

BOOK REVIEW

How to write a thesis in tourism fields: A methodological scheme

Monica Toyos & Mercedes Massafra, editor (2009). Ediciones Turísticas

To arrive to the final stage of a thesis dissertation seems not to be easy and sometimes students come across with several obstacles and methodological problems they are able to resolve by their own end; first of all in developing countries when they lack of necessary resources and time converges with disinterest by lecturers and professional researchers. Of course, the Bachelor thesis-research condenses not only years of learning but also a high-emotive over-load that sometimes wrecks havoc in student's mind. *How to write a Thesis* has been authored by M. Toyos and M. Massafra, two argentine lecturers, with the end of being a guidebook for students who want to propose a theme as well as the methodological steps to sustain their original investigation before to a trial.

On the introductory chapters, the book focuses on the types of works which range from scientific-research towards marketing planes to develop certain business or opportunity. The thesis dissertation ought to be the result of a combination of learning, experience and the need for solving a problem in the industry of tourism. Following this, the success of the research will be a consequence of how the problem is formulated and adapted to the student's resources. To some extent, three relevant aspects should be taken into consideration at time of beginning with a project of this calibre, the initial questions or concerns that in the course of the research will be answered, the type of investigation and the adoption of a coherent methodology. As the previous argument given, Toyos and Massafra classify investigation in quantitative and qualitative but they do not give further explanation to defend their classification. The juxtaposition of both methods, they add, is called triangulation but



unfortunately, the book does not give any serious specification of what quantitative and qualitative-research mean.

A good example of qualitative techniques, in the perspective of authors, is the ethnography which is aimed at examining cultures alternating modes of participant observation and interviews or story of lives. In addition, these types of methodologies comprise exploratory researches or descriptive cases. Furthermore, cases studies are other important techniques students can be alternating with ethnography. Observation is of paramount important to find information utilizing the sense of researcher as an auxiliary instrument. Next, Toyos and Massafra go on to acknowledge that non-participant observation characterizes by the penchant of researcher to take quantitative dataset previously collated of earlier studies.

After giving details on the contents, and structure of theses, Toyos and Massafra, throughout the second chapter, emphasize on the degree of accessibility of dataset at time of choosing the theme of investigation. What is important to note here is that students should elect a theme that can be investigated within a lapse of time for holding their degree. I doing so, the thesis should be framed under the possibilities and resources of every student. The working variables or categories will help students to circumscribe the investigation in a specific time and space. For that reason, no less important seems to be the justification of research where student should demonstrate the relevance of the topic as it has been presented. In perspective, this chapter will provide readers with all necessary guidelines and steps to materialize the research as well as it advices about the limitations and problems students will come across during their journeys. The third and fourth chapters are fully dedicated to explain how the investigation should be redacted. For the students who wonder how to write a thesis, Toyos and Massafra provide with a good book-guide and practical suggestions that facilitate the task but in some extent, the text is fraught with a set of inaccuracies and conceptual flaws which should be previously discussed.

First and foremost, Toyos and Massafra lack of experience in conducting ethnographies or leading in qualitative field-works. This assumption leads authors to preclude ethnography is a qualitative technique based on a bunch of formal or informal interviews where heritage and cultural issues dominate. To dissipate this confusion, ethnography, a technique most certainly linked to anthropology, seems to be something else than a qualitative methodology enrooted into cultural concerns. Ethnography corresponds with a form of facing the fieldwork, a gaze, wherein the reflexivity between natives and researchers converge

in comparison with other techniques. One might realize that ethnography is structured on the needs often associated to reveal the untangled dissociation between what people do and say. As first ethnologists contended, ordinary people aim to lie or even occult information for many reasons ranging from status to power-will. Most precisely, ethnography allows a vivid comparison between the native discourse and facts as they evolve in the field-work. For being a qualitative method, ethnography does not need of measurement but meaning. It is not important to ensure more than 20 interviews to determine the correlation between two or more factors. At any rate, ethnography only needs of a couple of informants (only one if it is possible) for decoding what the observer cannot interpret on his/her own. Sympathy as a form of mutual relationship and trust are two of the key factors to make ethnography. This is a limitation that sometimes quantitative-based research still remains unable to solve. For that reason, ethnography is watching, reading, hearing and writing and only it is possible if researcher lives into the community which is being studied. Formal interviews, story of lives, and other qualitative methods are not necessarily ethnography. Secondly, authors misjudge the conceptual difference between a state of the art, and theoretical framework. Whereas the former contains everything what has been written along with certain topic, the latter only represents what the author judged relevant to carry out the field-work. This means that theoretical framework often seems to be a theory or a couple of them selected to be validated or refuted in the proceeding of study. The theoretical framework is possible whenever the student takes the state of the art and places it under the lens of scrutiny.

Ultimately, their overemphasis on the dissociation between qualitative and quantitative methodologies has been widely criticized in the fields of epistemology. Based on the assumptions, that all are qualitative variables simply because human mind is not able to understand the world without a personal view (principle of subjectivity), the quantitative variables could not be applied on Social Sciences. The type of method is constructed depending of the ontological constitution of observer and not for the result of the observation. This means that in Social Sciences all forms of assessments are nominal and depend upon the level of measurement and not if the contents are expressed or not in numbers. Algorithms, numbers and statistics seem to be so qualitative so an ethnography because they are subject to perceptual interpretations. In sociology we have been witness how the same cipher can reveal two paradoxical states which is decoded depending of the previous gaze.

Following this reasoning, only questions related to physics that allows creating laws (no need to say this does not happen in sociology) as the gravity discovered by Isaac Newton, can be considered as quantitative-research.

For some reason, all these methodological errors have been adopted by tourism and hospitality from other disciplines but in the case of this book, the problem is that it is intended to learn advanced students who is close to be practitioners or researchers. More interested in presenting plans of marketing to guide in how improving their profit and business than in discussing questions related to scientific-research, these new and surface guidebooks of methodology not only lack too much to be desired, but also have serious problems to be materialized in practical implications for students. This happens because writers who like Toyos and Massafra are certainly advocated to methodological issues are not professional researchers. This reminds the assumption that good-research and experience are inextricably intertwined.

Maximiliano E. Korstanje

Maximiliano E. Korstanje (mkorst@palermo.edu) is a Lecturer at the University of Palermo, Department of Economics. Larrea 1079, Capital Federal, Buenos Aires, Argentina. CP 1188 AAB.