

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# FORMATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF TOURIST ATTRactions IN THE ARGENTINE NORTHWEST THROUGH TRAVEL GUIDES (1930-1960)

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is situated within the field of historical tourism studies in Argentina, addressing a geographical area that has received comparatively less attention in the Argentine national historiography. While classic tourist destinations such as Mar del Plata, the Atlantic coast, Córdoba, and Patagonia have been the subject of numerous studies, the process by which the Argentine Northwest was configured as a tourist region remains less explored.

This research aims to fill this gap, focusing on the specific strategies and mechanisms that contributed and consolidated the Argentine Northwest as a coherent tourist region between the 1930s and 1960s. To this end, this study adopts a conceptual framework that defines the “region” not as a pre-existing and static geographical entity, but as a “hypothesis to be demonstrated.” The study conceives of the region as a “flexible scaffold”—a dynamic spatial construct shaped by the social, economic, and cultural vicissitudes of the production of tourist space. This perspective enables an analysis of the region’s formation as a historical process in constant configuration, marked by continuities and transformations.

The central object of analysis for unravelling this process is the travel guide, which is considered not as a neutral source of information but as a powerful cultural artefact.

Travel guides are understood as devices that embody “expert knowledge,” legitimizing specific destinations and tourist practices. This article frames them within the concept of “apodemic literature”—that is, didactic texts with a performative function that instruct the tourist on what to see, how to see it, and, fundamentally, how to interpret and feel it. These instruments contributed to the creation of standardized imaginaries of destinations, the consumption of which allowed tourists to accumulate a symbolic capital that operated as a factor of social distinction upon their return.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

The central objective of this article is to describe the historical configuration of the Argentine Northwest as a tourist region by examining travel guides from the period between 1930 and 1960.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The research employs a historical-cultural approach with a regional perspective, focusing its analysis on cultural artefacts (travel guides) to reconstruct and understand the formation of a tourist region. The empirical foundation of the study is an extensive collection of travel guides from the period, with a specific methodological focus on the publications of two institutions of great national influence: the *Automóvil Club Argentino* (ACA) and the publishing house *Editorial Peuser* (EP). The choice of these two entities is justified by their sustained production throughout the four decades under study, which allows for a diachronic analysis of changes and continuities, as well as by their enormous prestige and mass reach, which granted them significant influence over the travelling public.

The ACA documentary corpus includes five key editions that mark the evolution of its approach: *Guía de Viaje. Zona Noroeste* (1944), *Guía de Viaje de la Argentina. Zona Norte* (1954), *Guía de la Argentina tradicional y pintoresca* (1958), and two editions of the *Guía turística de la Argentina* (1964 and 1968). In the case of EP, whose name became synonymous with “guidebook” during the era, the analysis covers its annual production, which began in 1942, referencing multiple volumes throughout the period.

The analytical framework for interpreting these guides conceives of them as engines for the construction of “expert knowledge” and as instruments of modern mobility that fostered confidence in professional expertise within tourism. Their dynamic nature is acknowledged, with the understanding that their evolution both reflects and, in turn, produces changes in the perception of territories.

For the analysis of the concept of “region,” the methodology draws on humanist geography. It is noted that the ACA’s approach was strongly influenced by the French regional school of Paul Vidal de La Blache, through the work of prestigious Argentine geographers such as Federico Daus. This perspective defines a region as a synthesis of natural factors and human action, resulting in a territorial unit with its own “personality.” This conception led the ACA to delineate a “Northwest Zone” that transcended provincial political-administrative divisions, presenting it as a homogeneous and immutable entity defined by physical-human criteria.

## 4. RESULTS

The chronological analysis of the travel guides reveals an evolutionary process in the construction of tourist attractions in the Argentine Northwest.

