

# Tourism in the Consumer Society: Anthropologic Subsidies to the Static Subsystem Figuration

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**Abstract:** Tourism is one of the most emblematic aspects of the industrialized societies, acting as a multidimensional system equipped with diffused limits, as much as goods or a social phenomenon, being at the same time a theoretical and a methodological challenge to anthropology. Starting with this premise, the objective of the present work is to discuss an aspect that is not very much considered in the discussions about the process of choosing a touristic destination as well as the construction of the static subsystem image: the cultural dispositions of the emitter society that shape the image of the destination and deflagrate all the process of travelling and "making tourism". Thus, this work also tries to establish a critique and to offer an alternative to the hegemonic analyses regarding this subject which most of the time underestimate the cultural attributes of the emitter society, needing to get close to the symbolic dimension of the travel, the tourism and the act of figuring the destination.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Consumption, Touristic Destination Image

*La lecture de multiples ouvrages et écrits sur le tourisme révèle un profond décalage entre la prolixité des commentaires et l'indigence de la pensée: de fait, tout le monde écrit sur le tourisme et, ce faisant, se pique de le penser.*

*MIT, Équipe. Tourismes 1. Lieux Communs. Paris: Éditions Belin, 2002. P. 7.*

## Introduction

The purpose of this section is to delineate, from within the general scene of the consumption in the complex societies, some of the main core elements of tourism seen as a type of a particular imagetive production, part of a symbolically and economically bigger universe; and, specially, to discuss the relation between the choice of a touristic destination and the configuration of its image, considering an aspect that is frequently forgotten by the notorious interpretations about the subject: the making of a "package" of cultural attributes easily reproducible for the consumption of the image and the influence that the cultural agendas of the emitter society have on this replication process of the other's exotism.

## 2. The consumptions of simulacra in the turbo-capitalism

The massification of tourism and the “need” to travel have their origins coincidentally in the period of what some authors called the late capitalism, turbo-capitalism, postindustrialism or postmodernity, whose historical-ontological ballast is synthesized by Ferry as followed:

“From Tocqueville to Arendt and Heidegger, from Weber to Leo Strauss and Dumont, the deepest analyses concerning modernity say what means, *negatively*, the rising of the individualism, in terms of the erosion of the universe of traditions: the disappearance of the orders and the bodies of the Old Regime, the disenchantment of the world, the end of the theological-political, the passage from an organic community (*Gemeinschaft*) to a contractualist society (*Gesellschaft*), of the restricted world to an infinite universe, the obsolescence of the great cosmologies, of the objective and hierarchic visions of rights and politics, the oblivion of the Being in the advent of the technique...” (Ferry, 1994, 18 [*italicized by the author*]).

This *momentum* would be marked by new kinds of experiences in the esthetic field (Jameson, 1996, 1998 and 2006) and by more flexible and ephemeral patterns of sociability, of maintenance of identity relations and ways of consumption and, in macro-processual terms, by the dissolution of the great foundational and totalizing narratives – such as science, the State-Nations or the progress – in fragmented fictional discourses (Lyotard, 1993; Hall, 2001; Harris, 2004).

According to many authors, these changes would be developed in the core of the new ways of capitalist accumulation and in the new uses of space and time, and also of a substantial alteration of these when facing new technologies, mainly the ones related to transportation and the mass media (Harvey, 1994, 256).

One of the most important elements of this distinct phase of late capitalism would be the hypertrophy of the market, not only as an institution, but as an arena endowed with a great capacity of engulfing other aspects of the society, in a process that many authors call an increasing economicization of the “modern” institutions.

Along with the mercantilization of traditional institutions and cultural intermediaries (Lyotard, 1993; Sodré, 1994; Bourdieu, 1998) it becomes clear that the social life would not anymore be ruled by the production of goods, but by incessant cycles of signals consumption (buying, selling, appropriation, discard)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For a critique of the idea of banality of consumption, see Hilton, 2006.

Pessimistic and nihilistic traces are frequent in *Brave New World's* description of the postindustrial world, in general putting the subject-consumer as part of an amorphous mass, heterogeneous and viscous: the "society of the individuals" by Norbert Elias (1994).<sup>2</sup> The authors that refer to the age of consumption as a reverberation of the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1993; Harvey, 1994) tend to paint a very obscure picture which, according to Mike Featherstone (1995, 75), would be the expression of the centrality of a "nostalgic moan"<sup>3</sup>.

