

Theory of knowledge of tourism: A sociological and epistemological reflection

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Abstract

This study analyses theoretical problems in the study of tourism and reviews some major thoughts and literature as well as tourism as an emerging discipline. Tourism as a scientific discipline still does not have its own and established academic body that distinguishes it from other sciences. Therefore, tourism as a recent field of research is struggling without being understood in the correct way because its theory of knowledge is not delimited and tries to be reflected from the point of view of its formal components. In this sense, the principal aim of this article is to try to delimit the perspectives and definitions of the main authors that have contributed to the "tourism theory" in general until now, by focusing on several dimensions such as: positivism, materialism, neo-durkheimism, functionalism and post-modernism.

Keywords: epistemology of tourism, sociology of tourism and leisure, positivism, materialism, neo-durkheimism, functionalism and post-modernism

Introduction

Tourism now is a mass phenomenon of great economic, social, cultural and environmental consequences, however the importance of tourism has barely been acknowledged in academia. Tourism researchers even failed to agree whether tourism is an academic community, academic study or an academic discipline (Taillon, 2009) which means that there is a significant epistemological analysis gap in one of the most dynamic fields of the world's economy. This socio-economic phenomenon which emerged after the World War II as a result of technological and social evolutions that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century. Tourism adapted to these changes until it became as one of the most dynamic economic activities of the post-industrial era. Tourism became a strong focus of attention from academics from different disciplines since 1970s (Echtner and Jamal, 1997). However it is still a challenge to establish tourism as an independent discipline in the crowded social science field (Crick, 1989). Many scholars characterize tourism as under-theorized, eclectic and ambiguous. Epistemological development of tourism not only can facilitate overcome these problems, but also create shared language and a sense of community (Belhassen & Caton, 2009).

The relative young age of tourism, as a widespread human activity in the developed societies, proves that it is still open to an extensive academic debate about its precise definition. Indeed, conceptualizing the word "tourism" is a difficult and complex task because of its multifaceted character within a vague semantic universe (ANECA, 2004: 25). Different approaches to tourism created to satisfy various operational needs could only satisfy only a part of the matter. This situation creates confusion in many ways.

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The conceptual amplitude of tourism phenomenon hinders the overall understanding of tourism as there is not any definition yet which could close the debate about the concept of tourism. The current stream of theories have been explaining the relations of tourism with other disciplines, however a self-sustaining epistemological structure of tourism could not yet been achieved. Smith (1989) states that tourism did not have a clear separate and independent existence; it "...is what people believe it is".

Tribe (1997) argues that a discipline should have an accepted definition. According to Smith (1989), definitions of tourism changes depending on the interest, they are mostly fuzzy and overlapping. Tourism does not have a real, objective, universal and independent existence (Smith, 1989) and production of scientific knowledge in tourism has been neglected because of its business focus (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). Therefore, there is a lack of epistemological studies on tourism and its theory of knowledge; as a matter of fact this situation weakens tourism as a discipline. Tourism in the academic environment has been criticized as a science; the main reasons behind this prejudice according to Leiper (1979) are fragmentation, novelty and its interdisciplinary nature. Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert and Wanhill (1993) also believe that tourism did not reach the level of theoretical depth to be considered as a discipline. In the absence of philosophical reflections about this issue, the lack of scientific research within tourism can also be seen as an opportunity for the advancement in this field of knowledge. Barreto (2004: 87) holds this perspective referring to the creation of tourism science:

"A lack of scientific creation enables to produce new theories, helps to implement improved techniques but fundamentally generates new paradigms. For creation of a new tourism model we need paradigms which are related to tourism itself and broader society".

