

THE IMPOSSIBLE SUSTAINABILITY: APPLICATIONS OF RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE IN TOURISM FIELDS

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Abstract

The present short manuscript discusses the influence of cultural values in the way West considers the nature. This anthropocentric view led us to create serious and irreversible climate changes. Far from being apocalyptic, we touch into the core of the problem by placing the current thesis of sustainability under the lens of scrutiny. The mimicry of current values of competition, exclusion and production will not fix the problem, even it can aggravate it. The role would play tourism in this stage is one of the aspects we have to deepen in this hot-debate.

Key Words. Sustainability, eco tourism, capitalism, climate change.

JEL Classification J4; O1; I1; Z1.

I. Introduction

Tourism scholar concerns for ecology has posed “global warming” as the main threat of humankind. Within social thinking, adherents and detractors for global warming have discussed for years; if human intervention caused the climate change, the importance in changing the habits of consuming will be vital to save the planet. Rather, if these changes are being generated by other factors than human pollution more radical course of action would be needed (Korstanje & George, 2012a; 2012b). As Anthony Giddens observed, whatever the case may, almost all authoritative voices agree “climate change” has been triggered by human intervention, but here a paradox is placed. At the time, humankind manifests its worries, fears and concerns for the situation the next generations will face, we are far from reducing the dioxide of carbon in the atmosphere, even it was duplicated over last years (Giddens, 2011).

The same happens in tourism fields. Although many studies have approached to ecological issues and sustainability (Becken 2005; 2007; Gosling & Hall 2006; Pearce & Schott, 2010, Moreno & Becken 2009; Amelung, Nicholls & Viner, 2007; Scott 2011), they failed to explain the dissociation between tourists overtly say and do. The paradox of ecology rests on the axiom of commons, where the costs are never assumed. Although the fears are real, people are not changing their main behaviour. The present paper not only discusses this paradox, but also explains why this happens. Our “dwelling perspective”, following Tim Ingold, leads us to a closed hermeneutics, where preservation is an impossible project. This is not a review of the state of the art in tourism and global warming fields, but also a brief discussion to what an extent our own cultural values as civilization, which are causing the problem are presented by the literature as the solution.

II. Conceptual Discussion

The paradigm of sustainability alludes to the study of ecosystems and environments to protect the non-removable resources for the care of community, the planet and next generations. In tourism fields, the theory was widely adopted to ensure the stability of the industry, its resources and stakeholders (Bramwell & Lane, 1993a; 1993b). Following the precautionary principle proposed by Jafari, these original studies acknowledged the tourism growth as positive results for much involved groups, but cautioned about its negative effects respecting to environmental issues (Gosling, 2000; Butler, 1999). With the passing of years, other more radical voices questioned the paradigms of sustainability. These authorities’ studies flourished in green-countries as New Zealand and Australia attempted to balance the advantages of tourism to revitalize local economies protecting the natural environment from the ecological risks recently detected that affects the functionality of whole system (Harrisson, 1996; Hall, 1991; Saarinen, 2006). The concept of global warming as originally was

formulated by expertise, or climate change paved the ways for the most important industrial countries to hear the eco-friendly paradigm. In terms of the senior sociologists, J Broswimmer (2002), what humankind is doing with the planet only has a name, ecocide. Recently, interesting studies emphasized on the needs to change the current source of energy to mitigate the effects of climate change such as hurricanes, typhoons and extreme weather (Gossling & Hall, 2006; Scott, Gossling & Hall, 2012; Korstanje & George, 2012).

Tourism is not good or bad, it depends on how it is employed. Jost Krippendorf, a pioneer in sustainable issues, noted that scholars, who criticize tourism as an instrument of alienation and domination, preclude the real nature of the industry. Even, there are some many benefits of industrialism such as the alleviation of poverty, the sense of progress and new applications of technology that makes of our world a safer place. The vicious of modern society is originated in the following allegory: we think that growth and progress are inevitably intertwined to consumption. The major consumption, more probability to strengthen the economy. The economic production not only gives jobs, and alleviates the conditions of work-force but needs from more resources. More production, inversely, requires further consumption. To change that, we need to adopt new cultural values (Krippendorf, 2009). The problem is that Krippendorf does not point out what are the values to change to reverse the ecological problems. The trust in technology, as an instrument to make our world a safer, fairer place has been remained in the core of intellectual thinking in West.