Beyond the intellectual sphere, this desire of returning to a past that was not lived (Ortiz, 1994), in a world increasingly estheticized and inflated by the consumption of images and simulacra (Mendes, 2007; Vásquez Rocca, 2007), will have important repercussions in the touristic arena.

According to a perspective from a sort of capitalism semiotics inaugurated by Baudrillard (1968), this signals or goods-signals would have their meaning fixated by relative positions in an auto-referenced system of signals.

And not only would they deslocate from their original function meaning – or from their *value of use*, as in the classic marxist theory – but they would be their own communicational mediator *par excellence* in this world superinvested by the image, the consumption, the advertisement and the media.

Finally, according to more pessimistic visions, we all would be confined in a kind of chamber of mirrors far beyond the real: a hyperreal world formed by simulacra (Mendes, 2007) and that, according to Vásquez Rocca,

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<sup>2</sup> Although, it must be considered that this vision of the consumer as a passive subject is not unique nor consensual. For a critique of this model, see, for example, Campbell, 2001; Slater, 2001 e Miller, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> This Nostalgia will evoke emergencies that are so unequal as the preservation of the socialist utopia or a certain religious renaissance (Featherstone, 1995, 75). For a critique of the concept of postmodernity and of some of the principal authors on the subject, specially Jameson, see Featherstone, 1989. For a greater debate about it, see Morley, 1998 and Jameson, 2006.

"desguises itself behind the profusion and the orgy of the images. Our world is publicity in its essence [...] The task of the modern occident was the mercantilization of the world, giving it away to the goods orientation, its presence in the cosmopolitan scene, its presence in images, its semiological organization [...] Even the banal estheticizes itself, culturalizes itself, museumizes itself. [...] The system works prior to the surplus value of the goods, much more than to the esthetic surplus value of the signal." (Vásquez Rocca, 2007, 55 and 58).

Status and life style independents of gain ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ Postmodern society without reference groups → a, b and c independents	From the second half of the Twentieth Century
Status and life style relatively depends on gain ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ Highly segmented market, personalization of consumption, customized and referenced products by the urban sub-cultures (prominence of "ethnic" or "tribal" goods in a forest of products massively offered) → a, b and c relatively independents	Beginning of the Twenty-first Century

Chart 1. Source: Roque Pinto.

It is necessary to question if the individualist model would apply to the emergent societies, specially Latin America and more specifically to the Brazilian context, considering its hyper-socialized nature of its character (Pais, 1996) and the great social inequality that permeates the country (Chauí, 2000), what makes the hierarchies and the prestige groups have great importance in the making of the social universe.

Regarding the Latin American context, there is no need for a rigorous ethnography to verify, for example, the impact of the *American Way of Life* image, idealized by the Hollywood movie industry and massively replicated since the end of the Second World War, also to verify the importance of the soap-operas<sup>5</sup>.

There is no sociological indicator that could show the decrease of the reference groups, even those mediated by a screen. Still less an indicator that shows the end of hierarchies. (Turner, 1989; Shils, 1992).

On the contrary, when it comes to face-to-face relations, with the inflation of new goods (Featherstone, 1995, 38) on one side, and an economic and social pressure that tends to reduce the traditional social distances on the other side, it is more and more noteworthy the importance of the phenotype or the positional possessions as social demarcators (Pinto, 2000 and 2005).

<sup>5</sup> To know how complex this phenomenon is, it is worthwhile indicating a sort "retro-colonizer" process from the Brazilian soap-operas broadcasted in Portugal: from the vocabulary to fashion, from attitude towards sexuality (chiefly feminine) to regularity of time, these television programs have been influencing the Portuguese urban habitus since the decade of 1970. In this context it would be interesting to say how much the Brazilian soap-opera *Gabriela, Cravo e Canela* (*Gabriela Clove and Cinnamon*) represented, in 1977, the emblem of the political opening of the post-Salazar era in Portugal (Cunha, 2003).



In other words, it is proper to question if (1) the “postmodern” methodological model, marked by the social disordering and by a radical individualism, would have an empirical ballast to support its theoretical and descriptive premises and, in case this model resists this first question, if (2) it could be extensive to other social contexts, thinking here specially of the developing societies of Latin America.