This lack of academic interest produces an image that tourism is not supported by an extensive theoretical base. Research on tourism is still published in journals not directly related to tourism. This results tourism to be dependent on other disciplines as the peer reviewers evaluate the material based on their main disciplines, theories, terms, methodologies and norms. This also limits the epistemological progress of tourism. For example Meethan described tourism as under theorized, eclectic and disparate (2001: 2). Britton (1991) also characterises tourism research as descriptive and weakly theorized. Therefore, it is necessary to obtain the conjugation of other disciplines such as sociology, economics, anthropology, psychology, business administration and geography among others (Gilbert, 1990) in order to establish a holistic epistemological background of tourism as a discipline. The study of tourism phenomenon actually requires a multidisciplinary approach, that in certain occasions is not always accepted and ratified by the different visions of social sciences, and because of multidisciplinary nature of tourism itself, it overshadows unilateral analysis of one social science and even researcher. It is hard to isolate tourism from other phenomena. The interdisciplinary nature of tourism has also affected the search for unifying theories of tourism (Williams, 2004). For example sociology deals with the impacts of tourism on society, geography deals it from a spatial perspective and economics analyses allocation of financial resources. Since interdisciplinary studies integrate different disciplines they facilitate knowledge production and concept creation as well. Sociology also progressed through a tough process of being acknowledged as a distinct discipline. Similar to sociology, tourism discipline is currently struggling to be recognized by other social sciences (Istanbullu et al., 2007).

In this sense, one can refer to Panosso (2005:24):

"Tourism was not born of a theory but of a human practice: men and women who acted at their premises; individuals who experienced something different from what they were used to do and who were far away from their usual residence. Thus, we can justify that all

theoretic lucubration tries to understand this phenomenon and not to construct it; seeks to explain and interpret it and not create it".

Thereby and with practical character, epistemology must serve more for understanding the phenomenon of tourism than to create it. Epistemology is important both in order to establish a review of tourism knowledge and boundaries of tourism (Tribe, 1997). Moreover epistemology has to serve more for transmitting the knowledge of tourism to end users (clients and students) than for storing this wisdom in paper or electronic forms.

Epistemological bases for the study of tourism

Tribe (1997:639) argues that epistemology applied to tourism is important for two basic reasons:(1) allows legitimizing and provides scientific quality to the relatively immature studies such as tourism; (2) permits delimiting tourism as a subject of study, that is: where it starts and where it ends. In this sense, the University and researchers have to lead an epistemological development of scientific production in tourism in order to establish reflections, analogies and differences with certain rationality of the tourism phenomenon. Panosso (2005) identifies three basic groups of authors who are trying to explain tourism in theoretical way but by taking into account a theory of scientific paradigms developed by Thomas Kuhn (1971) in his book. Thus, Panosso distinguishes three phases:

- Pre-Paradigm Phase,
- Tourism System Paradigm Phase,
- New Approaches Phase.

In the first place Panosso categorizes Pre-Paradigm phase which consists of researchers who published the first scientific papers on tourism without being considered as the followers of General Systems Theory. In this respect among others the first sociological study of tourism H. J. Knebel (1960) should be noted who was followed by other authors such as: L. Fernández Fuster, W. Hunziker, K. Krapf, A.J. Burkart and S. Medlik. According to Darbellay and Stock (2012), if tourism is considered as an autonomous and self organized system, than it can also be a discipline. Tourism was then started to be recognized as a science or discipline and its researchers as scientists. According to Kuhn (1970) during the pre-paradigmatic phase there are diverse and unorganized definitions, theories and methods that create constant debate.

Between the Pre-Paradigmatic and Paradigmatic phase there is a transition area of theories, there are authors as S.E.A. Wahab or R. Cuervo who introduced the proposal to analyze tourism on the basis of General Systems Theory. It expanded the scientific knowledge of tourism by recognizing its intrinsic nature. Although the scientists who study tourism as a social science are considered as observers of a group in which they are immersed. For all these reasons, they maintain direct relationships with tourism events and contrary to researchers of natural sciences who are able to distinguish themselves from the field of study. During this phase some shared beliefs, methods and norms started to emerge.

