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A portrait of Jost Krippendorf

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Introduction

The problem of sustainability emerged in last decades as a result of climate change and pollution produced by modern industry to the atmosphere. Seminal studies have contributed to give alternative course of actions for that climate change not affect tourism. In this hot debate among social scientists and policy-makers about what we can do to reverse the effects of our contamination, Jost Krippendorf presents as an authoritative voice. He received a great influence of exponents such as Sigmund Freud, Paul Rieger, Jurgen Habermas, and Erich Fromm. Psychoanalysis and its theory of hydraulic press postulated that the pressure in systems is constant forces that mould counter-forces; therefore, the psychological drives can be studied following the laws of physics. The attachment between the mother and her child is of paramount importance in Krippendorf’s development. In our rights to holidays, we attempt to recreate the conditions of “the lost-paradise”.

His formal contact to AIEST (Association International of Experts Scientifics in Tourism) through his acceptance as member of Tourist Research Center in 1969, allowed a fluid dialogue with senior researchers such as Walter Hunziker and Kurt Krapf or others such as Bernard Kramer, Ralph Krebs, Claude Kaspar, and Hansruedi Miller, his most brilliant successor. His prolific career exerted a great influence not only in Switzerland but in Germany paving a new conceptual paradigm in both countries to understand the nature of tourism. With the quest of improving a valid scientific method to infer the laws of tourist behaviour, AIEST boys embraced the contributions of this great mind.

Although his focus was echoed and continued today by many scholars, less attention was given to Krippendorf the epistemologist. This is the reason why a portrait of his legacy, trajectory, and main theses and ideas should be placed under the lens of scrutiny. He understood tourism as a projection of our universal psychological needs of discovery and entertainment, embedded with the logic of leisure. At the time the condition of exploitations over workforce increased in the evolution of capitalism, tourism would play a crucial role legitimizing the status quo. However, quite aside from Marxism, he did not feel that the exploitation resulted from the monopoly of means of production but from the cultural values that ushered us into the “big fish eats the small fish” doctrine. Therefore, the social marketing, adapted to new more humanist values, can do of this world a better place. As an epicentre of what will be the sustainable paradigm in tourism fields, Krippendorf worked hard to destroy the prejudices of his times.

His life

Professor Jost Krippendorf was born in 20 December of 1938 in the city of Bern, Switzerland. His academic life was oriented to expand the understanding of tourism and...
its effects on environment. The versatility of his texts led him to make substantial contributions not only in economy, his main discipline, but in the fields of psychology and sociology of tourism worldwide. He died at the age of 64 years in February 2003 and was buried in Muri Bei Bern, Switzerland.

Educated in Economy, and having a Doctorate of Tourism Marketing, he served brilliantly as director for Research Institute for Leisure and Tourism hosted by the University of Bern since 1971. Among his most notable works we have The Holiday Makers: Understanding the Impact of Leisure and Travels (Ferienmenschen, 1987) which was certainly translated to three languages. In his interesting career, other bibliographies less known were Commercialization in Tourism (Comercialization im Fremdenverkehr, 1980), On the Way Towards the Eco-Activism (Auf dem Weg nach Okotopia, 1993), The Landscape Eaters (Die Landschaftsfresser, 1975), For Another Tourism (Für Einen Anderen Tourism, 1989), and Freedom & Tourism (Freiheit & Tourismus, 1995) among others.

In 1977, Krippendorf was awarded by the prestigious “German Travel Prize” for his labour as journalist of tourism. This outstanding recognition was accompanied with invitation to serve as key note speaker in some European conferences organized to discuss the problems of environmentalism and sustainability. Most of his experience in ecological studies was learnt after the experience as Chair of the World Comission of Environment and Development Gro Harlem Brundtland through the 1980s decade. From 1989 to 1991, he was Professor for “German Ecology” and coordinator of the Department of German Ecology in Bern University. He assisted his colleagues in England to found the prestigious Journal of Sustainable Tourism in 1993. In 2003, the Austrian Association for Tourism gave for the first time, the “Jost Krippendorf award” which consisted in a financial donor to recognize the organizations that struggle for a sustainable tourism in the country. Not surprisingly, the acceleration of “climate change” in recent years delineated his relevance in the literature of tourism studies today. Because of language barriers, Krippendorf received limited attention in the Anglo-world in view of other scholars such as Dean Maccannell who addresses similar concerns.

