

# Tourism and Interculturality

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To consider tourism as a system that has its own framework of references is a highly complex approach, owing to the multidisciplinary vision necessary for its analysis. We propose an intercultural approach, that is to say, a method based on the dynamics of interaction between people, culture bearers, with the objective of seeing how far this interaction can contribute to the promotion of sustainable tourism and at the same time of an intercultural dialogue. The actors in this interaction are on one hand the tourists with their multiple origins, and on the other the local population, in this case the peoples of the Mediterranean region.

In 1998, tourism represented the most important human migration worldwide, and consisted of 550 million tourists with a great diversity of destinations. In its study «Tourism, Horizon 2020»,<sup>1</sup> the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) predicts 1,500 million tourists per year, which is three times the number of tourists in 1998. The Euro-Mediterranean area heads the list of the larger tourist destination areas and receives twenty-five percent of the tourist flow.<sup>2</sup> From the euphoric discourse on tourism generated by the economists in the sixties, a rather catastrophic critique has emerged from the side of anthropologists and ecologists in the sev-

enties and eighties, who condemned the destruction of the life-styles of the local populations, as well as the environment, as a result of tourism saturation in certain areas. Currently, debates focus on crisis and change that is taking place within the sector. It is not tourism as such that is changing, but the changes in the tourism are linked to the profound changes experienced by today's people and societies. Any element that provokes a change in the factors at the basis of tourism will modify, directly or indirectly, the demand and supply of tourism, and could result in the saturation or desertion of any tourist destination. We will first look at the basic elements that have made tourism possible, in order to then address the issue of who the tourists are. This leads therefore to the inclusion of the local population in our analysis, and proposes a renewed hospitality as a new dynamic of interrelations between visitors and hosts.

The origin of tourism is cultural. From the tours taken by British students at the end of their studies in the eighteenth century, to pilgrimages made to religious sites, the main objectives of this certain kind of travel that was only within the reach of the privileged classes were wisdom, religion and leisure. But the situation is seen to change when «paid holidays» for workers have been achieved by the social struggle, at the same time that the modes of transport make travelling generally easier. We could locate the evolution from pre-industrial tourism to industrial tourism

around the seventies, and the factors that have made such an evolution possible have been:

- The economic growth of the capitalist countries
- A worldwide process of urban concentration
- Paid holidays for workers
- The modernisation of modes of transport
- Advertising
- The relative political stability of originating and receiving countries

These trends are absorbed by the capitalist system and inscribed in its phase of service industry, which is controlled by the tour operators who organise both the supply and demand for the tourist industry. From this time, tourism has been considered a complementary product on sale, as well as a status symbol, a fact that is significant in the life-style of modern people, and above all of those who live in societies of urban centres in industrialised countries. It is from these basic factors that the changes in tourism should be analysed. For example, we should investigate how leisure within the tourism system has today been replaced by consumption,<sup>3</sup> and the way in which the family of today, complete with its new structures, has different needs and requires a different type of holiday in comparison with the families of the previous generations, who were content with the sun and beach package. In terms of factors of communication, we should

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wto.org/french/tratop\\_f/serv\\_f/results\\_f.doc](http://www.wto.org/french/tratop_f/serv_f/results_f.doc)

<sup>2</sup> *L'Atlas de Le Monde Diplomatique*. Valencia: Cybermonde, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Santana, A. *Antropología del turismo*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1997.

note the possibilities of exchange and contact that are represented by new technologies within a sector in which information constitutes the very essence of its activity.

So who are the tourists? It is impossible to define a «tourist»? Tourists come from different countries, from different regions within each country and from different social classes within these regions. In addition, the perspectives that are projected in their holidays are also widely diverse, and from all these differences comes the great variety of tourism that has developed in recent years.

The only points that we can consider common to all the above variations are:

- The desire to break with daily routine
- The freedom to choose a temporary different life-style
- The fact that it is the only economic activity in which the client (and not the product) is transported
- The availability of surplus resources to leisure

These elements mark the difference from other forms of human movement, such as immigration. The movement of the tourist is not forced, but rather it constitutes a means of escape from stress, motivated by personal fulfilment, pleasure, or the desire to be in another place, to which the tourist travels or is transported. With the objective of reorienting the analysis of the «different» from the «similar», tourism offers a wide field of multiple interactions where the amalgamation of the different and the similar is produced, reproduced and transformed beyond ideological passions and without the need to change mentalities or values.

This intercultural encounter has two dimensions, one temporal and another spatial. In terms of time, the interaction starts well before the beginning of the journey itself, and is formed according to the information available for making

contact with the destination. The second point is that of undertaking the journey itself, which culminates in the real displacement. The third point is the recreation of expectations, to which a fourth must then be added: the return. The length of this article does not allow us to enter into the characteristics of the interaction of each point, nor of their challenges and limits.<sup>4</sup>

In terms of the special aspects of this encounter we can say that «cultures function like works in progress and do not constitute finished wholes, and the individuals, as simple as we imagine them to be, are not sufficiently simple as not to be situated in relation to the order that a place bestows on them: they only express the totality from a certain angle».<sup>5</sup> For the tourist this angle is first determined by the fact of originating from another place, and also by the desire to escape daily routine, but mainly by the search for leisure. This means that the intention is not to change the world but simply «to play with it, acquiring experiences that enrich life.»<sup>6</sup>