*The 1930s:* The emergence of the first tourist guides and brochures in this decade is intrinsically linked to the development of the national road network by the National Highway Directorate and the growing culture of the automobile. Although these initial

publications lacked the systematic structure of later decades, they had already established a repertoire of attractions that would become the foundation of the regional imaginary. The foundational elements promoted were: natural landscapes (mountains, gorges, and valleys such as the Quebrada de Humahuaca); colonial architecture (churches, convents, and town halls that evoked the Hispanic past); economic activities (primarily sugar mills, presented in an idyllic manner that glorified their technification while omitting labor conditions); thermal baths (such as those at Rosario de la Frontera, promoted for their salutary properties); and the exaltation of “typical” characters and elements like the “arriero” (muleteer) or the “most vernacular tradition”.

*The 1940s:* The ACA and EP consolidated their positions as the primary producers of tourist knowledge, but with markedly different approaches. EP presented a “diffuse” idea of the region, organized around the provinces. Its guides emphasized the Northwest as an ideal destination for winter tourism, highlighting the “mildness of the climate” and its health benefits. Furthermore, they began to construct an image of the local population as repositories of a pristine authenticity, manifested in their cordiality and humility. For its part, the ACA imposed a more rigid and “scientific” regional definition based on the principles of humanist geography. Its “*Guía de Viaje. Zona Noroeste*” (1944) was highly selective: of 320 localities surveyed, it recommended visiting only 26%, thereby establishing a clear hierarchy of tourist value. The attractions prioritized in this stage were natural landscapes, churches, and traces of economic activity.

*The 1950s:* A notable “inflation of tourist objects” occurred, reflecting policies aimed at the democratization of well-being and the massification of tourism. The ACA’s 1954 guide, for example, recommended visiting 53% of the towns surveyed—more than double the proportion of the previous decade. The most significant change was the exaltation of folklore. Both publishers placed a new and strong emphasis on music, traditions, and both “pagan” and religious festivals, in alignment with the valorization of popular culture as a resource for collective identity during Peronism. The guides began to stage these practices as “authentic” experiences for tourist consumption. Concurrently, a new attraction emerged: modernization. The guides extolled Peronist public works, presenting paved, electrified, and orderly cities, as well as the technology of the sugar mills, in order to demystify the idea of a backward interior and project an image of progress. It was also in this decade that the ACA introduced the categorization of “monument” (historical, natural, and archaeological). This marked the first significant visibilization of the indigenous past, although it was framed as “archaeology”—a remote past disconnected from contemporary national identity.

*The 1960s:* The typologies of attractions crystallized and consolidated. The tourist identity of the Northwest became firmly defined by a triad: landscapes (with special emphasis on orographic formations), churches (symbols of colonial tradition and faith), and folklore. The figure of the gaucho gained central relevance, promoted as an archetype of the nation who embodied values of freedom and courage, transformed into a unanimously accepted and easily consumable cultural product. The treatment of the indigenous evolved toward its full incorporation as an exotic attraction. Having been rendered invisible in the 1930s and 1940s, it emerged from the 1950s onward as a spectacle for the urban tourist. During the 1960s, the guides framed it as a consolidated stereotype. Thus, the

indigenous was understood as an “absolute otherness,” whose cultural expressions (rituals, festivities) were offered as a “typical” and controlled form of consumption, denying any genealogy with the nation and reinforcing a vision of Argentineness that situated it on an external plane. This process reflects a broader ideological mechanism: the domestication of otherness, transforming a living culture into a safe and exotic product for the purpose of tourist consumption.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The article conclusively demonstrates that the configuration of the Argentine Northwest as a tourist region between 1930 and 1960 was a dynamic historical process in which travel guides acted as fundamental mediating agents. The ACA and EP established themselves as the leading dissemination enterprises, using the prestige of “expert knowledge” and scientific objectivity to produce, hierarchize, and disseminate a standardized tourist vision of the region. This process culminated in the crystallization of a regional tourist identity based on a recurring set of topics: landscapes, colonial-religious heritage, and folklore. These elements were presented in an essentialist manner, reinforcing the historical role assigned to the Northwest as the cradle of Argentine tradition and national identity.

The manner in which the indigenous were incorporated was crucial for delineating the boundaries of that same national identity, with sociocultural consequences that endure to this day. Indeed, the article allows for an understanding that the contemporary consumption of the “typical” tourist elements of the Argentine Northwest is the direct result of a cultural sedimentation whose origins lie in the period analyzed.