The legacy of Krippendorf to tourism studies

Although Krippendorf was the founding father of the concept of sustainable tourism, his original studies in tourism were oriented to understand the psychological and sociological motivations by which people (tourists) need to travel for enjoying of other fabricated experiences as long as their holidays. Their biographers as Muller and Lane (2003) explain that Krippendorf’s merit consisted in giving an all-encompassing model to explore the roots of leisure in the modern society. His fluency in English, French, and Italian, besides his native German, was of paramount importance to transcend the barriers of language conforming an interdisciplinary approach (Lane, 2003). It was unfortunate that the success to wake up the debate around ecology in some countries such as Brazil, France, Switzerland, or Canada was conjoined to the failure in others such as the USA and China. Surely, post industrial societies neglected the ecological concerns, where Krippendorf was a pioneer, by considering the there are not evidence enough to change their productive system (Panosso-Netto & Lohmann, 2009). Following this explanation, Margarita Barretto, who confessed overtly her admiration for Krippendorf, calls for attention that tourism generates environmental effects that the policy-makers should measure and quantify. The idea towards a sustainable tourism means “a fairer distribution of wealth” for all stakeholders. Since the modern capitalism brings material asymmetries very hard to
balance, the distribution of wealth becomes as a great challenge for the West in the next century (Barretto, 2009).

Recently, I have stressed on the importance to define tourism beyond the paradigm of productivity. Following Krippendorf’s contributions, tourism is enrooted in the deepness of our psychology, our mind. The social scientists interested in tourism should prioritize its function for societal order, beyond the profits or business a destination can generate. By the introduction of leisure and tourism, which is based on the individual needs of discovery, the social bond is revitalized so that the society does not disintegrate. Starting from the premise that workers suffer several deprivations in the daily context, the holidays, as a sacred space, work as a catalyst to alter temporarily the “rules of productivity” (Korstanje, 2013).

Surely, the problems of “ozone layer” in the 1980s and other ecological disasters produced by hyper-industrial societies prompted Krippendorf to make people understand that we have to do something to reverse not only the effects of current consuming styles of life, but also the effects on the earth. The responsibility for pollution is not limited to states; rather it should be shared by all citizens. The individual behaviour is socially determined by cultural values, which can be changed according to new ends. In this discussion, he envisaged the benefits to employ social marketing as a new discipline interested in changing the pattern of consumption into more sustainable ways. The concept of satisfaction was vital to adopt new policies. Underpinned in the proposition that the self alternate costs and benefits to make decisions, marketing would lead consumers to adopt practices which do not affect the non-renewable resources (Krippendorf, 1982, 1986, 1987a, 1987b).

This aforementioned point of entry, undoubtedly, started a new paradigm in the studies of sustainable tourism that inspired to the next generations to date. Managerial sciences, even marketing, should be used to something more important than creating wealth and profits for capital owners (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Goodwin & Francis, 2003; Korstanje, 2013; Lane, 1994; Ryan, 1991). Methodologically, many scholars were interested in developing econometric models to measure the tourist behaviour and its more profound motivations (Ap, 1992; Fodness, 1994). However, I find very interesting to examine a third epistemological alternative respecting to his argument, which remains unexplored by the academy. Is tourism an industry resulted from industrialism or an ancient institution common to almost all cultures and times? Each generation found Krippendorf the ecologist, the economist, even the psychologist, but little reference was done as Krippendorf the epistemologist.

His argument and global impact

In this section, I will discuss sociologically the immense legacy of Krippendorf’s thesis integrating the anthropological insights of mind with the ecological worries. First and foremost, I want to thank Professor Metin Kozak for the opportunity to accomplish this portrait as admirer and a critical reader of German sociology.

At a first glance, he develops a conceptual framework to situate tourism within the fields of leisure. World cultures allude to leisure “as a mechanism of escapement” to revitalize their production. The psychological frustrations suffered in the working conditions are catalysed by tourism in order for the social bond not to decline. Anthropological literature suggests that the needs of discovery jointly to rest are based in the constitution of our human nature. To some extent, social institutions play a vital role by creating the infrastructure and legal system where those needs are fulfilled. If the needs for
security lead to the adoption of security forces, then entertainment is constituted by “the holidays”. The goals of institutions are aimed at fulfilling individual needs. By expanding the study of these needs, social scientist may understand how the society works. Therefore, Krippendorf adds that tourism is not a simple business-oriented industry, but it is anchored into the formation of a specific “consciousness”.

