

A Geographer's Gaze at Tourism

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Abstract

The meaning and content of international tourism has shifted from Greek and Roman travel to a modern and complex phenomenon in the 21st century. All along this time path the scientific interest in tourism has changed from a descriptive and encyclopaedic knowledge of places and people to a discipline in its own right. The emerging geographical approach to tourism emphasises both the spatial analysis of tourism -including flows and space uses- and a synthesis of the territorial coherence among people, place, product and policies. The geographical approach, with its capacity to analyse the various components and to synthesise the interactions, contributes to the formation of a comprehensive and coherent framework for an integrated analysis of the multi-dimensional tourism environment. Over time the research focus has come to concentrate upon the transformation processes induced by tourism and on the multi-dimensional impact of tourism on natural and morphological characteristics, on social and political relationships, on economic structures and on functional profiles. Reflections on key issues for future research in tourism include a «return to the roots movement» in the territorial approach, the high expectations of methodological innovations and emphasis on the need for integrated planning and management in tourism.

Key words: tourism, scientific research, geographical focus, future research topics.

Resum. *Una mirada geogràfica al turisme*

El significat i el contingut del turisme internacional ha variat molt des dels viatges dels grecs i els romans fins al fenomen modern i complex del segle XXI. A llarg d'aquest recorregut, l'interès científic pel turisme també ha canviat des del coneixement descriptiu i enciclopèdic de llocs i pobles fins arribar a constituir una disciplina científica en si mateixa. L'enfocament geogràfic sobre el turisme posa l'èmfasi tant en l'anàlisi espacial del turisme (fluxos i usos del sòl), com en la síntesi geogràficament coherent entre persones, llocs, productes i polítiques. L'enfocament geogràfic, amb la capacitat d'analitzar components i sintetitzar interaccions, contribueix a elaborar un marc exhaustiu i coherent per realitzar una anàlisi integrada de la multidimensionalitat del turisme. Amb el temps, el focus de la recerca s'ha concentrat sobre els processos transformadors induïts pel turisme i en els impactes múltiples que el sector causa en el medi ambient, en les relacions socials i polítiques i en els perfils funcionals dels territoris. Alguns aspectes clau per a futures recerques sobre turisme

inclouen un «retorn a les arrels» en els enfocaments territorials, les elevades expectatives posades en innovacions metodològiques i l'èmfasi en el planejament i la gestió integrades del sector.

Paraules clau: turisme, recerca científica, enfocament geogràfic, temes de futur.

Resumen. *Una mirada geográfica al turismo*

El significado y el contenido del turismo internacional ha cambiado mucho desde los viajes de griegos y romanos hasta el fenómeno moderno y complejo del siglo XXI. Durante este recorrido, el interés científico por el turismo también ha cambiado desde el conocimiento descriptivo y enciclopédico de lugares y pueblos, hasta llegar a erigirse en una disciplina científica por sí misma. El enfoque geográfico sobre el turismo pone el énfasis tanto en el análisis espacial del sector (flujos y usos del suelo), como en la síntesis, geográficamente coherente, entre personas, lugares, productos y políticas. Con su capacidad para analizar componentes y sintetizar interacciones, el enfoque geográfico contribuye a la elaboración de un marco exhaustivo y coherente para lograr un análisis integrado de la multidimensionalidad del turismo. Con el tiempo, el foco de la investigación se ha concentrado en los procesos transformadores inducidos por el turismo y en los múltiples impactos que el sector causa en el medio ambiente, en las relaciones políticas y sociales y en los perfiles funcionales de los territorios. Algunos aspectos clave para investigaciones futuras sobre turismo incluyen un «regreso a las raíces» en los enfoques territoriales, las elevadas expectativas puestas en las innovaciones tecnológicas y el énfasis en la planificación y gestión integradas del sector

Palabras clave: turismo, investigación científica, enfoque geográfico, temas de futuro.