The second phase was supported by authors who used the General Systems Theory in tourism studies, and according to Panosso it was established as a paradigm that became "Tourism System Paradigm". Among the most prominent authors of this phase includes N.Leiper, M. C. Beni, A. Sessa and R. Boullón. The systematic approach can be considered as a paradigm in tourism studies because it allows analyzing complex interacting elements as a set of units between which there is an established relationships. Thus, from the interpretative simplification, the knowledge of tourism can be focused from a more comprehensive perspective considering the tourism system as an open system that relates to the environment in which the activity occurs by formalizing a series of exchanges.

After the second Tourism System Paradigm Phase and before the third phase, Panosso distinguishes an area of transition made up of authors like J. Krippendorf or S. Molina, who are (still) basing their studies in General Systems Theory but demonstrate more advanced proposals in their works taking shape almost like new approaches of tourism as phenomenology. Therefore, in this transition it continues sustaining the epistemological vector of tourism knowledge more on the paradigm that interprets it than in the object of the study itself.

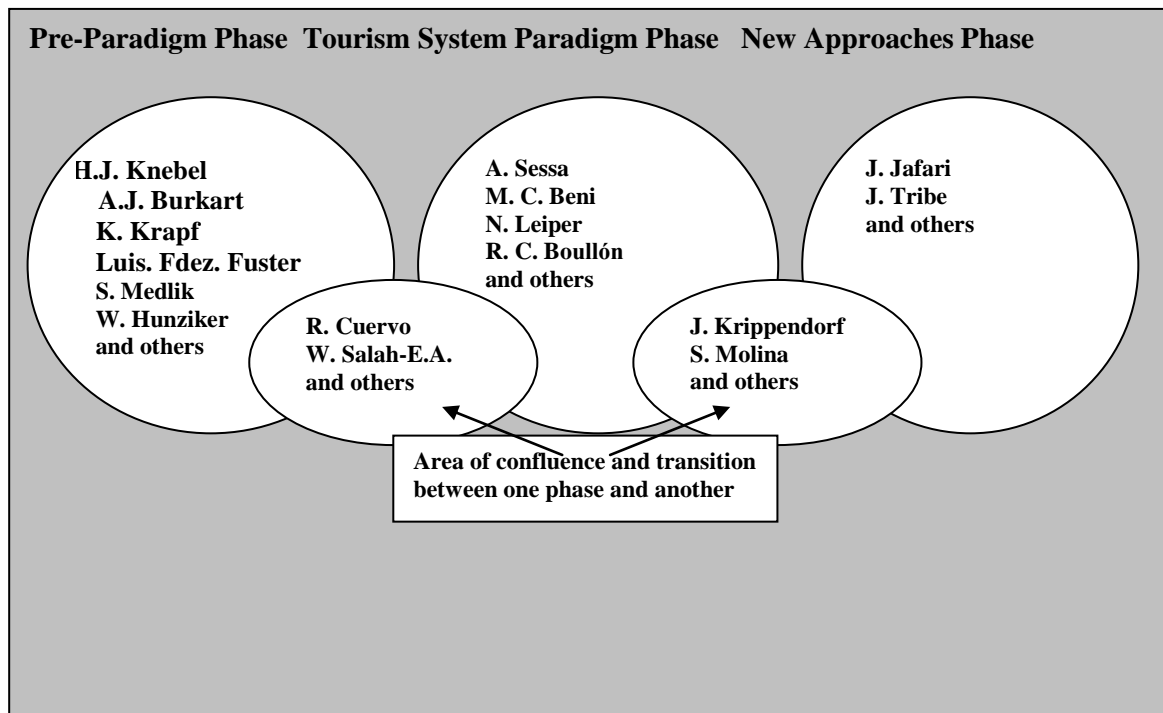
According to Panosso, the third phase is categorized as New Approaches Phase. This phase differs from the first two because it offers different and innovative analysis of tourism. Some authors of this phase are proposing schemas and interpretations that seek to overcome the Tourism System Paradigm through reformulation of General Systems Theory applied to tourism, by attempting to relocate the human in the center of discussion on tourism, by either using the Levy-Strauss structural method on tourism, or by the semiotic analysis of tourism and the application of symbolic interactionism or ethnomethodology to the tourism phenomenon. This group consists of authors like J. Jafari and J. Tribe. The following figure (1) shows three stages with two transition areas.

