THE IDENTITY OF SOCIOLOGY OR WHAT TO DO WHEN THE UNIVERSE IS UNKNOWN: QUALITATIVE SOLUTIONS AGAINST THE QUANTITATIVE OBSESSION

A IDENTIDADE DA SOCIOLOGIA OU O QUE FAZER QUANDO O UNIVERSO É DESCONHECIDO: SOLUÇÕES QUALITATIVAS CONTRA A OBSESSÃO QUANTITATIVA

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ABSTRACT

Social Sciences can, on occasions, be similar to the so called "hard" sciences. However, in many cases, neither the object nor the classical methods fit in with the objectives of the work. The object requires methodological and technical adjustments, which are often avoided by means of an improper rigidity of the object's needs. These adjustments can even alter the original research idea. The main objective of this article consists of proving that those objects of study, less suitable to be addressed by rigid positivistic strategies, can be approached both scientifically and sociologically. This can be achieved with the use of different strategies and flexible methodologies to ensure validity and reliability standards.

This paper will be posed, firstly, a reflection on the epistemological nature of the debate about the rigid-flexible perspectives. Secondly, the strategies and tools used by the research team to achieve the reduction of the uncertainty about the size and characteristics of the population studied will be described. Finally, some of the survey results obtained in this project will be compared to those provided by the *FAMILITUR* Survey (2008), conducted by the Spanish Institute of Tourist Studies (IET).

keywords: Metodological flexibility, quantitative-qualitative approach, identity of social sciences, residential tourism.

RESUMO

As ciências sociais podem, por vezes, ser semelhantes às chamadas ciências exactas. No entanto, em muitos casos, nem o objecto nem os métodos clássicos se encaixam nos objectivos do trabalho. O objecto requer ajustes metodológicos e técnicos, que muitas vezes são evitadas por meio de uma rigidez indevida das necessidades do objecto. Estes ajustes podem até mesmo alterar a ideia de investigação original. O objectivo principal deste artigo consiste em provar que os objectos de estudo, menos susceptível de ser abordada por rígidas estratégias positivistas, podem ser abordados científica e sociologicamente. Isto pode ser conseguido com o uso de diferentes estratégias e metodologias flexíveis para assegurar a validade e confiança adequadas.

Este documento coloca, em primeiro lugar, uma reflexão sobre a natureza epistemológica do debate sobre as perspectivas rígidas vs flexíveis. Em segundo lugar, são descritas as estratégias e ferramentas utilizadas pela equipa de pesquisa para conseguir a redução da

incerteza sobre o tamanho e as características da população estudada. Por último, alguns dos resultados de pesquisa obtidos neste projecto são comparados com os fornecidos pelo inventário FAMILITUR (2008), conduzido pelo Instituto Espanhol de Estudos de Turismo (IET).

Palavras-chave: Flexibilidade metodológica, a abordagem quantitativa-qualitativa, a identidade das ciências sociais, turismo residencial.

JEL Classification: C18

1. INTRODUCTION[1]

It is interesting to observe, in the daily practice of research, the manner in which professionals are obliged to constrain the techniques for quantitative data collection in order to make them appropriate for the operative demands of a project. From a qualitative and "flexible" perspective, such decisions can be methodologically justified and they can even result in a database that provides a close approximation to the population features. From a "rigid" or mathematical point of view, the actual capacity of these data to statistically represent the population, is an enigma.

Social Sciences can, on occasions, be similar to the so called "hard" sciences. However, in many cases, neither the object nor the classical methods fit in with the objectives of the work. The object requires methodological and technical adjustments, which are often avoided by means of an improper rigidity of the object's needs. These adjustments can even alter the original research idea when clashing against the fears aroused by not knowing how to approach the topic with the classical "hard" tools.

In other words, sometimes a sociologically interesting research project can be influenced, modified in its objectives and even altered, because of the mathematical restrictions imposed by the statistics models for inferring sampling results to the population. This fact may entail the exclusion of a certain target population, whose characteristics are interesting to be quantitatively investigated. Some examples of this are the illegal immigrant population (Heckmann, 2004), populations who have experienced environmental disasters (Henderson, Sirois, Chen, Airriess, *et al.*, 2009), the homeless population (Dávid and Snijders, 2002) or, as it is case of this research, the tourist population occupying non-hotel accommodations (Sharma, Dyer, Carter and Gursoy, 2008). This is an unregistered population group. It is unknown how many of them there are and where exactly they are located. Therefore, and according to the statistics discipline, it would be impossible to approach this reality as a sociological object of study. Several academically accepted solutions to this problem, such as random routes, can result expensive and almost impossible to use within projects which do not manage a considerable budget or logistics, which is pretty frequent in social research. As a consequence, the background problem emerges again (Diaz de Rada, 2004; Diaz de Rada, 2007; Diaz de Rada, 2008).