A similar discourse is reassumed in a recent book (*Tourism & Climate Change, impacts adaptation and mitigation*), authored by Michael C Hall, Daniel Scott and Stefan Gossling, who are three authoritative voices in these types of issues, call the attention of the failures of tourism to mitigate climate change. This text discusses the effects of global warming over the planet, and of course its potentiality to affect tourism industry. Although experts understand “climate change” poses as the primary threats for the planet, there is, within specialized literature, certain myopia respecting to the definition and formulation of the problem. We need to distinguish, sustainable tourism from “sustainable tourism development”. West should exploit the accuracy of its technology to monitor the impacts and changes to react in due course. The main thesis of the book is discussed in the fifth chapter, and it is there that the authors show that the tourism industry falls in a profound paradox. At a closer look, it contributes to the acceleration of greenhouse gases, which in turn jeopardizes tourism and its growth as never before. Although, authors do their best to clarify the facts that may lead tourism industry towards the most adaptive response, further revision is needed. What Hall, Scott and Gossling ignore is that social behavior results from basic cultural values. Global warming has been created by the same values; they defend, such as rationality, technology and forecasting. Historically, not only sustainability but also development was rooted in the capitalist ethos in a subtle way, in that they encouraged the idea of intervention which has been widely criticized by scholars of markets and the business world. Capitalism, as more than an economic project, is embedded in the lifestyle of Western societies by altering many of its primary institutions. As we shall see, this viewpoint rests on two main fallacies. The first ideological flaws imposed by capitalism were the assurance that the world should be divided between humans and non-humans. We think the eco-world as a reservoir without human presence. This has been the main problem, enrooted in capitalist ethos that has accelerated the climate change, the needs of intervention. To what an extent we can put out a fire with gasoline, is what we are debating here.

Last but not least, Korstanje and George recently explained that climate change has created a paradoxical situation not only in tourism but also in West. On one hand, ordinary people understand the importance to protect the planet following the recommendation of international eco-friendly organization, but at the same time, they do nothing to change the current style of consumption or daily behavior. As a result of this, the most tremendous consequences of climate change are commoditized by the mass-media as cultural entertainment modes of consumption. Though we have faced the dark side of Katrina a couple of years ago in US, this power had done little or nothing to reduce its emission of hydrocarbons to the atmosphere (Korstanje & George, 2012a; 2012b). Because of time and space, in this short essay-review it almost impossible to discuss with detail all produced bibliography, we only focus in what we consider are the seminal texts that exemplify the thinking of an area of tourism expertise. Despite the considerable volume interesting and pungent books and texts, it is unfortunate tourism fields have a limited permeability to borrow from anthropology its recent advances in ecological issues.

III. The Dwelling Perspective

Tim Ingold, a senior anthropologist, who is not recognized in tourism research, offers a valid response that helps us understanding why our view about planet and sustainability consists in an impossible project. The goal of our note is not to exert a radical criticism to tourism sustainable outcome, but introducing Ingold’s development to complement sustainable development in next years. Basically, he acknowledges that the recent global cataclysms prompted to reduce green-house effects led us to think how our actions in this planet affects our future. Unlike other authors, Ingold traces the roots of the problem to the Cartesian Dualism introduced in West through the

philosophy of modernity in XVIIIth century. Our civilization developed a degree of technology that expanded the life expectative. However, this cemented the creation of a new “ideology” where the meaning of being human changed forever. The concept of humankind was formulated in separateness with nature. It is viewed as a strange invention which nothing has to do with the rest of creation. Envisaged as a top-down administrator, the “homo-sapiens” become in the epicenter of the world.

As the previous argument given, Ingold argues convincingly that the success of West to organize the territory, passing from being nomads to sedentary societies, consists in creating a bridge between the humankind and the wild-life or bestiality. This dichotomy is associated to others as “the self vs. others”, leisure vs. work, or living organisms and inert objects. Without these bridges, not only the science was never matured but also our capacity to build infrastructure for our industries would never developed to the current states. Our current cosmology of this world depends on the “dwelling perspective”, which means that the space should be sanitized, disciplined to be built. To understand the whole argument of Ingold it is necessary to delve into the role played by space. “The dwelling perspective” calls the attention to the fact that “building” is a projection from environment. From its inception, anthropology and the rest of social sciences have certainly appealed to the “culture” as a “doom” to protect the people of the hostility of beast, natural disasters, and other external dangers.

