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Vincent Andreu-Boussut, Elodie Salin

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Tourism in the Americas: Territories, Experiences and New Issues?

Vincent Andreu-Boussut and Elodie Salin

- 1 Although the American continent holds only third rank in world tourist destinations, after Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, tourism in the Americas is nevertheless an important phenomenon, with 210.9 million international arrivals for 2017, representing 16% of world tourist arrivals (UNWTO, 2018). More importantly still, a number of American countries, such as the US¹ and Canada, boast highly developed home tourism. This home market is in fact preponderant for some of the more developed and rapidly growing countries like Brazil. Overall, tourist movement has a powerful structural influence on economies, societies and territories throughout the Americas. However, on the scale of the entire continent, the tourist development of areas is, for geo-historical, cultural, economic and political reasons, a patchy, unequal process. The majority of tourist arrivals is concentrated in North America, with 137 million arrivals for 2017, whereas, for the same period, there were only 36.7 million in South America, 26 million in the Caribbean and 11.2 million in Central America. In this geographical imbalance, the US emerges as uncontested leader both for home and international tourism, figuring regularly as the third most visited country in the world, as in 2017, with 76.9 million international visitors (UNWTO, 2018), way ahead of Mexico (39.3 million) and Canada (28.8 million). The most frequented destinations elsewhere on the continent straggle way behind, with barely more than 6 million international arrivals for Argentina, Brazil, Chile and the Dominican Republic combined. This state of affairs can be attributed in part to the long-standing development of tourism in the US and Canada, where it began in the 1850s, though in Argentina it dates back to the 1880s, but basically it reflects the disparities between countries in levels of economic development and reproduces the habitually observed economic and socio-political North-over-South hegemony. The cumulative effects of tourism are well-known: the richest countries get the most tourists and gain most from tourism's knock-on effects. Thus, the US alone garners the highest

tourist revenues in the world, with 1035.7 billion dollars spent in 2017 by both international² and home tourists (US Travel Association, 2018).

- 2 Nevertheless, because Central and South American destinations have been gaining ground for the last twenty years, this geographical scene has been shifting and the disparity between areas lessening. Since 1995, the number of international visitors has grown by 330% for Central America and by 230% for South America, whereas growth was 86% and 70% for the Caribbean and North America respectively (UNTWO, 2018).
- 3 Since the 1970s, research on tourism in social science disciplines (geography, history, anthropology...) has given ample consideration to American areas, thereby helping to widen the field of “tourism studies”. North American approaches tended over a considerable period to traduce the diverse dynamics of touristic areas rather than to contribute to theory on the development of tourism (Mitchell L., 1984). Much research continues to deal with topics such as the development of tourism in protected areas, the diverse forms of rural tourism seen in relation to questions of identity and land use, or urban development resulting from large scale tourist infrastructures. As time went by, scientific literature started to be of use in the management and monitoring of tourist areas by producing knowledge and analytic tools that could inform public decision-making, particularly with regard to urban spaces and national parks. More broadly, much work has been done on the history of tourism as a result of the pioneering role played by the US in creating specific spatial models (Andreu-Boussut V., 2012), widely disseminated by virtue of the mass tourist culture (Mackintosh W., 2018). More recently both anglophone and hispanophone research have moved towards a political vision of the consequences of globalized tourism specifically in Latin America. Ethnologists and geographers in particular have highlighted the perverse effects of tourism assimilated to an extension of colonialism (Nash D., 1989; McCannell D., 1976) or tourism seen as a post-colonial reality (Hall M. and H. Tucker, 2004; Martinez Mauri M., 2018). This critical denunciation of tourism has today shifted towards an analysis of dependence focusing on North/South and class inequality in the context of globalization (Marie Dit Chirof C., 2018; De Cássia Ariza da Cruz, 2018). However, in the wake of the United Nations conferences on sustainable development (Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit, 1992, the UN Millennium Development Summit, 2000), research has tended to relate to the public management of territories, social movements and community or solidarity tourism. In Brazil and elsewhere in Latin America tourism studies look regularly at the articulation between environment, protected areas and social inclusion (Irving M., 2015).

Tourism as an Area changer. From Old Destinations consolidated to New Tourist Fronts opening

- 4 Tourism is first and foremost a powerful factor in the transformation of its territories. Throughout the American continent, it is the reason behind historical and contemporary creations of tailor-made facilities, a fact which accounts for the differentiation and diversification of a whole typology of tourist areas. Three dimensions of such processes need particular attention: the conditions surrounding the tourist development of given areas, the long-term processes of developing tourism and the territorial consequences of that development.

