

IMAGINING THE IMAGE IN TOURISM: A ROUND TRIP

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ABSTRACT

Currently, the role of the image in the development of tourism and, especially, as an element of differentiation of a destination area is widely recognized. This is reflected in the literature, which seeks to identify the variables that motivate the purchase or incentivize the decision process. However, the reference to feedback processes or control mechanisms of the image, as well as its creation, is unusual. This article aims to present a model of understanding these processes.

KEYWORDS

Image; tourism; tourist-consumer; tourist destination; tourist system

IMAGINANDO A IMAGEM NO TURISMO: UMA VIAGEM DE IDA E VOLTA

RESUMO

O papel que a imagem tem no desenvolvimento do turismo e, em especial, enquanto elemento de diferenciação de um destino turístico, é hoje uma realidade amplamente reconhecida. Isto reflete-se na literatura, onde se procura identificar as variáveis que motivam a compra ou incentivam o processo de decisão. Contudo, a referência a processos de retroalimentação ou a mecanismos de controlo da imagem, assim como da criação da mesma, é pouco usual. Neste artigo pretende-se expor um modelo de compreensão destes processos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Imagem; destino turístico; sistema turístico; turismo; turista-consumidor

INTRODUCTION¹

Competitiveness, dynamism and innovation are intrinsic characteristics of every tourism system. Academic articles, institutional statements, intervention projects or requests for resources associated to tourism activities invariably refer to these characteristics, above all due to our throwaway Kleenex-style consumer culture.

The market requires permanent renewal of the form and content of tourism products and destinations, notwithstanding the fact that many are presented as traditional, historical or “age-old”. Certain renewed elements are obvious, wherein the consumer

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performs the role of an adventurous accomplice or participant, whenever there is aesthetic conditioning of the use of such products and destinations, complemented by the specific amenities required by tourism activities.

This is the context of the “image of the destination” which, whether stale, or imbued with special virtues and technologies, is created and presented to the plethora of buyers and consumers, in a paradoxical game of continuity and renewal, of familiarity and contrast, of tradition (in reference to a past that has been reconstructed *à la carte*) and modernity, based on a seamless presentation, as a whole which is only divisible if the recipient so wishes, or seeks an individual perspective.

Tourism destinations have been shaped as works of collective engineering with the exclusive purpose of economic exploitation of their real or imaginary attributes (supposed landscapes, operational and communications infrastructures, etc. grouped by their territorial nature and product-service, offered as an integrated experience (Bigne, Font & Andreu, 2000). Faced by this apparent chaos, agents converge with an operational definition, structured in accordance with defined interests.

Although these agents are by no means homogeneous (Nash, 1996; Santana-Talavera, 2003b), they can be classified into the following groups: (a) resident population; (b) tourists and (c) foreign workers (usually temporary workers). It is also necessary to add (d) population groups living in areas that are not necessarily close to the tourism destination. These categories correspond to various groups and many cultures, subcultures and cultural variations, all of which are subject to changes derived from the relations established between them and with the products offered and consumed in the tourism process, as well as other groups and cultures that are not immediately susceptible to the changes caused by tourism.

One of the main characteristic elements of this distinctive population found within each tourism destination is precisely the lack of homogeneity. Imaginary universes and their referents should be chosen and differentiated for a more or less well-defined clientele (e.g. in function of economic status, educational level, age group, sociocultural background, demands), although these factors are obscured by a series of available physical elements – attributes, resources, products – and by a business community and labour force that must also adapt, or show that they are sufficiently flexible to respond, to various factors of seasonality, changes in consumer groups, labour circumstances, etc., as well as a resident population that must adjust to changes in their surroundings. This is a process in constant evolution, subject to changes and adjustments in search of survival within the world of tourism, in accordance with Butler’s (1980) description of the life cycle of tourism destinations, as updated by Tom Baum (1998).

In the current era, in which tourism is recognised as not only one of the world’s most important legal economic activities but also as playing a more important role in national and domestic economies, there is a broad consensus about the importance of the image as the nucleus and key driver of this field of activity. This is illustrated by the fact that only one other subject – the impacts of tourism – competes with the image as a topic of interest in the research found within the specialised literature. Excellent

works, such as Gallarza, Gil Saura and Garcia Calderon (2002), or Frias, Rodríguez and Castañeda (2007) conduct an exhaustive review of this question, and Baloglu and McCleary (1999), in a text that had a decisive influence on subsequent research, review the main works developed on themes such as the impact of the visit, familiarity of the image, the relationship between the tourist's geographic location and the image, measurement of the destination's image, its components and the factors that influence it, the difference between the image held by the individual tourist and the destination's *projected image*, variations in the image in accordance with the purpose of the trip, the relationship between sociodemographic variables and images of the tourism destination, etc.