In this way, Panosso affirms that even if tourism possesses one paradigm, this does not mean that tourism should directly receive the status of science. According to him, this term presents semantic problems in this academic area. Even so, for Panosso scientific theories have their justification and serve as a basis to supplement and explain the facts. For example, Herbert Feigl (in Brown 1983:117) argues a theory as an intellectual construct that has no meaning until it connects with observations. Accordingly when applied to tourism, we can say that “[a tourism] science rests on the ground of observations and the data constitute hard background stratum of our knowledge”.

Although Marcelino Castillo Mechar (2005:236) confirms that the construction of knowledge in tourism does not mean that it accepts any theoretical and/or methodological proposal but rather that the challenge lies in: setting objectives of the study which are recognized as touristy objectives and inter, multidisciplinary and/ or hybrid participation that gives new meaning to what is intended to address.

Indeed, compared to Feigl, Popper (1962: 106) states there is not any “hard rock” on which knowledge could settle: “the theoretical structure of scientific theories that arise above the marshy ground is like a building constructed on piles. They do not settle on a stable rock and at least for the moment it is enough to have some firmness which supports the structure”. Therefore, the scientific theories applied to tourism always are provisional. When it produces some kind of observation whose outcome could disprove the theory and is not able to falsify the fact, it increases the level of corroboration and confirmation. Thus, Popper affirms that all knowledge which is scientifically disciplined rests on the hypothesis testing, and the subsequent creation of other hypotheses and search rules of deductive logic. For Popper only touristy knowledge is scientific, and if it is expressed into statements, it is logically-deductive, testable and refers expressly to testability. Hirst (1974), treats forms of logic as testable based on their logical structure, irreducible, and represent distinct theories, methodologies, subdisciplines and research (Hirst, 1974). Tribe (1997) also argues tourism cannot be treated as a discipline or a sub-discipline because it lacks internal conceptual unity, coherence, consistency and relies on other contributing disciplines rather than being a distinct body of knowledge.

Figure 1. Theoretical phases of tourism based on the theory of paradigms of Thomas S. Khun.



In other words, tourism nowadays is a field of study of other sciences, which have provided tourism with certain explanations but do not present any method of investigation or any defined object. So, its theoretical conceptualization is based on different perspectives and definitions. Kuhn (1962) describes unified language and literature, toolbox of methodologies and techniques and widely recognized theories as necessity for a discipline. Although tourism is considered as a distinct discipline by some authors such as Jovicic (1988) (tourismology) and Leiper (1981) (tourology). Unfortunately tourism could not yet reach the status of discipline in academia with its own method and object of investigation.

Perspectives and Tourism Definitions

Tourism: A global outlook

A so-called phenomenon of tourism is relatively new in the way we know it now. Its antecedents, romantic travelers and explorers, had more cultural components but probably were very elitist compared to tourism today. In this manner, it can be observed that at beginning of the third millennium the democratization process of tourism has achieved its maximum phase (Kozak, Eren & Cakir, 2013): even able to overcome the trauma of “9/11”. In fact, the tourism phenomenon now is a global reality that increasingly attracts more academic attention:

“In historical terms, tourism activity is a relatively new development and only recently has it been considered worthy of serious business endeavor or academic study. However, the tourism industry is of sufficient economic importance and its impact upon economies, environments and societies is significant enough for the subject of tourism to deserve academic consideration”. (Cooper *et al*, 1998:3)

In spite of these words that appear in the work of Cooper *et al* (1998), *Tourism: Principle and Practice*, for many this book is considered as the conceptual "Bible" of modern tourism. At

this moment there is a lack of gnoseology⁵ regarding the tourism phenomenon. However, the popularity of tourism as a subject of study at universities around the world and recognition of its importance by the governments, have accelerated methodical studies and reflections on tourism. In this sense, tourism as a field of knowledge is showing signs of a tentative initial consolidation with the growth of its academic staff, the increase in the number of magazines, scholarly journals and books on the subject and the rising number of national and international tourism associations. These are clear indicators of the professionalization and above all the emerging scientification of tourism.

