

Chapter 10

Studying Tourism During the COVID–19 Pandemic: Digital Platforms and Methodological Problems of Tourist–Centricity

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the recent decades, some scholars have alerted to the methodological limitations of tourist-centricity, which means the obsession with surveying tourists as the only source of vital information for applied research. Under some conditions, interviewees are of paramount importance to unpack some issues but to some extent, the obtained outcomes are not contradictory has been placed as the first point of entry in a hot debate among academicians. Interviews as well as other techniques have been widely used in the tourism field to understand travelers' behavior and preferences. The recent Covid-19 outbreak not only interrogated the methodological discrepancies of tourism research but also posed the following dilemma: how to study tourism in a world without tourists?

INTRODUCTION

Doubtless, the COVID-19 pandemic not only ground global trade but also the tourism industry to an unparalleled halt (Baber 2020; Korstanje 2021). The disposed of restrictive measures adopted by governments to contain the virus dissemination, which included the closure of borders and airspaces, lockdowns as well as strictest travel bans, harmed seriously the industry (Papas 2021; Barbosa et al 2021; Korstanje 2020). Although the literature in this direction abounds, the main goals of this book chapter are not oriented to discussing (or describing) the negative effects of COVID-19 on tourism, but also in the epistemology of tourism, which means the set of beliefs, notions, and ideas revolving around how to investigate tourism precisely in a world without tourists. As Wen (2021) et al put it, COVID-19 triggered a socio-economic crisis that transformed radically the ways of seeing tourists, tourism as well as

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travel behaviour. In the mid of this mayhem, scholars should rethink not only new innovative methods but in interdisciplinary methods to change the object of study in the constellations of tourism research. Although interdisciplinary research is engulfed in many disciplines, in tourism and hospitality, it faces no fewer barriers. Interdisciplinary research is strongly suggested to integrate produced knowledge in times of crisis or uncertainty as well as for finding innovative solutions to the challenges posed to the industry in a post-COVID-19 context. No less true seems to be that a systematic review of the published works reveals two important aspects of the pandemic. At a closer look, in a post covid, 19 pandemic tourism research mutates towards new forms and shapes. Secondly, a whole portion of the literature, which saw the light of publicity in recent months, focuses strictly on the economic effects of COVID-19 in the tourism and hospitality industries (Casado-Aranda, Sanchez-Fernandez & Bastidas-Manzano, 2021). However, there are no systematic approaches that tackle the problem of tourism methodologies after the pandemic. As Korstanje & George (2021; 2022) eloquently observe, the COVID-19 outbreak originally reported in Wuhan China, rapidly expanded to the entire planet. Tourism and modern transport means disseminated the virus over the question of months. This affected seriously not only the tourism industry but also the pathways tourism research has historically taken. Tourist-centricity, a term originally coined by A. Franklin, speaks to us of an obsession to interview tourists as the only valid source of information for applied research. The crisis accelerated by the virus exposed one of the main limitations of tourism research, displacing tourists to a peripheral position. Given the problem in these terms, the main point in this discussion is associated with the fact professional fieldworkers were hand-tied to study tourism in a world without tourists.

As the previous backdrop, the present book chapter concentrates efforts on describing the long-established discrepancies between qualitative and quantitative methods as well as the opportunities for digital technologies widely applied to research. The chapter is mainly based on the case of Argentinian tourists stranded abroad after Fernandez's resolution to reduce the quotas of international flights landing at Buenos Aires airport. The first section lays the fingers on the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methods. In the tourism fields, quantitative alternatives have been engulfed in the core of the epistemological debate relegating other methodologies and instruments to the secondary position. The second section offers a snapshot of the effects of COVID-19 not only on travel behaviour but also on the drawing of tourism research. The third section illustrates the pro and cons of virtual ethnography as well as the online platforms applied to empirical research during the pandemic. The section is limited to the methodological problems I came across in an investigation of Argentinian tourists stranded abroad. The last part discusses critically the next steps and challenges posed for critical tourism research in a post covid scenario.

Let's clarify for readers that this book chapter oscillates between two related themes: the philosophical dilemmas of mobilities in the post-COVID-19 context and the methodological limitations of studying tourism while using new digital platforms. Although both topics can be investigated separately, the crisis opened by the pandemic gives us the possibility to lump them together. In this way, the obtained outcome allows a further more encompassing diagnosis of the potential of the digital platform to implement new forms of research during the pandemic. Another interesting discussion point is how to study tourism in the world without tourists. Put the problem in these terms, it has no answer, but what is more important, in a low mobile culture engendered by the pandemic, the concept of tourist-centricity is at the best revisited. In so doing, it is necessary to start the discussion with the debate about the rivalry between quantitative and qualitative methods. The section contains a detail of the weakness and strengths of each method. In the second section, we reveal the details of an auto-ethnography conducted during the

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