The authors differentiate between two approaches – statically-structured and dynamically-structured studies – in function, respectively, of the relations between the image and the tourist's behaviour, or the interest in image formation and structure of the tourist destination. Given that the latter approach is less common in the specialist literature, this article aims to contribute to discussion of this issue from a transdisciplinary perspective.

THE GLOBALITY OF THE IMAGE: DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTIONS AND CONSTRUCTIONS

Since the 1990s (Gallarza, et al., 2002; Gartner, 1993; Hum & Crompton, 1990) we tend to view the touristic image as a complex and subjective conceptual construction (Bigne, Sanchez & Sanchez, 2001), in which the consumer's cognitive and emotional faculties are blended with various evaluations that compare knowledge and experience about the destination. In other words, a set of mental representations regarding the physical attributes of the tourism destination as a whole (the cognitive component) combined with the evaluations and feelings that the destination inspires (affective component) (Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997).

This type of conception is fully integrated within a changing model of the image that focuses on both the physical attributes of the destination's territory and the perception of the tourist-consumer who ultimately creates a single snapshot, charged with sensitivities, emotions and cognitive and affective evaluations (San Martín Gutiérrez, Rodríguez Del Bosque & Vázquez Casilles, 2006). The image is thereby individualised (according to the definition of Hunt, 1975) and marked by each tourist's active-passive role when planning his trip (Mercille, 2005), circumscribed by the consumption process and influenced by marketing.

Seen from this perspective, analysis of the image may ignore other agents involved in the process of design, formation, and transmission that will converge in the destination's imaginary universe. In other words, the profile projected by the groups involved in the outbound market, from their own environment, on construction of the destination's local identity, which will identify it, either in terms of its uniqueness or through subjective comparison with other destinations. In practical terms, the image in the tourist system is the item that configures the destination and to a large extent determines the satisfaction and memories of the tourist's experience by comparison with the experience of being a

tourist in a destination. The sociocultural effects on local populations of images derived from external sources are also experienced over the medium term, modifying the patterns and styles of behaviour, values and relationships, and rebuilding local identities (Franklin & Crang, 2001).

It therefore is necessary to contemplate the image from a global perspective, based on a procedural systemic approach, which leads to clear differentiation between the process of conception, design and activity of the materials that shape the image that has been constructed, in order to market processes of perception and interiorisation (individual comparison and creation). This is a question of opening up research models and approaches to a dual aspect of interconnected and feedback-based processes that methodically enable a step-by-step study, providing valid indicators for each parameter.