Anyway, an important element of contemporaneity, highlighted by many authors of several theoretical affiliations, refers to the fact that, paradoxically, at the moment in which modernity seemed to be at last accomplishing its rationalizer program (Weber, 1969 and 1994), that is when it appears something believed to be already vanished (Carretero Pasín, 2006, 13): a certain re-fascination of the world, now by other forms of sociability and new technological ballasts. An extreme example of this process is presented by Marc Augé in an essay about Eurodisney:

“ In Disneyland what is offered as spectacle is the spectacle itself: the cenography reproduces what was already decoration and fiction, namely, the house of Pinocchio and the space ship of *War of Galaxies*. Not only we enter the screen, with an inverse movement of that presented in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, but we also find another screen behind the screen. Thus, a visit to Disneyland turns out to be tourism squared, the quintessence of tourism: whatever we have just visited it does not exist. There we can have the experience of pure freedom, without object, without reason, without anything that might be under dispute. In that place we don't reencounter neither the United States nor our childhood; we only find the absolute gratuity of a game of images in which everyone who is around, and that we are never going to see again, can insert whatever he or she wants. Disneyland is today's world, with its worst and its best things: the emptiness and the experience of freedom” (Augé, 1998, 31-2).

Regarding this matter, Colin Campbell has an exciting proposal, inverting the scheme that relates consumption with romanticism, that is, the use of extraquotidian imagetic elements, that inspire greatness or passion, as a sort of password to instigate the desire to consume.

According to Campbell, the link between consumism and romanticism does not refrain from the evocation by the first one for the second one via propaganda – what is approximately the hegemonic thinking regarding the subject. It is very much the contrary, because his hypothesis is that the romantic ingredient would have a much more important role and would be wrapped up in the social tissue in such a way that it would become fundamental in the development of modern consumism, inclusively being crucial for the “consumption revolution” which

preceded the Industrial Revolution.

With the assumption of this perspective, the utilitarian paradigm of the growing rationalization of the world is relativized in behalf of an hedonist model of human conduct, in which the “goal” would be the pleasure itself, and not the satisfaction of it (Campbell, 2001). Or, according to Campbell’s own words:

“The modern hedonism is signed by a concern with the ‘pleasure’, idealized as a potential quality of every experience [and not with the ‘pleasures’ as events/discreet units]. But, in order to extract it from life, the individual has to substitute true excitement for an illusive one and, through the criation and manipulation of illusions, he constructs its own pleasant enviroment. This illusory kind of hedonism, autonomous and modern, manifests itself usually as a disposition to daydream and to fantasize [...] Thus, it is supposed that not only the modern consumption must be understood by these terms, but also the romantic love and the modern phenomenon of the fashion dynamics must be as well faced as dependent of an autonomous and auto-illusory hedonism” (Op. Cit, 284-5).

According to this, it is possible to find out in the equation consumption-image, fixated by a sort of hedonist semantics with a romantic basis, the key to the comprehension of the phenomena characterized as eminently contemporary such as fashion and consumism. And, mainly, tourism, because more than any other product wrapped up in the capitalist voracity, it is dependent on the maipulation of the extraordinary and the daydream.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that regarding tourism it is not possible to buy previously what is mostly desired: the experience and the memories. In tourism the imaginary has its price, not only in terms of money (what the tourist really pays), but also by a sort of co-participation quota, of complicity, to make the “dream” or the “business” (it will depend on the perspective) come true.

As a consequence, the tourist-consumer is urged to play a leading role in the construction of the very product he or she is consuming, what is developed through the course of the reproduction and the adaptation, based on a spiral of expectation-demand-consume-reminescence-expectation. In the end there will be a virtualized project in all its process of construction and consumption. A symbiotic virtualization with its own society which it is wrapped up in.

### **3. The architects of Neverland: the choice of the touristic destination in the consumer society**

In a first approach of the touristic system it is possible to segment it, as a methodological strategy, in four very well determined fields: the **dynamic** aspect, concerning the dislocation of the tourist; the **static** aspect, that would be the

touristic destination itself; the **theological** aspect, concerning the motivations of the tourist; and the **consequential** aspect, concerning the impacts caused by the touristic activities (Santana Talavera, 1997, 2003 and 2007).

In the studies about tourism, the destination – or static subsystem – is presented as a privileged theme of investigation and it is where most of the analyses about it are concentrated. Not only because it is where the enjoyment of the “product” happens, representing the laboratory of the social scientist *par excellence*, but also because it is the referent of all the symbolism that conforms the *touristic destination* in the larger context of the society, that is, a physical space that is activated for the tourism through sensorial stimulation and imaginary manipulation<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the imbricated spiral of the touristic cycle does not start in the static subsystem, but in the emitter society: the resolution to travel deflagrates a series of decisions, such as the choice of the destination, the transportation, the time of the stay and the kind of accommodation (Mathieson and Wall, 1992, 31). And all this enchainment of reflexive actions begins with the capture of the touristic image by the potential traveller.