Résumé. *Un regard géographique sur le tourisme*

La signification et le contenu du tourisme international a beaucoup changé depuis les voyages de Grecs et des Romains jusqu'au phénomène moderne et complexe du tourisme en ce début de XXIème siècle. Durant ce parcours, l'intérêt scientifique pour le tourisme a aussi changé depuis la connaissance descriptive et encyclopédique des lieux et des sociétés jusqu'à arriver à ériger une véritable discipline scientifique. Le regard géographique sur le tourisme met l'accent sur l'analyse spatiale du secteur (flux et usages) comme sur l'anlyse, géographiquement cohérente, entre des personnes, lieux, produits et politiques. Avec sa capacité d'analyser différentes composantes et de synthétiser des interactions, ce regard géographique contribue à l'élaboration d'un cadre exhaustif et cohérent pour obtenir une analyse permettant la compréhension du tourisme dans ses multiples dimensions. Avec le temps, les recherches se sont concentrées sur les processus de transformation induits par le tourisme, notamment dans les multiples impacts que le secteur engendre sur l'environnement, dans le cadre des relations politiques et sociales et dans les profils fonctionnels des territoires. Certains aspects essentiels pour les recherches futures sur le tourisme incluent un «retour aux racines» d'un point de vue territorial, avec des attentes élevées au niveau des innovations technologiques et de l'emphase entre planification et gestion du secteur.

Mots clé: tourisme, recherche scientifique, regard géographique, sujets pour le futur.

Summary

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Introduction

The quest for the roots of tourism and evidence about the social, cultural and economic aspects of the phenomenon, takes one back as far as Greek and Roman times, when the first writings described other places, landscapes, people and cultures (Herodotus, Ptolemy et al.). To understand more about the evolution of travel (by the early business travellers) in the Middle Ages, one can refer to Ibn Batuta with his famous and —at that time— unique work «Rehla» (14th Century). Religious motives for travelling have always been present: for pilgrimage, for missionary work, for war or peace making (Shackley, 2006). Gradually geo-political motives became the important incentives for travelling in the pre-tourism era and an important source of inspiration for the first scholars in the field of geo-tourism and biogeography. For instance, Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859, Germany) with his masterwork on KOSMOS (1845) and Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918, France), who promoted ecological views in geography and introduced the concept of *genre de vie* ('way of life') have marked the further development of geo-science in a multi disciplinary approach *avant la lettre* and definitely opened a window on the «outside world» (Butler and Wall, 1985).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the historical processes that have led to tourism in its present form. Within the wide range of social, economic and cultural changes in the tourism environment, focus will be placed more specifically on the tourist gaze of the geographer. The target is not only the role of geographers as founders of the tourism perspective, creators of (tourist) maps and often the best writers of travel guides, but also the social scientist in search of an integrated knowledge about a complex phenomenon.

In the colourful and mobile kaleidoscope of tourism studies, one can discover a rich variety of topics, but little coherence or a clear methodological framework. Through a selection of specific issues and a reflection on the most recent advances in this «new science», it is hoped to illustrate the slow but steady maturing of theories, methodology and techniques of multi-disciplinary tourism studies (Jafar, 2000). Research projects currently on the agenda of many tourism scholars and schools can demonstrate both the dynamics and innovative capacity of tourism research and, at the same time, its structural shortcomings.

Tourism: a science in search of its identity

The expansion of the travel business and industry, the supporting tourism infrastructure in the destinations and the increasing mobility of millions of people, is the outcome of social and economic trends and an exponent of an exploding leisure market (and society). The structural links between leisure and tourism present new challenges for social scientists, planners and tourism marketers, the main one being the integration of temporal and spatial dimensions in the analysis of human behaviour (Hall, 2004; Middleton, 2002). The necessity of an integrated approach to tourism is the message of many researchers, but this is rarely implemented. Contrary to the economic disciplines, in which a growing interest in spatial and environmental issues is evident, the importance of spatial factors in the development of tourism tends to be underestimated (Lew et al., 2004; Jansen-Verbeke and Dietvorst, 1987). One explanation could be the difficulties encountered in establishing valid databases with geo references, which are necessary in time space budget surveys, in spatial analysis and advanced development and simulation models. Certainly, the professional skills required can be expected from geographers and planners (Farsari et al., 2004; Shoval and Isaacson, 2007; Lievois, 2007).

The new geographical approach to tourism emphasises both a spatial analysis of tourism—flows and space uses—and a synthesis of the territorial coherence among people, place, product and policies. The innovative conceptualisation of space as a core tourist attraction involves both urban tourismscapes and natural landscapes. The process of tourist product development starts from cultural and natural resources and implies a wide understanding of the interaction between nature and human activities. Above all, the irreversible and hybrid impact of tourism on the environment is an emerging challenge for researchers and planners. The introduction and implementation of a systems approach, based on visions about interaction and interdependency has a high priority and explains the current exploration of new management tools and monitoring systems (Leiper, 1990; Pearce, 2001).