Beyond these complexities of tourism as a field of knowledge, it adds dynamic manifestation which continuous quantitative and qualitative growth. All this constant discovery of tourism that we use today might be poor description of tourism phenomena in the future (ANECA, 2004:6). Following this dialectic, tourism education continuously must adapt to new tourism principles and should use new paradigms:

“Constantly tourism product or tourism products are transforming and renewing; day by day, we are searching for new and different opportunities to satisfy traditional tourists and trying to fill unexplored gaps for the most demanding or the most anxious tourists. The tourism product offer of innovations in the biggest part relies upon the hope of future tourism markets”. (Manford, Morant and Ivars, 1996:124)

According to Naoum (2004:1) tourism is an area of academic knowledge. He states tourism: “speak of an area which is in the process of creation and to be able to approve this pathway, the construction necessarily involves the acceptance of complexity as a methodological approach for scientific research”. Tourism service is produced by a fragmented set of organizations providing travel, accommodation, entertainment even information and promotion (Tremblay, 1998). Tourism is used a single word to describe a combination of concepts (Gilbert, 1990). Therefore, the multifaceted nature of the tourism industry has hampered a consensus in the conceptual definitions of tourism, which has been a serious obstacle to its analysts. In the following paragraphs we are going to comment on main definitions of tourism.

The definitions of tourism and its historical developments

The scientific study of tourism possesses the initial problem of the delineation of this complex activity. Tourism is an activity as well as an experience which tends to create complex economic, social, environmental and social processes and outcomes between travelers, hosts, service providers and environment (Williams, 2004). Two difficulties emerge as the main challenges in the conceptualization of tourism. Firstly it is difficult to determine the boundaries of tourism as a distinct market (locals vs. visitors) and as resources (attractions, services, industries etc.). Therefore tourism product is amalgam of various services (Medlik & Middleton, 1973) targeted to tourists.

The framework of tourism can only be understood through a very, broad range of services and activities. In this sense, the first thing that needs to be clarified is to determine what tourism is. In order to define tourism we need to analyze different meanings emanating from current practical nature of tourism and ideas of various theorists (Gilbert, 1990). This debate has created more than seven decades of discussion. By time tourism phenomenon has experienced substantial and radical changes, and especially in the last few years has established itself as

⁵ Its origin lies in Greek, where "Gnosis" = knowledge, science; and "Logia" = study, ordered discourse, synonymous with "Epistemology". In this sense, epistemology, as we know it today, in academic circles was born with modern science in the XVI century.

one of the most important activities into the global economy. Tourism according to Oxford English Dictionary is defined as “the theory and practice of touring, travelling for pleasure”. Of course this definition is not precise enough to describe all tourism related phenomenon.

It might be also useful to make a distinction between technical and conceptual definitions of tourism. The technical definitions aimed to provide an definitional instrument for statistical and legislative purposes (Burkart & Medlik, 1974). The conceptual definitions on the other hand provide more general, holistic, theoretical and categorical features of tourism. For example Jafari (1977) defines tourism as follows:

“Tourism is the study of man away from his usual habitat, of the industry which responds to his needs, and of the impacts that both he and the industry have on the host’s socio-cultural, economic and physical environments.”

Generally speaking, tourism definitions can be posed from two perspectives:

- Supply side definitions
- Demand side definitions

As an example of supply side definition, Leiper (1979:400) defines tourism as a model which “can be considered as a range of individuals, businesses, organizations and places that in some way combine to offer a travel experience”. Krippendorf (1999:19) considers tourism as industry that “includes travel agencies, transport companies, catering and event management companies, constructors of second homes, manufacturers of equipment for camping and caravans, consultants of planning, architects, cable car makers, the textile industry and clothes for skiing, souvenir shops, casinos and amusement parks, auto industry, banks, insurance companies, etc.”.

