

## EDITOR'S NOTE

**Francisco Dias, editor-in-chief**  
**Sofia Eurico, co-editor-in-chief**  
**Paulo Alcobia, co-editor-in-chief**

The current issue of the *European Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Recreation* (EJTHR) is one more step of a very new editorial project that supports the Tourism Studies domain, and it aims to contribute to the consolidation of the so-called Tourism Science, as a specific domain of scientific scholarship.

The exponential growing of tourism education, particularly post-graduate degrees, is showing a very intensive vitality of this new scientific field. Following Salgado and Costa (2011), in a paper published in the current issue, “scientific progress and changing attitudes within science and society can help to explain the evolution of the social, scientific and educational importance of this field. On the one hand, the structure of its body of knowledge and, secondly, the methods of teaching and research gradually lead to their growing scientific maturation” (pages: XX).

This academic dynamism and the concomitant scientific “effervescence”, that shapes the scientific field of tourism, invite us to consider certain concerns and assumptions of the classical authors, especially these from the Anthropology and Sociology, putting once again the crucial question: now, in the current postmodern environment, does it still make sense to coordinate efforts aimed to get consensus on a desired “general theory of Tourism”?

As a first attempt to answer to this question, we took a glance to the interests of the academic community. For example, the list of most downloaded articles of the *Annals of Tourism Research* (Tribe and Xiao, 2010: 12) includes three papers on authenticity and two others on destination image. The remaining five papers of this list are about the following subjects: social impacts of tourism; sustainable tourism; tourist satisfaction and dissatisfaction; tourists decision-making and dark tourism. According to this data, the classic themes of authenticity and tourist image are in the top of popularity among the research community.

However, if we consider the list of more cited articles of the *Annals* (Tribe and Xiao, 2010: 11) in the same period, we find a wide dispersion of interests. The ten more cited articles are addressed to the following issues: efficiency in hotel sector; perceived impacts; ecotourism; tourist experience; destination image; sustainability; online information search; authenticity; tourism management; epistemology of tourism.

Interestingly, the destination branding concept, which is a favorite issue for marketing experts, is absent from these two lists. Because the tourism management organizations are applying this concept as an important tool for tourism promotion, we can ask why it is almost ignored by the tourism research community. According to Hankinson (2009), the main reason for such discrepancy is the existence of two parallel and independent traditions: the marketing research literature is focused on destination branding concept; the tourism research literature concerns predominantly the destination image concept. So, the insufficient integration of these two areas of expertise, with distinct focus and developing its own concepts, is creating competing conceptual tools for the same phenomenological subject.

The place branding experts tend to “hide” the concept of destination under the cover of geopolitical frames. They assimilate tourist destination to country or city, and they use more frequently the conceptual tools of “country brand” and “city brand”. Being defined by administrative or political criteria, a destination becomes a “top down concept”, created in the head of political administrations or marketing departments. In opposite direction, as a “bottom up concept”, a destination is primarily what is represented in the mind of real or potential tourists.

Indeed, from the point of view of tourism researchers, the tourist destination is more attached to the tourist resources and products existing in a given territory. These resources and products are considered as the basic elements of tourist destination concept, and this is why the tourism researchers usually employ carefully the geopolitical frameworks of country or city to describe tourist destinations, and this way they keep certain analytical autonomy between these two territorial realities. In fact, every destination includes a set of tourist products that don't necessary overlap (e.g., religious tourism, cultural tourism, golf, sun and sea, etc...), and that fit necessarily a given country or city. For example, if one asks to a sample of experts or consumers to inform about the most prestigious destinations for: (a) golf, (b) surfing, and (c) mountain ski; there should be a high likelihood that the answers for these three tourist products (golf, skiing, and surfing) will not coincide at all, and there is also a high likelihood that the evoked destination will not coincide with the geographical scales of country or of city.

This mere example reinforces our conviction that it's really necessary to coordinate efforts to get basic consensus in the tourism research community to develop integrative theories, creating this way a shared conceptual platform in the study of such complex issues like tourist destination. Such theories will allow harmonizing so many different scientific codes, from the more culture-oriented concepts of anthropologists and sociologists to the more business-oriented concepts of marketing experts and tourist managers.

The 1<sup>st</sup> EJTHR Conference on Destination Branding, Heritage and Authenticity (Santiago de Compostela, 21-22 June 2012), will be an appropriate forum to discuss the state-of-art of this issue, and a new challenge to reach the more holistic conceptions.

## REFERENCES

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