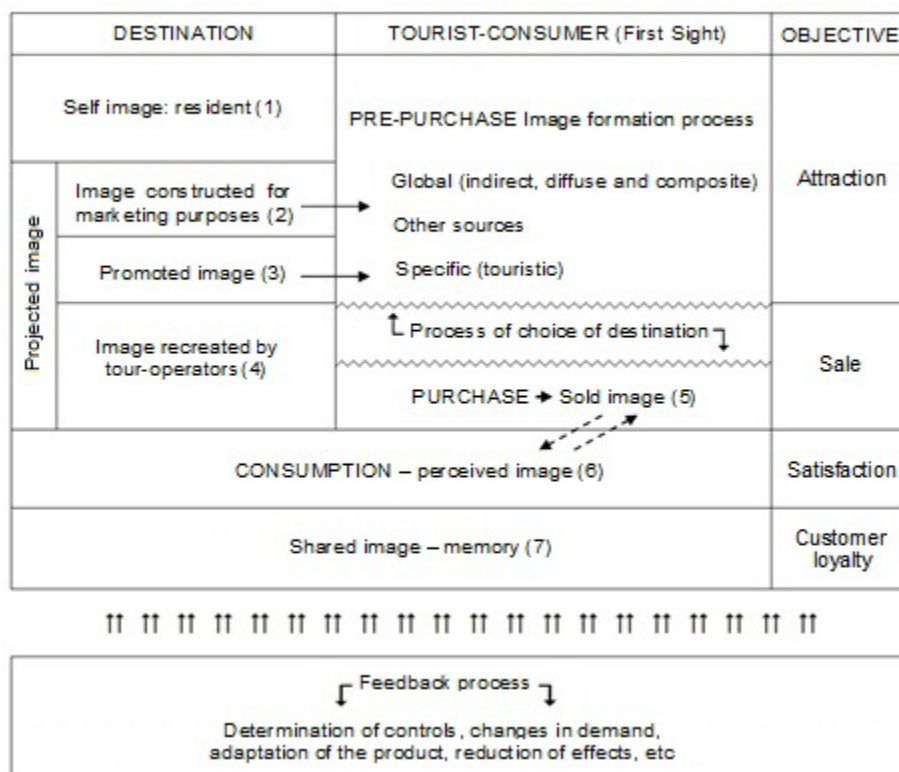


Figure 1: General model of tourism images (creation, consumption, recreation)

Source: Based on Santana Talavera and Pinto, 2008

It is often assumed that the attributes underpinning the image of a tourism destination are partly physical (e.g. environment, infrastructure, climate) and partly intangible (e.g. culture, friendliness, familiarity, well-being, identity). Since the late 1980s we have witnessed the progressive emergence of multiple “new types of tourism”, propitiated by the new market conditions and requirements, i.e., competitiveness, flexibility and segmentation. These new products are presented as “a new form of tourism”. The maxim is to produce a satisfying experience for the customer, an *authentic experience* that reflects the local nature, culture or people, or a combination of these elements.

The wide range of commercial terms applied in this field include ecotourism, ethnic tourism, rural tourism and cultural tourism, wherein the latter term has a broader scope. Development of such tourism activities is preferably carried out in areas that are not densely populated (uninhabited or with low human occupancy, non-urban rural environments or small, concentrated settlements), but may also include monumental-architectural or museum-related trips or present themselves as subsets of offers in new forms of mass-market tourism. In this context of new types of tourism demand, resident populations, who were formerly passive agents, become a substantial part of the image that is constructed in order to publicise the destination and become important for its *self-image* (i.e. the image perceived by the local residents) and the image of the area in which they live.

While *self-image* has rarely been incorporated into tourism research, attitudes towards the image have been extensively studied (Getz, 1994; Lawson, Williams, Young & Cossens, 1998; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994; Smith & Krannich, 1998), considering that attitude can have a major impact on the *perceived image*.

Incorporation of the *self-image* can add veracity to advertising campaigns, identifying attributes and avoiding unnecessary performances, but also establishes limits (spatial, qualitative, quantitative or temporal) to the development or tourism exploitation of the respective territories. It is understood that the *self-image* may not be unique, since it will depend on the different socio-cultural and socioeconomic groups included within the local population, in addition to the levels of integration of the foreign population in the specific context.

In an ideal situation much of the *self-image* should be reflected, at least in the image constructed for marketing purposes, and finally in the commercialised image, but this rarely occurs. It is difficult to match the ideal representations that each person harbours in relation to themselves and the environment with the demand for a mythical place – a paradise, in its multiple and changing versions – that coexists in popular tourism destinations. For this reason, there are often images that are constructed and promoted on the basis of virtual, ephemeral or overly adorned resources. Variable elements, such as climate or social events, are also included as an *atrezzo* (attraction) (Santana-Talavera, 2003b).

In such circumstances, due to the economic and organizational efficiency of the resident population and the demands of the logic of the market, *self-image* and everyday life are conceived as a copy, whose quality is measured in terms of its adaptation for consumption purposes. It thus becomes an argument used in the marketing of the destination as a *constructed image*, which highlights ease-of-access, safety and exoticism, in the classic model, or danger, risk, daring and adventure, in more refined approaches to designing new tourist experiences, more or less impregnated with sensationalism, as we move from “authenticity” towards a touristically-marketed “reality”. These are motivations, expectations and multidimensional activities reflected in the complexity and intangibility of the image (Villa, 2001).

