



Tourism as practice

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to (re)theorize tourism from a practice-based perspective by introducing the notion of “tourism as practice”. It aims to familiarize newcomers with different theories of practice and their current connections and future perspectives for tourism research. The paper is a theoretical endeavor supported by an epistemology of practice and empirical works that use practice theories to understand the nature of tourism. I advocate that tourism is a set of organizing practices wherein concepts such as “home” and “away”, “tourist” and “non-tourist”, may not be seen as dualisms but as part of a plenum. Tourism as practice also holds that mobility and performativity are not two distinct “paradigms” but rather core elements of tourism’s practices.

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Introduction

The increase of academic tourism studies over the last two decades has revealed several epistemological, theoretical, and methodological possibilities. As a “multi-extra-disciplinary” field of inquiry (Tribe & Liburd, 2016, p. 58), tourism theory has contributions from many fields of knowledge. Tribe (2010, p. 7) holds that tourism knowledge is fragmented and has opened many “tribes and territories” that lead tourism theory to remain under debate, with struggling positions (Tribe, 2010; Tribe & Liburd, 2016).

The first generation of tourism scholars in the 1960s and 1970s were from the fields of Economics, Anthropology, Sociology, and Geography and founded tourism as a multidisciplinary field of inquiry. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, tourism studies became philosophically and institutionally dominated by business and management approaches (Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010). From these two historical moments, tourism studies generated two networks in tourism: social science and business (Tribe, 2010). For Ren et al. (2010), however, dividing tourism scholars into two groups is simplistic and reductionist. They claim that tourism research should “encompass multiple worldviews and cultural differences as well as research praxis that recognizes and reflects the plurality of multiple positions, practices and insights” (Ren et al., 2010, pp. 885–886).

More recently, Cohen and Cohen (2012) identified three novel theoretical trends in tourism studies: the mobilities “paradigm” (Hannam, Sheller, & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2000), the performativity approach (Edensor, 2001, 2007), and the actor-network theory (Jóhannesson, 2005; Ren, 2011; Van der Duim, 2007).

The mobilities paradigm rests on the idea that we are living in an era of displacements—the “mobility turn” (Hannam et al., 2006). The mobility paradigm focuses on the “diverse mobilities of people, objects, images, information, and wastes” (Urry, 2000, p. 186). According to Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 2181), “[t]ourism is seen as part of a sub-set of a vast and

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heterogeneous complex global mobilities, which also includes migration, return migration, transnationalism, diasporas, and other obligatory as well as voluntary forms of travelling". For Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 2181) the mobilities paradigm contests the idea of "tour", is supported by the dualism "home" and "away", and understands society as "boundless networks of diverse flows".

The performativity approach can be understood from two main perspectives, as act and as performance (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Edensor, 2001, 2007; Taylor, 2016). Performativity as act draws on John Austin's (1962) idea of "performative speech acts". According to Cohen and Cohen (2012, p. 2183), "it expands the concept of performativity beyond utterances to include non-lingual symbolic acts, such as gestures, salutations or prostrations." However, performativity as performance rests on Erving Goffman's (1974) notion of social interaction. For Edensor (2007, p. 204) "performance can also be conceptualized as an interactive and contingent process which succeeds according to the skill of the actors, the context within which it is and the way in which it is interpreted by an audience." For Taylor (2016, p. 7), performance could also be understood as "doing". In this sense, "doing captures the *now* of performance, always and only a living practice in the moment of its activation".

The actor-network theory (ANT) draws attention to what is known by "social". According to Bruno Latour (2005), the "social" cannot be seen as something stable and only comprised of individuals. For Latour (2005), the "social" is a dynamic process enacted by the interaction of humans and non-humans wherein the notion of agency is not exclusively a human condition. According to ANT, the social and society are ongoing processes of (re)assembling (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Gherardi, 2006; Latour, 2005; Ren, 2011; Van der Duim, 2007).

However, although presented by Cohen and Cohen (2012) as three separate trends, it is possible to encompass the core assumptions of these three theoretical approaches under a broader term: so-called "practice theories", "practice based-studies", or the "practice-based approach" (Gherardi, 2006; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001; Geiger, 2009; Bispo, 2015; Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, & Yanow, 2009; Nicolini, 2013).

The proposal of a practice-based approach to understand tourism does not disregard or refute the mobilities paradigm, a performativity approach, or ANT as theoretical possibilities to study tourism. My position here is similar to that of Van der Duim, Ren, and Jóhanesson (2013, p. 6), who state, "ANT is not a paradigm. This lack is paralleled to the also "non-paradigmatic" mobility or performance turns that have also gained momentum in tourism research in recent years". The practice-based approach paves the way to understanding how mobilities, performativity, and ANT can relate to each other because all three draw on a set of elements such as "action", "doing", "activity", and "performance". All these words relate to "practice". Drawing on a practice-perspective to rethink tourism research as a "continuously negotiated entity" is an opportunity to challenge the discourses on knowledge and to try to produce new ones (Ren, Pritchard, Morgan, 2010, p. 886).

Practice theories focus on the study of social phenomena, with particular attention to their dynamic process of enacting, (re)assembling, and organizing (Czarniawska, 2008, 2013; Gherardi, 2006). Practice theorists have been influenced by the ideas of Aristotle's practical wisdom (1955), Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (1967), Bourdieu's habitus (1977), Giddens's structuration theory (1984), and Certeau's notion of everyday practices (1984), among others. The so-called "Practice Turn" began in the 1990s and brought together many scholars who resorted to different practice theories to understand social phenomena. These scholars understood that theories of practice share several assumptions that suggest the existence of an epistemology of practice (Gherardi, 2006; Miettinen et al., 2009; Reckwitz, 2002; Schatzki, 2001). The epistemology of practice "does not place the social in mental qualities, nor in discourse, nor in interaction", but in practices (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249). For Schatzki (2012, p. 13),

[a] practice is an organized constellation of different people's activities (...). The activities that compose it, moreover, are organized (...). [I]mportant features of human life must be understood as forms of, or as rooted in, human activity—not the activity of individuals, but in practices, that is, in organized activities of multiple people.

Schatzki (2001, 2012) also recognizes the importance of non-humans in a practice to understand the social. According to Schatzki (2001, 2012), a practice is a nexus of doings and sayings. Reckwitz (2002, p. 250) holds that a practice is "thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood." Through a practice perspective, tourism is not only forms of mobilities or tourist performativity but also a set of possibilities of humans and non-humans enacting, (re)assembling, and organizing. Tourism, in this sense, is the outcome of a set of ongoing practices (Bispo, de, & Godoy, 2012; James & Halkier, 2014; Valtonen, 2009; Valtonen & Veijola, 2011).

The goal of this article is to (re)theorize tourism from a practice-based perspective introducing the notion of "tourism as practice". It aims to familiarize newcomers with different theories of practice and their current connections and future perspectives for tourism research. The paper begins by discussing aspects of tourism knowledge, especially the problems regarding the use of several dualisms as forms with which to understand tourism. Next, it presents core ideas about practice theories and their approaches by focusing on the notion of practices as organizing activities and distinguishing between the concepts of "organization" and "organizing". Following these introductory aspects of tourism knowledge and practice theories, the concept of "tourism as practice" is presented using empirical studies as examples of how tourism may be seen as practice. The paper also discusses methodological strategies and the implications of carrying out research drawing on tourism as practice. Finally, conclusions are provided and a future research agenda is suggested.

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