These difficulties add to a wide history of theoretical and methodological controversies (Ferrarotti, 1991) which are ingrained in the basic question of the identity of sociology as

[1] We are grateful to the Institute of Tourist Studies for their co-operation, as far as they facilitated us the necessary data to carry out this research. We would also like to make a special mention to Salvador Gregori, ODEC technician, for his advice and quick response to our questions. Likewise, we are most grateful to our colleagues Hugo Pinto, Fernando Sousa, Pedro Pintassilgo and Teresa de Norhona (University of the Algarve) for their invaluable comments to the successive drafts of this article. The translation of this paper was funded by the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Spain.

a science. Some classical authors already focused their efforts on this issue at the outset of the discipline, and they consistently demonstrated its scientific status[2]. Nevertheless, contemporary sociology continues to be burdened with this identity crisis.

Once this problem has been posed, the main objective of this article consists of proving that those objects of study, less suitable to be addressed by rigid positivistic strategies, can be approached both scientifically and sociologically. This can be achieved with the use of alternative and flexible methodologies which could incorporate different strategies of to ensure validity and reliability standards. This paper has been structured as follows. Firstly, a reflection on the epistemological nature of the debate about the rigid-flexible perspectives will be posed. This debate is framed within the discussion between a definitely positivistic sociology and a constructivist and procedural sociology. Secondly, the strategies and tools used by the research team to achieve the reduction of the uncertainty about the size and characteristics of the population studied will be described. Finally, some of the survey results obtained in this project will be compared to those provided by the *FAMILITUR* Survey (2008), conducted by the Spanish Institute of Tourist Studies (IET). The objective of this final point is to validate the approximation and results obtained by the research team. In this sense, if the results obtained from our survey are similar to those from the *FAMILITUR* survey, the scientific validity of the methodological proposal developed on this research could be inferred.

2. EPISTEMOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION OF THIS RESEARCH

Durkheim (Durkheim, 1973) specifically defined the object of study of sociology, as well as the manner in which it should be approached. The *social fact* should be understood holistically, considered in its relational dimension, yet analysed according to its individual manifestations. The very isolation of these manifestations implies the risk of losing the scientific *line of life* with the necessary comprehensive approach (Hamel, 1992). The subjectivities show worlds of significance, related to a contingent interpretation (as meanings can be substituted by other meanings consecutively) rather than to mathematical modelling (Seiyama, 2006).

The sociological debate about the possibility of objectifying the subjectivity (Ho, 2008) is notably cleared up when considering that the main contribution to sociology of the classical sciences in general, and of mathematics in particular, does not so much reside in statistical techniques, as in a rigorous and realistic attitude towards the object (Feldman, 1972). We, as sociologists, are aware that our obsession to *seem scientific* sometimes leads our investigations towards an inappropriate use of the quantitative techniques, as well as towards the isolation of the individual manifestations of the object and to a deviation from the real object. Thus, the final appearance of the research is that of a "clumsy imitation" of science. This can be avoided if we keep our sight focused on the realism inherited from mathematics, rather than on the need to adopt rigid statistical models, as they cannot fulfil our needs and they can even make us mistake the means (method) for the ends (object). Therefore, the adoption of a quantitative technique should not determine the selection of our research aims. On the contrary, we shall look for the technique or the set of interrelated techniques (the methodology) that best enables the understanding of the object.

Also, in other social sciences, as in economics, the quantification of the object has been (and still is) very much questioned as far as it dangerously distances itself from a necessary adjustment to reality (Lawson, 2009; Swann, 2006; Pinto, 2009). In fact, since Heisemberg's indertermination principle (1927), the awareness of the imperfect character of measurement

[2] Emile Durkheim or Max Weber, constitute some of the main examples of this. Also, Vázquez (Vazquez Figueroa, 1975) carried out a good overview of the authors who established the basis for the study of the identity of Sociology.

in quantum physics brought attention to the limits of scientific knowledge in general as the main philosophical consequence, and especially, concerning probability-based knowledge (Colyvan, 2008). Non-probabilistic sampling and triangulation techniques in search of appropriate levels of confidence are often used in the *hard sciences*. They are necessary and important to assure the scientific nature of any process(Ben-Haim, Zacksenhouse, Keren and Dacso, 2009) or to control the risk implied in the limitations of knowledge (Guo, Bai, Zhang and Gao, 2009). The random or non-statistical nature of Nature often involves serious conceptual and operative complications for the practice of research in the realm of these sciences (Frellsen, Moltke, Thiim, Mardia, *et al.,* 2009).

The search for a quantitative technique – and nothing more than quantitative - which can adequately adjust to the object, often ends in the adoption of the least-bad solution (Heraux and Novi, 1974), which irrevocably increases the probability of error. The difficulties inherent in the quantification of sociological questions from the beginning of the process, with the control and classification of the population and its sample, to its very end (Hazelrigg, 1991) (Moin, 1989), practically compel us not to forget alternative possibilities in order to ensure the structure of quantitative reliability created in order to reduce the margin of error (Martin and Lynch, 2009).

