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TOURISM RESEARCH AND EDUCATION IN ARGENTINA AND ITS NEW CHALLENGES. WHICH WAY NOW?

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study aimed to determine the degree of maturity of tourism research in Argentina, based on three indicators: specialized publications, best known researchers and attendance of academic conferences, related to hospitality and tourism. Some ideas are outlined in order to improve research in hospitality and tourism in the country.

Key words: tourism knowledge, research, Argentina, academic journals, conference presentations.

INTRODUCTION

During the last few years, Argentina has become a tourist objective for the main countries of the world, whereby a promissory future is predicted for this activity.

Notwithstanding, tourism is not a recent phenomenon, as, according to Bertoncello, it is *possible to recognize the first tourism activities in the country, within the frame of the agro-exporting model at the end of the 19th century, and beginnings of the 20th century*, even though, *tourism may only be considered as a mass phenomenon as from the 60's and 70's*. (Bertoncello 2004:146-147).

Faced with the lack of trained personnel to attend this incipient demand, the private sector reacted in the early '60s, creating tourism courses, oriented towards the performance in travel agencies, and other related areas.

Due to various causes, the idea of these initial courses was widely publicized, turning into "careers" on this subject, until a somewhat arbitrary overview was configured, with regard to their study plans and to its institutional insertion, within the aforementioned careers. (Martínez Codo and Ayala 1989:149).

The tourism academic offer increased over the years, within the interior of the country, as well as in the city of Buenos Aires, and its Metropolitan area. Within the area of influence of the Federal Capital, as from 1991, the National University of Quilmes {Universidad Nacional de Quilmes} (UNQ) initiated their activities, of the program in hotel administration. A few years later, the National University of Lanús {Universidad Nacional de Lanús} (UNLa), incorporated their courses in tourism.

The aspects regarding the formation of human resources in tourism, also gained great importance internationally. Its governing entity, the World Tourism Organization (WTO), published a series of texts which reflect the restlessness on this matter, also referring to the importance of research, such as *Educando Educadores en Turismo* (1996a) {Educating Educators in Tourism}, *El Capital Humano en la Industria Turística del Siglo XXI* (1996b), {*Human Capital in the Tourism Industry of the 20th Century*}, and *Recursos Humanos en Turismo: Un Nuevo Paradigma* (2002) {*Human Resources in Tourism: A New Paradigm*}. Another publication is added to these: *Introducción al TEDQUAL* (1997) {*Introduction to the*

TEDQUAL}, centered on the quality of tourism education.

Even though in Argentina efforts in human resources formation were increasing, and numerous professionals were being incorporated to the labor market, little importance, if any, was dedicated to research. As tourism was considered a frivolous activity associated with leisure and pleasure trips, the specialists of other disciplines – apart from some honorable exceptions – showed no interest whatsoever in studying the subject, whereby such tasks were mostly banished to the research centers where they were produced, and only made known in a limited manner to the local or academic areas. A curious fact to be mentioned, is that the book *Mar del Plata: el Ocio Represivo* {*Mar del Plata: Repressive Leisure*}, by Juan José Sebreli (1974), is the least known of this acknowledged author. It is also important to point out that the national entities dedicated to financing research projects, were reluctant to consider tourism graduates for the scientific investigator career, or as members of the research task teams.

Nonetheless, as from 1991 academic publications which analyze tourism from the Social Science perspective started to make their entrance into the academic world and still are on the market. The first one was the *Revista Latinoamericana en Turismo* {*Latin American Tourism Journal*}, which changed its name the following year to *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo* {*Studies and Perspectives in Tourism*}. Edited by the Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Turísticos {Tourism Studies and Research Center}, this publication is characterized by being independent and not possessing any affiliation to a particular university or government office. It is of a strong international nature, offering research articles on various aspects of tourism but not focused on a particular region. It includes an ample participation of authors and researchers from Turkey, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and other countries, and the studies published by Argentine scholars are focused on the Patagonia region.

A few years later, the following publication made its appearance *Aportes y Transferencias. Tiempo Libre, Turismo y Recreación*, {*Contributions and Transferences. Leisure, Tourism and Recreation*}, edited by the Centro de Investigación Turística {Tourism Research Center} of the Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales {Social and Economic Sciences School}, of the Universidad Nacional de Mar del Plata {National University of Mar del Plata}. It published numerous articles, which mostly offer studies of tourism realities of the main destinations of the Buenos Aires Atlantic Coast Seaside Resorts, and whose authors belong to the aforementioned university. It also offers a study on academic tourism background (Castelluci 2001a), based on the tourism graduation thesis of the model of the Rejowski study (1996), and another article with a diagnosis of the condition of tourism research in Argentine universities (Castelluci 2001b). The supremacy of two national universities is observed, Comahue and Mar del Plata, over the remaining universities of the country which in many cases have no tourism and hospitality research whatsoever.

