

THE STUDY OF PUBLIC OPINION ON TOURISM

Critique and Proposal for a New Framework

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This paper presents a critical reflection on the use of the basic principles of the Social Exchange Theory to study how host societies perceive tourism. Specifically, I challenge its scientific relevance. This is important given that the empirical studies on tourism conducted over the last three decades have failed to produce a solid core of theories on which to base new knowledge, and have also led to a dead-end street. In addition, I suggest an alternative approach, inspired in sociological concepts rarely used until now in tourism research. This approach is based on the premise that public opinion is just the result of a constitutive process encouraged by groups mobilized around private interests, and it demands the reposition of power as an essential explanatory factor, and therefore, the design of more suitable methodological strategies.

KEY WORDS: *social perception, social exchange theory, sociology of tourism.*