Some authors clearly point out the need for flexibility and adaptability of the methodology to the object (Díaz de Rada, 2006; Diaz de Rada, 2006). We can also find a number of explanatory examples for the initiatives to be performed before the fieldwork in case of difficulties, as in the ones presented here (Mainar and Grilló, 2006). Also, the particularities of the object can be addressed with the qualification of the human resources employed in the development of the process of data production (Fernández Esquinas, 2003). Likewise, we should create strategies to get around the difficulties and provide constructive and creative solutions that fit each object and their own methodological problems. To be aware of the range of difficulties and to be able to overcome them, are tasks which are just as sociological as the analysis itself. In fact, this awareness is only achieved during tentative contact in the initial stages of the investigation, in its design and planning. A mistaken procedure would imply rejecting our goals or our object because of the methodological difficulties that they entail. This would involve the gradual reduction of the possibilities for sociological investigation and a limitation to the applied knowledge, which is a source of science-building and progress, whether it is "hard" science or not.

3. STRATEGY ADOPTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR PROJECT

In order to provide an example of this issue and to search for solutions for this problem with both methodological and epistemological implications, we will use as an example the case study of the "*Residential Tourism: demand analysis and proposals for the restructuration of consolidated destinations"* project[3] (henceforth *TURVERCON*). The main objectives of this research are:

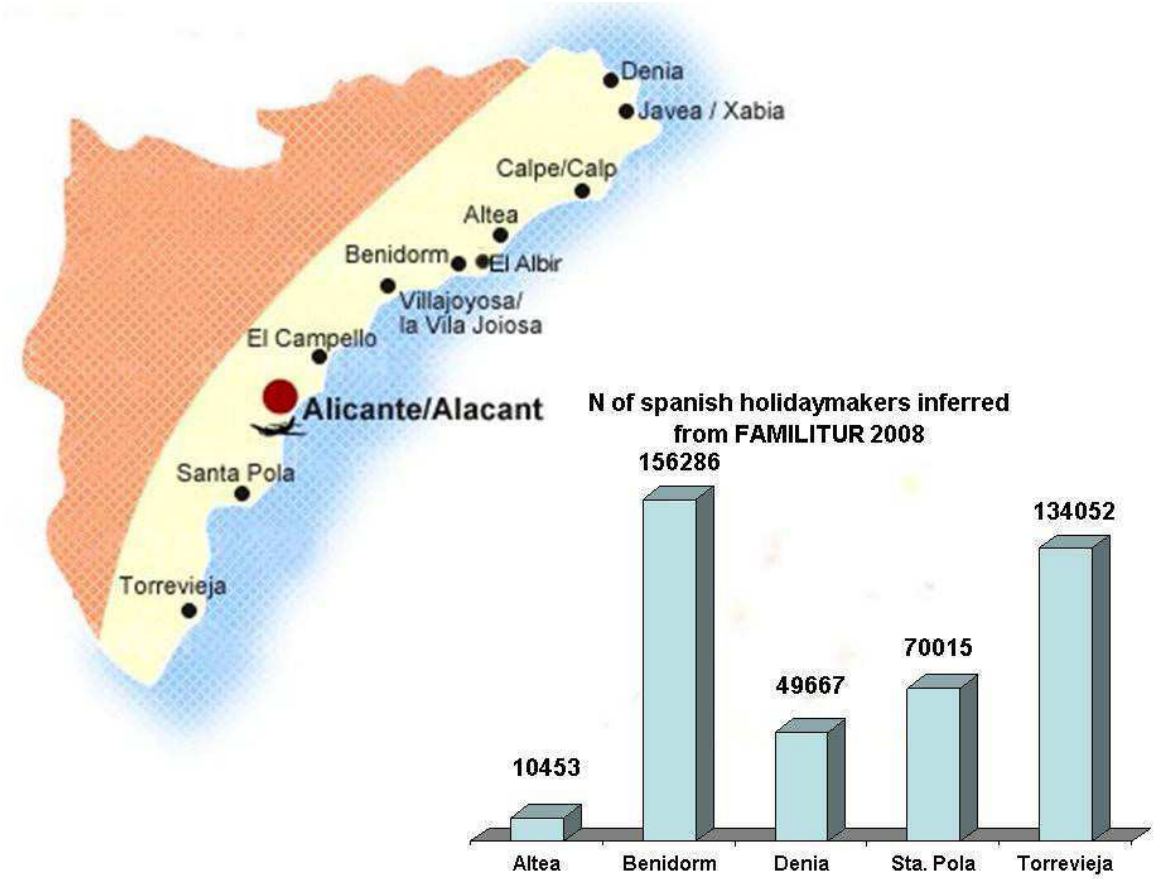
1) To analyse and diagnose the *Costa Blanca*'s residential tourism model (Salva, 1998; Torres, 2003).
2) To study the socio-touristic profile of holiday-makers, according to their socio-demographical characteristics, the configuration of different groups of holidaymakers and their lifestyles during summer leisure time.

These objectives were covered by using quantitative information obtained from a survey. This survey was addressed to Spanish summer holidaymakers in five municipalities in the Costa Blanca. The process of data collection was conducted simultaneously in the selected

[3] Research & Development project "Residential Tourism: demand analysis and restructuration proposals for consolidated destinations" (SEJ2005-04305), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education and Science (2005-2008).

municipalities (Denia, Altea, Benidorm, Santa Pola and Torrevieja) during the last three weeks of July and the first week of August (2008). The choice of these municipalities was made according to their significance as "sun and beach" tourism destinations (García Andreu, 2004; Mazon Martinez, 2006), the high number of non hotel holiday units available in the private sector (EXCELTUR, 2009; MUNRES) and with the aim of geographically covering the Costa Blanca from North to South.