From the demand perspective, Ryan (1995 in Bowen, 2001:33) affirms that “tourism refers to the lived experiences in different places and interaction, which takes place in these destinations”. Thus, tourism matches the characteristics of the supply and demand and the theories of the research on leisure and entertainment (Pearce 1987, Leoper 1995, Swarbrooke *et al.*, 2003).

Since it is difficult to describe different dimensions of tourism many definitions framed tourism based on tourists, the simplest form of this typology is “tourism is what tourists do” (Leiper, 1990). In this sense, tourism definitions seem to be more oriented toward the demand considerations than the supply. For some experts this sounds astonishing, because “to define tourism in terms of motivations and characteristics of travelers, and that means to speak on the side of demand, would be as patients describe their illnesses rather than the health care professionals” (Smith, 1989:33). Nevertheless, Piercy (1992:11) suggests a market approach which considers consumption and demand as something essential in any academic research:

“Eventually, all the organizations are forced to follow the dictates of the market (that is: the paying customer), if not, you go bankrupt. Any institution should look for organizational effectiveness and for this purpose should be ‘guided by market’ and focusing on needs, requirements and demands of the customer”.

This conceptual scope of tourist hinders its overall understanding. Therefore, governments’ have been promoting initiatives that try to provide and adopt a common terminology, which could be used internationally among the governments themselves, professionals and scholars, in order to advance their knowledge and further develop comparable tourism statistics. That is why the World Tourism Organization (WTO) approved the following definition in the Ottawa Conference celebrated in June 1991. This definition was endorsed by the Statistical

Commission of the United Nations in March 1993 and has been accepted by countries and professionals as a necessary starting point for the industry:

“Tourism includes the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes”. (WTO, 1991)

Thus, a scientific analysis of tourism continues to be characterized by a descriptive willingness, which has not been accompanied by an adequate theorization of this phenomenon. In this sense, for collecting the theoretical principles, which are coming from outside tourism and applying them for the diagnosis realization, is quite valid from the point of view of knowledge, but not for creation of their own research schools (AECIT, 1996). This situation created researchers' groups that adopted positivist perspectives, searching for an effective knowledge and organizing knowledge on tourism through the facts that are proven by independent observation.

In this mode, we would like to highlight the researcher, Jafar Jafari, who has contributed tourism as a science and its definitions, and lead tourism to a certain epistemological evolution. Prof. Jafar Jafari is one of the world famous “gurus” in tourism science. In 2005 he received the *Ulises Award* which is the most important academic prize in tourism area.

Jafar Jafari: Contemporary vision.

Professor Jafar Jafari, who is the founding editor of the leading journal of tourism studies *Annals of Tourism Research*, generates a change in the criteria of tourism science and makes a synthesis on understanding different groups of thinkers and the different views of the problems, which have been created various analytical platforms. In this sense, Jafari distinguishes five diverse platforms that stand out different historical periods, and these platforms are generated over the each other without disappearing of previous ones (Jafari, 1994 and 1995).

- Advocacy Platform (1950's- 1960's)
- Cautionary Platform (decade of the 1970's)
- Adaptancy Platform (decade of the 1980's)
- Knowledge-based Platform (decade of the 1990's up to the late 20th century)
- Public Interest Platform (since the early 21st century to the present).

The first platform, advocacy platform, mainly is defended in sixties by the authors, for instance, Clement, Davis, Lickorish and Peters, when tourism after the Second World War began to be important and, above all became an economic pillar for some countries, which base their economic development model on tourism, like many islands such as: Pacific Islands, Caribbean, Mediterranean, etc. The members of this platform focused on the positive impacts on tourism mainly on local economy.

The second platform, cautionary platform, emerged in the seventies and is defended by Kadt, Erisman, Foster, Harrington, Jafari himself, Mathieson and Wall, Turner and Ash, and Young, in addition to the UNESCO studies regarding the impact of tourism on society. This epoch contributes environmental ideas and criticizes the economic aspects and the costs of tourism, and during this period these authors are delving into the environmental, cultural and social impacts as well.

