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Exploring discourse ethics for tourism transformation

Abstract

The 'critical turn' in tourism studies is defined as a research perspective that explores social transformation in and through tourism by facing the negative impact of strategic-instrumental rationality on this activity. This work explores the features of discourse ethics that may normatively support tourism transformation, a gap that has not been thoroughly discussed in tourism research. For this purpose, the study combines the use of critical and ethical theory with an analysis of discourse ethics in tourism literature to demonstrate that the use of Habermasian discourse ethics needs to be complemented with the Apelian approach. Through these steps the work reveals the theoretical bases of discourse ethics to discuss whether understandings between stakeholders guided by strategic-instrumental rationality can be reached not only in the political sphere —Habermas—, but also in the ethical field —Apel.

Key words: discourse ethics; critical turn; tourism ethics; critical theory

Introduction

The negative consequences of approaching tourism through the lens of instrumental rationality prompted the emergence of a new type of research, known as the 'critical turn' in tourism studies (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard, 2007), which involves research about social justice and social transformation in tourism, taking into account aspects such as better tourism production and consumption, "with a particular emphasis in unleashing human agency and autonomy" (Tribe, 2008, p. 246). Based on the Critical Theory (Tribe, Dann & Jamal, 2015), which is a school of thought that was founded in Frankfurt in 1923 and is widely known as a theoretical movement that finds capitalism responsible for different types of social distortions (Honneth, 2009), the 'critical turn' denotes awareness of the negative consequences of the power of instrumental rationality in tourism development. Instrumental rationality can be defined as the capacity to choose suitable means as instruments to achieve ones ends. Obviously, thanks to this rationality, human beings have developed technological advances and dominated nature in the pursuit of human interests. However, instrumental rationality does not take into account ethical issues. Following the Weberian notion of instrumental rationality, Habermas proposes that economic and bureaucratic systems —the system—, which are guided by instrumental rationality, have colonized the lifeworld, a life sphere guided by communicative rationality and oriented towards understanding and mutual conflict resolution through compromise (Habermas, 1984).

As Spracklen has underlined, market capitalism is considered by Habermas to be part of instrumental rationality that constrains "the ability of individuals to rationalize and act on anything other than commodified things: so instrumental rationality leads to instrumental action, which leads to commodified leisure and passive consumption" (Spracklen, 2009, p. 31). In the tourism domain, the risk of instrumental rationality is that it may be used to exert control over society, because this is a rationality that impacts not only on the kinds of knowledge being generated in tourism studies, "but also the ways in

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which the natural world is characterised, studied, taught and 'managed' by those who "pass through tourism and recreation programmes" (Jamal & Everett, 2007, p. 63).

Concerned about the consequences of instrumental rationality in tourism, the 'critical turn' has opened research to practical knowledge, including ethics, that is a form of knowledge to orientate human beings. According to Aristotle there are three types of knowledge: *episteme*, which seeks knowledge for its own sake; *techne*, which is a knowledge oriented towards production; and *phronesis* or practical knowledge, which deals with matters of conduct (Aristotle, 2009, pp. 104–107). In this way, the 'critical turn' not only seeks to criticize some actions in tourism guided by instrumental rationality, but also researches new ways for a more sustainable tourism development. However, and this is the main reason that moves the development of this paper, research in tourism has yet to deeply explore the possibility of criticizing and orientating the social transformation sought by the 'critical turn' through an ethical framework able to face explicitly the instrumental rationality that may complicate that transformation. Given that studies about tourism ethics were critically characterised for the proposals' general lack of foundation (Fennell, 1999), research in tourism needs to use valid frameworks to develop its studies. In order to link ethics and the 'critical turn' in tourism studies, this work explores the characteristics of discourse ethics, a framework barely used in tourism research, and which contributes to Bramwell and Lane's (2014) call for research into the link between tourism ethics and the 'critical turn' and Tribe's (2008) call for research into new theoretical approaches in tourism from a Critical Theory approach.