- 5 Discerning the reasons behind the tourist development of areas is a question of analyzing and deconstructing what certain French geographers have called *le moment de lieu*, the time-place factor (Equipe MIT, 2005). When new places emerge on the tourism planisphere, the explanation habitually brings into play evolutions in cultural representations, inventions and successes in tourist practice and increases in purchasing power. **Hervé Théry** here demonstrates the role played in Brazil by the growth of the middle class under the Lula government in the formation of a powerful tourist trade in which home tourism is preponderant. The consolidation of two major destinations, the Nordeste and the Sao Paulo region, derives from the proximity of tourist basins with a population of increasing means and from the construction of a social “desire” for vacationing. More rarely invoked, climate change is also driving the emergence of new destinations where new accessibility is opening up pioneer tourist fronts. **Alain Grenier** describes how global warming and the melting of Arctic ice in Canada have led to the development of polar cruises where rich tourists reactivate dreams of unreachable frontiers. This new adventure tourism throws up a paradox: on the one hand, new world shipping routes upend world geopolitics, on the other, the economic opening of Inuit territory increases the need for the patrimonial protection of the Inuit population and for their participation. Concerning the role of representations in tourist development, **Serge Jaumain** provides a study of the presentation of the history of Quebec in tourist guides produced since the 1960s. The tourist guide reveals the shifting representations of a territory and mirrors its social, cultural and political transformations. Anglophone and francophone guides of Quebec bear witness to the progressive revalorization of indigenous populations and to the increasing degree of politicization in the presentation of the nation’s history.
- 6 Long term tourist development may be studied from the point of view of geopolitics and economics because the principal tourist destinations change both as a result of competition in a highly globalized tourist market and of area models enacted. The famous model describing a life cycle of successive growth and slump of tourist destinations invented by geographer Richard W. Butler, the *Tourism Area Life Cycle* (TALC), owes much of its scientific reputation to the way in which it provided an understanding of many American areas, either national parks, urban areas or seaside resorts (Butler R., 2006a, 2006b). **Michel Desse, Jusline Rodné, Monique Gherardi** and **Simon Charrier** demonstrate how the tourist development of the Caribbean islands, based especially on cruises (Dehoorne O., 2007; Dehoorne O and N. Petit-Charles, 2011), can be accounted for by both the global economic context and the way in which local public and private actors participated in the development. Two opposed development models are involved: a closed, exclusive model, genealogically that of the resort community, and an inclusive model integrated into the life areas of local inhabitants.
- 7 Finally, a classic theme of tourism studies, particularly with regard to Latin America, is the effect of tourist development on areas and the societies within them (Wilson T., 2008). In this perspective, **Laura Henry** uses a detailed analysis of the tourist development of cocoa producing areas in the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica to point out how tourism has resulted in the valorization of that particular agricultural field. At a considerable remove from stock images of Dominican seaside resorts and Costa Rican nature tourism, this development of rural tourism has provided a showcase for the quality of local cocoa while at the same time contributing to the empowerment of women. More widely, where the social sciences regularly demonstrate the subversive action of tourism on societies,

they also highlight its transformative power, bringing territorial dynamics under scrutiny via the prism of sustainability.

Experimenting New Balances between Tourism, Local societies and the Environment: Questions of Sustainability

- 8 American areas figure regularly in scientific and technical literature on account of their experimentations in local sustainable tourist development, as evinced in the good practices guide recently published by the World Tourist Organization and the Organization of American States (UNTWO and OAS, 2018). Of course, questions of the best balance between tourist development and the protection of natural areas came to the fore early on the US. The conception and creation of the first national parks as early as the 1870s in the US, followed by Canada, went hand in hand with their opening to tourism. (Butler R. and S. Boyd, 2000; Depraz S. and S. Héritier, 2012). In the 1930s, the rapid growth in the number of city-dwelling visitors and campers in search of some reconnection to nature caused a considerable impact on wild, protected ecosystems. **Terence Young** looks the pioneering role played by Emilio P. Meinecke in setting up the first measures for the management of such ecological impacts and in drawing up a management model for visitor flows in wilderness settings (park zoning, spatial control of visitors, specific rules for laying out campsites) which was copiously exported beyond the US. *A Campground Policy*, published in 1932, is still a reference for laying out national park campsites accessible to motor vehicles according to a design Meinecke drew up in order to curtail ecological damage by campers while consolidating their experience of the wild. Since that time, many protected areas in the US have become top tourist attractions in which the balance between the protection of natural spaces and their continued or increasing frequentation is a constant and primary preoccupation. The choice of the most suitable management methods is often a matter for local governance. As **Vincent Andreu-Boussut**, **Caroline Rufin-Soler** and **Céline Chadenas** show, the enactment of such local governance in the case of the Guadeloupe National Park, comes up against dissension on the part of local socio-economic actors as to how open to tourists and how intensive use of the park should be, despite a relatively shared consciousness of heritage value. Whereas protected areas on land can now put tested tourist management tools to work, marine areas constitute a new field in which sustainable tourism and tourist use management (zoning, good practice charters) are newcomers on the scene.
- 9 Apart from protected areas as privileged objects of experimentation, the mass development of seaside resorts in Mexico and the Caribbean in the 1970s (Weaver D., 1990; HiernauxD., 2007; Dehoorne O. et al., 2010) was very soon criticized for the environmental damage done and for the meagre economic benefits accruing to local populations (Weaver D., 2001; Hiernaux-Nicolas D., 2008). In such contexts, alternative tourist practices tend to emerge (Weaver D., 2001) and indeed it fell to a Mexican architect, Héctor Ceballos-Lascurain, to provide, in 1983, the first definition of ecotourism (Ballantyne R. and J. Packer, 2013). The ecotourism model, the economic produce of which is used to finance natural area protection projects conducted by local communities, met with considerable success (Ceballos-Lascurain H., 1987) in the Caribbean (Douglas J., 1992; Weaver D., 1993) and in Latin America. Eventually, all over the American continent, local