The take off of tourism as an academic discipline

The publication of the first special issue on «Geography of Tourism» of *Annals of Tourism Research* in 1979 and the first edition of the journal *Tourism Geographies* in 1999 are milestones in the difficult path towards the recognition of tourism as an academic discipline in its own right, with specific theories and methods, in the cradle of geographical sciences. In this period of booming tourism (since the 1960s) it has become evident to what extent tourism research requires an interdisciplinary approach and why the study of tourism aspects and impacts hardly fits into the traditional curricula at the established universities. This is in strong contrast with young universities, upgraded polytechnic universities and professional tourism schools that are eager to explore this new field of social, economic, business and environmental aspects of

tourism. There is a booming tourism market and a growing demand for better training of researchers and professional managers and, in many countries, this warrants governmental support for more professionalism in the sector. These conditions have been the driving force in the quantitative expansion of facilities for tourism education, albeit without any guarantee of academic quality. Tenured professorships -with tourism as the core task- or even endowed chairs fully geared towards the development of tourism as an academic discipline, are rare. This deficit has a direct impact on the research programmes, the number of staff in the field, the status of related Ph.D. projects and, as a consequence, the number of publications in international peer reviewed journals. It is also reflected in the rather low status of tourism curricula and staff within the university landscape, in general, and at the traditional European universities, in particular.

The lack of fundamental research programmes and, in many cases, a policy or business orientation in research projects, are still characteristic of much tourism research nowadays. A wide range of colourful and interesting case studies, government reports and «explorative» marketing studies fills our libraries, but these fail to build a theoretical framework, so badly needed for progress in this specific field of social research. The opportunities to learn about tourism systems through contract projects offer a number of advantages for empirically based research, but also clearly mark the selection of key issues, objectives and even the (standard) research methods and ways of communicating the results. Most of these reports —irrespective of the quality of the results and the innovative level of the recommendations— seldom have an impact on the international knowledge networks. This is a missed opportunity both for the progress of a developing discipline and for the researchers trying to position tourism as an academic discipline. In the academic rat race of «publish or perish» this has had a significant impact on the competitive position of tourism staff members —rather weak— and, as a consequence, on the difficult development and embedding of a coherent and balanced tourism teaching curricula in the established disciplinary programmes. Nevertheless, the days of difficulties for tourism academics might soon disappear as a consequence of a new, international thrust in tourism studies, both academic and professional, mainly driven by the dynamic attack of Australia and New Zealand's tourism and business schools. The tourism sector in the 21st century has entered a stage of maturity, reflection, cross-disciplinary debates and international social discourse.

Many European projects in tourism related fields have been real incentives for exploring new networks and partnerships, including specialised or ambitious university teams, consultants and governmental departments to focus on specific objectives. The fruits of such collaboration between tourism industries, organisations, NGO's and universities are now materialising. The internationalisation of tourism projects and cross-border interuniversity exchange programmes among universities within Europe (Socrates, Erasmus, etc.) and overseas have together created a more attractive image of tourism studies. This

trend is reinforced by the fact that the young generations have taken a real interest in tourism and leisure as a challenging, dynamic and flexible job market. For many schools and universities such a «student potential» is most welcome in their competition for higher numbers and hence funding. Worldwide new tourism schools are being created, in non-traditional locations and often independent from existing universities. Obviously this booming educational supply cannot be supported by qualified staff, by experts in tourism studies, by knowledge of tourism literature and, in many cases, not even an international travel experience on the part of the teaching staff.

A widespread call for a consistent and equitable quality control system in tourism education is emerging, probably inspired by the hype about quality management policies in the tourism industry. However, it requires more maturity and less political influences in the educational networks, more standardised criteria and guidelines (e.g. UNWTO and TEDQUAL to establish an objective assessment system). Several international organisations and networks such as¹ Aiest, IAST, TTRA, UNWTO and ATLAS, play an important role in stimulating more professionalism in the sector and in promoting the rich opportunities that international and interdisciplinary knowledge networks afford.