Image 1. Sampling area map. Number of Spanish residential holidaymakers



Source: Own elaboration based on data from FAMILITUR (IET , 2009a)

The universe of study was the Spanish population who chose some of the cited destinations to spend their summer holidays in non-hotel accommodation (i.e., privately rented accommodation). Thus, these summer holidaymakers had to meet a number of requirements in order to be eligible for the study:

a) Their main residence could not be located in one of the participant destinations.
b) Their accommodation should be different from a hotel, a camping-site, a rural accommodation or a tourist complex accommodation. The summer holidaymakers linked to Residential Tourism stay in privately owned properties, family and friends' properties or rented properties.
c) They should not be in any of the participant destinations for work reasons.
d) Their length of stay should not be longer than three months or shorter than a week.

The main difficulty encountered by the *TURVERCON* research team was the lack of reliable data to establish the exact number of subjects in the universe of study (Casado, 1999). In other words, the number of Spanish summer holidaymakers who chose these municipalities

to stay in non-hotel accommodation was unknown (Aledo Tur and García Andreu, 2007). Thus, if the universe is unknown it is not possible to establish the representativeness of the sample. From a statistical or rigid point of view, the survey should have been ruled out as an appropriate research technique. Nevertheless, this research team adopted a more flexible approach with regards to the object of study. Likewise, information of a qualitative nature and from secondary sources was included in order to achieve an acceptable degree of knowledge about the population being researched. This became a necessary condition in order to make the use of the survey viable as a research technique and to accomplish the aims of the *TURVERCON* project.

As mentioned previously, there are no official records or elaborated data to determine the total number of tourists in the participant municipalities during the summer holiday period. Therefore, when faced with the difficulty of studying a volatile and numerically uncontrollable population, *TURVERCON* resolved to employ alternative tools, which allowed an approximation to the quantitative dimension of the universe of study (Heckmann, 2004; Dávid and Snijders, 2002; Mainar and Grilló, 2006; Eaton, Messer, Wilson and Hoge, 2006). Likewise, several interviews prior to fieldwork were conducted. The interviewees were key informants such as service company representatives (water, waste and energy companies, etc.), municipal experts on tourism and members of local councils responsible for tourism and town planning. After collecting this qualitative data, the impossibility of knowing the exact number of subjects in the universe of study was recognised.

Nonetheless, the information provided by the interviews, combined with complementary data[4], allowed us to confirm that the universe of study would exceed 100.000 Spanish summer holiday-makers in the *Costa Blanca* as a whole. This figure has been traditionally recognised by sociological studies as an acceptable lower limit for an infinite universe. A total of 400 questionnaires would imply a confidence level of 95% and an error margin of 5%. The total amount of questionnaires conducted was 1800.

The difficulties to know the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the population discarded the use of quotas or other criteria for sample selection (Cea D'Ancona, 1996, p. 415). Once again, we resorted to the use of the information provided by key local informants. They were asked to point out on a map the mobility of the summer holidaymakers, mainly searching for the urban areas with the highest affluence of tourists and their peak times. All of this was based on their knowledge of the possible types of holidaymakers with regard to their tourist and leisure behaviour. With this information, sampling points and routes were established in each municipality under the criteria that they kept the highest possible affluence of people during the summer period. Besides, several time intervals were scheduled for every sampling points, with the purpose of complying, insofar as possible, with the probabilistic requirement of allowing each member of the population to be included in the sample. The fieldwork of the *TURVERCON* project was carried out during July and August 2008.

Under the presumption that the foremost reason for residential tourists choosing these municipalities as their destination is "sun and beach" (Aguiló, Alegre and Sard, 2005; Haug, Dann and Mehmetoglu, 2007) and given that the used routes cover a wider area than the one covered by the sampling points, we decided to conduct 70% of the interviews on the beach, where routes were established. The remaining 30% was carried out at the sampling points, with the idea of including those holidaymakers who were not on the beach but were taking part in other activities such as shopping, walking, socialising in terraces and coffee shops and the like. The sampling points were locations with a high concentration of people: central areas, shopping areas and malls, hotel locations and promenades. The time intervals

[4] *The number of households for potential tourist use and the households and population census data were provided by the FAMILITUR and FRONTUR surveys (IET, 2009a; IET, 2009b).*

were also defined according to people density on routes and at sampling points, namely from 10:00 to 14:30 in the morning and from 17:00 to 20:00 in the evening. In order to select the sample unit, one out of eight holidaymakers was randomly selected. It is important to highlight here that, apart from the selection of the last sample unit, the establishment of sampling rules responds to criteria of a qualitative nature based on reliable information, yet with no statistical basis given the lack of quantitative data to establish the quota.