The *image constructed for marketing purposes* is usually marked by the interests of the institutions and businesses, and to a lesser extent by the local residents. Three more

or less limited strategies are often encountered: i) a joint and participatory policy involving all, or a subset of the people involved in design of the image, through selection of attributes, products and their physical and emotional references related to the identity of the destination; ii) a more or less motivated selection of the products and activities available in the area, grouped by thematic blocks or territorial sub-areas; iii) a set of more or less articulated initiatives, usually exogamous, that tend to highlight certain attributes of the tourism destination, in function of the respective demand.

Tourism policies based on the sustainability of tourism destinations (i.e. those that satisfy the needs of current tourists without undermining the possibility of the use of resources by future generations²) strongly recommend the first of the above three options, in particular given that anchoring the image of the destination to its *self-image*, does not reduce the negative effects of tourism activity, but also provides the visited area with dynamic tools to respond to changes in the market without serious changes in its social and economic structure.

This strategy to a large extent avoids transforming everyday goods and spaces into products of representation, attempting to adjust the respective attraction or resource (or decision related to local attributes) without de-legitimatising them culturally. In fact, on many occasions the environment, the culture itself, or a distorted selection of these elements, have been objectified, depersonalised and extracted from their original context, in order to obtain an extemporaneous product presented as authentic, suggesting an idea of a unique and unforgettable experience for the respective consumer (Markwell, 2001) which, at the same time, is replicable and standardised.

The second and most frequent of the strategies used to build the constructed image of the destination is usually determined by experts and applied to the destination in an intermediate stage of its life cycle (Butler, 1980). This image is not primarily related to major innovations, but to incremental changes and additions to previous promotional campaigns. In general terms, this concerns maintaining competitive advantages by modifying the attributions of resources and products, combining different activities and introducing new infrastructures. As Schouten (1995) points out, a good impression of a tourism destination is based on connections made with ideas and experiences that are already familiar, while increasing visitors' curiosity. In the case of small-scale destinations, this form of diversification of the constructed image can easily be traced back to participatory strategies but involves serious operational problems and conflicts of interest in large, consolidated areas.

Finally, the third strategy is to adapt "realities" to the respective addressees (residents and tourists), whereby it may be possible to offer an aesthetic appropriation and an emotional experience within an extremely short time-frame. This mode, whether or not combined with participation, may be contemplated, especially in the new tourist areas that have emerged as a result of remodelling the system in the 1990s. In the worst-case scenario, when the exogamic nature of the constructed image has prevailed, and the markets failed to respond, the socioeconomic impacts have been extremely important.

² See World Commission of Environment and Development, 1987.

This without the presence of the tourists themselves (frustration in terms of the generation of expectations and the commitment of invested capital), thus breaking with the conceptual framework of the image and of the tourist system. The advantage of this kind of reinterpretation of the constructed image of the destination is that it enables the entrance of multiple individualised products, whether or not covered by the destination's specific brand or identity.

Considering any of the previous cases, the ideas underpinning this design may be materialised via several promotional campaigns, forming what is called the *promoted image*, i.e. conception of an image that to a large extent is intended for commercialization, shaped by demand and advertising elements related to the attributes that are more or less present in the area, and by the constructed image.

Regional and local institutions play an important role in this process, complemented by the role played by the business community. Analysis of recent promotional campaigns reveals how the "creative leader" (person or group) of the tourism organisations-institutions imprints their brand, based on consolidating (often for legislative periods) projects for a tourism destination that express a certain level of quality (constrained by the competition and the identity of the destination), honesty (not deceiving the customer), preparation (professionalism in provision of the services and products), and the ability to respond to the values and desires of all or part of the recipient market (the tendency towards *a la carte* tourism). To a large extent, the solidity of the project will be determined by compliance with objectives (number, frequency and type of tourists) and organisational maturity (persistence), and also within the limitations and uncertainties of the tourism system, and its effective durability (successful duration within the market).

Although drastic changes rarely occur, the transition from the *constructed image* to the *promoted image* requires minor adjustments, in order to adapt to variations in tourism demand, competition from other destinations and the specific marketing needs of different market segments (potential tourists). The configuration of the image is tremendously flexible but also plays a key role in defining the destination in the consumer's perception, i.e. while it allows a set of figurative alterations when combining products and / or fostering new resources, it also limits the range of possibilities of an interior nature.

The *promoted image*, with an important tangible physical component, as reflected in leaflets, brochures, brochures, posters and other forms of advertising material, may be found next to other props in the tourism trade fairs primarily directed towards tour operators and retailers, or travel agents, although on certain occasions major advertising campaigns to reach the general public are also conducted.

