
Anthropological insights on rural tourism: strengthening the debate between rural and tourist studies

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Introduction

In the second half of the 1960s, rural studies experienced an epistemological shift that led to a reevaluation of the peasant production systems. Until then, both capitalist and orthodox Marxist used to consider these systems as a barrier to agrarian development. The disappearance of the traditional farmer seemed irreversible and desirable (Giner and Sevilla Guzmán, 1980). When the limits and vulnerabilities of agrarian modernisation, the so-called Grefen Revolution, became evident, this way of thinking started to change. An ecological interpretation of Marxism and the recovery of agrarian anarchism (Narodnism) redefined the way of understanding historical evolution (Shanin, 1983). This led to the peasants no longer being seen as an historical category of the past. Their production systems began to be considered as specific models of natural resource exploitation (Sevilla Guzmán, 2006). Specifically, a socially, economically and, ecologically sustainable way of managing the agrosystems.

In the 1970s, during the epistemological change of rural studies, the earliest anthropological researches about tourism in rural areas were published. In fact, most of the anthropologists who became interested in the tourism field studies referred to the conceptual frameworks applied in the rural studies analysis (e.g., Evans, 1979; Pi-Sunyer, 1973; Turner and Ash, 1975; Vries, 1981).

However, with some exceptions, since the 1990s, these pioneering efforts to link tourism studies and rural studies have been neglected. On the one hand, tourism studies, and anthropology of tourism among them, have developed disregarding the analyses and debates undertaken by the rural studies. For example, from the 1990s onwards, tourism studies have supported the apriorism that the tourism-based economic growth automatically stimulates the other local/regional economic sectors, assuming an uncritical and complacent view of the tourism phenomenon (Wearing & McDonald & Pointing 2005, Tribe, 2008). Nevertheless, this axiom still does not consider the complex relationship that exists in the rural world between economic sectors, production models and agro-ecosystems (Gascón and Ojeda, 2014). This does not mean that the study of tourism has ignored the 'rurality' of the region under analysis; it was mostly done without taking into account the debates and analyses generated in rural studies for more than half a century; especially those concerning the reevaluation of the peasant mode of production (Shanin, 1973) and the analysis of its reproduction strategies (Ploeg, 2008).

For quite some time, rural studies disregarded the role of tourism in rural society. This happened even when the rapid growth of tourism turned vast territories traditionally dedicated to agriculture or fishing into tourist destinations. Moreover, emblematic analysis in rural studies such as the New Rurality or Pluriactivity have not analysed the impact on the emergence of non-traditional economic activities in the rural space (Kay, 2006). Only some leading academic publications in the field of rural studies, such as the *Journal of Agrarian Change* or the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, started to use the

term 'tourism' (or its variants: ecotourism, agrotourism, etc.) among the keywords of the papers published until the end of the last decade.

Lately, however, some incipient bridges within these two fields of study have been built, therefore rural studies can now no longer ignore the tourism phenomenon. Tourism has become a constant element in the socio-economic fabric and local landscapes, bringing about substantial changes. On the other hand, has emerged the Critical Turn in tourism studies, which goes beyond the ontological or academic criticism of the phenomenon: it has an explicit political commitment to social justice, equity, and the fight against oppression (Ateljevic et al., 2007). Although, this critique has not always inquired into the power structures and the underlying ultimate causes of inequality, (Bianchi, 2009) which might establish connections with rural studies (Gascón and Ojeda, 2014).

This Special Issue of the *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology* aims to contribute to the debate on how tourism development affects rural areas. Several studies seem to observe an ambivalent relationship. At times, tourism has acted as a method of depeasantisation and deagrarianisation (Gascón and Cañada, 2016; Gascón and Milano, 2018), either by occupying agrarian spaces for the construction of tourist infrastructures, or by impoverishing the agrarian economy by hoarding resources (natural resources, labour force, capital for investment, etc.). However, in other cases, tourism has increased peasant incomes, reinforcing their economic viability (Cáceres-Feria et al., 2021). Furthermore, rural tourism has boosted the revaluation of food traditions fostering the heritagisation of indigenous agricultural varieties and contributing to the strengthening peasant production models (Medina, 2017).

