
Part V. Maximiliano E. Korstanje's Contribution to the Epistemology of Tourism

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Maximiliano E. Korstanje

University of Palermo, Argentina¹

Abstract

This paper examines Maximiliano E. Korstanje's contribution to the epistemology of tourism and his role in redefining tourism as a complex social, cultural, and political phenomenon. Moving beyond traditional economic and managerial approaches, Korstanje argues that tourism should be understood through interdisciplinary perspectives that incorporate sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political economy, and cultural studies. The paper explores his critique of reductionist approaches, his interpretation of tourism as a social institution, and his analysis of hospitality, risk, fear, identity, and mobility as central dimensions of tourist experience. Particular attention is given to his contribution to critical tourism theory, where tourism is conceptualized as a field shaped by power relations, globalization, capitalism, and symbolic meanings rather than merely a form of consumption or economic exchange. By examining concepts such as tourism as a rite of passage, the crisis of hospitality, risk perception, and the commodification of experience, this study argues that Korstanje has expanded the theoretical boundaries of tourism knowledge. His work challenges scholars to reconsider what tourism is, how it should be studied, and how it reflects the broader contradictions of contemporary society.

Key Words: Epistemology, Methodology, Tourism, Rite of Passage

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Introduction

The epistemology of tourism concerns the ways in which tourism is understood, studied, and produced as a field of knowledge. It asks fundamental questions: What is tourism? What kinds of knowledge are considered legitimate within tourism studies? Which theories and methodologies should guide the analysis of travel, mobility, hospitality, and tourist behavior? Since the emergence of tourism as an academic field in the second half of the twentieth century, much research has been dominated by economic, managerial, and geographical approaches that often define tourism through measurable variables such as arrivals, expenditures, employment, destination competitiveness, and consumer satisfaction.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje has made a distinctive contribution to the epistemology of tourism by challenging these dominant approaches and proposing a more interdisciplinary, critical, and sociological understanding of tourism as a complex social phenomenon. His work argues that tourism cannot be reduced to an industry, a market activity, or a form of consumption. Rather, tourism represents a cultural institution embedded within broader systems of power, capitalism, globalization, identity formation, fear, hospitality, and social transformation.

Korstanje's epistemological contribution consists not only in introducing new concepts but also in questioning the foundations upon which tourism knowledge has traditionally been constructed. By drawing from sociology, anthropology, philosophy, political economy, psychology, and cultural studies, he argues that tourism research must move beyond instrumental approaches and examine the deeper meanings, contradictions, and symbolic dimensions of mobility.

Moving Beyond the Economic Paradigm of Tourism

One of Korstanje's most important epistemological contributions is his critique of the economic reductionism that has historically shaped tourism studies. Since tourism became recognized as an academic discipline, much research has approached it primarily as an economic sector concerned with revenue generation, employment creation, destination development, and consumer behavior.

Although these approaches provide valuable information, Korstanje argues that they offer only a partial understanding of tourism. A purely economic definition fails to explain why humans travel, why certain destinations acquire symbolic importance, why societies construct ideas of hospitality, or why tourism becomes deeply affected by crises such as terrorism, pandemics, and disasters.

For Korstanje, tourism is fundamentally a **social phenomenon before it is an economic activity**. Economic exchanges occur within cultural and political frameworks that determine how mobility is organized and experienced. Tourism therefore must be studied as part of broader processes involving identity, social distinction, power relations, and historical change.

This position represents an epistemological shift: instead of asking only how tourism contributes to economic development, researchers should ask what tourism reveals about society itself.

Tourism as a Social Science Object

Korstanje's work contributes to redefining the object of tourism studies. Traditional approaches often define tourism through movement: a person traveling outside their usual environment for leisure, business, or recreation. While useful for statistical measurement, such definitions do not capture the symbolic and social meanings of travel. Drawing from classical sociology, Korstanje argues that tourism should be understood as a social institution comparable to religion, education, or family structures. Tourism organizes relationships between hosts and guests, produces cultural meanings, creates social identities, and establishes distinctions between different groups.

This approach challenges the assumption that tourism is simply an individual choice based on personal preferences. Instead, tourism behavior is shaped by historical conditions, social expectations, economic systems, and cultural narratives. The tourist is not merely a consumer choosing a destination; the tourist is a social actor participating in a complex system of meanings.

The Interdisciplinary Foundation of Tourism Knowledge

A central feature of Korstanje's epistemological contribution is his insistence that tourism cannot be adequately understood through a single disciplinary perspective. He argues that tourism studies require dialogue between multiple fields because tourism itself crosses traditional academic boundaries.

His research incorporates:

- **Sociology**, to examine social structures, inequality, identity, and modernization.
- **Anthropology**, to analyse rituals, hospitality, cultural encounters, and symbolic exchange.
- **Philosophy**, to question concepts such as authenticity, freedom, fear, and ethics.
- **Political economy**, to explore capitalism, globalization, and commodification.
- **Psychology**, to understand perceptions of risk and tourist motivations.
- **History**, to investigate how tourism develops within particular social contexts.

This interdisciplinary orientation challenges the fragmentation of tourism knowledge. Rather than seeing tourism as a specialized managerial field, Korstanje positions it as a meeting point between different traditions of social inquiry.

His epistemological position suggests that tourism researchers should not simply borrow methods from economics or management but develop theoretical frameworks capable of explaining tourism's cultural and political dimensions.