agencies carried out experiments in tourist development and demonstrated that the tourist economy is not exclusively in the clutches of large national or international groups. **Sylvain Salméro**, **Gilles Caire** and **Christian Gagnon** describe how socio-economic actors (native American communities, small firms...) in areas of Quebec subject to demographic and economic difficulty have mobilized to form solidary cooperatives in which multipartite governance is the central tourist management principle and where the redistribution of economic benefits fuels local employment dynamics. However, the vitality of this cooperative tourism in Quebec should not mask the difficulty it encounters in terms of building an economic impact capable of halting the process of regional decline.

- 10 Climate change, although it now threatens the lasting existence of certain tourist areas, also presents a horizon of opportunity while imposing a need for experimental and innovative responses. **Vincent Andreu-Boussut**, **Caroline Rufin-Soler** and **Céline Chadenas** explain how in Guadeloupe, the expected disappearance of the Grand Cul-de-Sac Marin islets has forced the Nature reserve to embark on a joint reflection with other economic actors as to future tourism use. **Matthew McCourt** and **Gabriel Perkins** relate an example of how in the US, where climate change has threatened winter tourism, it has also created a wonderful opportunity to bring civil society together around a “skiable village” project with a lasting territorial effect. At Bethel, Maine, a group of volunteers took charge of the organization of a Nordic ski race to prevent its cancellation because of climate change. They named it “Protect our Winters” and set out to mitigate climate change by reducing the amount of automobile transportation necessary for participants in the event. Certainly, the level of avoided CO₂ emissions was low relatively to the sum total of emissions by participants travelling to the race, but the benefits of the initiative and the volunteer labor involved were considerable for the area, in terms of both local development as a result of spending by visitors and of an acknowledgment of local society’s ability to construct a shared tourist development project of relevance to the question of global environmental impacts.

The Importance of Community in Tourist Development

- 11 Community tourism is considered as driving social and economic development but in fact corresponds to thinking that took hold at the end of the 1990s often referred to as “pro-poor tourism” (Figuroa Pinedo J. *et al.*, 2014). Promoting as it does accessibility, opportunities and jobs in remoter, disadvantaged areas, community tourism can also trigger a new awareness in favor of cultural diversity and, subsequently, of a valorization of natural, cultural or immaterial heritage. The autochthonous population of Yucatán shares in the development of their community by restoring natural heritage and taking part in the enactment of a national alternative tourism project in native areas. Analyzing a community tourism initiative, **Samuel Jouault** details the emergence of pioneer sites offering alternative tourist practices in a region heavily marked by mass tourism (the Maya Riviera). The tourist development of the Maya hinterland, with the example of a Yokdzonot village, illustrates the transformation and inversion of spatial and social hierarchies. The *cenote* (a water-filled open-air sink-hole) was previously seen as a marginal place, sometimes used as an open-air garbage dump, but has now been transformed into a site of central importance, offering diving facilities and stewarded in community fashion.

- 12 Despite the number of encouraging examples, there has been criticism of pro-poor tourism (Harrison D., 2008) on the grounds of its inability to reduce poverty or to solve social and environmental problems in local communities. The example of the indigenous Guna people in Panama shows that despite being self-managed, indigenous tourism is not necessarily sustainable. The interview with Iniquipili Chiari carried out by **Johanna Durget** and **Elodie Salin** shows us a lukewarm version of community tourism in the coastal district of Guna Yala. The tourist model, managed exclusively by the Gunas, offers seaside resort attractions situated on the numerous islets of the archipelago. At a far remove from ecotourism, the strongly hierarchical structure of the community management seems rather to promote a non-sustainable, highly profitable approach to tourism which gives rise to social and environmental conflict both within Guna society and with the Panama government.
- 13 How, then, may ecotourism serve as an opportunity for indigenous populations and a development choice for a tourist destination? **Bastien Beaufort** describes the Vinte Quilos ecotourism project run by the Sateré-Mawé people in the Amazonian jungle of Brazil figuring guarana as an agricultural and heritage resource, organized around the concept of ethno-development. This opportunity for community tourist development sprung from a fair trade project set up in 1994. Though results are still tentative, the perspective of a partial and as yet timid tourist development of Brazilian Amazonia does seem to suggest the possible emergence of a pioneer tourist front. With relation to the appearance of new destinations, **Alain Grenier** specifically raises the problem of how far local populations actually participate since, as far as the Canadian Arctic is concerned, touristification in Inuit territories is going ahead largely without any involvement of the local communities.

