



Vol 6, Nº 14 (Junio/junho 2013)

TOURISM: THE MACHINERY OF PRODUCING IMAGINARIES.

Alastair Thirkettle

Tourism School

University Autonoma of Nicaragua

Maximiliano E. Korstanje

Department of Economics,

University of Palermo, Argentina

Abstract

On this short paper, we explore the nature of tourism, its first steps and evolution according to the diverse ways of defining this rite of passage. What we have clear is that tourism is after all a rite, a rite of passage like many others, where the traveller suffers a dislocation, a rupture between the self and others. Over years, we have been educated under the paradigm that tourism should be considered as a commercial trip, exclusively from profits and business. This not only is not true, but also presents a trouble image of tourism that has been critically attacked by social science. If God created the universe as sacred texts say, the sixth day he rested. Of course he did not tourism, and in that epoch Adam & Eve did not know tourism, but what is important to discuss is that many cultures in the world focused on the right of rests and displacement to create a more than interesting forms of Anglo-Tourism.

Key Words: Epistemology, Tourism, Displacement, Trips.

Tourism for certain authors may be seen as a cultural voyage or rite of passage (Berger, 2004), or the consumption of inter-woven signs in a coherent and organised discourse (Culler, 1981). For many years researchers have tried to define tourism, even when the fragmentation of knowledge led to an epistemological lack of discipline (Tribe, 2010). According to the specialised bibliography tourism might be understood as a voyage to a sacred or special place, which by necessity involves the commercialisation of hospitality (Cohen, 1972; Maccannell, 2003)

The economist Muñoz de Escalona (2011) comments that in recent years a current, arising from management studies, has developed, giving priority to tourism demand and ignoring the role of the offer or supply within the economic system. He states that those researchers who follow this current claim that the complexity of tourism merits an inter-disciplinary study. Actually, far from clarifying the issue or arriving at unified paradigms, which would allow methodological and scientific development, their efforts seem to be directed at studying certain matters concerned with

the image of tourism destinations and profitability. The culmination of the methodology employed by these researchers is the development of case studies using classic market and consumption research techniques.

Thus, the function of tourism within society, for these researchers, has been simplified to a mere product. Thus, according to the author, commercialised hospitality has been misunderstood, as has been tourism itself. Meanwhile, the Spanish anthropologist A. Santana Talavera (2006) states that, in spite of the taboo in anthropology concerning treating matters in an integrated and systemic way, in order to understand tourism it should be seen from a holistic perspective, which would not only describe the dynamics as observed in the field, but also the effects and changes caused by tourism over time. In contrast to his colleagues, Santana Talavera suggests that the “tourism system” is formed by three well defined elements. The first refers to the demand by all the actors within the system, whether for prime commodities, or for goods to which value has been added. Secondly he refers to a static element, in the form of infrastructure, which facilitates tourism, and territorial planning. Thirdly, he refers to the process by which the elements form a system.

More widely, it appears that tourism cannot be understood other than as geographical movement with the specific intention to return. Thus J.C. Monterrubio has developed a systemic model which helps us to understand the evolution of the variables which make up the tourism system. Tourism has experienced many problems in recognition by more established disciplines partly because of the dispersal of texts on the subject, but partly because of a tendency to define tourism in terms of its effects on the economy, or the population, or the environment, without taking into account other essential components. The author states that even if travel is an essential part of tourism, not all travel can be considered as tourism, and therefore he prefers a definition of tourism based on recreation and leisure. However, to define tourism as being purely allied to leisure would be reductionist, because it would be seen purely from the point of view of the tourist. Tourism is much more than elements related to habitual residence or travel. According to Monterrubio Cordero tourism is:

“a complex system composed of various social, cultural, economic, political and ecological elements, structures, interactions, relations and consequences which involve travel by an individual or group from their usual place of residence and their stay in a specific destination, usually for recreation.”

In order to understand tourism as a social phenomenon it is necessary to return to a systems model (Monterrubio Cordero, 2011) as we will endeavour to show in the present essay.