4. VALIDATION OF THE SOLUTION ADOPTED

The aim of this section is to validate the approach and results developed by the research team. Likewise, if the results obtained by the *TURVERCON* survey are similar to those showed by the *FAMILITUR* survey (2008), the scientific validity of the former's methodological proposal could be inferred. *FAMILITUR* is a monthly, panel-type survey, conducted by the Institute of Tourist Studies, which belongs to the Spanish Industry, Tourism and Commerce Ministry. This survey is addressed to a representative sample of 12,400 Spanish households. Information is subsequently obtained from approximately 34,000 individuals residing in family main households in the whole Spanish territory. All collective accommodations, including hotels, barracks, convents, etc. were excluded from the population framework. The information provided by FAMILTUR is structured in three main blocks, in accordance with the three units of analysis: households, individuals and journeys.

In order to be able to carry out this comparison, we have used a subsample of the *FAMILITUR* data comprising the journeys made by Spanish citizens to every coastal destination in the province of Alicante (*Costa Blanca)*[5]. The types of journeys selected from *FAMILITUR* were the summer holiday trips with residential accommodations in the destination (privately owned or belonging to friends and family, time shares or rented housing). The duration of these trips should be equal to or greater than 6 nights, or less than three nights. These trips will be referred as **VRCB6** trips from now on.

The selection of all the municipalities of the *Costa Blanca* from the *FAMILITUR* survey (conducted "in origin"), and not only of the journeys made to the five municipalities specifically studied by the *TURVERCON* survey (conducted "in destination"), is justified owing to a number of reasons. Firstly, the five municipalities included in the *TURVERCON* survey are regarded as representative of the universe researched (*Costa Blanca*). Secondly, as the *FAMILITUR* survey comprehended the whole extent of the *Costa Blanca,* it provided us with a higher number of entries in the subsample of VRCB6 journeys (648 summer journeys in 2008 from 268 different households[6]).

For the results obtained from the *FAMILITUR* and *TURVERCON* surveys to be comparable, we proceeded to prepare the databases.

a) Since the *FAMILITUR* survey offers statistically representative results of the Spanish population who travelled to the *Costa Blanca* in the summer, the first step was to estimate the number of **VRCB6** trips in 2008. This is the population framework of the questionnaires conducted in the destination sites. It was only possible to make this estimation in May 2009, when the *FAMILITUR* data was available to the researchers, that is ten months after the *TURVERCON* survey was conducted.

[5] *Costa Blanca* is the tourist brand-name for the coastal destinations in the province of Alicante.
[6] This implies a top sampling error of 6.0% for a confidence level of 95%, where p=q=0.5, and a simple random sampling. The *FAMILITUR* is stratified and multi-staged. Therefore, the complexity of the exact calculation of the sampling error is beyond the scope and objectives of this study. It is necessary to highlight that stratification reduces the sampling error and that the number of stages (also known as conglomerates) increases it. For that reason, the approximation in a simple random sample is often used in these situations with an illustrative purpose (Abascal Fernández and Grande, 2005), pp. 266-267.

We checked that *FAMILITUR* estimated the number of people living in Spain in 2008[7] at 44,764,076 and the number of tourist trips completed in the same year at 168,802,178. 12% of those trips were summer holiday journeys. 60% of these summer holidaymakers used residential accommodations. We will refer to this type of holidays as **VR** from now on. In the *Costa Blanca*, **VR** trips account for up to 69% of the total of summer trips to the destination. The *Costa Blanca*, as a destination specialised in **VR**, received 940592 **VR** trips in 2008, accounting for 7.66% of the whole **VR** by Spanish residents. The length of these trips was mostly over six nights (876,584 trips made by 773985 people)[8]. Out of the 876,584 VRCB6 trips estimated by the *FAMILITUR* survey in 2008, almost half of them (420,473) had one of the five municipalities cited in *TURVERCON* as their destination.

Stemming from the above it follows that the estimation of the population carried out by the research team for the destination survey (*TURVERCON)*, was indeed correct. As indicated earlier, qualified informants and data from secondary sources were used to reach that estimation, which allowed the triangulation of the infinite universe (>100.000 **VR**).

b) The second task to accomplish with the *FAMILITUR* data was the estimation of the weight that each one of the five participant destinations should have over the total of VRCB6 *FAMILITUR* journeys to the *Costa Blanca.*

For the *TURVERCON* survey a constant allocation of the sample was used in each municipality. Thus, 400 questionnaires were conducted in *Benidorm*, *Torrevieja, Santa Pola* and *Denia* and 200 in *Altea*[9]. This implies the need to weight the trips made to each destination, according to the estimated quota of VRCB6 journeys for each of them (estimation obtained from the *FAMILITUR* data). Annex 1 includes the table used for the calculation of the weighting coefficient for the five destinations.

At this point, it is necessary to highlight that the *TURVERCON* survey contain information about the sex and age of all the members of the interviewees' travelling group with the sole aim of providing a reference frame in order to check that the profile of the interviewees adjust to the profile of the VRCB6 travellers over 15 years old (under 16 years old travellers were not interviewed).