Tourist Development and Heritage Properties: a Co-construction?

- 14 Tourism lies at the heart of concerns to do with the preservation and development of heritage objects, either as a validation of development strategies arising from the quality-label it confers or as something to be managed and controlled (Bourdeau L., M. Gravari-Barbas *et al.*, 2012, Gravari-Barbas M., S. Jacquot, 2014). The desire for international recognition, together with the long task of drawing up applications for UNESCO heritage status, leads to local/global dialogue and shunts areas in the process of patrimonialization into the globalized arena of tourism.
- 15 For the World Heritage Convention, the concept of Outstanding Universal Value guarantees unity throughout listed properties, while at the same time emphasizing the diversity of sites and their presentation, and precipitating a renewal of approach by virtue of the introduction of new categories such as that of cultural landscapes in 1992. **Elodie Salin** provides a comparative analysis of three UNESCO listed cultural landscapes by looking at the arguments used to explain their Outstanding Universal Value. All three, coffee in Colombia, the agave (tequila plant) in Mexico and the Quebrada de Humahuaca in Argentina, sent dossiers that attempted to construct a heritage narrative aimed at tourist development. Images and language, sometimes exterior in nature and/or conveyed by specific area actors, were highlighted in such a way as to show the emergence of an identity, or even a strong area brand, with an aestheticization of

landscapes, even at the price of constructing an artificial image conforming to the idea visitors already had of the place. Such stories bring about a shift in the significance of the property by virtue of the transition from local to global (Djament-Tran G., E. Fagnoni, S. Jacquot, 2012).

- 16 Heritage fabrication as a political, social and cultural construct occurs in a context of globalization in which the expectations of local communities may well find themselves in conflict with those of decision makers. Disagreements to do with management and with the immaterial and symbolic factors involved in appropriation give rise to questions of heritage and tourist governance. A heritage property can be integrated into tourism policy as a distinguishing advantage, reinforcing the attractiveness of an area. For **Elsa Broclair**, **Linda Boukhris**, **Sébastien Jacquot** and **Elodie Salin** the international appeal of the tango and its extensive practice in Buenos Aires feed both a fertile image nexus and an area marketing process which confirm a reinstatement of the tango in its original home ground. The demonstrative instrumentalization of the tango, which was declared an immaterial cultural heritage by the Buenos Aires authorities in 2009, went hand in hand with scores of private initiatives setting up a fully-fledged tourist tango economy. However, there is a not insignificant degree of tension between a globalized immaterial heritage, fed to tourists in tango-shows and mega-happenings, and a more socially-based tango, seen by the *porteños* of the *tanguero* world as their local heritage. The idea of resistance to a hegemonic form of heritage construction correlative to area tourist development is also studied by **Sébastien Jacquot**, who looks at the city of Valparaiso through the prism of its controversial emergence as a cultural tourist destination. In order to restore the city's post-crisis image, the civic authorities have opted for heritage tourism underscored by the World Heritage status acquired by Valparaiso in 2003. The logics of protection and listing, together with grand urban development projects, have given rise to topographical, social and entrepreneurial change which has transformed the entire cityscape. The dissatisfaction expressed by inhabitants centers on the process of gentrification, the eviction of local residents, together with the excessive speculation and tourist development on the now heritage-status *cerros*, which amounts to a confiscation and reassignment of the UNESCO labelled districts. Tourist development expanding also outside the most emblematic areas produces an alternative, tourist-cum-heritage city geography.

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NOTES

1. The US recorded 2.25 billion individual tourist stays (person-visits) in 2017 (US Travel Association, 2018).
2. From international tourism alone, the US takes an 18% share of the world tourism market.

AUTHORS

VINCENT ANDREU-BOUSSUT

Maître de conférences en géographie. UMR ESO 6590 CNRS, Le Mans Université. vincent.andreu-boussut@univ-lemans.fr

ELODIE SALIN

Maîtresse de Conférences en géographie, Le Mans Université, Laboratoire Espaces et Sociétés (UMR ESO 6590 CNRS), Chercheuse associée EIREST (Equipe interdisciplinaire de Recherche Sur le Tourisme) - Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne.