

In favour of an assumed methodological pluralism in Tourism Studies

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Four themes

- The multiplicity of data-collection methods
- The risk of quantitativism
- The interest of qualitative aspects
- Injunctions linked to the publication system and reduced reflexivity

1- The multiplicity of data-collection methods

- Each "investigative tool" available to social sciences has its advantages, its costs and its shortcomings. Proficient in methodological pluralism, I rely equally on qualitative methodologies (semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant and non-participant observation), quantitative methodologies (surveys by questionnaire, statistical analysis), documentary research and analyses, and iconographic studies (photographs, images), etc.
- It is the area of study, the corpus of hypotheses and the problematization of the subject which help in defining the choice of methodological tool.

1- The multiplicity of data-collection methods

- The collection of empirical data is a necessary part of a global and non-arbitrary consideration of the act of "researching" in social sciences: According to Auguste Comte in his 'Cours de philosophie positive' (published from 1830 to 1842):

"The method is unlikely to be studied separately from the research in which it is used; or else, at the very least, it's not a dead study, incapable of fertilizing the spirit that employs it."

1- The multiplicity of data-collection methods

- The study of tourist populations is a textbook example, an ideal-typical case of the inherent methodological difficulties. Although the definition of the word "tourism", and therefore of "tourists", poses a problem in itself, the fact remains that whatever the definition chosen, we are dealing with a population which is difficult to evaluate using a survey.
- There is therefore a significant risk of falling into what the french philosopher Gaston Bachelard calls the trap of "*general knowledge*" where "*general laws define words more than things*" (1938). Generalization, which unfortunately is especially present in tourism studies, represents an impasse and potentially involves errors in interpretation and standardizing description.
- In addition, "the riot of numbers" according to the formula developed by Bachelard, which is to say false precision, is nothing but an illusion and as such does not correspond to the scientific spirit. (Bachelard G. *La formation de l'esprit scientifique*, Paris : Vrin, 1938.)

2- The risk of quantitativism

- The quantitative data nevertheless only partially explain firstly the variations in tourism practices or secondly the intensities and levels of involvement according to each individual.
- The essential structures of the social world are expressed as much in the practices and behavior of individuals as in the social classes they belong to. It is therefore essential to highlight the socially differentiated relationships with tourism practices. Indeed, "alongside quantitative surveys which reveal the recurrence of vacation models [...], ethnographic observation allows us to discover a little more" (Cousin & Réau, 2009) without however resorting to "oppositions of principles" combining quantitative and qualitative interpretations.
- Although there is obviously no question of erasing the social relationships of class, age or gender, as studied by quantitative surveys, by taking into account the "tangled complexities" of their movements we are able to explain particular tourist mobilities, in other words their "methods of traveling and living" (Urry, 2005).

3- The interest of qualitative aspects

- The detailed description of the modalities relating to tourist practices is thus based essentially on what tourists actually do (in all senses of the term) rather than, for example, on the number of tourists visiting a certain place or country, the number of people going on vacation according to their economic resources or tourist mobility depending on their place of residence in terms of a typology which is relatively essentialist (urban, peri-urban, rural).
- Although interest in knowledge originating from macrosociological analyzes is necessary and scientifically based, the study of socialization processes and the modalities of tourist practices - that is to say their “ways of doing things” (Lahire, 2007) - at the individual level allows us to better understand the reasons why individuals do what they do when they are tourists (Guibert, 2016) .

4- Injunctions linked to the publication system and reduced reflexivity

- The study of different Anglo-Saxon journals specializing in "tourism studies" allows us to make a number of observations:
- Management sciences largely dominate the academic world concerned with tourism studies.
- The published articles systematically follow a model inherited from the natural sciences and offer a structure which gives pride of place to an initial literature review, before revealing the presentation of the adopted methodology, and then finally presenting the "results" (findings) and "discussing" them (discussion).

4- Injunctions linked to the publication system and reduced reflexivity

- The impact factor, the indicator which judges the visibility of a scientific journal (by the average number of citations of each article published within; one of the most structuring being the method calculated by Thomson Reuters) is in that case the essential element: the more an article is cited, the more visible it is and therefore the more it is considered relevant.
- This culture of numbers evolves depending on the methodologies adopted, most of which are quantitative, and which often means the analysis is at risk of falling into the mathematic trap.
- Having formulas incomprehensible to the neophyte at the heart of their approach, they set aside individuals' social dimension and consider only their practices (travel, shopping, etc.), from a perspective which adopts a strong applied dimension .

To conclude : a paradoxal injunction for french researchers in social sciences

Merci!

ご清聴ありがとうございました