A catching-up movement is also reflected in the spectacular boom of specialised journals in tourism, initially predominantly in English (77 in 2004). Lately there has been a modest but clear manifestation of new journals and publications in various languages, edited in, for example, Spanish, French, German, and, more recently, in eastern European languages. This eruption of journals opens opportunities to report on specific themes in tourism (economy, environment, culture, hospitality, transport, rural, urban, events, and many more). However the critical mass of qualified authors and reviewers—even readers—has become problematic, as well as the accumulation of numerous case studies, with endless lists of references but with few general relevant or reflective conclusions.

The frequent absence of a theoretical framework or concepts means that only minor contributions are made to the «scientification» of tourism. In addition, there is a clear clustering of Anglo-Saxon knowledge networks, often difficult to access for non-English speaking scholars. This predominance marks the current academic landscape. In fact, it is only over the last two decades that the study of tourism as an important academic topic has gained increasing popularity, as evidenced by the growing number of books, monographs,

1. Aiest: Association International des Experts de Sciences Touristiques. Swiss origin and created in Rome in 1951 (www.aiest.org).
IAST: International Academy for the Study of Tourism. Founded in 1988 in Spain (www.tourismscholars.org).
TTRA: Tourism and Travel Association. Based in USA (www.ttra.com).
ATLAS: The Association for Tourism and Leisure Education. Founded in 1991, now a global network (www.atlas-euro.org).

edited collections, and journal publications. Each year more and more regional, national, and international conferences are held relating to travel and tourism with delegates examining a broad spectrum of topics linked to this global phenomenon.

Nevertheless, it is significant that tourism has caught the attention of researchers from a variety of fields, including anthropology, business administration, economics, geography, political science, sociology and, recently, architecture, urban studies and planning have also got strongly involved. Representatives of these and other disciplines have explored various aspects relating to travel and tourism including: the political economy of tourism; demand and supply-side studies; impact assessment; tourism and sustainable development; and tourism planning, environmental design and, of course, policy-making. While the multi-disciplinary nature of tourism research is one of its major strengths (since it allows various viewpoints), it is arguably also its greatest weakness, because there is no real consensus on how to define and approach the study object. Dissonant definitions, incompatible methods of analysis, tensions in the discussions on form, function and value, different affinities with the role of stakeholders, etc. are just some of the divergences.

It would appear that a general rule for most books and publications on tourism is to open the door by referring to the growth of tourism and its increasing impact on the environment. This can be interpreted as some kind of legitimating statement by the authors who lack the confidence to assert that tourism, irrespective its size, volume or impact, is a multi-faceted phenomenon worthy of scientific debate. In addition, the weak conceptualization of the different aspects of tourism and their interaction should be a strong argument for further investigations. The answers given by the multiple case studies published will remain limited as long as comparative studies are not tackled and obscure databases or biased survey methods not questioned.

A spatial focus in the kaleidoscope of multi-disciplinary research

Without doubt, tourism deserves its rightful place in the social sciences, precisely because of the need to develop more theoretical understanding of the system. This article aims to observe the geographers' gaze at tourism, starting from the paradigm that tourism geography offers the most appropriate framework and concepts for an integrated analysis of the multidimensional tourism environment. This is adequately illustrated by fig. 1.

When scanning the flow of new publications on tourism, it could be concluded that interest in the spatial aspects and territorial uniqueness is remarkably low in comparison with the economic or business, management and marketing issues being studied and reported. A multi-disciplinary approach is the buzzword and this has opened the door for a wide range of new concepts, mostly borrowed from the «mother» disciplines and now applied to tourism: e.g. product life cycle, clustering, erosion and many more. The practice of achieving inspiration in the mother discipline is even appreciated as explo-

