

**INTERVIEW WITH CARLOS ALBERTO STEIL.
“TOURISM CANNOT CONTINUE TO BE SEEN AS
AN EXTERNAL ELEMENT TO CULTURES”**

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**ENTREVISTA COM CARLOS ALBERTO STEIL. “O
TURISMO NÃO PODE CONTINUAR SENDO VISTO
COMO UM ELEMENTO EXTERNO ÀS CULTURAS”**

In the context of edition of this volume titled “Discourses and Images of Cultural Tourism, we wanted to listen to the opinions 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. Carlos Alberto Steil, Permanent Professor of the Postgraduate Program in Social Anthropology and the Graduate Program in Public Policies of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil), author of several reference works related to the anthropological, politics and human displacements, including pilgrimages and tourist activity, was one of the investigators who kindly acceded to our invitation. We want to thank Carlos for his 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?

The production of tourism in the Social Sciences in the last decades has fallen far short of the accelerated process of growth of this phenomenon in the world. In fact, tourism has a vast horizon of research possibilities that challenge social scientists. On the other hand, the complexity of tourism as a social phenomenon requires multidisciplinary approaches that need to go beyond the boundaries defined by the Human and Social Sciences as well as Applied Sciences. In this sense, we could begin our reflection, asking ourselves about the appropriateness of the distinction, in the spectrum of the types of tourism, of a cultural tourism, which would appear alongside other types of tourism. What, to some extent, would define a specific object, in this broad spectrum that covers the phenomenon of tourism, for Anthropology, as a science that deals with culture. And, in this case, Anthropology would take care of this slice called cultural tourism, leaving other areas of knowledge to study other forms of tourism.

Contrary to this fragmented view, which starts from a cartographic perspective, I think it would be more appropriate to take a fractal approach, in which the complexity of social life, its possibilities, its tensions and its conflicts will appear in any empirical cut that we make of the tourism phenomenon. That is, I understand that each slice of the social reproduces the multiple dimensions of which life is constituted in its individual and collective expression. In this approach, any analytical relevance that seeks to situate the local and the global in different spaces is discharged. The local and the global are, in fact, dimensions of life that comprehend the extent we assume in our gaze. The local is always a form of expression of the global, which does not exist outside its local realization. There is no global that hangs over the local, just as there is no local isolated from the global.

What can the Social and Human Sciences do to transform this traditionally "ill-said" object into a "well-said" object? Perhaps the path is to abandon the idea that tourism is constituted as a circumscribed territory, with defined limits in relation to other sectors of society, to be explored by the social scientist. I prefer to think that tourism is a dimension of social life that crosses our experience in the world, at the same time that is crossed by the other dimensions of life that intertwine in a tangle of lines to form the mesh of what we call culture. That is, what I propose, in fact, is to return to the empirical, to watch closely what is happening around us. And rather than departing from definitions and typologies or intending to arrive at them with the clarity of an external observer, I suggest that as social scientists we make an effective effort to describe what we are given to live in contexts where mobility produces real changes in social dynamics and local life.

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 who study 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 they entered the field of Tourism Studies, the Human and Social Sciences certainly made a difference. Concerned more with social processes than with the impact of tourism on the social and cultural life of communities, social scientists introduced another paradigm of analysis, which imposed an alternative research agenda. In the field of Tourism Studies, this paradigm and this agenda, on the other hand, were confronted from the beginning with the hegemonic presence of Applied Sciences, especially Administration and Economics. In this sense, in the understanding of the tourist phenomenon, the methods of field observation and sociological analysis were added to the instruments of economic analysis, used for the production of indexes and for the measurement of impact. This entry of the Human and Social Sciences into the field of Tourism, at the same time as it was hailed by some administrators and economists as beneficial for the deepening and unveiling of dimensions that remained in the shadow in their theoretical

analyses, also produced tensions and conflicts that have made difficult dialogue and the exercise of interdisciplinarity in the field.