The paper begins by offering some characteristics of the 'critical turn' in tourism studies and its considering connection with Critical Theory. This step supports the possibility of achieving the social transformation that the 'critical turn' seeks through the ethical sphere. The work explains the features of the Habermasian discourse ethics and its limitations to guide ethical tourism. This will be shown theoretically but also through the use of this framework in the tourism domain carried out by Smith and Duffy (2003). After that step, the work explores another discourse ethics basis (Apel, 1993, 2001) that lays a foundation for ethically orientating the transformation that the 'critical turn' in tourism studies seeks through agreements in the ethical sphere. Whilst the possibility of reaching agreements between tourism actors guided by instrumental rationality would be shifted by the Habermasian approach to the exclusive field of legal regulation —politics—, this work will suggest that the achievement of these agreements can be theoretically justified in the ethical field through the Apelian discourse ethics approach.

Ethics and the 'critical turn' in tourism studies: an intersection in discourse ethics

During the 21st century, academicians' critiques of a kind of tourism research based on industry-driven business themes and the obsession with applied and empirical research was pointed out as being one of the reasons for the lack of a critical perspective in tourism research. This has justified the creation of a new approach to tourism under the name of the 'critical turn' with the aim of emphasizing the need for challenging instrumental rationality in tourism research because this kind of rationality abstracts itself from society and overlooks social justice issues (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard, 2012; Tribe, 2005). But the critical perspectives from which these studies have been formulated in reaction to non-critical research are very different. The ambiguity with which the term "critical" and its derivatives have been used in tourism studies causes confusion regarding the nature of these research works (Nava & Castillo, 2017). Therefore, it is advisable to clarify the meaning and the roots of "critical" in order to make explicit what type of connection between ethics and the 'critical turn' in tourism studies is made in this study.

Tribe (2008) indicates how the term 'critical' has grown in tourism studies and has adopted several meanings: a) to evaluate the elements needed for tourism to be successful; b) to analyse those elements that weaken the sector and make a judgement about them; or c) to analyse tourists' satisfaction with the quality of their destination with the aim of evaluating sustainable practices in tourism. According to Tribe, none of these refers to the specialized and technical meaning of the term linked to Critical Theory. What the term 'critical' contributes to tourism studies through Critical Theory lies in the possibilities that it offers: a) a criticism of the existence of an economic determinism —cause-and-effect relationships— which would make any ethical change impossible; and b) a reflection on what may unleash human agency and improve individuals' capacity to move to a better production and consumption of tourism (Tribe, 2008). However, this critical approach, concerned with social transformation that tries to challenge instrumental rationality in tourism research, has not involved deep exploration of the possibility of orientating the 'critical turn' through ethics, a limitation which this study seeks to redress.

Bramwell and Lane have explicitly pointed out the potential of integrating the ethical point of view into the critical turn, because both are worried about the causes and consequences of power relations and injustice that arise as a result of instrumental rationality in tourism and "share an interest in ethical and normative issues and in securing progressive societal change" (2014, p. 4). Although other ethical theories, such as, for example, teleological ethics, utilitarianism or deontological ethics, offer frameworks to orientate humans, not all of these thinkers have kept in mind the impact of instrumental rationality on society in the grounding foundations of their philosophies. Discourse ethics, a proposal which has emerged within the Critical Theory tradition, provides a framework to support social transformation by taking into account how to face the power of instrumental rationality in modern society. However, this framework has barely been explored in tourism research.

Features of Habermasian discourse ethics

According to Habermas, economic and bureaucratic spheres —which the terms "system" —, which is oriented by instrumental or strategic rationality, have the power to colonize the lifeworld:

a progressively rationalized lifeworld is both uncoupled from and made dependent upon increasingly complex, formally organized domains of action, like the economy and the state administration. This dependency, resulting from the Mediatization of the lifeworld by system imperatives, assumes the socio-pathological form of an internal colonization [...] (Habermas, 1987, p. 305)