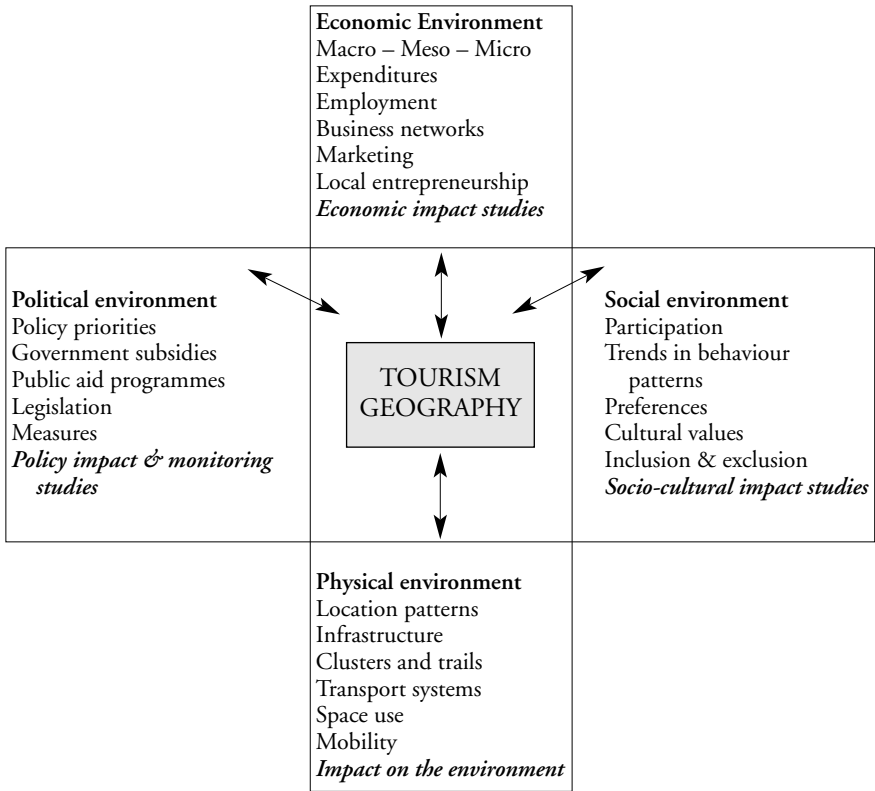


Figure 1. Tourism Geography: an integrating framework for tourism studies.

rative, innovative and creative research work. In fact, this trend can be seen as «navigating without a compass», certainly leading to interesting experiences, but not to mainstream progress in the discipline. The drive to look at tourism from a different point of view can be seen as an escape from the disciplinary cages to explore the jungle the way young lions do (Tribe, 2005, p. 360). This procedure seems to be typical for social sciences in a stage of exploration and search for identity, for theoretical models and for a specialised vocabulary.

The geographical approach, with its capacity to analyse the various components and to synthesise the interactions, contributes to the formation of a comprehensive and coherent framework (fig. 1.). Moreover, this approach, typical of geographers, planners or environmentalists, tends to exclude most scientists not familiar to working with geo-referenced data, maps and the spatial analysis of flows and patterns. Clearly, the geographical gaze at tourism, or rather, the added value of spatial analysis, opens new perspectives. A quick

scan of the abstracts of recent publications shows the growing frequency of keywords such as «Space», «Place», «Environment», «Geography», «GIS», a clear indication of the growing interest. (Lew et al., 2004, p. 15). Presumably, this re-orientation to geographical aspects is related to the ongoing lively debate about sustainability, which places tourism even more to the fore. The launching of the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* (in 1992) is in line with this development of interests. New topics have thus appeared on the research agenda, such as sustainable development of tourism destinations, measurement of carrying capacity, impact assessment of tourism in general or of specific tourism activities in particular. Developing tools to measure and monitor environmental impact have indeed a high priority on many a research agenda.

Tourism analysis: Time and space dimensions

In the endeavour to understand the dynamics of tourism and to identify the parameters, the inclusion of time and space dimensions proves to be crucial (Butler, 2006). Although the basis for time-space studies was laid by Scandinavian geographers (Hägerstrand, 1982), concepts such as time-space paths, authority, coupling and physical constraints, clustering and bundling of activities, activity prisms, etc. are now being reinvented in the context of empirical studies and not only by geographers. Different disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, and communication and transport sciences are now including time and space aspects in their studies (e.g. the current discussion on the genesis and constructs of the tourist's mental map and on how to influence this by clever marketing). Gradually the research focus has come to concentrate on transformation processes induced by tourism. The multi-dimensional impact of tourism on natural and morphological features, on social and political relationships, and on economic structures and functional profiles can be traced to a limited number of selected indicators. In order to analyse the dynamics of change, the structure of the tourism system needs to be well understood.