Focusing on the description, interpretation and analysis of tourism as a process, the Human and Social Sciences have effectively shifted ideas from impact to change, transformation, adaptation and appropriation. This does not mean that these ideas have achieved hegemony or that they have had a wide and disruptive impact on the prevailing view in the field of Tourism Studies. The perception I have is that these areas follow most of the time parallel, as if they were separate territories. At the same time, it must be remembered that none of these areas – Applied Social Sciences and the Human Sciences – constitute monolithic blocks without internal divisions and tensions. Thus, these tensions and divisions have often favoured dialogue and rapprochement between sectors on both sides.

When tourism is viewed from the point of view of efficiency and results, it seems that index and impact-oriented approaches have a great advantage over those of the Human and Social Sciences. That is, the knowledge produced by economists and administrators generally offers public and market managers immediate and strategic responses to action, while the one produced by social scientists presents these managers with the complex and contradictory context of reality within which it is necessary to decide and act and gives them the awareness that all decision and action is marked by the uncertainty that is inscribed in any social process. The non-prescriptive character of the Human and Social Sciences ultimately obscures its importance and its indispensability for social and political action. That is, qualitative research, especially the one that unveils the perception of the subjects involved in the process – tourists, residents, managers, investors, traders, opinion makers, etc. – can offer a broader horizon and a more solid basis for collective action and for overcoming conflicts of interests constitutive of social life.

3. With regard to the theme of tourism and culture, what is the state of the art in your country, in the area of Social Sciences or Humanities?

Tourism enters the agenda of most social scientists in Brazil as a theme that emerges in the process of research as a secondary object that challenges the researcher who, initially, went to the field to study another topic. Few of the social scientists who have been dedicated to the study of tourism in Brazil have chosen it as their research theme at the beginning of their trajectory of training as researchers. My interest in tourism, for example, came during my field work, when I studied the pilgrimages for a Catholic shrine in the Brazilian backlands. Personal engagement in the pilgrimages and sharing of life with the pilgrims who went to the shrine of Bom Jesus da Lapa in Bahia each year showed subtle and significant differences between tourists and pilgrims, although we must recognize, as Victor Turner warns us, that "every pilgrim is a little tourist and every tourist is a bit of a pilgrim". At the same time, I became aware of a tension between pilgrimage and religious tourism in the pastoral care of Catholic shrines. That is, it was the need to

account for these differences and tensions in practice that led me to study tourism as a dimension that crosses Catholic pilgrimages.

A retrospective look at my research trajectory shows that although I have changed my empirical object several times, in all of them tourism appears as an underlying data to be considered. Thus, when I began to study the contemporary apparitions of Mary in the 1990s, I could notice how the displacement of people towards the places where Our Lady appeared was structuring various tourist services to attend to those who came to these places. The most emblematic example of these apparitions is undoubtedly Medjugorje, who, at the height of the apparitions, received dozens of charter flights from various countries. Later in the 2000s, when studying the ways of Santiago in Brazil and its approach to the New Age movement, tourism once again assumes relevance as an important element in the organization and diffusion of this form of spirituality. In the last decade, when my focus of research turns to the relationship between spirituality and ecology, I find tourism again, acting in the promotion of nature walks.

This adjacent place that tourism has occupied in social research may perhaps help us understand the incipient methodological and theoretical development of the subject in Brazil. That is, although tourism crosses the whole of modern social life, it has not been configured as an autonomous thematic field of studies in the Human and Social Sciences in the country, with a relevant scientific production, major research centres forming researchers or lines of research in graduate programs in the Humanities and Social Sciences. On the other hand, there is a production of excellence about tourism that remains almost invisible, since it intertwines with themes that count with greater recognition in the field. This makes its thematization fundamentally dependent on educating the attention of the researcher to perceive the presence of tourism as a dimension of its objects of investigation.

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?

As an anthropologist, I think it is difficult to talk about tourism in a generalizing way. Tourism is multiple and must always be contextualized. It assumes many forms that can be associated with both natural, climatic and landscape resources as well as the political, cultural and imaginative action of human collectives. There are tourism ventures that reach a long duration, with power to attract a number of people who maintain them and make them sustainable. Its success usually results from the association of investments of the public power, the market and of a local community receptive to the tourist. Without the convergence of these social agents, tourism is hardly sustained. Establishing this synergy is an indispensable condition for the implementation and continuity of any tourist project.