In fact, the perception of the potential tourist about the destination is a conditioning factor to the deflagration of the act of “making tourism” (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999, 875; Santana Talavera, 2007): according to Guthrie and Gale (1991, 555 *apud* Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002, 57), “images are more important than tangible resources, once the perceptions, more than the reality, are what motivates the consumers to act or not”.

According to Baloglu and McCleary (1999, 869), “the period when the formation of the initial image occurs, before the trip, is the most important phase in the selection process of the destination by the tourist”.

Among all the changings of the tourism in the last fifty years – technological and imagetically speaking – , nothing seems to be more volatile than the destination image. It is paradoxical that something so inconstant and fugacious is the principal element of fixity in the mind’s eye of the tourist and the potential travellers.

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<sup>6</sup> *Due to the fact that the touristic place can be – in spite of tourism itself – an imaginary projection of a “real” space lived in the quotidian concreteness by the local residents, the system can be changed fast, going easily from dynamic to static: that is the reason for the existence of touristic areas that are both emitters and receptors.*

Besides, the intangibility of the touristic service makes difficult a precise evaluation of the image, taking into account that this depends on elements present in a previous selection before the tourist's first visit (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002), and the classificatory systems developed in the very society from which the tourist come from.

An additional problem, in the perspective of the investigation, is that all the apparatus, mounted behind the curtains of the receptive society and based on politics, economy and on the marketing focused on the formation of the destination image, entails itself to other areas out of its control, such as the interests of the touristic agencies, the local and foreign investors and the air companies, besides, the geopolitical, environmental and macroeconomic variations.

Although most of the time the touristic scene is mistaken for the destination, the touristic system is not only that. Institutions, individuals and agencies act with more or less capacity of intervention in the system, not only in the receptor society but in the emitter society as well. And it is from the amount of the relations between these subjects that the webs of significants, referring to this or that destination, will emerge (see chart 2).

TOURISTIC SYSTEM		
	DIRECT PARTICIPANTS	INDIRECT PARTICIPANTS
Origin Societies	Travel Agents	Populational groups near the tourist (relatives, friends, neighbours, etc.)
	Entrepreneurs of the area	Entrepreneurs of other areas
		State
	Workers of the area	Non-Governmental groups
	Potential tourists	(conservacionists and other ones associated to the local development)
Destination	Population residing in the destination area (locals and foreigners with permanent residence)	Non-Governmental groups (conservacionists and other ones associated to the local development)
	Politicians and public administrators	Politicians and public administrators
	Workers of the area - foreigners	Commerce agents (destination providers)
	Foreign Entrepreneurs	State
	Workers of the area – locals	Nearby residents – offlimits of the touristic area
	Local Entrepreneurs	
	Tourists	

Chart 2. Based on Santana Talavera, 2007.

Burns (2002) identifies three primary factors of tourism: demand for travels, *brokers* (intermediates associated to the transportation system, tour operators, providers, etc.) and the touristic destinations. Each one of these factors is composed by a series of elements with complex characteristics that would escape a unidimensional definition.

For example, the air companies, that are one of the most important elements in the international tourism, including as a defining responsible for the choice of the travel due to their prices, have their own operational and strategic agendas at medium and long terms, and it, most of the time, does not coincide with the interests of the travel agents and hotelkeepers.

The same dilemma is present in all the chain of the touristic system: from Entrepreneurs to politicians, from the resident population to the tourists, every knot in the productive web of tourism sustentation is only partially linked to the system, keeping important connections with other operational structures (except the travel agencies and the labour force of the area).

And these “alien” inputs – variations in the monetary exchange, a new productive arrangement of an air company, election plans of a very influent politician, an ecological disaster, civil engeneering *lobby*, the appearance of a new informational technology, the appearance of the enology or the mountain tourism... – can affect the touristic system in an irreversible way, relegating a touristic area, once important, to the ostracism, or creating a sudden interest in a distant village that possibly, after the golden hordes, will never have its anterior social aspect back.

That is where the great instability of the touristic system comes from, as much as the difficulty to foresee its behavior in a long term. It is been necessary to adopt a multidisciplinary and transversal perspective in its studies (Santana Talavera, 1997, 2002 and 2007), conjugating several methods of investigation, mainly the qualitative tools of anthropological matrix (Barreto, 2003).