As noted earlier, two major themes are found in Krippendorf’s argument. In Western societies, the decline of happiness is conjoined to the rise of insecurities with respect to the labour conditions. People not only are extremely concerned because the precarization of working contexts but also by unemployment. Second, the trust as a mediator between citizens is being undermined into more sophisticated ways of consumptions. Whilst tourism and leisure regulate the frustration resulted from the current states of worker’s exploitations proper of late-capitalist system, we need to discuss more sustainable forms in the economic cycle of production. In this vein, Krippendorf’s development is not pretty different than Maccannell who argued convincingly that the influence of tourism to keep functioning the society equaled to the degree of exploitation people face in their daily life (Korstanje, 2012; Maccannell, 1973, 1976, 2001).

Nonetheless, Krippendorf goes into the opposite direction. What tourism is conducive to the logic of modernity does not mean, as Maccannell precludes, tourism resulted from modernity’s advance. One of the pillars of tourism signals to the concept of paradise, as it has been formulated by main religions. Anthropologically speaking, the quest for “lost paradise” means the attachment to the mother womb as well as the recreation of mythical landscapes reserved and consumed by elite. The aristocracy escapes from urban cities to rural zones not only to struggle against modern alienation, but also making ostentation of their status and power over the rest of community which still is immobilized.

In the Holiday Makers, Krippendorf argues convincingly that the link of tourism to modern economy is one of our big problems. While tourism is globalized by enlarging economies worldwide, cultures and people are commoditized according to the “capitalist gaze”, changing values, traditions and institutions to create a financial dependency between the centre and its periphery. Of course, one might question, how can we fix the problem without affecting tourism?

The tourist system is formed by the conjunction of many interests and groups, which can be classified into four main segments: first, the practitioners and policy-makers who are in daily contact with visitors. The second actor is “the capital-owners” of tourist-related companies whose interests are aimed at enhancing further profits. The community that lives off tourism such as farmers, and vendors allocated at local handicraft markets, who keep a closer liaison with tourists. Politicians are in charge of passing the laws for protecting the tourism activity. Finally, we have people who not only have no contact but also resisted to bolster any dialogue with strangers.

As this backdrop, Krippendorf explains that tourism is not good nor bad, rather it works as an instrument which can be used in diverse ways. Those scholars who focus in tourism as a mechanism of alienation are not understanding its anthropological ancient nature, while the others who embrace the uncritical view, according to its economic benefits, are not calculating the ecological problems it creates in the developing world. The thesis of sustainability comes into scene so that policy-makers may reconsider what type of tourism we need. Since more uncontrolled production needs further consumption aggravating the problems of ecology, substantial changes are suggested. Four subtypes of systems are drawn by Krippendorf as the pillars of society:
The economic sub-system alludes to stages of centralization and decentralization which affects the costs, structures of production, and the workforce. Rather, the socio-cultural ones gives insight on the ways citizens are socialized and educated as well as the values to understand the others. Ancient forms of tourism prioritized travels to discover new customs, while today, tourists possess the native by commoditizing their heritage into specific form of hedonist consumptions. The question of politics uses the violence to legitimate the status quo of elite, at the time the ecology protects the environment not to be compromised by uncontrolled forms of exploitations based on profits. One of the great fallacies of postmodernism rests on the thesis that natural resources are unlimited.

The Holiday Makers as a masterful work poses the question over the logic of escapement. Touring would be a liminoid displacement, similarly to what Turner (1995) denominated a rite of passage that changes the status of travellers. The sense of security we lost in the birth is adamantly recreated during our lifespan. But “why do we need to move out of home to relax?” is elsewhere a safer place to be than home? In what I consider one of the most brilliant discussions in the epistemological nature of tourism, the economist will answer that the human psychology is based on contrasting drives which ranges from relax, escarpment towards the work, and the boundaries of security. The equilibrium of the self consists in combining stages of gratification with deprivations. This explains why we need to travel abroad to take distance of our routine world, but considering the opportunity to return within a reasonable lapse of time. The axiom is given by the following development.