The general importance of this component of the global image resides in its position as a conscious and unconscious motivator, that encourages the individual to join the flow of tourists, by means of symbolic stimuli that evoke certain emotional states (relaxation, adventure, discovery, fun, etc.). In a more specific framework, the objective of the image is to help consolidate the purchase decision to visit the destination and a specific type of tourism.

At this point, the *promoted image* may both generate and reinforce stereotypes about the destination (of a group nature) (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Gallarza, et al., 2002)

and many also foster (individual) expectations (Litvin & MacLaurin, 2001; Litvin & Ng Sok Ling, 2001) in relation to the area, the promoted products and the emotions caused by their respective consumption. Nonetheless, it is important to understand that the image of tourism destinations is incremental, i.e. it cannot be directly substituted by another promotional campaign, because areas with a negative or degraded image will have to invest a far greater effort, resources and time than others which already have a positive image, in order to be included in the pool of eligible destinations in tourists' decision-making procedures (Fakeye & Crompton, 1992; Frías, et al., 2008).

However, the choice of the tourism destination is also conditioned by other factors, above all economic (costs, discounts and payment or deferred payment possibilities), time-related (seasonality factors, and coincidence with school and work holidays) and incidental (presence of minors or elderly persons, climate, safety, travel time, etc.). Although tourism destination areas increasingly promote themselves (they propose themselves as being eligible), this does not mean that they themselves take charge of the processes of selling their products (e.g. via booking centres), since the summit of the tourist intermediation market is occupied by several multinational operators (wholesale agents) (responsible for up to 55% of holiday trips contracted in the UK in 2001, according to Parra López, Navarro & Ramos Domínguez, 2003).

In relation to their generation and adaptation to tourism demand and to ensure a better composition of their business activity (Martín de la Rosa, 2003), tour operators can combine the products of a single destination or products of differentiated areas, and even several destinations within their overall product portfolio. Or they may even create new products (in particular services) that may be inserted into one or a few specific destinations. The *recreated image* is thereby considered to be the image that can be projected in a non-homogeneous manner, to the market by different operators, in parallel with the *promoted image* introduced by the institutions, organisms and, to a lesser extent, by local companies (Andreu, Bigné & Cooper, 2000, refer to the *projected image*, which in the framework we propose may be methodologically subdivided into *promoted image* and *recreated image*).

In this process, the tour operator brings the trip closer to the consumer, especially for the first-time buyer, brokering the purchase of a specific product (set of goods and services). The tour operator reaches the customer via the travel agent (retail agent) who can substantially modify the images (both positively and negatively) and the impressions generated in relation to the destination. The travel agent usually has no direct personal knowledge of the destination, neither the products nor the promoted image (much less the image constructed for marketing purposes). Hence, in the final analysis, he himself interprets and offers the potential consumer a product-destination based almost exclusively on the tour operator's promotional material (*recreated image*) and his own experience / skill as a seller.

In practice, the information added by travel agents once again introduces some significant variations in the image, thus shaping the *sold image*. Both images – the *recreated image* and the *sold image* (corresponding to the distribution channels, as active

subjects), are the images that consolidate expectations about the potential tourist-client, who acquires the time-limited enjoyment of several products, constituted by goods, services, activities, territory, climate, landscape, culture, etc. Or, in other words, paid for via a temporary and agreed appropriation of a portion of destination and the experiences that may be replicated therein.

Usually the *projected images* (*promoted, recreated and sold*) are defined by a series of variables or codes (see Ronai, 1976, referring to the landscape). They may be operatively simplified and broken down into four categories of elements: a. functional (mobility, infrastructures, possibilities of relationship or activity); b. picturesque and grandiose (specific settings with plastic qualities, monumentality and landscape elements); c. emotional (evocation of feelings); d. unique (tangible or intangible attributes of an area that are specific to it).

In theory, the layout of the destination-spectacle, where everything that happens can be constructed and regulated as a tourism attraction, is concluded by means of its presentation to consumers using a uniform style, lexicon and thematic diversity (according to the groups of recipients) and standard representative icons. Depending on the specific tourism products and activities (*reality tourism, voluntarism* and similar forms), there is a fundamentally aesthetic appreciation of the area, which conceals the possible contradictions between the space and the rest of the local population, as well as between its constituent social groups, offering an apparent harmony.