Policy makers share a contagious ambition to manage and control the processes of change induced by tourism in their respective territories. This can only become a realistic proposition when there is agreement about significant indicators of change and, above all, tools to measure the various aspects of spatial impact. The technological tools to track changes in land use patterns are available; the problem rather resides in the interpretation of the driving forces in spatial transformations and the social understanding of changing patterns of space use. To quote one example: a spatial concentration of museums, monuments and cultural facilities offers, by definition, opportunities for a cultural tourist experience and, as a consequence, a claim for tourism uses and activities in the area (Graham et al., 2000; Jansen-Verbeke, 2007). The process of tourismification in the area generates new dynamics, which also affect the immediate surroundings.

Innovative spatial analysis methods and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) open new perspectives to identify the factors and to understand

the vectors of change (Boers and Cottrell, 2007). The use of GIS as a policy supporting tool is not new, but surely now catching full attention. While knowledge of GIS and computer mapping was formerly applied to describe spatial patterns in detail (e.g. location of tourist attractions, spatial behaviour of visitors at a specific site or destination), the emphasis now lies on the interpretation of issues such as tourists' mental maps, carrying capacity of places and, above all, the use of these results for strategic resource and visitor management. The gap between visitors' mental maps, their expectations and their actual behaviour patterns, in time and space, are not yet unravelled (Poria et al., 2003; Shoval and Isaacson, 2006). With the exception of some case studies, little is known about the impact of the Tourist Opportunity Spectrum (TOS), the location pattern of tourist attractions, landmarks and icons on time-space use patterns and flows of tourists (Butler and Woldbrootz, 1999; Jansen-Verbeke and Lievois, 2004).

The key to understanding the perception and appreciation of visitors is worth a fortune for the suppliers, designers and planners of tourist destinations, a fact that explains the call for more empirical studies about spatial interactions with an emphasis on the «hidden» demand side. However, there is a certain degree of inertia in terms of the tourist infrastructure (the hardware), so the required adaptation to new trends and interpretations needs to come from events, image building and narratives (Jansen-Verbeke et al., 2008).

Current issues in tourism geography: a selection

A «back to the roots» movement induced by tourism

The process of globalisation has reinforced the need for territorial identity and cultural authenticity, grass-rooted tourism products and, above all, the conservation of cultural resources and diversity. This touches the core motivation of tourists: the pull factors to travel, to visit other places, to look for «different experiences» The call from the *Journal of Tourism, Culture and Communication* to submit papers about tourism and spatial interactions, about landscapes and action spaces, about cultural identity and sense of place is a clear signal of this trend.

The current move *back to the roots* is definitely linked with a search for unique selling propositions (USP) for destinations, regions, attractions, and events and, probably to a lesser extent, also to the growing involvement of local communities in the creation and renovation of their tourism resources. The notions of territory, habitat, local history and folklore are reloaded with new values. The regional patterns and coherence of cultural heritage resources permit the development of characteristic tourism destinations and images (ESPON, 2006). This rediscovering and growing awareness of regional resources and identities is closely related to the current regionalisation movement in the new Europe (Hall et al., Smith and Marciszweska, 2006). The region as a territorial, but also organisational, unit in tourism development and destination mar-

keting is an old, but recently revalorised strategy (Rieucan and Lageiste, 2006; Gravari-Barbas and Violier, 2003). Regions are becoming brands and the icons are carefully selected in order, for instance, to distinguish the different *costas*. The association of cultural landscapes with territorial products and the protection of (agricultural) product brands are reinforced by European legislation and although not intended as such, this is bringing more diversity and competition into the European leisure landscapes (Sangate et al., 2008).

Assessing the role of cultural assets in the process of territorial cohesion and identity building has indeed become a mayor challenge in «regional development»; this does not represent exactly a return to the regional geography of the past, but a revalorisation of territorial coherence between the place and its people, their history, habitat, and heritage. The understanding of the dynamics of tourism starts by identifying the action and awareness spaces of people, their everyday environment with its leisure functions and the tourism destinations beyond the «usual» environment. This spatial category, however difficult to define, has become an important criterion in current attempts to calculate the added income through tourism in a country or administrative area, constituting, moreover, a crucial debate in the development of Tourism Satellite Accounts (TSA) (Smeral and Weber, 2000).