A Critical Epistemology of Tourism

Perhaps Korstanje's most important contribution is the development of a **critical epistemology of tourism**. A critical approach does not simply describe tourism practices; it examines the assumptions, ideologies, and power relations underlying them.

Korstanje argues that tourism has often been presented through positive narratives: tourism creates peace, promotes cultural understanding, generates development, and encourages global connection. While recognizing these possibilities, he argues that such interpretations may overlook contradictions within tourism systems.

For example, tourism can simultaneously:

- promote intercultural exchange while reinforcing inequalities;
- celebrate cultural diversity while commodifying traditions;
- encourage mobility while strengthening surveillance;
- create economic opportunities while producing dependency.

By highlighting these contradictions, Korstanje challenges researchers to question tourism's commonly accepted meanings. His approach reflects the broader tradition of critical social theory, which argues that knowledge production is never neutral but always connected to historical, political, and economic contexts.

The Epistemology of Tourism and Hospitality

Korstanje's analysis of hospitality represents another important epistemological contribution. Rather than treating hospitality as simply a component of the tourism industry, he returns it to its anthropological and philosophical foundations. Hospitality, according to Korstanje, is a fundamental social relationship governing encounters between strangers. Tourism depends upon hospitality because travel requires temporary relationships between hosts and visitors. However, modern tourism transforms hospitality into a commercial exchange. Hotels, restaurants, airlines, and destinations provide hospitality through market mechanisms rather than traditional ethical obligations. This transformation raises epistemological questions about how tourism scholars understand relationships between hosts and guests. Are tourists consumers purchasing services, or are they participants in cultural encounters governed by social obligations?

Korstanje's work encourages tourism studies to recover the philosophical and anthropological dimensions of hospitality.

Risk, Fear, and the Knowledge of Tourism

Another major epistemological contribution concerns the role of risk and insecurity in tourism research. Traditional tourism studies often assume that travel decisions are based primarily on economic factors, preferences, and destination attractiveness. Korstanje challenges this assumption by arguing that tourism knowledge must include the study of fear, uncertainty, and risk perception. Terrorism, pandemics, disasters, and political instability demonstrate that tourism depends upon perceptions of safety as much as physical conditions. A destination may be objectively safe but perceived as dangerous due to media representation, political narratives, or collective memory.

By introducing risk perception into tourism epistemology, Korstanje expands the field beyond behavioral models toward a deeper analysis of how societies construct ideas of danger and security. Tourism is therefore not only a movement toward pleasure but also a negotiation with uncertainty.

Tourism, Modernity, and the Search for Meaning

Korstanje also contributes to tourism epistemology by interpreting travel as a response to existential conditions of modernity. Tourism is not merely about recreation; it reflects deeper human desires for transformation, authenticity, belonging, and meaning.

Through concepts such as tourism as a rite of passage, Korstanje connects tourism with anthropological theories of ritual and identity formation. Travel becomes a symbolic process through which individuals temporarily leave ordinary life, experience difference, and reconstruct their identities. This perspective challenges purely functional interpretations of tourism. People do not travel only because they have leisure time or financial resources; they travel because tourism fulfills symbolic and cultural needs.

Tourism Epistemology and the Critique of Positivism

Korstanje's work also represents a critique of excessive positivism within tourism research. Quantitative approaches have produced valuable data regarding tourism flows,

economic impacts, and consumer behavior. However, Korstanje argues that numerical measurement alone cannot explain the meanings attached to travel.

Questions such as:

- Why do people seek authenticity?
- Why do societies fear certain destinations?
- Why do people visit sites of tragedy?
- Why does hospitality decline under conditions of insecurity?

cannot be answered through statistics alone. His epistemological position does not reject empirical research but argues for methodological pluralism. Tourism requires both measurement and interpretation, both quantitative analysis and theoretical reflection.

Contribution to the Future of Tourism Studies

Korstanje's epistemological contribution has helped broaden the intellectual boundaries of tourism research. By challenging disciplinary limitations and questioning established assumptions, he has encouraged scholars to consider tourism as a central phenomenon for understanding contemporary society.

His work suggests that tourism studies should investigate:

- globalization and mobility;
- capitalism and consumption;
- identity and belonging;
- fear and security;
- hospitality and ethics;
- memory and death;
- social transformation.

In this sense, tourism becomes a privileged lens through which broader social processes can be examined. The future of tourism epistemology, according to the direction established by Korstanje's work, requires moving beyond the idea of tourism as an

industry and recognizing it as a complex social system that reflects the hopes, conflicts, and contradictions of modern life.

Conclusion

Maximiliano E. Korstanje's contribution to the epistemology of tourism lies in his transformation of how tourism is conceptualized as an object of knowledge. By challenging economic reductionism and advocating an interdisciplinary, critical approach, he has expanded tourism studies beyond managerial and descriptive frameworks. His work demonstrates that tourism is not simply the movement of people across geographical spaces but a social institution shaped by culture, power, capitalism, risk, hospitality, and identity. Through his analyses of tourism as a rite of passage, tourism security, dark tourism, hospitality, and globalization, Korstanje has provided new theoretical tools for understanding the complexity of travel in contemporary societies. Although some aspects of his work remain debated due to its theoretical ambition and provocative arguments, his epistemological contribution is significant because it forces tourism scholars to reconsider fundamental questions about what tourism is and how it should be studied. Ultimately, Korstanje's legacy is the argument that tourism is not only an object of economic analysis but also a profound expression of human society itself.

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