THE GLOBALITY OF THE IMAGE: INDIVIDUALITY AND MEMORY

The beholder – the tourist-actor – perceives the image as part of his daily processes and as an object of the culture that he visits (usually hidden beneath the veil of tourist activity), in an exercise of codification, interpretation and comparative valorisation based on his way of life and culture of origin, mediated by the tourism system.

Spatiality and the temporality of everyday life are limited in the tourism destination when not suspended *a priori*, thereby reinforcing the immanent (essential) character of that which has been created for the pleasure of tourists and this is where the image is completed. Hence, the *perceived image* appears as a complete set (Assael, 1984) of beliefs, ideas and impressions of the place that has been visited (Crompton, 1979), juxtaposed with the stereotypes and expectations acquired before the visit.

In this sense, the individualised image as a mental representation is involved in a long process of formation that can begin even prior to the moment when the potential customer gains the motivation to travel. This can happen indirectly as long as individuals have access to global information, that is divided into themes in function of personal, group, social, political, environmental, etc. interests, creating states of opinion and specific knowledge, preconfiguring images and simplified stereotypes (the organic image proposed by Gunn, 1972; and developed by Fakeye & Crompton, 1991), according to the tourist's sociodemographic characteristics (above all gender, age, schooling, income). It is true that this type of indirect information is often vague and imprecise, but it means

that individuals are more predisposed to receive more touristically sophisticated discourses (an *induced image* according to these authors or a *projected image*, using the terminology developed in this article) and, consequently, there is a higher probability of the occurrence of motivations (Castaño, Crego & Moreno, 2006) and selection of a specific type of destination.

Baloglu and McCleary (1999) establish that the trajectory of the image includes direct or indirect knowledge of the destination's objective attributes that generate emotions, which may be differentiated between stimulus factors (sources of information in function of quantity and type, previous experience and distribution) and personal factors (psychological factors – values, motivations and personality – and social factors – sociodemographic characteristics). In the empirical application of this model, Beerli and Martín (2004) classify the stimulus factors, distinguishing between (i) secondary sources, i.e., information perceived prior to the stay, subdivided into organic, induced and autonomous, and (ii) primary sources, formed during the stay, which determine the vital influence of induced information sources (distribution channels) and autonomous information (travel guides) as decisive factors of the chosen destination and the perceived global image.

Although the tourist's individual characteristics, to a greater or lesser extent, condition the understanding of the image of the destination and its respective evaluation, the stereotypes disseminated by the media (Bardón Fernández, 1991) distort it and try to oblige the individual to adapt his personal observation / participation to the image that is more convenient for the tourist trade (more profitable and less costly). Something similar, but with more long-lasting consequences happens to the local residents living in the destination.

It seems that the tourist's experience and the sociocultural origin of customers (Santana-Talavera,), and not directly their nationality (Beerli & Martin, 2004), will influence both the cognitive and affective aspects of the *perceived image*. Both aspects are based on the ability and knowledge to compare images, attributes, services and experiences of the destination with those previously experienced in the tourists' travels or daily lives, in addition to prior expectations of the trip. In this sense, impressions or emotions are always subjective (and hardly quantifiable) and are distinct, albeit related, from the tangible elements of the tourism destination. Attributions are specifically performed in relation to these tangible elements that are confronted in evaluative terms, highlighting not only the indicated similarity or difference, but tending, moreover, towards generalization by analogy.

Thus, conducted interviews (Cruz Modino, 2004, 2007; Pinto, 2007; Rodríguez Darias, 2007) reveal that, even if the tourist while staying in the destination is continuously involved in an exercise of comparison (inclusively with that which is most familiar to him), any unexpected or anomalous element will be included in the overall emotional appreciation and evaluated positively or negatively.

Faced with similarities in terms of specific facets, qualities or relationships with a previously experienced situation, the individual will develop emotions and forms of

behaviour as if responding to that initial situation, thereby affecting the perceived image in the present moment. Based on impressions, this process is one of the reasons why the *perceived image* of the tourist destination can be quite different (Gartner, 1993) from that which the resident population and the permanent agents of the tourism destination may consider, stated with great caution, to be an *objective* or *real image*.

