency' of differently positioned hospitality workers in a Swedish context. In her understanding, workers are embodied and embedded subjects and the coming together of this embodiedness (educated/uneducated, single, married, parent, etc.) and embeddedness (household, geographical setting, labour market) is formative to the actions they choose and are able to take. The value of her contribution, among others, is that she weaves in a relational perspective where workers' decisions with respect to labour mobility are mediated by other

circumstances (e.g. age of their children, spouse's career path and desire to remain in a particular geographical area). Consequently, she claims that labour mobility and career paths commonly regarded as strategic and leading upward (or at least conveying an improvement of some sort), must also be recognized as fragmented, happenstance and sometimes even erratic.

Åberg and Muller also examine the Swedish labour market, aiming to identify whether or not the low status of formal education among tourism employees is fact or fiction especially when compared to other sectors of the economy, which are also normally associated with low skills (manufacturing and retailing). Through a quantitative study, they identify that, at least within peripheral regions, contrary to prevailing opinions, tourism workers are actually better educated than those in the other sectors. This leads the authors to conclude that one-size-fits-all strategies relating to the educational needs within the sector are unlikely to be successful as they do not account for geographical contingencies.

Breaking from the focus on Scandinavian countries, Terry's research relates to labour precarity associated with guest worker programmes in the United States. His investigation argues that although guest worker visa programmes are in place to deal with seasonal shortages in the tourism sector, the migrant workers find themselves in a very vulnerable position with regard to access to basic human needs such as affordable housing. Given the recent attempts to tighten immigration regulations for workers such as these, Terry believes that it is imperative to deal with issues that would protect their rights and decrease opportunities for their exploitation.

### **Dive instructors, teachers and volunteers: blurring work and tourism**

Three additional papers were selected by the journal's editor to be part of this special issue although each was submitted independently. This is because they all, to one extent or another, also deal with tourism-labour dimensions. Interestingly, while the first five contributions focused specifically on Norway, Sweden and the U.S.A., this final set of papers plays closer attention to non-western contexts.

Hampton et al. provide the reader with an in-depth portrayal of the political economy of the dive tourism industry in Sabah, Malaysia. They use the concept of 'rentier state', which specifically refers to countries like Malaysia whose economy depends overwhelmingly on oil and also international tourism. Focusing specifically on the islands of Sipadan and Mabul, off the country's east coast, the authors uncover what we might term 'concentrations of privilege, wealth and influence', but also divisions of labour and various forms of precariousness among workers of different ethnic backgrounds and legal status. Hampton and his colleagues point to the policy implications of their findings, stressing the need for governments aiming for inclusive economic growth to pay specific attention to labour precarity in connection to ethnic divides.

The last two articles in this special issue deal with the blurred boundaries between doing work and being a tourist, something that others have also referred to in the past (e.g. Bianchi, 2000; Uriely, 2001). First, Stainton discusses the theme of TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language), which has been a means through which many individuals can travel and support themselves in the host environment. Her argument is that these people's roles shift during their trip from being tourists, transforming into teachers and also becoming what she terms as 'educatees'. Stainton's work focuses on TEFLs in

Thailand whom she studied through a mixed methods approach. This led to the development of a typology centred on the concepts of leisure, philanthropy, career and expatriatism, which are the four dominant positions adopted by those participating in TEFL in that country. Though she admits there are similarities between TEFL and volunteer tourism, she maintains that there is also a significant distinction portrayed through remuneration, packaged products, characteristics and motivations.

The very last paper picks up on the theme of volunteer tourism specifically by examining the experiences of US students in Cameroon. Here, Ji Hoon Park performed an ethnographic study of students who visit a rural area in Cameroon aiming to work on a project to purify a community's water supply. This is a contribution primarily relating to host-guest interaction, the guests being the volunteer workers. The author seeks to ascertain whether the experience can generate greater understanding by the students about Africa or if, indeed, in the absence of a suitable educational exposure about the continent the experience leads to the reinforcement of misperceived stereotypes.

Though admittedly all the eight papers selected for this special issue display varying perspectives about tourism work and workers, and indeed reflect that within this sphere it is not always easy to determine clear-cut edges between what constitutes work or leisure while on holiday, it is obvious that tourism research can be influential in furthering the agenda of labour geography. We hope you find the contributions of value to your own research agenda and enjoy reading these as much as we have enjoyed putting the special issue together.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributors

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