

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

WHAT'S A TOURISM RESOURCE? A DELPHI ANALYSIS TO THE HISPANIC ACADEMIA

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After more than fifty years of looking into people's movement outside their usual environment due to leisure purposes and, therefore, arguing the development of equipment, infrastructures and facilities; implementing policies and tourism planning; evaluating programs and actions; the raw material of tourism, which justifies the existence of the previous elements, has not still reached an agreement among researchers. The literature review showed that the concept of resource, in general, is directly linked to the social value and not only to its natural domain. Besides, this social value is influenced by technology and by the knowledge of any given moment/time and community, which determines the direction and meaning this assessment will take. Consequently, we are facing a term comprised by subjectivity (because of/due to the dependency in the interpretation by culture), relativity (by the interpretation depending on cultures), functionality (since every resource must fulfill a need) and dynamism (because changes over time and space will surely modify such perceptions).

Regarding the tourism resource idea, many meanings have been identified. Most of them agree on the premise that attraction is a mandatory requirement so that it is described as touristic. However, while attraction represents the core to the creation of tourism resources, this is not the only variable to consider. It should be acknowledged that, at the present time, the vast majority of resources addressed to tourism were not born for this purpose, as WTO had already mentioned in 1979. In consequence/Thus/Therefore, these resources need an adaptation in order to guarantee its usage, enjoyment and preservation in each moment.

In other words, only in the case where tourism use was intentional (planned and managed), apart from the role that tourism demand plays in their assessment (Callizo & Lacosta, 1999:22), we could talk about tourism resource. Paradoxically, the found definitions of tourism resource do not clearly denote this aspect of adaptation, whereas they do of attraction.

Why is it so difficult to reach an agreement on the components of tourism resource? Several answers were found. According to Swarbrooke (2002), it depends on diversity and complexity of tourism, since, as a sector, *it is fragmented geographically with different inter-*

pretations and approaches being taken in the USA and Europe. Furthermore, it is split into several very different subsectors such as heritage and theme parks (2002:4) For instance, some voices support the idea that anything can be a tourism resource merely by generating fluxes to it, while finding it impossible to determine the minimum number of visitors (who must travel there before), or whether the purpose of the visit is touristic or not. Others attribute it to the variability of tourism resources, the diversity of its nature, the different patterns of ownership and the low profits generated in comparison with other elements of the tourism system (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006), even though they are defined by users, not reaching an agreement whether residents also take part in the total of the visitors (Page, 2003).

Consequently, and despite the fact that tourism resources represent the core of many studies in the last decades (Benckendorff, 2004; Leask, 2010), research projects usually suggest their own specific definition according to the discipline, excluding some that for others would probably be of prime importance (Weidenfeld & Leask, 2013).

With this framework as a starting point for the study and in order to find a common ground on tourism resource, it seemed relevant to consider a qualitative research to Hispanic academia through the Delphi technique. The aim was to reveal, firstly, the perception about the relationship between a resource and social value, secondly, between resource and tourism and, finally, whether resource adaptation to tourism purpose was perceived as a core element on the definition of tourism resource.

In order to implement this investigation technique the study applied, essentially, the structure and recommendations suggested by Landeta (2002; 2006), taking also into account other works as Coll-Serrano *et al.* (2013), Pulido (2007), Pulido and Sánchez (2009), Solsona (2010) and Tsaor *et al.* (2006), bearing in mind that there is no specific universally accepted patterns for the use of Delphi nor a standardized method for its management (Ballantyne, Hughes & Bond, 2016). According to the keywords of the investigation (tourism use adaptation, valuing cultural heritage, tourism resource, tourism attraction), and using DIALNET search engine, we obtained a raw list of one hundred and six possible participants for the expert team. Then, the production of each scholar (papers, collaborations, coordination and books) was analyzed in order to quantify their experience, which was pointed out by an indicator that reflected the average relevance of each one. To this end, the elements affecting this calculation were: the total author's papers, the total author's papers in tourism, the total author's papers according to the keyword and the total papers of the sample. According to their score, one hundred and six panellists were initially selected. The first fifty were invited to the Delphi, thirty-five of them got involved in the first round and twenty-five in the second.

The questionnaire provided to the panel was comprised of thirty-four statements, which were extracted from literature review, that is, all of them were found in investigations linked to the dimension evaluated. Each statement had to be assessed on a Likert scale of 1 – 5. The result of internal consistency, measured according to Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability, and in line with the recommendations of George & Mallery (2016), reached 0,946 out of 1 which meant an excellent outcome for the purpose of this study. Wilcoxon's signed-rank test to repeated samples was also used to determine when the Delphi could be ended. Due to the lack of significant difference between the results of the first and second round the panel was finally halted.

Delphi results showed many convergence points related to the theoretical framework: twenty-six out of thirty-four items reached an agreement. This fact constitutes a framework under which the concept of tourism resource can be articulated. In the context of a more in-depth analysis, resources (in its most generic sense, that is, any element capable of fulfilling a need) are, in fact, the result of the culture and the values in which it is embedded. For this reason, assessment methodologies applied to resource attractiveness cannot ignore this subjective character.

The answer to another more controversial aspect has been found: the one concerning facilities (accommodation and restaurants). Neither of them can be considered as a tourism resource because, generally, they do not constitute the reason why people travel. Hence, facilities are not the raw material of tourism, but resources. Due to this, it would seem obvious that if they justify the development of tourism, they must be examined in the initial stages of any initiative.

After this analysis of the attractiveness, and in case of identifying potentiality, a resource must be adapted to tourism purpose more so when it has not been originally conceived for this function. Forgetting the cultivation of tolerance, respect and what it represents to host societies, a resource will inexorably entail its physical and symbolic deterioration and loss, not only for residents but also for visitors.

Nevertheless, attractiveness is not enough to consider a resource as touristic and, in the same way, neither adaptation to tourism purpose is in its own right. In other words: adaptation to tourism purpose (which depends on the nature and function that each resource may acquire), facilitates the enjoyment of an appropriate experience based on resource attraction, but adaptation cannot be the attraction in any case.

It is worth noting, however, that some results reveal that this new definition of tourism resource is not yet well-established among academia. This explains, for instance, that no agreement was already reached to whether a resource can be considered as touristic only for targeting to tourists, for being available to the market or for generating flows towards it, which are clearly incongruent aspects when a resource has not been adapted to this new use.

The most striking feature is that the raw material of the tourism system, which gives meaning to the rest of the components is, at the same time, the hardest to define. What seems to be beyond all doubt is that tourism resources configure the mainstay of tourism because they constitute the main factor in motivating demand (Gunn, 1994a; Tudela, 1999), and justify the development of basic facilities and services so that the interaction between resource and visitor takes place (Fyall, Leask, & Garrod, 2001). Hence, it is the first element to assess in the planning process, an evaluation which has to consider not only its physical nature but also its symbolic one, and that will define future tourism policies in the territory. As Mitchel (1979) already pointed out, working on the tourism resource concept and its phenomena and stakeholders imply improving the knowledge on how social assessments and cultural variables alike can explain its use, exploitation and transformation according to needs, desires and human capacities.

In view of these circumstances, identifying the attractiveness of a resource (social assessments) only represents the first step. Adaptation to tourism purpose (use, exploitation and transformation) is placed, together with the previous one, as the two fundamental and unbreakable elements to properly define tourism resource.