... the aforementioned supremacy of the two national universities of Comahue and Mar del Plata is explained for the first of these due to the existence of a specific academic unit in the area: The Tourism School, and in case of the second university, for the work performed by the Centro de Investigaciones Turísticas de la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales {Tourism Research Center of the Social and Economic Sciences Faculty} ; whereby 67% of the total production on this subject is contributed by these two entities. This indicates that these two universities constitute, at present, the two main academic centers producing tourism research in Argentina (Castelluci 2001b: 8).

The last publication to appear is: *Realidad, Enigmas y Soluciones en Turismo* {*Tourism Reality, Enigmas and Solutions*) also known as the publication of the CONDET, as the responsible editors are the Consejo de Decanos y Directores de Unidades Académicas Relacionadas con la Enseñanza del Turismo {Directors and Deans Council of Academic Units Regarding the Teaching of Tourism}. Even though they publish articles by authors and researcher belonging to different universities in the country, the most important participation of specialists belongs to

the group from the Universidad Nacional del Comahue {National University of Comahue}.

Notwithstanding, within the general academic community, and within the Argentine society in particular, the perception of the importance of tourism has taken an important turn at the beginning of the 21st century, more precisely after the crisis which began in December 2001, *in which the national currency devaluation turned the country into an important international tourism destination.* (Bertoncello 2004:149).

It is important to point out that according to INDEC data (2003), an abrupt decrease occurred at first, in tourism arrivals and departures:

The data analysis of international passenger movement through the Ezeiza and Jorge Newbery airports, and the Port of Buenos Aires during 2002, must be performed in the light of the local and international events which marked the end of 2001, and an important part of 2002. In this sense, Argentina's image deteriorated in the eyes of the world, due to the international broadcasting of the political and economic crisis at the end of 2001 in our country. That is why the arrival of foreigners, which could have been favored by the impacting devaluation of the Argentine currency at the beginning of 2002, not only did not provide a positive reaction until the second half of the year, but during the first months, recorded a severed drop, as compared to the same period of the previous year.

Tourist flow increased notoriously once confidence was restored in the country, thereby resulting in an insufficient hotel capacity, both in the city of Buenos Aires as well as at main destination of the country. Suddenly the tourists were *visible*, both in the central areas of various locations as in the main shopping centers buying whatever they were able to find and which the Argentines were unable to purchase, due to their deteriorated income.

Consequently, tourism started to be regarded as *a development impeller, an employment generator or a type of show place through which the country is exhibited to the world.* (Secyt 2004:139). As a result, tourism became important enough to be considered as a study goal, and alternative factors were searched for to justify and back-up its development, as the *accepted knowledge for tourism, lacks a solid and clearly distinguished basis, of which many of its virtues are – in more cases than one – supposedly well-intentioned, and that the possibilities of verifying these tourism affirmations, are limited.* (Bertoncello 2004:139). A panel of experts was summoned with the objective of working on these aspects. They met on November 3, 2004, and amongst their considerations, referred to the following points:

(...) An expression of these lacking factors, is the scarcity of research, to fully understand tourism in the country. Within this context, it is indispensable to advance on the production of knowledge by means of scientific research whose results shall deserve to be contrasted and reliable.

Regarding the need to form future tourism researcher, the existing limitations of the country are recognized. The scarce research tradition on the subject, the institutional limitations, and the lack of human resources to provide the required qualifications and reluctance for this level are presented as the most important problems. It is considered that the formation of professors for this superior level is now urgent, due to the need to count on a trained faculty group, who are involved in research and graduate development (Secyt 2004:133).

By means of this paper, the main aim was trying to contribute to what has been planned by the Secretariat of Science and Technology {Secretaría de Ciencia y Tecnología - Secyt}, commencing by analyzing the degree of maturity of tourism research in Argentina based on the knowledge that educators have on the subject, at the public and private universities of the country. Therefore, for this purpose, the study performed by Sergio Rodríguez Leal (2006) was used as a basis to determine the degree of maturity reached by scientific research in Brazil, by

means of three indicators (specialized publications, recognized researcher, and academic events), to perform a comparative analysis between both countries.

METHODOLOGY

This study, exploratory in its kind was performed to recognize the condition of the state of art of tourism and hospitality research in Argentina based on three indicators which refer to well-known specialists in the country and abroad, main academic publications on the subject, and attendance of prominent conferences in the country and abroad. It took place between March 1 and July 14, 2006 within the frame of the Tourism and Hospitality Research course, for the Hospitality Administration Career of the National University of Quilmes.