Inside the touristic cartography of imagined places, the *lost paradise* – a nice tropical piece of land bathed by a constant sun, surrounded by a sea of clear waters and adorned by happy and sensual people – has always occupied a privileged place in the imaginary of the industrial societies (Martín de la Rosa, 2003; Burns, 2002; Moreno Gil, Beerli Palacio and Martín Santana, 2004b; Dolnicar and Huybers, 2007).

It is the *ethos* of work before the promises of leisure, its opponent, as a complementary pole. The first, cold, formal and impersonal: the labour and the quotidian featured by the interpersonal asperity and by a tasteless routine. And the second, ardent, calm and voluptuous: the vacations, and the imaginary of sun, beach, sex and fun (Crick, 1992; Krippendorf, 2001).

In fact, the vision of the *lost paradise* (in its romanticized version) or the discovered paradise (in its imperialist and sexualized version) is constantly put

into action for the capture of potential tourists, because the modality of sun and beach is the mass tourism *par excellence*, being the main reason for the dislocation of about 763.000.000 people that travelled in 2004 (Prats, 2006, 73).

Nevertheless, from the decade of 1990 on the international tourism has been investing more and more in a careful assembly of customized images of the destinations (Mediano Serrano, 2002; Gallarza, Gil and Calderón, 2002; Beerli and Martin, 2004), adequating itself to a well defined target public, presenting more specific products indicated to emitter societies previously chosen by specialists (Pike, 2002; Lee, Lee and Lee, 2005; Ekinici and Hosany, 2006).

They are not cases of isolated actions just like the brazilian publicitary campaigns in the 1990's, made to the emissive argentine tourism<sup>7</sup>; or the Canary Island, with a merchandizing treatment that is strongly directed to the british and the german markets. Or even of Turkey's, which has increased its international receptiveness in more than 50% between the years of 2000 and 2005, focusing the western european public, emphasizing its history and specially the two empires that constituted it (the bizantine and the otoman), selling itself as a mosaic that would mix east and west.

This is the way the touristic places (and their respective images) segment themselves more and more for the two types of potential tourists, that is, of the expectations regarding the ways of experience that their visitors search for, what is directly connected with preconceptions; and the stereotypes formed about the destinations from the society the tourists come from (Simmonica, 2001; López Lara, 2005).

The most disseminated idea of Brazil outside the country, represented by elements such as beach, sun, feijoada, carnival, caipirinha and, most of all, "beautiful, explosive and accessible women"<sup>8</sup>, is related with a profile of a tourist that is

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<sup>7</sup> *It is worth noting that in the 1990's, due to a low and favourable rate exchange to Argentina (with the argentine peso equivalent to the american dollar) Brazil experienced the arrival of great tourist hordes from that country, including towards the northeast region – until today the international target public of Bahia, for example, are mostly from Argentina (Bahiatursa, 2000). Nowadays, with the rate exchange favourable to Brazil, what is seen is the opposite. the contrary flow, mainly towards Buenos Aires.*

<sup>8</sup> *That is the way a german tourist referred to his idea of Brazil in a bar in the south of Tenerife, in march of 2006. Actually his image corresponds to a stereotype (that reinforces the sexual appeal and logically the prostitution, besides the reinforcement of criminal practices as much as the children sexual tourism) one thing that the Ministry of Tourism in Brazil has tried to change, although there is no news regarding its success.*

clearly defined as male, single, with insignificant gains for his societies and who is not interested in the baroque architecture of Brazil or in visiting the museums of art.

Since the decade of 1970, thanks to the pioneer work of Hunt, "Image: a factor in tourism", the destination image formation (*Tourism Destination Image* or TDI) is been one of the most seriously investigated objects in the field of tourism: Gallarza, Saura and García (2002) say that until 1999, 65 articles about the subject had been published in important international magazines, and Pike (2002) counts 142 works between 1973 e 2000.

The many investigators that work with TDI are unanimous in affirmating that the destination image formation, besides the fact that it is defined from tangible and intangible elements (Santana Talavera, 1997 and 2007; Gandara, Bernier and Mielke, 2004), is necessarily multiple, relative and dynamic (Moreno Gil, Beerli Palacio and Martín Santana, 2004a and 2004b; López Bonilla and López Bonilla, 2007).

It is constituted by different sources such as television, internet, the official propaganda and the mouth-to-mouth "marketing", and its process of construction includes not only "the nature of the destination" itself, but also its management policies (Beerli and Martin, 2004).