This means that the "pathologies that arise when systemic imbalances that are symptomatic of crisis in the economy or the state apparatus are displaced onto the lifeworld and interfere with its symbolic reproduction" (Habermas, 1993, p. 148). In other words, the ethical problem of this colonization is that the lifeworld is the sphere of life that allows for the transmission of values and understandings through the use of communicative rationality and the system may cause negative interferences in its sphere. Habermas distinguishes between actions oriented to instrumental, strategic and communicative success. An instrumental action is that action in which we follow technical rules of action and assess the efficiency of an intervention in a complex set of circumstances. An action is strategically oriented when we consider it under the condition of following rules of rational choice and assess the efficacy of influencing the decisions of a rational opponent. These actions are based on egocentric calculations. However, communicative actions are coordinated "not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285–286). Thus, if the lifeworld is colonized by the system, the possibility of reaching ethical understandings between subjects can be affected.

This negative effect is a reason why Habermas proposes that ethical understandings can only be reached in the sphere of communicative rationality. The theoretical purpose of Habermas to determine how moral norms can be reached is termed discourse ethics, of which two relevant features can be distinguished: formal and dialogical. 'Formal' in discourse ethics means that this proposal does not say what subjects must do, thus it can be considered a procedural ethics. This is a feature Habermas rooted in the formal character of Kantian ethics. Here, formal means that, discourse ethics does not say what should be good or right, but theoretically offers only the framework or procedural to reach understanding this is in contrast to other ethics proposals like for example hedonism, which, as is well known, argues that the main goal of human beings is the pursuit of pleasure. In the words of Habermas: "To that extent discourse ethics can properly be characterized as formal, for it provides no substantive guidelines but only a procedure: practical discourse" (1990, p. 103). In contrast to Kantian ethics, in which the source of moral decision-making is the subject, which means that there is a individualistic and monological way to ground moral norms, Habermasian ethics shift the frame of decision towards "intersubjective" and dialogical relations (McCarthy, 1981, p. 327). To clarify: "Only those norms may claim to be valid that could meet with the consent of all affected in their role as participants in a practical discourse" (Habermas, 1990, p. 197).

According to Habermas, to determine the legitimacy of a moral norm within the procedural framework of discourse ethics, dialogue must take place under ideal speech conditions. 'Ideal' means here that: "Anyone who seriously engages in argumentation must presuppose that the context of discussion guarantees in principle freedom of access, equal rights to participate, truthfulness on the part of participants, absence of coercion in adopting positions, and so on". (Habermas, 1993, p. 31). These ideal conditions are assumed before starting the dialogue about moral norms, but there is no certainty that these conditions are really present: are ideal. Therefore these ideal speech conditions are counterfactual, but necessary to reach understandings at the theoretical level: "Only in theoretical, practical, and explicative discourse do the participants have to start from the (often counterfactual) presupposition that the conditions for an ideal speech situation are satisfied to a sufficient degree of approximation" (Habermas, 1984, p. 42). Discourse ethics seeks to base ethical truths on examining the presuppositions of discourse and this means that ideal speech conditions could not occur in fact, but it is possible to forecast what the outcome would be if such conditions were possible.

According to this approach, the Habermasian purpose has sense at the normative foundation level, that is, to lay the foundation of how moral norms can be justified. The ideal speech conditions in practical dialogues in society are potentially counterfactual. People can usually guide their actions through instrumental or strategic reason. So if it is not possible to reach understandings on ethical matters if actions are guided by instrumental or strategic rationality, then Habermasian discourse ethics cannot be used as a framework for an applied ethics, such as tourism ethics. According to Habermas, only through communicative rationality is a consensus possible on norms and values "coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding" (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285–286). Spheres guided by instrumental-strategic rationality, such as the economy or State, are not guided by communicative processes oriented towards reaching understanding, an agreement in these spheres cannot be reached through the ethical field. The definite rift between system and lifeworld developed by Habermas involves the suggestion that ethical normativity is only linked to the lifeworld, thus agreements between these spheres should be articulated through the framework of public sphere (García-Marzá, 2004). The public sphere is for Habermas an intermediate system of mass communication, situated between the formal deliberations in the political system and the

conversations which take place in civil society at the periphery of the political system (Habermas, 1993, pp. 445–446).