In addition to these objective conditions, related to convergent processes of overcoming and managing tensions between the state, market and local community, tourism

depends on values, feelings and lifestyles that shape the culture and historical context of a given society. A diachronic look at the history of tourism shows that the valuation of certain elements, which become points of attraction of people, depends more on the aesthetic vision prevailing in the culture and the historical conjuncture of lived time than on its natural force. To be clearer, the sea and the beach, for example, which today attract millions of people all over the world, at other times and even today, in some societies, have no power of tourist attraction. I bring this example to call attention to the inseparability between the tourist movements and the changes observed in the culture towards the valorisation of nature as a bearer of sacred forces of physical, mental and spiritual health restoration. In the book I wrote with Rodrigo Toniol on *Hiking in Nature* (Appris, 2016), I show how the emergence of New Age spirituality promotes low intensity tourism in small rural municipalities with the involvement of various agents of the State and the market.

Responding more specifically to the question, I conclude by saying that if it is true that tourism is subject to political, economic, social and ecological circumstances, tourism is also dependent on culture at a deeper level. That is, it depends on the beliefs of what is good, beautiful and desirable for a society. And, what is good, beautiful and desirable changes over time. In short, I believe that tourism ventures can achieve success when they become capable of offering to a human collective the means of access to the core values of culture. This means to change the focus of tourism from mass entertainment to personal experience. I illustrate this with the account I heard, in a meeting with the mayor and secretaries of governance, tourism and Gramado education. In discussing the transformations that they, as public managers, detected in the motivations that attracted the six million tourists who, each year, visit Gramado, they point out the search for an "experience" as the main reason. That is, even if massive, tourism today has to give people the opportunity to experience the city and the events as a personal experience, of connecting with oneself and with something that transcends the social and the leisure.

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?

Anthropology is a field of eminently empirical research, which has in the ethnographic method its fundamental mark. For several years, it was stuck to a functionalist and systemic conception of the social. Originally aimed at the study of indigenous peoples and traditional communities, only recently has Anthropology studied complex and modern societies. It was in the wake of this movement, which has been called an *Anthropology at home*, that anthropologists, in the 1970s, began to research and produce articles and books on tourism. The first works were marked by an opposition between the local and the advenient, in which the communities were seen as autonomous totalities and harmonic, threatened by the modernization process, which, according to these

researchers, had one of its spearheads in tourism. In this epistemic context, anthropologists generally assumed a position of defending the local and denouncing tourism as a threatening and disruptive element of the traditional order.

To this perspective was associated a substantive understanding of cultures, seen as specific systems of values, kinship relations, and institutions that distinguished themselves from each other. A belief was thus created, which spread far beyond Anthropology, that cultures existed as units in themselves. This belief, in turn, has produced an exoticization of cultures, especially those associated with the traditional pole within the process of modernization. Much of the cultural tourism, as it has been diffused in common sense, is founded on this belief. The promise of getting to know strange lands and getting in touch with exotic people has been one of the most valuable products in the tourist market. This predisposition to take the other as exotic, however, gains a tourist appeal because it is part of the beliefs that constitute us as modern. But it's just a belief.

Finally, I think that the great theoretical, methodological and deontological challenge that the Anthropology of tourism is facing today is to give up radically the functionalist concept of culture. Tourism cannot continue to be seen as an external element to cultures. Since tourism made himself present on the local is because it was already appropriate. That is, communities are not passive entities, which only resist to what comes from outside. What is seen as outside, in fact, can only be identified as such because it is already present as an instituting element of culture. The critique of the functionalist concept of culture, already carried out by the most advanced research in Anthropology, needs to be applied to Tourism Studies, so that one can move towards a more effective contribution of Anthropology to the Tourism field.

Translation: Zara Pinto-Coelho

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