In this way, choosing a destination would involve three very well defined dimensions: a *rational* evaluation based on the perceived attributes, marked by cognitives signs associated to the level of knowledge and to the stereotypes of the place; an *emotional* interpretation founded on an affective perspective; and a *global* focalization with a general valorization of the destination<sup>9</sup> (Moreno Gil, Beerli Palacio and Martín Santana, 2004a).

Two distinct focalizations are identified regarding the process of the destination image formation. The static focalization, which investigates the relation between the image and the behavior of the tourist, including more demarcated focuses, such as the tourist's satisfaction or the selection of the destination (Pardellas de Blas and Padín Fabeiro, 2004a). And the dynamic focalization, aiming the structure and the formation of the image itself. For Baloglu and McCleary (1999, 870), the formation of the image would be derived from personal issues as much as from external ones with regard to the individual:

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<sup>9</sup> Many writers highlight the fact that the global image is influenced by elements present in the cognitive dimensions, such as "culture", social diffuseness, natural resources, general infrastructure, political and economical diffuseness, nocturnal leisure and shopping options.

- Personal issues (internal)
  - ↗ psychological → values, motivational, personality
  - ↳ social → age, education, marital status, others
  
- Stimulation factors (external) ⇔ previous experience
  - ↗ source of information → quantity e type
  - ↳ distribution

Some authors suggest the isolation of some variables that would determine the formation and the perception of the touristic image from the tourist's own point of view. such as variety (quantity) of sources of information, types of sources, age, level of education and social-psychological motivation to travel. These elements would be some of the key-factors when deciding what tourist package to buy.

Although, it must be considered that the image of the touristic product is not separated from the territory in which it is located, that is, the geographic landmark will always be a present element in the tourist's mind (potential or actual), and it will be mixed up with the marketing discourse and with the previous experiences to make him/her compose his/her image of the destination<sup>10</sup>. Even so, although many destinations can offer similar services, in general they present distinct images and marks. (Gallarza, Saura, and García, 2002; López Bonilla and López Bonilla, 2007).

According to this way, the image of the touristic destination would gather, in the tourist's point of view, the functional and the psychological attributes of the place and its image-identity as a physical-environmental correspondent (Valdés, 1997). It is in this context that is possible to think about the destination as a territorial macro-product (Borja Solé, Casanovas Pla and Bosch Camprubí, 2002), that is, a territorial entity perceived as a unity where it is possible to find out smaller and distinct destinations.

One example of this can be verified in the city of Ilhéus, in the south of Bahia, Brazil, where during the summer the tourists stay in hotels, bed and breakfasts or rented houses in Ilhéus due to its lower prices comparing to other cities in the surroundings, but in general they prefer to explore the vast littoral of the region, visiting places like Olivença, Canavieira and mainly Itacaré – and they choose Ilhéus exactly to have these choices at hand (Pinto, 2007).

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<sup>10</sup> However "personal", this image will always be linked to a certain consensus with his/her travel mates or whoever has been to the destination. So, it is important not to forget that even this psychological guided perspective is also a result of a collective process.



Once at the destination, the tourist will confront the image previously designed in his/her mind with what is being experienced. Some academic works indicate that the tourist's satisfaction is directly related to the proximity between the previous image and the experienced reality of the destination (Chon, 1990, 1991 e 1992b).

Thus, the management of the touristic destination must consider not only the territory demarcation as a distinctive mark, highlighting it as a unique place that conjugates determined attributes found only there, but also make this image correspond to what the tourist hopes to meet there.

According to López Bonilla (2007), the touristic product is made of generic products, that is, natural and artificial attractions; the expected product, the basic touristic assets and services, that is, its material infrastructure; and the improved project, that would be the additional "advantages", like the hospitality and the quality-price relation.

There is a scale of offerings going from the "native experience", based on a simulacro of authenticity sharing the quotidian of the autochthonus in the touristic package (Maoz, 2006), to the "enviromental bubble" (Crick, 1992; Urbain, 1993), with a minimum contact of the tourist with the "real" world, having the *resort* accomodations as an example.

