

INTERVIEW WITH SUSANA DE ARAÚJO GASTAL. “TOURISM AND CULTURE CREATE INTERTEXTUALITIES”

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ENTREVISTA COM SUSANA DE ARAÚJO GASTAL. “TURISMO E CULTURA CRIAM INTERTEXTUALIDADES”

In the context of the edition of this volume titled “Discourses and Images of Cultural Tourism”, we wanted to know the opinion of social science researchers about the state of the art in the area, in Brazil and Portugal. We have set out a number of questions and have invited several colleagues to respond in writing. Susana de Araújo Gastal, titular professor and researcher of the Graduate Program in Tourism and Hospitality of the University of Caxias do Sul (Brazil), author of several books and articles related to culture and tourism, was one of the researchers who kindly acceded to our invitation. We want to thank Susana for her work and care.

1. The possibilities, tensions and conflicts experienced by cultural tourism as a simultaneous local and global phenomenon can be seen as opportunities to expand the territories of research in this field. In this context, what can the Social and Human Sciences do to make this object traditionally “ill-said” (that is, seen as irrelevant and unworthy) into a “well-said” object?

My academic work follows a theoretical and methodological context associated with Semiotics, especially considering text theory and deconstruction. From the 1970s onwards, there are semiotized contributions present in academic studies as diverse as Architecture, History, Geography or Psychoanalysis, and including Tourism, among others with Urry and Urbain. These approaches are now treated as postmodernity, which in turn is presented as the cultural expression of the globalized economic system.

David Harvey, for example, wrote that the “postmodern consists of seeing cultural expressions as a ‘text’, with its own ‘rhetoric’ and ‘idiolect’” (1992, p. 49) and “cultural life as a series of texts intersecting with other texts, producing more texts” (1992, p. 59). This intertextual interweaving would have its own life. If we apply such theorizations to cultural tourism, first we must consider that in contemporary reflections the antagonisms between erudite culture and popular culture disappear. We treat all of them as culture. Another important change, the concept of “culture” ceases to indicate only expressions as arts and architecture, for example, to deal with everyday manifestations such as street

food, music in the subway, graffiti. Urry also includes sports as a cultural expression. In this way, cultural tourism follows the same paths, with post-tourists seeking to interact with the daily life of visited places.

In many cases, Social Sciences still bears an antagonism between scholarly and popular in academic terms, associating tourism knowledge with the popular. Today we live in a mobility world and Tourism studies people and cultural situations guided by mobility. Congresses in the area begin to indicate the breakdown of academic prejudices, facing new scenarios.

2. We can say that the discourse of cultural tourism produced by the Social and Human Sciences, especially since the 90s, implied a shift from the idea of impact to the ideas of change, transformation, adaptation and appropriation. What are the risks and opportunities that these new dynamics pose for those studying the relationship between tourism and culture, within a framework of colonization of scientific policies by the imperatives of relevance and intervention and election of tourism as a strategic sector of national and international development?

As previously stated, new theoretical conceptions have changed the understanding of culture. At present, everyday expressions are also seen as "cultural", a recognition that was an exclusive attribute of extraordinary heritage. In the same way, cultural tourism starts to include items such as gastronomy and moments of everyday socialization of the localities, leading to urban destinations visitors who were previously oriented to natural spaces.

To say culture today is to recognize it as an important economic segment, as Unesco does when it presents a proposal such as the creative economy or creative cities. This does not mean demeaning culture and turning it into a "product", but just the opposite. It means recognizing cultural practices as copyright and as a work to be remunerated. When tourism and culture create intertextualities and interconnect themselves in the same productive chain, all of them increases. Our research must also have this intertextual indicative.

The problem we face in terms of impact is perhaps another: the downgrading of Humanistic Studies at all levels of education, leading residents and tourists to engage in inappropriate social behavior towards heritage, in musical or in performing arts.

3. With regard to the theme of tourism and culture, what is your opinion about the state of the art in your country, in the area of social sciences or humanities?

For a long time, Brazilian tourism marketing focused on the eroticization of the country and the people. In recent years, marketing has prioritized the exuberance of tropical nature and cultural diversity. These public actions have been studied in the Social Sciences in a critical way. As a recent phenomenon, Tourism Studies have been growing in exclusive masters and doctorate courses since the 2000s. Many of them associate sociocultural studies in their lines of research, but unfortunately still with great emphasis

on descriptive and less analytical case studies. There are many studies on festivals and the gastronomy is also an emerging research topic, as well as the architectural heritage and the urban question, associating tourism and culture. A significant indication about the presence of new academic approaches is the award of the National Association of Tourism Research (ANPTUR) for dissertations that achieve excellence, where they have already been awarded researches of the Social Sciences. I especially note the works of a colleague at the University, who in the last two years had research conducted by her among the three finalists at ANPTUR, both methodologically associated with the French Discourse Analysis carried out by Michel Pêcheux. The results are very stimulating.

4. It is well known that tourism activity is very susceptible to political, economic, social and ecological conjunctures. How is tourism adapting locally because of these and / or other conjunctural aspects?

In recent years, public policies that favored the creation of jobs and better distribution of income, have led to the growth of domestic tourism in Brazil. The favorable exchange rate favored trips abroad, which were highly motivated by shopping tourism. The crisis of 2016-2018 removed popular strata that had been incorporated into tourist consumption, while redirecting the average layers of trips abroad for domestic tourism. In academic terms, both in research and teaching, the area is still very sensitive to the presence of public incentive policies.

5. From the point of view of your area of action, which theoretical, methodological and deontological arrangements or connections have been designed lately? What are the future prospects?

As previously mentioned, we have witnessed, in the last 20 years, the constant presence of research in Tourism in masters and doctorate courses, as well as a less operational view of undergraduate courses. Dissertations and theses elaborated by researchers with all their higher education – from undergraduate to postgraduate – in Tourism represent an academic intervention with another type of approach. We will have researchers with theoretical and methodological contributions filtered by experiences internal to Tourism, which will present good surprises in academic studies.

In Brazilian universities, the presence of researchers with a background in History, Sociology and Anthropology is still strong. History, when it uses a critical and complex view, has surpassed the chronological descriptive and it has presented very interesting results. The history of tourism in Brazil has gained important contributions, freeing itself from the facts and the exclusively European dates.

And, as already mentioned, the contribution of semiotic methodologies such as discourse analysis and content analysis has been very rich. The greater production of research has led to the appearance of numerous periodicals and scientific events, giving visibility and density to academic studies.

Translation: Susana de Araújo Gastal

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