The confrontation between the tourist's *perceived image* and the game of non-predictive expectations and stereotypes associated to *organic* and *projected images*, derives from an evaluation (cognitive-affective) of the tourist's experience (Santana-Talavera, 2003a). This evaluation is known as *tourist satisfaction* (Bigne, et al., 2001; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Westbrook, 1987). Given that the ultimate goal of tourism is to maximise benefits – and it would be utopian to deny this – the main concern of tourism destinations is to generate a high level of satisfaction for their customers and, if possible, retain these tourists as well as their immediate friends and family. But as noted, there are many factors that can distort the *perceived image* (Teye, Sönmez & Sirakaya, 2002) and thereby affect the levels of satisfaction (understood using a bipolar scale of non-satisfaction / satisfaction) and dissatisfaction (also understood using a scale of non-satisfaction / dissatisfaction) (Westbrook, 1987). It is therefore necessary to determine not only these levels in a global way without breaking them down, at least in the same variables and factors used for analysis of the image and the generation of expectations.

The tourist's experience should be understood in this manner, as a set of experiences that begins with the tourist's conscious motivations, develop during the trip, stay in the destination and the return to his normal way of life, concluding with the configuration of the memory, communication of this memory and comparison with his peers (*shared image*).

CONCLUSION

Some authors have referred to the contemporary era as being propitious for re-imagining a neoromantic past, or an era of good men who admired the local savages – obviously, at a distance – while obtaining prestige in doing so. This era is characterised (at least in the West, which harbours the main tourist outbound markets) by leisure time, recognized as a right, and by high levels of consumption and an unprecedented capacity for individual and family indebtedness. These are the constraints that place us within the global village, that every day impels us to look beyond small frontiers and thus, in light of the threat of immediate loss, focus on local attributes, manifested in the context of cultural hybridization, i.e. the conjugation of ideas, essences and material relations, of meanings and structures that merge in unison.

Eden, historically present and almost universal, once dreamt about, and described as a garden-like, chameleon, cultural Olympus, adaptive and adaptable according to the rigours and habits of each society and each historical moment, is now invaded, filled with hammocks where people can rest, local residents who see themselves as actors and cameras that demonstrate and guard the path, that is immortalized in a banal snapshot.

Tourism has inspired humanity to a far greater extent than even war, hunger, or the desire to reproduce. And not even the finest romantic literature has dreamt up so many day-dreams, of more or less filtered stereotypes that have transformed others into part of a private paradise, almost one paradise for each tourist and for each person looking for one.

This network of expectations can be primarily attributed to tourism. But the effects and impacts go beyond the exclusive sphere of tourism. It is almost impossible to distinguish how much is due to the tourist system and its constant generation of images about products and destinations; or to other influences, such as television or cinema, with their programming schedules and sequences without a declared intentionality in the motivation of the trip; or to the demonstration effect that drives us to combine our interests with others, to feel what others have said they have felt; or to individual initiative and creativity. However, the case studies seem to indicate that the result of these and other variables is an image that infiltrates Western culture, assumed as an intrinsic element of everyday life, which inspires us to become passengers, temporary guests of the system, grouped according to our expectations, motivations, hopes and desires to experience our private paradise.

This image, culturally understood as a process, generates memories that haven't been directly experienced, desired spaces and desire itself, promises of encounters with others, lesser equals, different people, above all, hiding the inequalities in principle but also highlighting them when this is required by the product.

Far from the good savage who is subjected to the dominions of the Empire, the actors of the tourist system become an active part in manipulation of the signs, producing, reproducing and consuming the tradable cultural forms, according to the represented role and the mode of timeless simulacra. Consumers of the tourist product, as accomplices in the consumption of authenticity, legitimise themselves through increase of their active role in the creation of meanings. It is necessary to verify who offers these meanings, or at least determine the basic guidelines in order to infer them, or to "innovatively" generate these new versions of meanings already in use for other areas. The key feature of tourism destinations, whether cultural or mass destinations, or of any other kind, is not exactly originality. This leads us to believe that architects of hybridization actually exist.

This article presents a distinct way of contemplating the formation of the global tourist image, in order to guide further research and contribute to discussion on theoretical and methodological tools, with the conviction that it is possible to establish a framework of understanding, criticism and discussion about the tourism system and the processes developed therein.

Translation: Sombra Chinesa Unipessoal, Lda.

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