After reviewing the *TURVERCON* fieldwork, it has been observed that the 16-30 year old group is underrepresented in the VRCB6 total. In others words, after interviewing the subjects in their destination, the most represented age group is the over 30-year-olds[10]. Therefore, following the guidelines afforded by Abascal *et al.* (2005), and prior to analysing the profile of the *TURVERCON* interviewees, a certain weight was given to each interviewee according to their age. This was done in order to adjust them to the age profile of the five destination's sample. In Annex 2 the calculation of their weight is shown. Hence, each interviewee will have a final weight in the *TURVERCON* survey's database, as a result of combining the adjusted weight of each destination and their respective age weights.

Once the databases were ready for comparison, we proceeded to validate the representativeness of the *TURVERCON* survey. This was achieved by comparing the results from *TURVERCON* to those obtained from the *FAMILITUR*'s VRCB6 subsample. For this purpose, some specific questions from the questionnaires used in each survey were selected on the premise that these questions were worded in an identical manner.

The questions contained in the *TURVERCON* questionnaire that are comparable to the *FAMILITUR* ones are mainly of two kinds:

[7] Not including Ceuta and Melilla.

[8] Taking into account that the global size of the *FAMILITUR* sample that we used comprised 12,400 households, it follows that 1.7% of the population resident in Spain has made VRCB6 journeys, with a sampling error of ± 0.23% (102700 people) and a confidence level of 95%.

[9] The final distribution of valid interviews was: 218 in *Altea*, 395 in *Benidorm,* 398 in *Denia,* 397 in *Santa Pola* and *393* in *Torrevieja.*

[10] Ortega (Ortega Martnez, 1990, p. 361) highlights the fact that, in any sample selected using a random procedure, it is frequent for the youngest population group to be underrepresented.

1. Questions relating to all the people travelling with the interviewee (travelling group), such as questions about their sex and age[11].

2. Questions relating to the interviewee[12] only: type of accommodation, province of origin, length of journey, level of studies/qualifications, civil status, employment status and activities to be performed in destination.

Comparisons by sex and age of the members of the travelling groups are shown in Annex 3, Table 1. The differences observed between *TURVERCON* and *FAMILITUR* are not statistically significant, and are admissible within the error margin accounted for in each survey. The differences by sex account for a 2.3% and, in terms of age groups, the maximum difference is a mere 3.6%.

With regards to the results stemming from the questions relative to the interviewees, we also reported a high degree of similarity. With regards to civil status (Annex 3, Table 2), the main differences are found within the married group, although they minimally exceed the allowed error margins. The remaining differences are minimal and the distribution of percentual results by categories also coincides in both surveys.

As far as the level of studies of the interviewees is concerned (Annex 3, Table 3), the most significant differences are found in primary education. Yet, they are within acceptable margins. The rest of educational levels show similar results in both surveys. The distribution of results by categories also matches.

In the province of residence of the travellers (Annex 3, Table 4), the differences are within an admissible error margin, with Madrid and Alicante accounting for half the travellers.

Relating to the length of the stay in the destination (Annex 3, Table 5), the categories were grouped into two clusters, given the strong prevalence of short stays (between and a week and fifteen days). The match in this case is practically total.

Among the questions referring to the holiday leisure activities (Annex 3, Table 6) the most relevant differences are found in those questions that were not posed identically. Nevertheless, these questions were recodified with the aim of keeping the highest degree of similarity for their statistical treatment. Thus, the most important difference is found in the question related to "Cultural outings (museums, monuments and cities)". While in the *FAMILITUR* survey the question formulated was literally "Cultural outings (museums, monuments and cities)", in *TURVERCON* the analogous question was "Cultural outings (museums, theatres…)". In spite of this, the differences found in the results are within the acceptable margins in both studies.

Lastly, with regards to the employment situation of the participants, in those categories comparable in both surveys (Annex 3, Table 7), we found no significant differences in the results.

Therefore, we were able to observe that the findings of both surveys are very similar, in general terms. There are several explanations for the most significant differences identified in some of the categories. Qualitatively speaking, these two surveys are different. While *TURVERCON* interviews were conducted in the streets, *FAMILITUR* is a panel-type survey, which allows for an easier and more intuitive response. In this case, the interviewees completed the questionnaire in their own homes and in a reiterative manner as they knew the questions better and they could therefore respond as they had done on previous occasions.

[11] Out of these questions there are 6567 registered entries from *TURVERCON* (See Annex 1, column (B)), obtained from 1801 valid interviews, which implies an approximate sampling error of 2.4%. These entries can be compared to the subsample of 648 FAMILITUR VRCB6 trips, since here each subject's displacement is counted as a trip. These 648 entries in FAMILITUR come from 268 different households, which implies an approximate top margin error of 6.1%, for a confidence level of 95% and a simple random sample.

[12] There are 1801 registry entries obtained from these questions in the "in destination" survey.. Therefore the approximate top sampling error in *TURVERCON* is ±2.4%. These questions can be compared to those from the *FAMILITUR* VRCB6 for the group over 15 year old (obtained from 264 households). This creates an approximate top sampling error of ±6.1%.

This is possible because the situations and conditions referred to by the questions do not change with time.