In a general way, the investigators of TDI tend to use the "seven phases theory" (or the Gunn model) to describe the circuit through which is formed the destination image (Chon, 1990 e 1991; Gandara, Bernier and Mielke, 2004; Traverso Cortés, 2004):

1. Accumulation of mental images about vacation experiences → Original image
- ↓
2. Modification of these images by new ones → Induced image
- ↓
3. Decision to go on vacation
- ↓
4. Travel to the destination
- ↓
5. Participation in the destination → Modified image
- ↓
6. Travel back
- ↓
7. New accumulation of images based on the experiences

This scheme, as practically all the literature on TDI – whose investigators are mostly from areas like marketing, administration or economy –, is centered in the tourist who is characterized as a consumer, literally, a *Homo Economicus*, a rational and pragmatic individual that maximizes his/her benefits and minimizes his/her harms – or, as suggested by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, a pleasure maximizer and a pain minimizer (Balbachevsky, 1993, 197).

In this perspective, which conforms with the ballast of the classic economy, the society would be the aggregation of autoconcentrated and independent consciences, with each and every individual looking for the accomplishment of his/her pleasures and impulses through endless utilitarian calculations.

This model has two main problems, situated in different and distinct levels: in first place, it underestimates the value of the social embarrassment and the cultural dispositions defined by the origin society of this individual-tourist-consumer. That is, the rational-consumist calculation happens in a bigger arena, where the social integrity of each individual is in dispute, in a world in which not everything can be bought (Douglas and Isherwood, 2004). Besides, inside an economy of *status*, the consumption shares the space with things that are not completely monetized, such as reputation, personal image, career, family, etc (Shils, 1992).

In second place, the hegemonic model of TDI practically does not consider the importance of other images of the touristic destination, which are conformed by several other factors in the touristic system, chiefly in the conception, formation and transmission process of the touristic image, and that also will contribute to form the destination imaginary.

Although it is recognized the great progress of the literature on the touristic image formation, from the point of view of the anthropology it is important to speak about what seems to be a mistake that grounds all the discussion about the subject: the omnipresence of a psychologizing *bias*, that not only underdimensions the importance of cultural attributes of the emitter society but also prints a hyposocialized vision of the touristic image formation, lacking the symbolic dimension of the trip, the tourism and the figure of the destination – what is necessarily a collective “work” (beyond the “emotional” singularity of the individual-tourist-consumer).

In fact, most of the studies about the production and reproduction of images of the touristic destinations consider the aspects of the rational choice and the emotional interpretation, starting from highly individualist and economicist

premises.

These interpretations minimize the importance of the cultural background of the tourist, what is, by the way, the key-element to fixate the symbolism of the place where he or she intends to go, and whose reference will always be his or her origin society, according to its greater or smaller cultural distance with regard to the destination.

In other words, all the construction process of the destination's *identity* it is put aside, from the emitter society's point of view as well as from the receptor society's. It is not considered that both elaborate stereotypes and preconceptions by contrast, from each cultural agenda – having in mind, logically, all the social dynamics which involves this trade, that is, the larger informational and communicational flows, just like the modisms, with a greater or smaller visibility through media or else as they see themselves and the others in a global economic hierarchy<sup>11</sup>.

In this way, each society gives to the area a symbolic unicity while territory, and this will define the relations between “us” and “them”, most of the times gathering distinctive traces opposed to the tourist, but also regarding other destinations, mainly those that offer similar products.

Thus, consolidating the previous contributions, nevertheless highlighting the deficiencies already indicated, an alternative model of the formation of the touristic destination image that contemplates a global image can be established, thinking in terms of a processual systemic focalization. And that, at the same time, can distinguish not only the conception, design and activation processes which form the image built for sale, as well as the processes of perception and introjection of the image. (see Chart 3).

According to Santana Talavera (2007), “it is a matter of opening the schemes and models of investigation to a double slope of retrofed and interconnected processes that methodologically permit a study by stages, with valid indicators in each one of them.”

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<sup>11</sup> *Two examples would be emblematic: one of them, already indicated, is the current inversion of the touristic flow involving Brazil and Argentina: with the end of the parity regarding the Argentine peso with the American dollar and the increasing value of the Brazilian money, Argentina went, in less than ten years, from an emitter society to a receptor one in the South American tourist circuit. A second example would be the current forged image by Portugal (of a urban, modern and current world), that is clearly “directed” to the European scenario, what many authors indicate as a strong influence of the Brazilian television which has a great presence in Portugal since the decade of 1970 (Cunha, 2004).*