The word voyage (viaje in Spanish) stems from a composed-word, via from the Latin Road, and cum implying company. In contrast to “wandering” which implies going outside the established travel infrastructure, voyages must take place, according to Prado-Biezma (2006), within routes established by society. Following up this argument G. Santayana explains that voyages are a human ability to travel according to a consciously pre-established motive, in contrast to other animals that are not conscious of the motive. Thus, Santayana (2001) suggests that adaptation and domination are two inherent aspects of the voyage. However, for some researchers voyages may be conceived as a method of constructing “otherness” (Krotz, 1988), or as a form of storing reflective knowledge (Mengo, 2008). If we start from the assumption that a voyage implies geographical movement, the question is then: what is the relationship between a voyage and tourism? Saxon peasants long ago used the word “torn” to signify a journey with a return to the place of origin. Towards the end of 18th century the word “tour” was used in French to mean an educational journey carried out by aristocrats in order to know of the customs of different regions of Europe (Jimenez-Guzman, 1986). Following this logic, Albert Sessa (1971) had explained that tourism is composed of three elements: the subject (or tourist), the travel, and the stay in the destination. The generation

of revenue, although it might be present, is not inherent to tourism. Thus, all travel where there is a subject, and which involves a temporary stay, is, for Sessa, tourism. In contrast, other authors, like Barucci (1976) consider that tourism has little in common with travel. He understands that tourism is a completely different phenomenon to other types of travel, such as those associated with the discovery of new lands or training. Thus, according to Professor Barucci, theoreticians of the evolutionary school say that tourism is a socio-economic phenomenon which emerged from the industrial revolution, and which was unknown until this time. Thus, a touristic voyage might be understood as:

“Travel in space and time away from the place of residence for rest, pleasure, business or other motives for more than twenty four hours and less than a year”.

Unlike other voyages, which are also determined by specific motives, a touristic voyage implies a return home. According to Castaño tourism as a social phenomenon is formed of three elements: a) the individual away from his normal environment, b) the tourism industry as the sum of offerings and demands and c) the socio-cultural and economic impact on host societies.

“From a historical point of view human groups have moved for necessity, only leaving their place of residence in extreme circumstances. In the society of today individuals are not so linked to their surroundings, and easily adapt to other new environments, being interested in different cultures and customs, thus giving rise to a new value: experience of novelty and the unusual. However, these individuals also need to find in this new reality something which is familiar and reminds them of their home (housing, services) and their culture (language, gastronomy, morals) (Castaño, 2005, p.39).

In contrast, for other authors like J. Urry, tourism cannot be understood other than through subjective experience. Thus, all tourist experiences have a high visual content which mean that geographical journeys are not necessary. Thus, different forms of “seeing” are organised by professionals in specific categories such as: a) education (journeys for educational reasons), b) health, c) social solidarity or d) recreation and rest. The predominance of the aesthetic, which came to the fore in 19th Century Western Europe, is one of the principle characteristics of the tourism of today (Urry, 2007, pp. 21-22).

Because of this division between the two models in the modern age, two parallel phenomena have resulted. On the one hand, scientific knowledge tends to fragment into sub-disciplines; while on the other hand, tourism itself takes on a purely aesthetic and hedonistic nature, whose main function is to maintain the material asymmetries of the society which had promoted the development of mass tourism. While mass tourism today may be seen as a product of a combination of important socio-economic factors, such as technological advances and the reduction of working hours since the middle of the 20th century, reality seems to indicate that each society has looked to its own mechanisms to absorb the tensions produced by the political and social hierarchy. The history of tourism shows us that different eras develop their own cyclical discourse concerning the practise of tourism (Rejowski, 2002; Khatchikian, 2000; Schluter, 2008).

We might suggest that trends in tourism are as important as other trends in society. However, current specialised literature emphasise only a purely mercantilist discourse concerning tourism. This new trend not only uses a very superficial definition of tourism, but also sees this phenomenon as a commodity which subordinates territorial organisation to economic and rational ends, in the strict weberian sense. For better or worse this position, which is adopted by the great majority of academics, will be examined critically in this article.

Is tourism a voyage which produces income for someone? In this context, it is interesting to read the recent article by Minnaert, Maitland and Miller (2011) who study “social tourism” as a phenomenon related to the protection of the neediest in society. In their development of the theme

the authors ask whether tourism should be conceived of as a commercial activity associated to pleasure and luxury or as a right of all citizens independent of their acquisitive power. The answer is not simple. Capitalist countries exploit tourism from a purely mercantilist perspective, whereas socialist countries regard the activity as a right. From this point of view, tourism has a different nature depending on the type of society. For the first type, tourism is a logical result of the benefits of work, whereas for the second, it is a universal right acquired by every person. However, if the utilitarianism which is fundamental to capitalism results in commercial tourism, the authors are incorrect in asserting that socialist countries are developing a universal form of tourism. Modern capitalism, whether in industrialised countries or socialist countries, has characterised tourism as an institution, and the right to consumption as universal, as we discuss later in relation to our theory of the dream-like nature of tourism.