The third platform, adaptancy platform embraces a softer perspective and is in the middle of the previous two and it is followed by Britton, Cohen, Long, Krippendorf and Rodenburg. This group emphasizes promotion of low intensity tourism in poorly developed places, and

proposes ecotourism as an alternative. The principal ideas of this epoch have had very important influences in the third world and have mainly focused on the alternative and responsible tourism.

These previous three platforms helped to understand dimensions and place of tourism within a progressive growth all over the world. Moreover studies of these platforms gave broader perspective of the impacts, benefits and effects that come with tourism growth.

According to Jafari, the fourth platform was knowledge-based platform, which systematizes an academic and scientific vision of the phenomenon. This platform has multidisciplinary and global characteristics, also its idea is to investigate the impacts of tourism and minimize those which are negative and irreversible. Tourism scientific knowledge has undeniable value for these kind concerns in the future. Already in the eighties Wahab stressed out that it is necessary to perform systematic analysis to know the actual structure of the tourism phenomenon.

Jafari states the knowledge-based platform as the starting point of projecting tourism from a modern perspective, with more holistic, global, multidisciplinary and trans-disciplinary vision. Its authors come from different platforms and, in addition to appearance of new researchers; they focus their studies on tourism phenomenon in a wider perspective than before. The representatives of this platform are: Cohen, Dann, Nash and Pearce, Graburn, Jafari himself, MacCannell, Mitchell, Van der Berghe and Keyes. Knowledge platform can be seen as a holistic and integrative approach to tourism and considered as important for tourism to be recognized as a distinct discipline (Echtner & Jamal, 1997).

Besides the four platforms discussed so far, Jafari introduces the fifth stream, as "Public Interest Platform". This platform is still emerging and we can affirm that it is "in its infancy". It is based on some comparatively recent incidents such as "9/11" or "bird flu" that have pushed governments, NGOs and citizens of various tourist destinations to claim attention to tourism. Therefore, it is important to make these changes so that industry takes its own new roots and provides new "formal" spokespeople (Jafari, 2005: 45).

In this context, the rapid development of tourism in the last five decades, which leads to very dynamic and creative environment, in fact, shows us that the existing differences between various authors and Jafari are relative, because all these researchers and Jafari agree: that the periods are short and the new ideas are very dynamic; that the tendency is evolving from one disciplinary perspective to a multidisciplinary perspective, and with a holistic approach of the tourism phenomenon. Thus tourism researchers should not only understand the perspectives agreed upon in their own disciplines, they should also be able to understand approaches of other disciplines to be able to address related issues.

Finally, we have to remind that the various suggestions, raised by previous mentioned authors including Jafari, mainly are circumscribed in the context of developed countries with an important domestic and significant outbound tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to perform a greater number of studies from the developing countries perspective, where the effects and tourism-induced changes are rough, in some cases even violent. This perspective, which was formulated in the 1960's by authors like Sessa and still remains in its initial gestation and construction.

Other perspectives of the tourism concept

Jafari and previous mentioned authors corresponds to positivist analysis of the tourism concept, whose proposals are based on the use of observation, experimentation and comparative historical analysis, although other critical conceptualizations and interpretations have addressed to knowledge of tourism. For example García (2005: 41) makes a review on

tourism studies from the axis of Marxist thinking, pointing out theoretical schools...and describing its contributions. This Marxist or critical materialist approach takes the modern world into account, by understanding past and future phenomenon. That is, through materialistic thoughts they give reasons for: that the knowledge of tourism would have apolitical approach and would be analyzed through the labor force, this unveils a new innovative vision and interest which support the concept of tourism. Similar ideas were supported by authors like: Toti (1961), Harvey (1998), Massé (2001) and others.

A theoretical philosophy emerges, derived from methodological principle that sustains the functionalistic fieldwork, highlighting the negative effects of tourism in Third World regions and even creating dependency relationships between metropolis and periphery, which adopts forms of colonial domination or imperialism in the context of structural underdevelopment. These ideas in their researches are presented by such authors as: Nash (1997), Matthews (1978), Hoivik and Heiberg (1980).