This dualism in the rural tourism outcomes can also be seen within the papers published in this Special Issue. Some of these papers underline the idea that tourism in rural settings has negatively affected the local economies. For instance, Malu Rendón and Vanessa León apply the neo-extractivism framework analysis to describe how in two territories in Ecuador the growth of this activity has led to an intensive use of local resources, their material and immaterial commodification, and an increase in social tension. In the same direction, María Offenhenden and Montserrat Soronellas observed as in several valleys in the Catalan Pyrenees, in Spain, the introduction of skiing and related tourist activities has led to changes in production models, land use, and lifestyles. In particular, they have affected the agricultural and livestock farming activities traditionally carried out in these areas. These two papers highlight how tourism capital uses rural territories and their population under logics of exploitation and dispossession which entail fundamentally negative impacts. Likewise, Pablo García's paper shows how certain processes can change over time in an Andean village of Chinchero, near Cuzco. The author shows how, although agriculture has declined in recent decades due to the increase of international tourism in the area, the COVID19 pandemic might lead to changes in the population's perceptions towards agriculture and open up a reconversion process of depeasantisation triggered by tourism.

On the other hand, the Special Issue encloses papers that highlight solidly connections between rural economies and tourism. For instance, Pauline Georgiou analyses on the island of Cyprus the conversion of the local tourism model from one oriented on festivals to another based on agro-tourism. The festival tourism model was intensively concentrated within few months of the year and had negative impacts on rural territories while the agro-tourism is developed throughout the year and has reinforced agricultural production. Similarly, Sabrina Doyon and Eliseu Carbonell note how the

growth of agrotourism in the Empordà region of Spain has boosted both the value of products and services linked to agrarian economies and the sale of local products, holding catering, and tasting activities within accommodation facilities. Agro-tourism has also contributed to the revaluation of farming and local knowledge. Finally, Carter Hunt, Ryan Naylor and Karl Zimmerer analyse how, in the rural coastal areas of Alaska in the USA, the adoption of small-scale niche cruises, in opposition to large-scale cruises, has favoured a better community well-being. Tourism has thus been integrated into existing livelihoods in a balanced way.

Within this perspective, two papers identify processes of heritagisation of agriculture and gastronomy. This phenomenon has occurred in parallel to the growth of tourism, enhancing the peasant economy. Cristian Terry reports on the role of native potatoes in an area of five Andean communities in Cusco, Peru. Thus, the boosting of the production of this wide variety of highly valued potatoes has guaranteed a sustainable diet and has helped the raise of tourism in local areas with the organisation of related activities and events. In turn, Daniel de Jesús and F. Xavier Medina's paper, based on three case studies of food and wine tourism in Tokaj-Hegyalja (Hungary), the Penedès region (Spain) and Querétaro (Mexico), show how the tourism development has fostered the heritagisation of agrofood resources in rural areas and has helped the reactivation of local economies.

The set of papers collected in this Special Issue shows the controversial and complex dynamics of the relationship between tourism and agrarian economies. The tourism practices in rural contexts might lead to multiple pathways. There are several factors that could determine the outcome of this interaction such as the ways in which the tourism activity is organised, the economic context in which it takes place, the specific political circumstances, the participative dynamics of tourism governance, the local conflicts to which they give rise and the way in which they are resolved, among others. Furthermore, the study of tourism practices in rural contexts can provide a critical look at structures and agencies of the current challenges of agrarian economies. This might contribute to the transdisciplinary debates on the multifaced relationship of tourism in the rural world. In this way, the intersection between rural and tourism studies should be carried out taking into account specific historical and socio-cultural contexts without apriorisms.

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