The holidays, as social construes, portraits a “tourist-consciousness” creating a fragmentation between three allegories: working here, dwelling here, and relaxing in another space. The self uses travels to avoid the responsibilities of the life, emulating an atmosphere of prosperity and abundance as what is experienced at the paradise. As tourists, the citizens adopt other roles pretending to be a person they never will be. The paradox is given by the fact that in doing so, they become the person the society expects them to be. Second, the possibilities of going beyond home represent a sign of status and social respect. However, it is important not to lose the sight that tourist motivation is not based on egocentrism as modern sociology precludes. In this point, the gap between Krippendorf and Maccannel is enlarged. While the latter is convinced that tourism is the maiden of empires, or an unethical form of mass-consumption that accelerates the social bond decline, in Krippendorf, it serves as a conduit not only to change the society but also the world.

**New epistemological alternatives**

Senior archeologists acknowledged that tourism-like practices have taken room in the past. Civilizations as Romans, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Greeks developed infrastructure to facilitate the mobility, but also constructed the legal scaffolding to grant the security of their travellers. The concept of holidays was coined by Romans. The “feriae” (lat) consisted in a leave invested temporarily for three months to citizens who worked in the complex administrative centre, situated in Rome, to visit their relatives and family in the provinces (Carcopino, 1956; Korstanje, 2009; Paoli, 1975). For some reason, historians of tourism had no interest in turning their attention to the ancient history, or at least towards other aboriginal cultures as Aztecs, Incas or Navajos. The
epicentre of industrialism in England was enough to determine the evolution of transport that cemented the conditions for the appearance of tourism. Despite its interests for understanding the effects of the industry alone, American sociology not only ignored the ancient history but also developed a critical view of the western tourist. Instead of scrutinizing the individual and social factors, which in association determined the tourist behaviour, this critical viewpoint led many post-Marxian sociologists to think tourism as an instrument of control.

Originally, the Marxian thought claimed that the elite employ ideological apparatus such as education, movies, and even tourism, to engender a lack in the society, which is finally fulfilled by commodities produced by the worker. In these terms, the paradox is that the work-force is condemned to spend their salaries on the holidays, so that capital owners enhance their profits. Following this argument, Krippendorf, versed in German sociology, acknowledged that leisure controlled the lower classes, but unlike American sociology, the concept of tourism was not limited to an industry but a social fact derived from a juxtaposition of entertainment and curiosity. Let me clarify readers that European tradition, even German school of sociology which evolved from weberian tradition, explored the historical roots of tourism and travels. Undoubtedly, he opened the discussion into new fresh sources from an interdisciplinary way. His legacy not only defied the “Anglo-centrism” of the epoch, considering tourism as superior form of production proper of the civilized England, but also paved the pathways for its consolidation as an independent discipline (Korstanje, 2013).

Conclusion

Some of the criticism exerted on Krippendorf’s texts agree the utopian nature of his development trying to harmonize indicators such as “gross happiness rate”, which is almost impossible to address in the fieldwork (Goodrich, 1988), while others alert on his nostalgia for bourgeois man or the overemphasis given to some simplifications in the hydraulic-press theory of needs (Clarke, 1997; Moscardo, 2003; Veijola & Jokinen, 1994). In respect to this, Moscardo (2003) made an interesting criticism to the idea that people can change their behaviour if the cultural values are placed upside down. Though the climate changes are a strong concern by many tourists, they are unable to alter their current style of life (paradox of Giddens, 2009). To this critique, Krippendorf would respond that tourists nowadays are being socialized in the old paradigm of industrialism, which produced the climate change. To correct the cultural values to more humanist concerns, a lot of time is needed. Of course, it is easier to talk about sustainability today as well as his conceptual incogruencies towards the development of a theory, but Krippendorf was not only an exceptional scholar gifted with a great mind, also he struggled to create an autonomous discipline that helps understand societies by their patterns of consuming leisure. The idea of tourism under the archetype of lost paradise, a point we may find in almost all mythical structures, conjoined to the conception of sustainability, as well as his contribution in the fields of sociology and psychology, reminds us that he was far ahead of his time. Last but not least, what I want to point out in this essay review is that Jost Krippendorf deserves considerable recognition for his achievements and advances in tourism research.

References