The dwelling view reminds that the common wellbeing of community depends on its success on intervening in environment. In so doing, the space as it is symbolically prefigured should be built before to be inhabited. This epistemological view, which has only two hundred years old, does not contemplate the human existence enrooted in environment. This is the reason we need from maps Gps and technology to travel. Tribes of hunters/gathers have developed similar pattern to travel; even they leave their homes to visit neighbors or relatives in a moment of the year. The difference rests on their cosmology to perceive the environment. Based on a relational perspective, hunters/gathers take the necessary food of animals to fulfill their basic needs. They not only do not accumulate or store the food, but also keep strict restriction to kill more animals they can eat. In consequences, the commercialization of surpluses is very slim. The animal which is seen as “a sacred-protector” of the clan may become in a “demon” that devours everything every-thing in its path. This relational-way of being in the world does not conceive as a separated from animal-kind. As their brothers, animals provide hunters everything they need lest the economic doctrine of accumulation was not practiced. To put this in bluntly, hunting is not killing. They do not need maps simply because they are familiarized with their route. As geography, the maps are signs of dissociation between the traveler and its territory. Whenever the traveler is unaware of the topography of the soil, the map is requested. The space is inhabited while living with others into the same cosmology.

“We have already seen how the practices of destination-oriented travel encouraged the belief that knowledge is integrated not along paths of pedestrian movement but through the accumulation of observations taken from successive point of rest. Thus we tend to imagine that things are perceived from stationary platform, as if we were sitting on a chair with our legs and feet out of action. To perceive a thing from different angles, it is supposed that we might turn it around in our hands, or perform an equivalent computational operation in our minds. But in real life, for the most part, we do not perceive things from a single vantage point, but rather by walking around them (Ingold, 2011 p. 45).

The concept of the landscape corresponds with a disciplinary effort to domesticate nature. It is important not to lose the sight that the production of knowledge, in these terms, adopted a systemic frame of protocols and rules that makes from the environment more predictable. The world becomes in an object of concern instead of being a place to live. The gap between subject and objects was enlarged by the invention of chair. It has been created to confer dignity and authority to the sitter; to separate humans from animals. At some extent, if we pay attention to how people travel, we will note two things. We do not move unless by a machine, whose conforms allows us to be sited while moving. Secondly, travels were commercially adopted by European elite during 18th century while blue-collar workers were subject to walk. The pedestrian practices stigmatized to lay people. The knowledge was given only to those who displaces to other places to know further on customs and lives of others. This asymmetries between those who would be able to travel long distance and those who would be unable to do that paves the ways for the advent of capitalist hegemony. The fact that some groups are mobile while others are not is conducive to a discourse of domination. The contributions of Ingold to sustainable studies are of paramount importance because he shows how many of our revealed truths should be placed under the lens of scrutiny.

IV. Conclusion

Some radical social scientists question the problem of global warming supporting the role of science in this process. Needless to say, for Ingold, this represents a clear paradox impossible to solve. The climate change

resulted not only from the practices of exploitation of modern capitalism, but also is enrooted in the “dwelling perspective”, as Ingold put it. So, to what an extent it is possible to change the problem without altering the values which give form?.

The post-modern eco-friendly practices, as well as the theory of sustainability, are aimed at preserving the natural environment, but in doing so, the human presence is neglected. The eco-reservoirs exhibits the aversion for the presence of humans, even the eco-tourists who had the luck to visit natural park found serious constraints for outdoor use or interact with other animals. Policy makers resist the presence of tourists in eco-parks. Rather, in the Zoo, the interaction surfaces by controlled in strict steps and protocols. West has developed a specific ideology (dwelling perspective) that causes to turn our back to environment. Here a more than interesting question arises, is tourism part of the problem or the solution?.

If we consider tourism is a modern invention surfaced from the dichotomy between work and leisure, we will accept the cultural values of “dwelling perspective” that created the problem. Possibly, we would measure the consequences of our action, but we would be unable to change it. Ingold proposes the passage from dwelling to relational perspective to grant a better adaptancy to climate change. And of course, we think this is the way. One might speculate that perhaps travels and curiosity were ancient practices in all civilizations, so in one moment were merged into the label: tourism. Since today a whole portion of specialized literature is based on a “dwelling view”, the sustainability as it has been formulated remains an impossible project.

V. References

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