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THE TECHNICAL PERSPECTIVE IN TOURISM FIELDS

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Abstract

The present short piece is a criticism against the technical perspective in tourism research. It has gradually has commoditized tourism as a product, bringing to education and workforce only a managerial view of the activity. Based on the idea that, tourism is a total social fact, this work explores the limitations of technical perspective in tourism, first of all in the argument of social geography and urban studies. The process of territorialisation and picturesque seem to be key factor for the advent of tourist destinations. To some extent management and marketing have in last years replaced to scientific research in academy.

Key Words: Tourism, Hospitality, Technical perspective, Definition of tourism.

One of the fundamental aspects which determine the discourse concerning the technical perspective on tourism is territorial organisation and planning. R.Dosso states that “certain urban areas have a territorial centrality (or transterritoriality) according to their dynamic role of the attraction they have on the surrounding area influencing economic and territorial development” (Dosso, 2005, p.28) Taking other conceptual tools from marketing and management, Dosso states that the consolidation of the centrality which he mentions is possible only by the intervention of two factors: 1) competition, and 2) the use of the strengths in the economic base of the area. His analysis derives from the supposition that the social dynamic does not imply a break in social order, and vice versa. The necessity for order and stability is the first element which we find in the technical perspective on tourism. The second refers to the rational use of resources to achieve a higher material benefit, not necessarily in financial terms. In other words, the technical perspective emphasises the necessity of creating a situation which is better than the present situation, which is always presented as being undesirable.

Dosso states that while the landscape is the principal attraction in tourism, there are other elements such as the transport infrastructure. The territorialisation of the economic (although territory is part of the economy) is the third aspect in the technical perspective on tourism. The organisation of territory is seen always as being in the future, being linked to probable events. In the treatment of Dosso, there are essentially two areas which should be analysed. One is the time element concerning future ideal situations, and the second is the relationship between the technical rational use of resources in territorial planning and the desire of the principal actors to reach this efficiency. J.C. Mantero introduces a new concept into the definition of tourism – the attraction and the nucleus. The nucleus, geographically speaking, is the point in space which serves as a centre of orientation to the rest of the landscape. The nucleus is not only a point of orientation, but also is unique with respect to the remainder of the visual universe. In part, this is the prerequisite of the unique nature and exclusivity which is constructed symbolically around a tourist destination. The future and physical position appear to relate to each other. However, even if in Spanish geographical and temporal destination are identical, in English this is not so – and we have “destination” and “destiny”. In the summary of his presentation Mantero clarifies that “Because of the growth of tourism in the hinterland of Buenos Aires we will suggest and develop the idea of tourism as a territorial phenomenon, considering social density, an appropriate political and economic context, and both urban and rural tourism attractions” (Mantero, 2005, p.49).

For Mantero tourism is born in the convergence between the availability of a density of sites which are attractive to tourists in a given territory, and a landscape which is sufficient to attract a substantial flow of tourists. One cannot conceive of tourism without this capacity to attract, and external infrastructure. Thus tourism generates expectations in consumers who evaluate the product from an economic perspective (again we see a reference to the future). However, Mantero does not forget that tourism also involves social, human and psychological factors (Mantero, 2005: 59). Mantero does see a clear subordination of human and social factors to economic factors. Work and commercial exchange, a result of the free market, synthesises the relationship between mankind and geographical territory. Mantero follows by describing touristic necessities and experiences, concluding that tourism permits a “union” of the tourist with the surrounding landscape, so that his environment not only provides the resources necessary for his very survival, but also gives added value to the commercial relationship between the resident and the tourist. One can conceptualise the argument of Mantero using the following key words: attraction, value, satisfaction, consumption, time, usefulness, tourism, and territory. Sometimes history is presented by the technical perspective on tourism as an example of scientific objectivity, but it is actually only a description of the “tourism product” and not a history of tourism.

To summarise, the technical perspective in tourism research emphasises the following:

- a) Tourism is, and should be, evaluated for its present principal function, and not for its historic function.
- b) Tourism is an economic and commercial activity whose main characteristics are movement, and the transformation of the geographic landscape. The undesirable consequences of tourism can be mitigated by the rational use of resources, which should be directed towards the protection of heritage and ecology.
- c) Work, which is the principal value in the West, relates four very different elements: territory, the individual, tourism, and the future. Tourism activity, as a type of leisure, has a geographic logic and an economic logic. By the imposition and reproduction of ideas and beliefs such as good, bad, better, worse, deterioration, growth, value, higher and lower, writers about tourism from the technical perspective promote the idea that tourism

development is completed, but at the same time is subject to future events (or, in other words, business collapse).

- d) The technical perspective emphasizes attractiveness as the main criterion of academic discourse, while usefulness or the necessity of structure and order are seen to be secondary matters. The need to improve is associated with the anguish of not being able to predict the future; indeed, technical reports are written in the future tense rather than the past. Their horizon looks towards what is to come (in contrast to scientific reports which look towards the past or the present).

Among the principal limitations of the technical perspective is the wide variety of definitions concerning tourism, which, by their nature, are not mutually exclusive but rather abstract and general, referring to such activities as business, leisure and rest, among others. These generalising definitions are appropriate to the modern system of conducting business in which cohesion and synergy are seen to be the principal strengths. But these definitions, although maybe efficient for some purposes, are too superficial to analyse the phenomenon of tourism from a scientific point of view. Secondly, the technical perspective is more concerned with the profitability of the suppliers of tourism services and the attractions of the destination than understanding the real dynamics of the process of tourism development. Many studies from this perspective openly declare that tourism should be understood as a western and modern phenomenon, thus trivialising more than 2,500 years of history, and the value that other cultures and civilisations have put on their forms of tourism activity. As a form of leisure, tourism evokes the value which civilisations have always placed on social order. Unfortunately, the systemic perspective, which could have helped the understanding of the functioning of tourism, has been co-opted by disciplines such as marketing and management, where efficiency and success are seen to be more important than understanding. The literature in tourism in the last few decades has placed great emphasis on themes related to the impact of tourists on local communities. According to this perspective, this impact may be divided into three elements – development, interaction between the guest and the host, and culture. From the point of view of local residents, one of the most negative aspects of tourism is the concentration of people and capital, and the consequent rise in criminal behaviour (Brunt and Courtney, 1999). This perception is an important aspect of research into tourism.

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