Habermas interprets economy and the politics as a norm-free relation of communicative action. This is why system cannot be expected to regulate itself through ethical agreements. This lack of normativity within the economic area that avoids its inclusion in the ethics-discourse procedure constitutes a proposal that has been the object of criticism, because the only normative way for civil society to solve these problems is by shifting to the exclusive field of systemic rationality's legal regulation, this is a kind of regulation through instrumental-strategic rationality, and is not communicative. According to Honneth, if capitalist societies are conceived by Habermas as social orders in which system and lifeworld stand against each other as autonomous spheres of action, two complementary fictions emerge: "We then suppose the existence of norm-free organizations of action and the existence of power-free spheres of communication" (Honneth, 1991, pp. 296–303).

Thinking back to tourism, obviously this practice does not necessarily involve a systemic combination of stakeholders guided by instrumental or strategic actions, because there can be experiences and moments of emancipation, of dialogue, of wonder and of contemplation. However, the pressure of the system's power over the individual who has free time, which was also pointed out by Habermas (Habermas, 1968), seems plausible enough. By adapting the Habermasian vocabulary of Critical Theory, Spracklen points out some examples in *The Meaning and Purpose of Leisure* (2009) of how strategic-instrumental actions have colonized tourism, which is usually developed with relationships between several stakeholders under the guidance of the forces of capitalism.

These relations in tourism sometimes demand the attainment of understandings in the ethical field between some tourism stakeholders. Nevertheless, according to the features of the Habermasian approach, discourse ethics cannot be held to be a framework to reach agreements on ethical issues, not only because Habermasian ethics is a theoretical purpose—it only seeks to lay the foundation of how moral norms can be justified—, but also because some of the stakeholders belong to the system, which is oriented by instrumental or strategic reason. From a Habermasian viewpoint, locals could not reach a normative agreement with the business sector in the ethical field, basically because business belongs to the system, whose actions are oriented by instrumental or strategic reason. If locals want to demand any change in business behaviour, as long as they are in a civil society they must play a normative role through the public sphere in order to generate public opinion to try change the regulation. The articulation of communicative—lifeworld—and instrumental-strategic—system—rationality must take place in the field of the deliberative democracy. Social movements against tourism which emerged in some Mediterranean cities with the objective "to criticize, denounce and, in some cases, subvert the bases of the capitalist society" (Huete & Mantecón, 2018, p. 13), are a good example of the normative role of the Habermasian civil society in tourism. According to Habermas, civil society must operate "offensively" in a democracy to define ways of approaching problems or to propose solutions to problems, and also "defensively" when they attempt to maintain existing structures of association based on communicative rationality (Habermas, 1994, pp. 447–448).

Nevertheless, new global relationships have introduced a new reality that put the Habermasian purpose of regulation between lifeworld and system into a predicament. Whilst the issue of a just society has traditionally been addressed in the political context within the state, globalization has shifted the state as the sole responsible actor of social life and has broken its monopoly in discussing issues of social justice. This situation has evinced the power to intervene in the public sphere of other actors that have nothing to do with the majority. However, these actors do have power and responsibilities towards society (García-Marzá, 2013; González-Esteban, 2007). Such as points out MacCannell, in

the tourism domain this power determines whether this activity can be ethically aligned with local community (López-Gonzalez, 2018).

This is a part of the strong criticism of Habermas that has inspired new basis of discourse ethics, which may give theoretical support to the demand agreements between stakeholders for the development of tourism not only in the political field, but also in that of ethics. In the tourism domain it can be observed that sometimes different activities are oriented, at least formally, by agreements that involve tourists, companies, and locals, that is, stakeholders belonging to system and lifeworld. However, that practical purpose has not been rightly supported at a theoretical level in tourism research. An analysis of the application of discourse ethics for tourism is undertaken next point with the objective of suggesting that a new ethically guiding basis of discourse ethics is required in tourism research.