On the other hand, there are other new visions, which we could be seen as mentalist form of tourism knowledge and these views are based on psychological properties. In this mode, we could affirm that these new visions have Neo-Durkheimian influences, conducted on very microsociological aspects. They approach tourism through psychology, which is necessary for creating knowledge and analyzing the sociological impacts of tourism. Namely, psychology goes out of the laboratories (some have criticized this fact) and examines tourism in its own natural environment and frame of reference (e.g. changing attitudes, social effects or stereotypes, etc.). Some authors who marked out this vision of tourism are Pearce (1982), Sousa (1993; 2004) or García (1997).

Finally, compared to approaches discussed so far that have tried to operationalize the knowledge of tourism, a postmodern projection offers an epistemological breakthrough and conceptualizes tourism in terms of diversity, hybridization and local discourses rather than homogenous terms. This is very important in an increasingly cosmopolitan environment and greater cultural diversity. Among the leaders of this stream are Urry (1990), McCabe (2002) or Smith (2003). In this sense, and even though postmodernism can be criticized for applying to the theory of knowledge of tourism, in many cases it appears appropriate, because indeed globalization has caused tourists to travel more than ever, and therefore, industry needs to fulfill a broader range of interests and tastes. In this sense, postmodernism theory is more appropriate for accepting more extensive definitions of tourism phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the postmodernism vision tries to consider the idea of "*be of your time*" (Baudelaire, 1982) and so it seems more relevant to analyze the tourism knowledge in this context, and since tourists may be reflected and interact with the culture of their own time (and often their own place).

Ultimately, the theory of knowledge of tourism has a semantic tangle of proposals that have been developing since the first positivist studies of tourism, passing by most critical interpretations such as materialism or structural functionalism, and reaching the most contemporary visions as Neo-Durkheimian or postmodernism.

Conclusions

This article has analyzed sociological and epistemological theoretical framework of tourism, comparing different perspectives and definitions, in order to create valid scientific ideas, and to clarify basic notions related to the activities of this "invisible export". Tourism is epistemological in its roots rather than simply economic (Gilbert, 1990). Belhasen and Caton (2009) also argues that analyzing the epistemological evolution of tourism would result in better comprehension and understanding of knowledge production process of tourism. Thus, the main aim of this article is to take out diapers tourism as a social science, that could be

understood as the sum of an object of epistemological study and scientific method, by allowing current and future tourism and leisure researchers combine theoretical tendencies, which could serve as a base for its practical implementations.

However, the multidisciplinary nature of tourism entails that there are new and profound transformations that affect the construction of its knowledge as a discipline. Particularly, postmodern theories that are mentioned at the end of this article are quite appropriate. Hence, its opportunism defends hybridization, pastiche, decentralization of intellectual authority and multidisciplinary nature. Pearce (1993) argues that tourism should tolerate eclectic perspectives. In fact, in social sciences and in tourism it seems inappropriate to hold exclusive idea regarding epistemological knowledge generation, as the borders almost always tend to be challenged. The challenge, which nowadays scholars should consider in new sociological research, is focusing on the object of study that is recognized as tourism and utilization of inter-disciplinary and / or hybrid view (e.g. tourism economics) which gives a sense of what is intended to deal with. Of course, one can take different philosophical theories when planning to conduct a sociological research in tourism and do not seek to have good or bad theory, but rather more or less appropriate according to a particular context. According to scientific realism, the goal of science to develop knowledge about the phenomena is open to critical judgment although its certainty would never be known (Echtner & Jamal, 1997).

In this way, tourism seems to be in a constant process of reviewing and questioning of its foundations and theoretical proposals, particularly, its own scientific logos associated with its contemporary character. Therefore, new perspectives and definitions appear and redefine an epistemological identity of tourism, and lay the foundations that facilitate new paradigms that deploy new possibilities of knowledge. Fortunately there is a growing interest from universities starting graduate education and research institutions on tourism. More complex, innovative and contemporary research is conducted to push paradigmatic boundaries and to search for a deeper understanding and knowledge of tourism.

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