The starting point was the study performed in Brazil by Sergio Rodrigues Leal (2006) in order to achieve during a second stage the comparative analysis between the two countries. The document 'Foundations for a Strategic Mid-Term Plan in Science, Technology and Productive Innovation' prepared by the Secretariat of Science, Technology and Productive Information (SECYT) was considered. In it the need to approach tourism from a scientific production standpoint was outlined, and the existing limitations within the formation of human resources recognize.

The first phase was a familiarization with the subject to be studied which consisted in an analysis of the articles published in *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo*; *Aportes y Transferencias* and *Realidad, Enigma y Soluciones en Turismo*. Three e-journals were also consulted: *Pasos: Revista de Turismo y Patrimonio Cultural* {*Steps: Cultural Heritage and Tourism Magazine*} (www.pasosonline.org), *Revista Eletrônica Patrimônio: Lazer & Turismo* {*Electronic Heritage Magazine: Leisure & Tourism*} (www.unisantos.br/pos/revistapatrimonio) and *The Journal of Hospitality Management, and, Leisure, Sport & Tourism Education – JoHLSSTE-* (<http://www.hlst.ltsn.ac.uk/johlste/index2.html>); and the summaries and articles available on the Internet of three international publications: *Annals of Tourism Research* (www.elsevier.com/locate/annals) and its Spanish version (www.uib.es/escola/turisme/annals); *Tourism Management* (www.elsevier.com/locate/tourman); and *The International Journal of Hospitality Management* (www.elsevier.com/locate/ijhosman). The digital version of The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly was accessed through <http://biblioteca.secyt.gov.ar>.

A specialized tourism bookstore was also visited in Buenos Aires (*Librerías Turísticas*) to obtain information regarding national authors who have published material on the matter, observing that various national authors from different backgrounds had publications on tourism and hospitality.

To achieve a wider vision of studies and analyses not specifically directed towards tourism, three important bookstore chains were visited (*Prometeo, Jenny / El Ateneo, and Cúspide*). It was discovered that there was an important absence of general disclosure books that mentioned or had any chapter referring to tourism. In "Buenos Aires a la Deriva. Transformaciones Urbanas Recientes" {*Drifting Buenos Aires. Recent Urban Transformations*} (Welsh Guerra 2005), a superficial reference was made in one of the chapters on the layouts of the tourist circuits of the city. Simultaneously, Cicerchia (2006:195-213), in his work on the daily life in the province of Córdoba, dedicates a chapter to workers' tourism. A book was also found on Mar del Plata, by Fernando Fagnani (2002), but no trace was found of the net academic works published about the city by the School of Humanities of the National University of Mar del Plata.

To perform the study a survey was carried out by e-mail, to the faculty of Argentine universities. A questionnaire was prepared which was based on four axes. The first referred to professional information, requesting information on the degree obtained, the entity from which

they graduated, if they had postgraduate studies, and if they had performed research tasks in tourism and hospitality.

The three following questions were adjusted to the indicators proposed by Rodrigues Leal for Brazil. The first request was on the three most distinguished authors / researchers in a) Argentina, and b) abroad. No establishment of order of importance was requested.

The second indicator used referred to the three most important conferences they had attended in the country and abroad, and finally, the fourth question and third indicator was aimed at knowing their opinion on the three best academic publications edited in the country and abroad. Again, no establishment of order of hierarchy was requested.

The study group was made up by professors who taught tourism and hospitality careers both in public and private universities in Argentina. The first contact was established with those who had submitted publications in any of the three academic magazines edited in the country. At first there was an intention to make a division between the public and the private universities, but this was not possible due to the fact that in most cases within the city of Buenos Aires and its surrounding area the same professors taught in both entities.

The sample was reasoned and not probabilistic. In order to reduce bias, an Internet search was carried out on universities offering tourism and/or hospitality programs who were requested to provide the name and e-mail address of a reduced number of teachers. This step was obviated when the university had professors who had published articles in any of the academic magazines informing the authors' e-mail address.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Profile of the Interviewed Parties

The greater percentage (66.67%) corresponded to those who had graduated in tourism. An 85.71% stated that they were dedicated to research, and only 5.4% had not continued with postgraduate studies, either in the country or abroad. As most of the universities offering careers connected to tourism and hospitality are located in the city of Buenos Aires and its surrounding area, this was the area that concentrated the largest number of interviewed parties.