Intercultural contact within tourist interactions are generally limited to superficial levels of contact, which Geert Hofstede calls «cultural practices».<sup>7</sup> These practices are visible to external observers, and constitute the preservation of references to heritage from a group or a place. These references are neither static nor unique, but are made up of a diversity of references in constant dynamics with both internal and external elements. «[this] potential stock of resources of heritage and symbolic referents are constituted in a heritage, from the moment it is activated by an ideological vision of identity.»<sup>8</sup>

For the local population, interaction with tourists can on many occasions represent an unequal and unbalanced experience: the tourist comes in order to relax and do nothing, while the local population has to work to ensure that the tourist is able to spend time doing nothing, for which service the tourist

pays. In addition, as the tourist does not have to do anything, the normal desire is entertainment, sometimes without the least effort or initiative on the tourist's part, aside from the service of hospitality, to occupy the leisure time. Until now studies conducted by the social sciences on tourism have placed great importance of this inequality of conditions that marks the meeting between tourists and hosts, emphasising how the perception of apparent abundance can give way to exploitation on the part of the guest (directly related to the tour operator), or provoke the distrust of both hosts and visitors.

Tourism has been classified by certain authors as commercialised hospitality: «We can consider the tourist process as a commercialisation of tradition in tourist-host relations, in which foreigners occupy a temporal role and a client status of the society visited. In this way, hospitality is industrialised and is temporarily sold to the tourist».<sup>9</sup> Hospitality is a fundamental factor in tourist interaction, and is of equal influence in both the growth and the abandonment of tourist destinations.

If we turn to renewed hospitality instead of commercialised hospitality, we may want to adopt the idea of Perelli,<sup>10</sup> of which he says in his book *Implantations humaines, paysages agraires*: «We persist in believing that tourism could become one of the most elevated forms of the knowledge of places, of a crossover between diverse cultural identities, of economic exchange that is not destructive of local resources. (...) Beyond its own mechanisms of regeneration, tourism must be associated with the rediscovery of hospitality, not in the vulgarised form that is dominant today, but in the modern re-proposal of the status of liberty and of the respect reserved for those who bring diversity. (...) The risk of new racist barbarism could perhaps vanish through a direct and authentic representation of diversity that an alternative conception of travel could permit.»

<sup>4</sup> Onghena, Y. in Saïgh Boustia R. (dir.) *Tourisme durable*. Marrakech: Université Cadi Ayyad, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Augé, M. *Les non-lieux. Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité*. Paris: Fayard, 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, V.L. *Anfitriones e invitados*. Madrid: Endymion, 1989.

<sup>7</sup> Hofstede, G. *Allemaal anders denkenden. Omgaan met cultuurverschillen*. Amsterdam: Contact, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Prats en Prat, J. and Martínez, A. *Ensayos de antropología cultural*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen in Santana, A. *Antropología del turismo*. Barcelona: Ariel, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Perelli, A. *Implantations humaines et paysages agraires*. Aix-en-Provence: Edisud, 1997.

### CULTURAL TOURISM NETWORKS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

At a time when «sun and sand» tourism seems to have peaked, cultural tourism has emerged as an alternative that encompasses cultural action and development in most Mediterranean countries, with significant heritage assets. To date, there have been various initiatives related to cultural tourism in the Mediterranean:

**The Mediterranean Observatory on Cultural Tourism:** Located in Ravello (Italy), accountable to the *Centro Universitario Europeo per i Beni Culturali* and the Italian government,

and associated to the European Council's European Centre Network. It monitors, analyses and undertakes development projects on cultural tourism in the Mediterranean.

[www.cuebc.amalficoast.it/osservatorio\\_europeo\\_sul\\_turismo\\_culturale.htm](http://www.cuebc.amalficoast.it/osservatorio_europeo_sul_turismo_culturale.htm)

**The IBERTUR Network (Barcelona):** undertakes development projects on cultural tourism in Latin America and the Mediterranean.

[www.gestioncultural.org/ibertur](http://www.gestioncultural.org/ibertur)

**Network of World Heritage Cities of Southern Europe and the Mediterranean:**

Accountable to the UNESCO and the Organisation of World Heritage Cities (Quebec). Currently based in Cordoba, it encompasses southern European and southern and eastern Mediterranean cities that have been declared to be sites of World Heritage by the UNESCO.

[www.ovpm.org](http://www.ovpm.org)

**Various cultural tourism product networks:** specific initiatives constituted as networks: *The Andalusian Legacy*, *Sepharad Routes*, etc.

In order to achieve this «new hospitality», we would have to include the local population in the process, not only as beneficiaries but also as subjects of their own tourism, as proposed in the Charter of Sustainable Tourism (Lanzarote 1995).<sup>11</sup>

The climate of distrust that is provoked by this situation of inequality could be neutralised through an interest shown by the tourist in the local culture, the traditions and the local products. Moreover, this same interest can even generate in the local population a pride in their own history, knowledge, agricultural products and craftsmanship. On the other hand, the challenge for the local population would be that of organising, coordinating and transforming the tourist demand into a more personalised offering. In this way, something that has been until now merely a paid service could become the

basis of an intercultural meeting of equality.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.insula.org/tourism/version.htm>  
<http://www.world-tourism.org/francais/projects/ethics/preamble.htm>  
<http://www.insula.org/tourism/version.htm>  
[http://www.wto.org/french/tratop\\_f/serv\\_f/results\\_f.doc](http://www.wto.org/french/tratop_f/serv_f/results_f.doc)