Modernity and the desire to see the different and new have shaped our way of travelling in the last few years. Up to a point, even touristic voyages have been transformed into a business which is not associated with recreation as such. This at least is the thinking of G.Higginbotham (2011) who reflects whether assisted suicide might be considered a form of medical tourism. Considering the aforementioned definitions of tourism, the author recognises that recreation is an important element of tourism, and that, as there is not a return journey for the person who pays for an assisted suicide voyage, there is no touristic motivation. At the junction between recreation, free time and tourism we can see that there are two keys to understanding modern leisure – one is perceived liberty and the other is internal motivation. Both are present in tourism with the aim of suicide, but here is an important condition: the subject, by dying, does not receive any kind of recompense, or, if he receives the death that he wishes, he cannot enjoy it. Thus, we cannot talk about “assisted-suicide tourism”. The article by Higginbotham explores questions related to commercialisation and ethics. Modernity, it would seem, has invaded every aspect of our social lives, including leisure. Today a voyage must be, it would seem, a commercial transaction, which does not really take into account the motive, or prior narrative. However, as we will see below, tourism should not be strictly considered as an income-producing voyage.

References

BARUCCI P. *Tourism: ¿the end of Myth ?*. Firenze, Giunti-Barbera ed. Centro Studi Turistici, 1974.

CASTANO, J. M. *Psicología Social de los Viajes y el Turismo*. Madrid, Thomson Ed, 2005.

COHEN, E. Toward a Sociology of International Tourism. *Social Research*, 39, 1972, pp. 164-182

CULLER, J. The Semiotics of Tourism. *American Journal of Semiotics*, Vol. 1, 1981, pp. 127-140

HIGGINBOTHAM, G. Assisted-suicide Tourism: is it tourism?. *Tourismos, an international Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism*, 6 (2), 2011, pp. 177-185

KHATCHIKIAN, M. *Historia del Turismo*. Lima, Universidad San Martín de Porres, 2000.

KROTZ, E. (1988). Viajeros y Antropólogos: aspectos históricos y epistemológicos de la producción de conocimientos. *Nueva Antropología*, Vol. IX (33), 1988, pp. 17-52.

- MACCANNELL, D.. *El Turista: una nueva teoría de la clase ociosa*. Barcelona, Melusina Ed., 2003
- MENGO, C. Los Volúmenes del Tránsito: antiguos y modernos en el camino del pensar. *En Derroteros del viaje en la cultura: mito, historia y discurso*. Rosario, Pro-Historia Ediciones. Pp. 61-72, 2008
- .
- MINNAERT, L. MAITLAND, R. AND MILLER, GRAHAM. What is social Tourism?. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 14 (5), 2011, pp. 403-415
- MONTERRUBIO CORDERO, J. C *Turismo y Cambio Socio-cultural, una perspectiva Conceptual*. Plaza y Valdez y Universidad Autónoma de México, México.
- MUNOZ-ESCALONA, F. La Visión convencional del Turismo según sus primeros codificadores (los grundisse de Hunziker y Krapf, 1972". *Turydes. Revista de Investigación en Turismo y Desarrollo*, 3 (8), 2011, pp. 1-20
- PRADO-BIEZMA, J. Viajes con viático y sin viático. *Revista de Filología Románica*. Anejo IV, 2006, pp. 15-29.
- REJOWSKI, M. *Turismo no Percurso do Tempo*. San Pablo, El Aleph, 2002.
- SANTANA-TALAVERA, A. *Antropología y Turismo. ¿Nuevas hordas, viejas Culturas?*. Barcelona, Ariel, 2006.
- SESSA, A *El Balance de la Investigación turística con implicaciones sociales en los últimos 25 años: ensayos de turismo*. Bogotá, Bogotana Impresores, 1979.
- SCHLUTER, R. *Turismo: una versión integradora*. Buenos Aires, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Turísticos, 2008.
- TRIBE, J. Tribes, Territories and Networks in the Tourism Academy. *Annals of Tourism Research*. Vol. 37 (1), 2010, pp. 7-33
- URRY J. Introducción, Culturas Móviles. *En Viajes y Geografías*. Zusman, P. Lois, C y Castro H (compiladoras). Buenos Aires, Prometeo, Pp. 17-31, 2007.