Most Outstanding Authors / Researchers

The first indicator was focused on getting to know who were considered the most renowned researchers due to their publications. The importance could be according to the publication of books, added to the permanence over time of the authors. The lack of mentioning authors recently incorporated to the market, could justify this last statement. Notwithstanding, it is surprising that other authors / researchers who have published books and articles in academic magazines have not been taken into consideration.

It is possible to observe the disparity of the answers as they comprise both the name of a consultant, as that of a long-standing public official connected to the industry, demonstrating that the principle of authority indicated by Gunn (1994) still continues to displace the research principle.

It is also probable, that the questions may not have been formulated correctly, as they were meant to be focused regarding prepared researcher who publish their work in academic magazines, or who are authors of books.

Regarding the most notable foreign personalities, Jafar Jafari (USA) resulted as the most prominent, with 12% of the answers. In order of importance, he is followed by Margarita

Barretto (Brazil), Alfredo César Dachary (Mexico) and Fernando Vera Rebollo (Spain) with a 6%.

On the other hand, under the heading of *Others*, which, with a 36% is the most important, those who were mentioned only once, were grouped together. Formation disparity is very great and comprises the following researchers / authors: Salvador Antón Clavè, D. Biosca Vidal, Hill Bramwell, José Dorado, George Doxey, Néstor García Canclini, Michael Hall, J. Ivars, Jordi Juan i Tresserras, Francisco Morchón Morcillo, L. Moss, P. Nielsen, Stanley Plog, G. Richards, Miguel Seguí Llinás, John Urry, J. Valls and George Walls.

A 2% of the persons interviewed, a figure slightly higher to the reference on researchers in the country had no knowledge of any foreign author related to the academic or research world. One of the persons interviewed mentioned: *Those who appear in the media, Ladevi, Report and WTO*. Ladevi (The Latin American Travel Agency) and Report are weekly publications directed to the travel agencies, with general information of interest for this sector.

Main Academic Journals

Another indicator considered in the survey, was that of the “Main Argentine Academic Publications”. Here, the three academic magazines which are published in the country were mentioned. The one most referred to was *Estudios y Perspectivas en Turismo* (41.86%), followed in order of importance by *Aportes y Transferencias* (20.93%), and *Realidad, Enigmas y Soluciones en Turismo* (13.95%). A 4.65% of the interviewed parties had no knowledge of academic periodic journals.

The heading *Others* (18.61%) was very important, and within it, publications were incorporated which were only mentioned once, such as *Turismo + Marketing & Negocios* {*Tourism, Marketing and Business*}, *Estudios Regionales de la Universidad de Misiones* {*Regional Studies of the University of Misiones*}, and the bulletin of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Carreras Universitarias en Turismo y Hotelería (Latin American Association of University Careers in Tourism and Hospitality - ALCUTH).

It is worthwhile to mention regarding this point, the lack of clarity observed in some of the answers, as, instead of naming the publication, they were referred to as, *the magazine of Schütler; the magazine of the CIET*, as well as *the publications of the CIET; the magazine of Mar del Plata, the one of the CONDET*, etc., and on various occasions reference was made in an independent manner of the universities integrating the CONDET, as for example: *the Tourism publications of the UNC, UNM, UNS, and UNMP Universities*. A publication was also mentioned which was not able to be located in the market: *la Schust de La Plata* {*The Schust of La Plata*}.

Regarding the main foreign publications, around twenty were mentioned, amongst which the most named were the *Annals of Tourism Research*, with a 31.58% and, far behind, *Tourism Management* (5.26%). In the first case, it was not specified if reference was made to the English version or, the *Annals of Tourism Research en Español*.

Under the heading of *Others* (47.37%), the most important, and amongst the publications mentioned, were *Cuadernos de Turismo* of the University of Murcia, the electronic magazine *Pasos*; *Papers de Turismo*; *Estudios Turísticos*; *Tourism Economics, Leisure Sciences*; *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*; *Turismo em Análise*; *Sociological Review*; *Progress in Human Geography*, *Nature*; and *National Geographic*, amongst others. It was observed as a curiosity, the importance given on one hand, to sociological and geographic magazines, and the other hand, to those of general distribution.

Attendance at Congresses

This question was directed to find out which are the most popular conferences attended by members of the academic field in Argentina and abroad. In the case of Argentina, the largest number of specialists attended the Research Congress – Tourism Actions {Congreso de Investigación – Acción en Turismo}, carried out at the National University of Comahue's headquarters (21.21%). Following in order of importance, the congresses summoned amongst other entities, by the National Secretariat of Tourism in 2005, and those which were held in Córdoba (9%), and in Tucumán (6.06%). Of the interviewed parties, 6.06% attended the Research Congress – Tourism Actions, which took place in the city of Bahía Blanca, that same year.