A critique of the use of Habermasian discourse ethics in tourism research

In the Introduction it was indicated that a discourse ethics framework has been rarely used in tourism research. So far, none of the relevant works in tourism have carried out an approach to tourism from the perspective of discourse ethics, with the exception of the work developed by Smith and Duffy (2003) in *The Ethics of Tourism Development*. To mention some examples, some well-known works such as *Tourism Ethics* (Fennell, 2018), *Philosophical Issues* (Tribe, 2009), *Ethics of Sightseeing* (MacCannell, 2011) or *Ethics of Tourism: Critical and Applied Perspectives* (Lovelock & Lovelock, 2013), have reviewed most of the ethical frameworks but do not provide a theoretical consideration of tourism from the view of discourse ethics. That does not mean that tourism academics have no interest in instrumental reason. In *Tourism Ethics* (2018) Fennell points out that the organisation has replaced the individual as the moral touchstone in society, that is, corporativism has replaced individualism (Fennell, 2018, p. 165). There Fennell highlights that the pressure of the instrumental reason of corporations affects us in our decisions to holiday or not to holiday in a particular place. This has imbued a corporatist mentality in human beings by focusing on consumption. The problem in this situation is that the state so far from working with humanistic values, answers to the pressure of corporations through "managerial and structural equations rather than humanistic ones, just like corporations" (Fennell, 2018, p. 134). This is a good example of Habermasian colonization of Lifeworld by the system. Facing this, Fennell proposes that "better linkages between stakeholders in a transparent forum" or "newer values or philosophies that are shared" could help tourism to challenge problems generated by instrumental reason (Fennell, 2018, p. 136). However, there is no mention here of discourse ethics as a framework to give support to this proposal.

Smith and Duffy may currently be the only academics using discourse ethics in tourism research. Contributing to this analysis, two levels of reflection related to discourse ethics are analytically distinguished: a more general level, not exclusively related to tourism; and another one more specifically applied to tourism. Within the second level, the issue of the inclusion of stakeholders with different rationalities in reaching agreements in the tourism domain is discussed.

At the first level of reflection, Smith and Duffy point out some key issues that have accompanied discourse ethics, specifically related to the time needed to develop deliberations, which implies a very slow procedure for interested parties: "If properly practised, discourse ethics would clearly be very time-consuming for those concerned" (2003, p. 104). Smith and Duffy are no strangers to the social acceleration process present in many social practices, tourism included. According to Rosa, social

acceleration, which is a modern feature that means that almost everything in modern society runs faster, has consequences in the relations of understanding proposed by Habermas, both the ethical relations within lifeworld and the relations between lifeworld and system, since the speed at which relations in modern societies are established, and the time which the consensus that Habermas' proposed deliberation requires, cannot be "synchronised" (Rosa, 2010, p. 56). For this reason, Smith and Duffy point out "that communicative ethics may not sit well with business requirements or with contemporary governmental and international institutions" (Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 104).

However, this apparent disadvantage can also offer an advantage, because human beings can have a reference in the counterfactual nature of ideal speech conditions to measure the "moral distance" that must be covered to reach this moral level, that is, the distance between ideal and factual speech conditions (Smith & Duffy, 2003, pp. 104–105). As has been noted, Habermasian ideal speech conditions, within which an agreement can be reached, require publicity of access, participation under equal rights, and participants' truthfulness—or an absence of coercion—when taking positions. This is a feature of Habermasian discourse ethics avocated by Benhabib, who maintains that the validity of Habermas' proposal must not lie in considering discursive procedures as a means from which validated agreements emerge, but as a method of evaluating anything permissible for continuing the moral debate (Benhabib, 1990, p. 13; Smith & Duffy, 2003, p. 106). In short, the real value of communicative rationality on which discourse ethics is based would be a "regulative ideal". From this point of view, the relevance of discourse ethics would lie in "trying to provide conditions for engagement in wholehearted communication, and for this action to have no unfortunate consequences" (Cortina; 2007, p. 173).