On the other hand, the periods of data collection (fieldwork) are not completely similar in each case. Whilst the *TURVERCON* data was collected during the last three weeks of July and the first week of August 2008 and the travellers had reached their destinations by then; in *FAMILITUR* fieldwork was conducted monthly (the travellers are asked about any journeys[13] they have carried out in the previous three months and those journeys are included in the month in which the journey concluded).

5. CONCLUSION

Although this work has been justified both from an epistemological and a methodological point of view, our conclusions comprise and interrelate both dimensions.

The high degree of similarity found in the results obtained from the *FAMILITUR* and *TURVERCON* surveys fully justify the decisions taken by the research team at the stages of design and development of the study. Likewise, it legitimates and validates the results obtained through the application of methodological strategies which, from a positivist point of view, could be termed as unorthodox. The wider scope conclusions refer to the need and appropriateness of designing alternative methodological strategies when aiming at objects of study with quantitative control difficulties. For instance, in the case we have put forward, we approached our object of study through a quantitative technique: the survey. Yet, we obtained the initial information not from irrefutable, accessible, reliable and statistically appropriate quantitative data, but from qualitative primary sources that were contained within the very object of investigation. This data was triangulated and supported by secondary and complementary data. The final outcome is the configuration of an alternative methodology that becomes valid for the project's goals.

On the other hand, the chronic identity crisis of sociology often leads to a preferential use of quantitative techniques and tools whose comparability, validity and reliability are accepted by the Academia given their proximity to the positivist methodologies of the "hard sciences". As an unintended consequence, social research may tend to exclusively study those objects which call for the employment of "highly contrastable" and orthodox methodologies. The use of these methodologies would increase the level of scientific legitimacy of the projects in which they were developed. This is the case of the survey and the statistical analysis derived from its application. On the contrary, it could indirectly entail the abandonment (and even the discredit) of those objects of study which cannot be quantitatively controlled under the requisites of orthodox methodologies.

The results of this work show that new methodologies based on a mixed use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in order to support the decisions made at each stage of the research process, can be valid and reliable in those cases where the objects are highly uncontrollable. Moreover, these methodologies should be considered before discarding the object because it does not fit in with the requisites of a specific research technique.

[13] Every month, a third of the *FAMILITUR* sample is asked about the family journeys completed in the three previous months. Consequently, monthly preliminary reports of the final data are produced. Each month's final data will be only available three months after the month in which all the participants in the panel are interviewed

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Annex 1

Calculation of the weighting coefficient for each TURVERCON destination.

	Number of VRCB6 trips Familitur 2008	Percentage of VRCB6 trips Familitur 2008 (A)	Number of journeys[1] in TURVERCON (B)	Percentage of journeys in TURVERCON (C)	Weighting coefficiente in TURVERCON D= A/C
Altea	10453	2.49%	782	11.92%	0.208600323
Benidorm	156286	37.17%	1400	21.33%	1.742170377
Denia	49667	11.81%	1524	23.22%	0.508608364
Santa Pola	70015	16.65%	1468	22.37%	0.744328332
Torrevieja	134052	31.88%	1388	21.15%	1.507235505
Subtotal	420473	100	656.0	100	
Other	420473	-	-		-
Total	876584				-

Annex 2

Calculation of the weight given to each interviewee according to age[14] (over 15 years old)

Age of member of the travelling group		TURVERCON Non-interviewed	TURVERCON Interviewed (E)	TURVERCON Total (T)	Weight of each interviewee C= T / E
16-20 years old	Count	257	37	294	
	%	7.1%	2.1%	5.4%	2.64
21-25 years old	Count	280	100	380	
	%	7.7%	5.6%	7.0%	1.26
26-30 years old	Count	310	105	415	
	%	8.6%	5.8%	7.6%	1.31
31-35 years old	Count	309	165	474	
	%	8.5%	9.2%	8.7%	0.95
36-40 years old	Count	359	213	572	
	%	9.9%	11.8%	10.5%	0.89
41-45 years old	Count	302	187	489	
	%	8.3%	10.4%	9.0%	0.87
46-50 years old	Count	321	198	519	
	%	8.9%	11.0%	9.6%	0.87
51-55 years old	Count	305	182	487	
	%	8.4%	10.1%	9.0%	0.89
56-60 years old	Count	336	198	534	
	%	9.3%	11.0%	9.8%	0.90
61-65 years old	Count	305	175	480	
	%	8.4%	9.7%	8.8%	0.91
Over 65 years old	Count	540	241	781	
	%	14.9%	13.4%	14.4%	1.08
Total	Count	3624	1801	5425	
	%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

[14] The objective of this weighting is to adjust the age profile of the TURVERCON's interviewees over 15 year old (1801 subjects) to the age profile of the travelling group in the *TURVERCON* survey (a total of 5425 individuals over 15 years old).

