

## What is This Thing Called Tourism – Is it a Science or a Discipline?

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### Abstract

This presentation has two objectives: First, dating back to 1920s, it provides an overview of the historical background of tourism studies on the basis of various perspectives such as launching first schools, research institutes, journals etc. Second, it presents an in-depth analysis of the conclusions reached in a search conference about the scientific position of tourism education and research, held in Turkey, April 2011. The search conference was accomplished through the sponsorship of a hotel business located on the south-west part of Turkey.

In the morning session of the first day, the moderator aimed to produce a pool where tourism was accepted to be a part of social sciences and not to be accepted. Commencing from the afternoon session, the participants were divided into four main groups, namely: 1) tourism is an applied field; 2) tourism is a discipline; 3) tourism is somewhere between a discipline and science; 4) tourism is a science. In the last session, a concluding report was written, through the confirmation all participants.

The first group of researchers emphasizes that tourism should be considered as an applied field but underlines the lack of unique theoretical foundations that have so far prevented tourism research to become a scientific discipline. The second group deals with an approach in a specific reference to tourism as an academic discipline and adds that researchers have accumulated enough knowledge within the discourse to create a discipline and methodology to advance the capacity of current research. Those participants in the third group propose that tourism studies benefit from major fields of sciences, e.g. sociology, psychology, economics etc., but lacks using theories to be drawn out of tourism studies and the difficulty of setting implications to be generalised. Members of the final group suggest that tourism is a part of social sciences and benefit from both qualitative and quantitative methods that social sciences traditionally employ.

**Keywords:** science, discipline, tourism education, tourism research, tourism studies