Beyond these notes however, which include part of the critique of discourse ethics, Smith and Duffy assume, at the second level, the validity of applying Habermasian discourse ethics to tourism when they say that ",Discourse ethics' should be particularly useful to the kind of cases that emerge as a result of tourism development" (2003, p.103); or "[i]n giving a voice to interests and ideas that are otherwise suppressed, discourse ethics also seems to lend ethical and political support to developments such as community-based tourism projects" (2003), p.104). These authors propose explicitly that different stakeholders can discuss the moral norms that affect them: "many parties involved, including the developers, the local populace, potential employers and employees, the tourists themselves, the business community in general, environmentalists, and so on" (2003, p. 105). However, as explained above, Habermasian discourse ethics specifies the validity of this proposal only as an ethical procedure for the lifeworld and communicative rationality, not for the system and activities guided by instrumental or strategical rationality. This is why, although the Smith and Duffy approach to discourse ethics points out the potential of this framework to support agreements on ethical matters, the study of ethical tourism through the lens of discourse ethics needs to be complemented with a theoretical basis to support the dialogue between stakeholders on ethical issues. This study contributes to this objective by exploring some of the Apelian bases of discourse ethics.

Whether reaching agreements in actions guided by both communicative and instrumental rationality is or is not possible is the key issue around the possibility of using discourse ethics as a framework from which to build a critical understanding about tourism development and to guide actions in tourism. While Habermas does not consider its use to guide decision-making in specific social practices, Apel gives reasons to support this position.

Apelian discourse ethics as a basis for tourism transformation

Unlike Habermas, Apel, the originator, along with Habermas, of discourse ethics, supports the need to develop two dimensions that are part of discourse ethics: the normative foundation (Part A) —which only Habermas is concerned with— and the application (Part B). Part A seeks to lay the foundation of how moral norms can be justified and Apel concurs with Habermas' position. However, with Part B, Apel justifies the validity of discourse ethics to orientate practices in life by maintaining that:

The strict separation between instrumental-strategical and consensual-communicative, i.e. discourse-ethical, rationality of action cannot be maintained in part B of ethics. Instead, we now need ways or methods of mediating between them e.g. according to the rule: as much advance in the sense of relying on discourse as can be answered for in the face of the risk; and as many strategical provisos as are required by our very responsibility for the foreseeable consequences of our actions (Apel, 1993, pp. 25-26).

As the cited text shows, Apel extricates discourse ethics from the abstractive sphere, where only communicative rationality allows us to reach valid moral norms. By converting discourse ethics into an ethics to orientate life practices, Apel assumes that people involved in agreements on moral norms can use not only communicative reason, but also instrumental-strategic reason. With this 'applied turn', discourse ethics becomes necessarily an ethics of responsibility, because nobody can justify a decision without considering the consequences that it will have. Apel affirms that part B of discourse ethics "demands that our deviations from the ideal discourse-principle in favour of strategical action must be capable of being consented to by the members of an ideal communication community" (Apel, 1993, p. 26). Naturally, this ethics allow us to think that stakeholders in tourism as different as companies, tourists or locals could, together, reach agreements on ethical issues as long as the presence of instrumental rationality in discussions on ethical matters is justified to achieve two goals: the conservation of the subject and those who depend on it, and instituting material and cultural bases in order that someday it is possible to act communicatively "without jeopardizing the conservation of oneself and others" (Apel, 2001, pp. 90–115; Cortina, 2008, p. 20).

With Apel's proposal, discourse ethics eliminates the stumbling block that a definite rift between the rationality of system and lifeworld entails. Honneth has criticized Habermas for this division since it leaves the spheres of power —system: economy and state— void of normative substance, because that involves accepting that both the economy and the State are "norm-free", that is governed only by strategic-instrumental rationality (1991, p. 296). However, the discourse ethics proposal put forward by Apel does not renounce the attempt of discourse ethics to establish a regulative ideal to solve moral conflicts in the instrumental domain. This is why Apel suggests that the definite rift which Habermas is not reflected in reality and ethics cannot refuse to guide social practices. Neither does civil society act without strategic practice, nor do economic institutions exist that do not need communicative action to be legitimised by reaching agreement with those affected by the consequences of their activity (García-Marzá, 2013).