A high percentage of those interviewed (15.15%), answered “does not know – does not answer”. Under the heading of *Others*, the largest percentage of answers was grouped (42.42%). It is necessary to mention that under the heading of “others” all the other conferences which were only mentioned once were grouped, as for example, Jornadas e Itinerarios Culturales (Cultural Itineraries and Seminars - CICOP, Argentina 2005); Desplazamiento, Contacto y Lugares (Displacement, Contact and Places - UBA 2005); VI Congreso de Turismo de Concepción del Uruguay {VI Tourism Congress of Concepción del Uruguay}; I Encuentro Nacional de Gestión Hotelera (First National Encounter of Hotel Management - Merlo, San Luis 2005), VI Jornadas Nacionales Investigación – Acción en Turismo (VI National Research Seminar – Tourism Actions, Ushuaia 2004), amongst others.

The section of *Others* (33.33%) covers the IV Congreso Internacional de Educación Superior (IV International Congress of Higher Education - Havana, Cuba 2004); Turismo Cultural en Iberoamérica (Cultural Tourism in Ibero-America - Mérida, Mexico 2004; Barcelona, Spain 2005); IV Conferencia sobre Ciencia y Gestión de Áreas Protegidas (IV Conference on Science and Protected Area Management - Ontario, Canada); Congreso de Geógrafos Españoles (Congress of Spanish Geographers - Santander, Spain); amongst others. Lastly, a 9.52% attended congresses organized by the UNWTO.

FINAL COMMENTS

This study confirms primarily what was outlined in the document prepared by the Secretariat of Science, Technology and Productive Innovation, regarding the degree of knowledge for research subjects, available to tourism university professors.

Even though a very high proportion of those interviewed, stated having achieved post graduate degrees in the country and abroad on tourism, and that they are dedicated to research, it is remarkable to see the importance assigned to general publications for their studies and, on the other hand, the lack of available information on academic publications.

This leads to a possible debate on the final product of a large number of researchers whose works are not made public in academic magazines but which can be observed in the minutes of the congresses, published on the website as on Compact Disks. It is necessary to remark that generally these works do not correspond to studies performed but are rather proposals for the execution of some kind of activity related to the development of a certain site without considering its feasibility for a real market.

This situation is presented with variations in both universities mentioned by Castelluci (2001), as the most distinguished in research matters. Certainly a reality exists, it is found in places where tourism is a visible activity and generates a series of effects on the area. But contrary to what this author indicates, that it can be supposed that is not due to its academic independence, but also due to the rigor applied to research tasks which comply with the same academic requirements as those disciplines which have been longstanding.

Regarding the attendance of congresses, a large disparity was observed in the answers submitted. Supposing that it is a meeting place for discussion of results amongst pairs, this objective is difficult to attain, as very rarely this interchange of ideas and experiences is obtained when persons do not attend the same events.

Although the present situation appears to be rather unfavorable, this does not mean that different ways exist to solve it. Bearing in mind that the rigidity of the curricula of the tourism and hospitality career does not admit modifications, the first alternative is oriented towards the promotion of masters' careers and specialties, which lead to the formation of educators, in order to generate a faculty group, trained and involved in research.

Given the scarce number of renowned researcher within the national scope, it would probably be recommendable to form a network system amongst the universities of the country; to create a faculty group not limited to an entity in a specific geographic area. It would also be important to attract specialists from other areas with an important research history to the tourism study field.

Another important point would be to establish research lines which contemplate 'causes and effects' of tourism in Argentina, using basic concrete facts and not just proposals based on the dreams or wishes of the researchers.

The quantity of specialized tourism publications existing in the world is very large, but these are only slightly known in Latin America in general, and in Argentina in particular where an important ignorance exists as to the majority of the cases of many e-journals of renowned academic quality. It would therefore be convenient to prepare an inter-university agreement, which would allow a continuous exchange of bibliographic information.

As a result of the study, a noticeable lack of knowledge on what is being researched and who is studying it in the rest of world frequently leads to "reinventing gun-powder". It would be important to create better links with foreign universities and create networks with world level investigators for the purpose of benefiting. These agreements should involve all universities and their faculty groups related to hospitality and tourism in order to multiply the knowledge-exchange possibilities.

To exit the careful isolation which each entity has created for itself, to interact with pairs in the same discipline as with others and to benefit of all the advantages of the new communication technologies probably would lead to an awakening of curiosity with respect to the reality of the country in order to study it with the appropriate research methods and techniques. Probably the next first step would be to elaborate a plan involving universities and research centers in order to focus on particular issues related to the main problems that involve tourism in Argentina and start working on specific research issues.

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