



# Anthropological Study of Tourism in Spain

## Notes about a Brief Anthropological Culture Dedicated to the Study of Tourism

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During the 1970s, American anthropologist Davydd J Greenwood analyzed the effect of tourism in a small northern village in Spain, revealing the processes of cultural transformation to which its inhabitants succumbed when they became a tourism-receiving society. Other anthropologists, such as Oriol Pi Sunyer, Antonio Mandly or Francisco Jurdao, also analyzed the sociocultural transformations caused by tourism in Spanish populations during the 1970s, granting tourism an undeniably contaminant and critical value. This was the first time that Spain as a tourism product became ethnographized.

Until the 1990s, the contributions of anthropology to the understanding of tourism were relatively scarce, both in Spain and in Europe in general. This occurred because, contrary to other disciplines, anthropology omitted the social relevance of tourism; it did not have the necessary epistemological instruments for its understanding, and it had certain prejudices about studying tourism (Boissevain 1977). However, it is important to note the excellent contributions of Antonio Miguel Nogués-Pedregal and Agustín Santana, considered the most important scholars of the anthropology of tourism in Spain since the 1990s.

The globalization of tourism and the diversification of the study of anthropology explain why today the anthropological study of tourism has finally become a notable referent within the discipline. Likewise, the contributions of anthropology have also received certain recognition among scientists who currently study tourism. In fact, it is undeniable that since the end of the 1990s studies of tourism have grown and diversified in very important ways, producing what is called *tourismology*—a disciplinary body that encompasses the sciences dedicated to the study of tourism, generating a disciplinary hybrid. This is both relevant and in some cases problematic.

Since two decades ago, the translation to Spanish of the internationally recognized work of scholars applying a socio-anthropological perspective to tourism (Dean MacCannell, Marc Augé, Jereremy Boissevain, Turner and Ash, John Urry) has moti-

vated the creation of new interests and knowledges on the topic. According to the World Tourism Organization, Spain is the second country in the world with the largest number of international tourists; this issue explains in part why this country has become one with a considerable contribution to the study of tourism. But it is not only that. According to Nogués-Pedregal (2011), currently there is an epistemological displacement of the anthropological study of tourism, moving from studying tourism as object or issue that produces transformations in the receiving societies, to studying tourism as a vehicle or element that allows us to understand alterity in a more profound way. That is, the field has moved from studying receiving societies, to studying stories, images, uses, meanings, symbols, appropriations and experiences associated to tourism, placing it as a fundamental component in the majority of contemporary societies and as an agent producer of new identities, spaces, and times.

Currently, a considerable number of Spanish universities have established transdisciplinary research teams focused on the socio-cultural study of tourism. Anthropologists are part of these teams. Some examples include: the Tourism, Heritage and Development Research Group at the Complutense University of Madrid; the Multidisciplinary Laboratory of Research on Tourism at the University of Girona; the Research Group on Territorial Analysis and Regional Development at the University of Barcelona; and the Social Research and Tourism Institute at the University of La Laguna. New projects that combine research and development centered on tourism and that incorporate anthropologists are proliferating; this demonstrates the importance of understanding tourism not only as an economic and territorial phenomenon, but also and fundamentally, as a socio-cultural process. In regards to training, in the last few years universities have incorporated courses that deal with the relationships between tourism, society and culture in anthropology and tourism. Since almost two decades, there are seminars, symposiums and working panels on tourism in anthropology congresses and their venues. Likewise, the number of doctoral thesis on the anthropology of tourism have grown visibly, which is the cause and the effect of a growing produc-

tion of scientific literature on the subject. In this regard, it is highly important to have specialized journals on heritage and tourism in Spanish. Perhaps the best-known journal is *Pasos: Revista de Patrimonio Cultural y Turismo*. Undoubtedly, the edition in Spanish of the *Annals of Tourism Research* is also one of the most important opportunities for researchers on tourism in Spain.

Even though the anthropological study of tourism has advanced profusely and a valuable academic tradition on the subject has developed, it is necessary to recognize that there still exists great distance between academic-theoretical production and its social application. In regards to transference of knowledge, the anthropological research on tourism produced in Spain still has very little relevance. Thus, while the interconnection between administrations and tourism sectors and the academic circles specialized in tourism has intensified drastically and consistently, the contribution of anthropology has remained on the margins. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the institutions and sectors claim practical knowledge and tools to plan or promote territories and products. Thus, the results deriving from anthropological studies, not always being applicable, have only relative interest for tourism organizations. It is also important to remember that economic and politic organizations look for data that legitimizes, and do not question, tourism. It is possible that the anthropological interpretation of tourism troubles those responsible for the industry. For this reason, the field needs to advance and become useful and visible.

While for anthropology culture constitutes a necessary framework to understand relations and social issues of the groups studied, the industry of tourism utilizes more and more cultural elements as fundamental components of the promotion of destinations. The epistemological relations between tourism and anthropology are, in this case, inexcusable, because that which we call culture is at the center of interest of both fields.

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