In view of instrumental interests that any subject or companies could have, the ethical challenges justifying criticism of these stakeholders, and the possibility of normatively justifying their orientation, cannot be reflected appropriately by Habermasian discourse ethics. But tourism ethics can find in Apel's discourse ethics a framework to justify the ethical agreements between tourism stakeholders. The power of industry, criticized by the critical turn, and also the instrumental interests of any subject, require theoretical frameworks that allow the integration of current realities. For some academics, the tourism

literature that tackles the ethical challenges of economical or entrepreneurial dimensions is extremely scarce (Power, Domenico & Miller, 2017). Therefore, an ethical framework able to justify the inclusion of stakeholders, and criticize and orientate how understandings are taken articulating communicative and strategical rationalities, is especially interesting for tourism research and tourism development.

With the Apelian proposal, the exclusive field of articulation between communicative and instrumental-strategic rationality is not only the sphere of political deliberation in democracy, such as Habermas proposes. Then, the ethical sphere is also a field to articulate actions of lifeworld and system. As a result of this, the business sector in tourism cannot be thought of as an agent that can only be regulated by laws which have emerged from the political sphere. According to the Apelian model, the business sector can reach agreements on ethical matters with other agents taking responsibility for their actions. In this, the most important aspect from discourse ethics is that tourism can find in it a normative framework to orientate understandings between different agents. One opportune example to outline some ways of application of this thought to tourism is the macro level. Tourism is composed by global practices that can hardly be regulated by states. This is why the World Tourism Organization (henceforth, UNWTO) officially was born, which is, undoubtedly, one of the institutions that plays a key role as meeting point of global stakeholders in tourism. Defined as an organization that supports sustainable tourism, the UNWTO proposes that "tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building" (UNEP-WTO, 2005, p. 11). In this, discourse ethics can be not only a valid framework to criticize how agreements are reached, but also to orientate how understandings between stakeholders with instrumental, strategical and communicative reasons can be articulated. Far from working satisfactorily for all parties, this organization has been strongly criticized.

According to Higgins-Desbiolles, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism developed by the UNWTO works as a necessary face-lift that seeks to alleviate the negative effects of an activity that the same organization generates (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008). The difficulty in reconciling contradictory elements such as the promotion of transport and the limitation of global warming, free trade and liberalism with more efficient regulation are also problems related to complex negotiation within the framework of the UNWTO (Dubois & Ceron, 2000). The force of business interests in decisions within the UNWTO has been regarded by Bianchi and Stephenson as a feature that reveals the neoliberal character that guides tourism development (2013). The lack of responsibility in the decisions of these agents oriented by instrumental-strategic reasons is detected as a problem for the other stakeholders. In this, Apelian discourse ethics can theoretically orient the way to reach understandings between tourism stakeholders, that is, in a responsible way, not only based on universal foundations, but necessarily caring about the conservation of the subject and those who depend on it, and instituting material and cultural bases in order that someday it is possible to act communicatively without jeopardizing the conservation of oneself and others, as was pointed out above. Following Apel, globalisation is a process that primarily concerns an international expansion of the economy that seems to exceed any control by the nation state. According to Fennell, there may be no definitive solutions for the problems generated by tourism, but tourism development in a global sense demands "a focus on well-being rather than strictly profit, better accountability of policy makers; better linkages between stakeholders in a transparent forum; a better understanding of systems and networks" (Fennell, 2018, p. 136). This is why this situation provides an urgent challenge to a valid type of ethics, "say in regard to social justice on a global scale" (Apel, 2008, p. 135). This goal, which is a shared goal with the 'critical turn' in tourism studies, needs stakeholders integrating ethical actions in their behaviour to get understandings with the people of lifeworld.

Since Stark proposed that Habermasian discourse ethics needs to be developed theoretically for it to be applied to the field of tourism (Stark, 2002), and since Tribe also noted that the ideal conditions for Habermasian discourse constitute a framework from which he defended what may be considered ethical tourism (Tribe, 2002), research has not deeply developed discourse ethics within tourism research. Accordingly, the Apelian discourse ethics basis establishes a starting point to continue this research line in tourism.