Tourism: Tools and Techniques

Technological innovations open new ways to register and analyse geo-referenced data. There exists a real risk that advanced expertise in this field will remain rather exclusively in the hands of researchers for whom the development of techniques tends to be a study objective in its own right. It takes more than electronic tools to detect the hidden agenda of different actors, their motives and moods, expectations and frustration, beyond the registration of, for instance, spatial behaviour and flow patterns. Surveys, Delphi methods, observation techniques, are all methods that have been tried out to collect much wanted information on high numbers of respondents. The limitations of these social science methods and results are becoming manifest surely when simulation models are needed in reference to aspects such as visitor numbers, appreciation scores, word of mouth practices, etc. (Ateljevic, 2000). Scepticism is growing about the validity of large-scale surveys and the accuracy—and even the utility—of quantitative data. An exception could be made for standard statistical data, registered by governments or specialised institutes. And yet statistics and data on tourist nights, trips, stays, activities, and expenditures are essential in order to manage the tourism, transport and hospitality sectors professionally. Competition means that tools are needed to make reliable comparative studies. Statistics are, in fact, one of the weak points in tourism studies: incomplete statistics, at a national level, that are hardly comparable internationally. The still high number of grey areas in terms of reliable data is a serious handicap (data on day trips, on second homes, on seasonal labour, on volunteers, etc.). The vogue to forecast future scenarios in leisure, tourism

and travel is creating jobs and constitutes an eye-catcher for the media, however weak the scientific basis for many statements may be.

A serious resulting problem is that this image of a booming economy nurtures the high expectations of many developing regions. Tourism is seen as the only way out for poverty alleviation, for unemployment reduction, for favouring emigration areas and downgraded city or post-industrial landscapes. Criteria to assess the actual tourism potentials need to take into account factors such as location and accessibility, infrastructure and involvement of local communities and national governments and, last but not least, financial and human resources. What has gone right and goes wrong with all the ambition to fight poverty through tourism (Ashley and Goodwin, 2007)? Apparently too many would-be tourism professionals and NGO's are designing tourism development plans and raising false hopes in developing countries. Tourism can indeed be a tool for development when in hands of true professionals.

Integrated management and planning

More than ever the need to integrate tourism in the existing landscape, in the cultural environment and in the framework of the economic forces becomes evident (Pearce and Priestley, 1998). This implies a growing interdependency of disciplines, skills and knowledge networks (Van der Duim, 2007). The example of new museums being constructed as landmarks and icons for tourism destinations is illustrative of this trend. Initially the creativity of the architect seems to be a prime condition in order to meet the expectations. However, the location, added value and integration in the local tourism system and cultural life and in the destination's marketing policies, are crucial for the survival of the project. In addition, there is external competition from many more museums all over, often more related to the «impressive architecture», rather than the content of the collections or the messages offered to the public. Knowledge about the actual and intended museum visitor requires yet another management capacity. Visitor management, even equipped with sophisticated tools, requires a great affinity with the «client». Positioning the museum as a core attraction in the town or the region is yet another continuous challenge. Examples of museums with a rather short product life cycle bear witness to the story (Plaza, 2000).

The examples quoted illustrate the range of capacities required in the implementation of sustainable models and practices of integrated planning, referring to the harmony or equilibrium between form and function, place and people and, last but not least, the capacity to develop both creative and synthetic views on future developments (Debbage and Ioannides, 2004; Richards and Wilson, 2006). As illustrated in fig. 1, tourism geography can be the hub in this new network approach to tourism.

Anticipating «post tourism» syndromes

The future scenario of ever expanding tourism travel and a continued fever of building new resorts is frightening, to say the least. Dissociation between project developers, real estate business, environmental managers, cultural, leisure and tourism experts, and —even worse— with the educational foundations of tourism management, is like navigating without a compass. Excess capacity and killing competition will be at the top of the menu of the tourism industry. The «deaf-ear» policy to exclude different groups of stakeholders from the decision making process on tourism projects will not stand much longer. A global awareness of tourism as a two edged sword, capable of making the world both more beautiful and uglier, is gaining momentum.

Which forces can stop this growing dissonance and can bridge the gaps between inclusion and exclusion? Future research on tourism definitely faces a spectrum of challenges: new issues, alternative methods, accountable interpretations of results and transparent presentations. The empowering of integrated research on tourism implies communication between disciplines, creativity and, above all, a vision on the pro-active role of scientists as stewards of a better world.

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