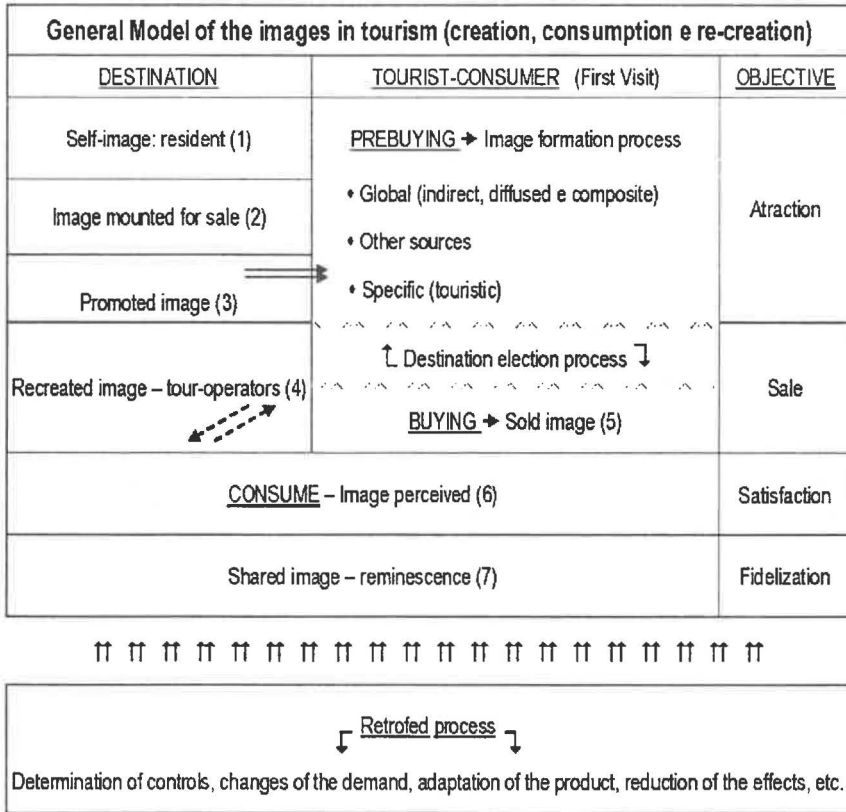


Chart 3. Based on Santana Talavera, 2007.

This model would be unfolded in seven distinct subprocesses, interrelated in its analysis and in its operationalization, whose partial results would form images referred not only to the perspective of those who elaborate them but as much as from the point of the process where they are created (and/or recreated).

Its advantage is to incorporate to the phases of creation, consumption and recreation of touristic image actors and points of view most of the times not considered in the TDI, such as those who elaborate the resident self-image or the several types of brokers (tour operators, marketing professionals, press...). It also correlates the several phases of the process with multiple views of the *place*, situating simultaneously the various agents involved in the system and not only the view of the tourist.

Herewith, when the contrasting images and even when the conflictive

ones are situated, it is possible to have a more realistic perspective of the touristic image formation. A less homogeneous and hyposocialized panel, what brings it near to a model which is more suitable for the poliphony proper to the agitation of the social life.

## **Conclusion**

Usually tourism – as positional consumption – is presented as a peculiar subsystem inside a system of greater classificatory schemes, economically and symbolically at the same time. And, like any goods in the consumer society, it is fragmented for the representation of prestige and status replicating a scale of travel costs, that is, the more expensive the travel is, the more it has to seem pretigious.

And the key element that makes visible the hierarchy of status in tourism is the image of the destination, because it deals directly with something so fugacious (and profitable) such as the production and the reproduction of images whose final objective is the enjoyment of the experiences (touristic) – or the “mental states”, as said by marketing professionals.

In the context of this esthetics marked by the saturation of the image and by the discardable consumption (Saavedra, 2007), tourism would reflect a very relevant dimension and maybe it could be elected the “product” of the contemporaneity *par excellence*.

Although it has to be considered the reduced capacity of previsibility of the touristic system in a long run and the enormous diversity of its manifstations, we must have in mind that (1) it emerges from inside the capitalism in a defined space-time, for specific social and economical factors; that (2) the tourism is abstractly based on sociological and economical universal rules, that is, it is regulated by rules and *mores* (for all the subjects involved) and also by laws of market (offer, demand and regulation).

The maintenance of this perspective, and specially the comprehension of the touristic image formation – representing at the same time the way and the message of tourism – is vital to understand the touristic system and the dimension of its tentacles, in the emitter society as much as in the receptor society. And, mainly, in many “other” places that cannot be fixated geographically, like the imaginary of the tourists or the residents of the touristic destinations.

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