Conclusion

As with many other social activities, tourism development has been influenced by instrumental and strategic actions (Spracklen, 2009; Tribe, 2006), which have not taken into account ethical issues.. The 'critical turn' in tourism studies has warned of the negative impact of strategic-instrumental rationality on tourism and underpins research on social justice and social transformation in and through tourism (Ateljevic, Morgan & Pritchard, 2012). This type of research that does not deal only with what "is", but also with what "should be" in tourism practice to transform it (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011), embodies a goal that shares an interest with ethics, because both are involved in thinking about how the world should be and in securing progressive societal change (Bramwell & Lane, 2014).

In order to respond to Bramwell and Lane's (2014) call for research on the potential link between tourism ethics and the 'critical turn', and Tribe's (2008) call for research on new theoretical approaches in tourism from Critical Theory, the work has developed several steps to explain that discourse ethics can work as an ethical framework to justify the criticism of tourism transformation and orientate it. This is why discourse ethics shares a common concern about the negative consequences of strategic-instrumental rationality in society with both the 'critical turn' in tourism studies and Critical Theory. This connection has allowed the suggestion that the Apelian ethical framework of discourse ethics can give a starting point of theoretical support to the tourism transformation and social justice that the 'critical turn' seeks.

To support this idea, the paper started by pointing out the features of the discourse ethics developed by Habermas, the most representative figure of this ethical proposal. With this step, the paper has clarified that, at the theoretical level, Habermasian discourse ethics seeks to establish under what ideal speech conditions for dialogue among individuals who belong to the lifeworld—those subjects orientated by communicative rationality—the validity of moral norms could be justified (Habermas, 1987, 1993). However, acts oriented by strategic-instrumental rationality that belong to the system—such as the economy—are excluded from any possibility of reaching understandings within the ethics discourse framework. These understandings need to be reached within the political context and the public sphere. Thus, if it is assumed that tourism activity is built in large part by stakeholders who belong to both the system and the lifeworld, Habermasian discourse ethics cannot normatively orientate social practices and therefore cannot be proposed as the most valid framework to guide tourism transformation.

The analysis of the use of discourse ethics in tourism literature through the work of Smith and Duffy (2003) has revealed some of these theoretical problems, because these authors theorize on the idea of reaching agreements between different stakeholders from Habermas' discourse ethics proposal. In the tourism domain, ethics needs to adopt an applied ethics framework and this work has specified some features of a valid ethical framework that can conceptually justify the agreements between different tourism stakeholders within the ethical field.

For that purpose this work has pointed out Apelian discourse ethics (Apel, 1993, 2001) as the starting point from which the application of discourse ethics to social practices can be sustained. While Habermas' proposal normatively limits the articulation of the strategic and communicative rationality to the field of public sphere and deliberative politics, the Apelian discourse ethics opens the possibility of articulating both rationalities within the ethics field. As the work has shown, the use of strategic rationality can be normatively justified in agreements if and when material and cultural bases are put in order so that it is possible to act communicatively, that is, with the intention to reach understandings. If we assume that tourism is guided by strategic-instrumental actions, this step makes the application of discourse ethics to the tourism domain possible. In this sense, some of the critiques about the goals of the business sector within the UNWTO pointed out that the ethical field provided by this organization could be colonized by the economic sphere to obtain their instrumental-strategic ends. This may be a skewed view of the business sector in tourism. However, the important point here is to highlight that, if it is assumed that states and politics are indispensable to challenge instrumental rationality in tourism, but they alone could not be enough to regulate global tourism activities, then discourse ethics can work like an ethical framework both to criticize the power of some stakeholders of the UNWTO and to guide the way in which ethical agreements can be reached. This can be another way to support the tourism transformation sought by the 'critical turn' in tourism studies.

Despite being one of the most important contributions to moral philosophy in the 21st century, discourse ethics has not only not been sufficiently introduced into the ethics of tourism, but most importantly, has not been openly discussed. The issues raised in this work to introduce this ethical framework in a critical way are theoretically complex and may be subject to specific discussions. But it is hoped this conceptual contribution is regarded as a first step towards laying down and discussing widely in future what the potential and the limitation of this ethical framework are to develop tourism in a fair way.

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