Annex 3

Comparison of the TURVERCON-FAMILITUR results

Table 1: Sex and age of the members of the travelling group

		TURVERCON		Familitur VRCB6 trips 2008	
		Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)	Approximate sampling error[2]	Total VRCB6	Approximate sampling error[3]
Sex of the members of the travelling group	Male	46.6%	2.4%	44.9%	6.0%
	Female	53.4%	2.4%	55.1%	6.0%
Age of the members of the travelling group	0-10 years old	11.9%	1.5%	15.5%	4.3%
	11-20 years old	9.2%	1.4%	10.1%	3.6%
	21-30 years old	11.9%	1.5%	11.6%	3.8%
	31-40 years old	15.3%	1.7%	12.0%	3.9%
	41-50 years old	15.0%	1.7%	15.3%	4.3%
	51-60 years old	15.5%	1.7%	16.4%	4.4%
	Over 60 years old	21.0%	1.9%	19.1%	4.7%
	TOTAL	100.0%		100.0%	

Table 2: Civil status of the interviewees (over 15 years old)

	TURVERCON		Familitur VRCB6 2008 trips (over 15 years old)	
	Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)	Approximate sampling error[4]	Total VRCB6	Approximate sampling error[5]
Single	24.5	2.0	28.1	5.4
Married	66.1	2.2	58.3	5.9
Widowed	3.9	.9	7.2	3.1
Divorced	1.8	.6	2.0	1.7
Separated	1.6	.6	3.1	2.1
Cohabiting	2.1	.7	1.2	1.3

Table 3: Educational level of the interviewees (percentage of trips for the over 15 year olds)

	TURVERCON			Familitur VRCB6 trips 2008 (over 15 years old)		
	Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)		Approximate sampling error	Total VRCB6		Approximate sampling error
Illiterate	.3		.3	.2		.5
With no qualifications (primary education unfinished) [6]t	4.4	33.6	2.2	3.1	40.6	5.9
Primary Education (old system, 10 years old)				14.5		
Primary Education	29.2			23.0		
Secondary Education	33.7		2.2	31.5		5.6
University (3rd year)	13.6		1.6	12.0		3.9
University (4th year and over) Postgraduates	18.8		1.8	15.7		4.4

Table 4: Province of origin of the interviewees (percentage of trips for the over 15 year olds)

	TURVERCON		Familitur VRCB6 trips in 2008 (over 15 years old))	
	Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)	Approximate sampling error[7]	Total VRCB6 trips	Approximate sampling error
Alicante	10.8	1.4	8.8	3.4
Madrid	38.9	2.3	46.8	6.0
Valencia	3.2	.8	6.5	3.0
Others	47.4	1.8	37.9	4.4

Table 5: Length of stay (percentages of trips for the over 15 year olds)

	TURVERCON		Familitur VRCB6 trips in 2008 (over 15 years old)	
	Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)	Approximate sampling error	Total VRCB6[8]	Approximate sampling error
A week to 15 days	45.2	2.3	45.4	**6.0**
16 days or more	54.8	2.3	54.6	6.0

Table 6: Activities performed by the holidaymakers during their stay

Activity	TURVERCON		Familitur VRCB6 trips in 2008 (over 15 years old))	
	Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)	Approximate sampling error	Total VRCB6 trips	Approximate sampling error
Visiting family and friends	44.4	2.3	45.9	6.0
Cultural outings (museums, monuments, cities)			43.8	6.0
Cultural outings (museums and theatres)	35.2	2.2		
Clubbing, pubs	44.6	2.3	41.3	5.9

Table 7: Employment status of the interviewees (percentage of trips for the over 15 year olds)

Employment status	TURVERCON		Familitur VRCB6 trips in 2008 (over 15 years old)	
	Total of VRCB6 trips (weighted)	Approximate sampling error	Total VRCB6	Approximate sampling error
Student	8.4	1.3	11.5	3.8
Retired or pensioner	22.1	1.9	16.8	4.5
Housewife	12.8	1.5	13.9	4.2
Unemployed/inactive	3.6	.9	3.7	2.3

(Footnotes)
[1] We regard each trip as a return journey for one person. If the interviewee's travelling group comprises four people, we consider it to be four trips in TURVERCON, in order to use the same terminology as FAMILITUR.
[2] In a simple random sample, for a confidence level of 95%, K=1.96 and sample size=1801 participants.
[3] In a simple random sample, for a confidence level of 95%, K=1.96, and sample size= 268 households.
[4] In a simple random sample, for a confidence level of 95%, K=1.96 and sample size=1801 individuals.
[5] In a simple random sample, for a confidence level of 95%, K=1.96 and sample size=264 households.
[6] In FAMILITUR there is a category called: "Certificate of Education, EGB 1º, 10 years old", which is not included in TURVERCON. As this category is situated between "With no qualifications, or Unfinished Education" and "Finished Primary Education", the categories for Primary Studies have been grouped in "Finished and Unfinished Primary Education" in order to make the samples comparable.
[7] Given that in TURVERCON the percentage of no answer for this question is very low (1.5%), the approximate sampling error is calculated as in the previous table. The percentage here is estimated over the total amount of valid responses.
[8] Given that in the FAMILITUR sbsample for the over 15 year olds there are some individuals who completed two or three VRCB6 journeys in 2008, the length of the stay has been calculated adding the duration of each of their journeys, in order to make this comparable with the TURVERCON's length of stay. In TURVERCON, interviewees were asked for the total length of their stay in destination.