

How is tourism reshaping the world?

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What do tourists want nowadays? Is it to travel the world and experience new cultures and other ways of living completely different to their own? MacCannel (1973) considers the tourist a product of modernisation, searching for 'authenticity' but the result is the creation of 'authenticity' being staged by host cultures to attract tourists.

The phenomena of tourism has risen rapidly in the past few centuries, becoming one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Travel has become far cheaper and easier, allowing people to explore new places, but are the attractions and sights a true representation of the society they are visiting? All around us in everyday life are commercials and adverts offering us cheap getaways or once in a lifetime trips, displaying pictures of things we would not get to experience any other time. Reality soon becomes clear once we reach our destination, guided by English speaking reps and menu's offering a 'full English', that in many cases the host country has adopted Western culture, in an enticement for British people who want to enjoy home away from home. Somehow this



appears to defeat the purpose of travelling, but with the tourism industry booming, it seems that the shift in countries no longer representing their own culture but instead adapting culture of Western tourists is what encourages people to book with them. This critical reflection will also explore how the concepts globalisation and consumerism also appear to have an impact on how tourism is shaping the world.

Urry et al (2011: 7) argue: "isolated from the host environment and the local people, mass tourists travel in guided groups finding pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying 'pseudo-events' and disregarding the 'real' world outside." Take London for instance, a prime example of how the tourist culture is now shaping the world, where masses visit the City to see 'famous' sights. Urry (2002) suggests that seeing 'unique objects' is what Westerners want to see at some point in their lives. However is it really the English who have made these sights famous or the tourists that visit and pay to get an insight into what they

perceive to be English culture? Berger (2008) argues the 'tourist gaze' is not a matter of individual psychology with a learnt 'way of seeing' as tourists construct themselves through seeing and visiting these places and conforming to expected behaviours such as participating in guided tours and taking pictures to prove to themselves and others that they have visited these places. Similarly MacCannell (1999) believes that although tourists embody a quest for authenticity, 'real lives' can only be found backstage and are not always evident to us. This suggests the tourist gaze would involve obvious intrusion into people's lives, hence why locals construct back stages in a contrived and artificial manner (Urry, 2002).



Heidegger (2005) talks about the visual puzzlement that is involved with being a tourist, emphasising the 'tourist gaze' he explains how experiences of other places become transformed into 'an object ready at hand for the viewer'. But as countless tourists before and after him do, he complains that his experience did not offer much of a view and was limited on vision, hence the disappointment experienced by many that what they have sensed and expected did not appear. Alternatively to the tourists that want to see what they expect, there is also seeing ordinary aspects of social life undertaken by people in unusual contexts. This for example, primarily takes place in poorer countries, where visitors interestingly gaze upon people carrying out day to day domestic tasks, sparking realisation that routines of life are not that unfamiliar (Urry, 2002).

More importantly what is to blame for the mainly standardised version of the culture that tourists get to see? The answer; Homogenisation. This refers to the decrease in cultural diversity, giving way for a more global culture, thus diminishing local cultures. This also reflects Ritzers (2004) theory of 'Mcdonaldisation', in which the principles of the fast- food restaurant are dominating the world. For tourists, the notion that they will be stepping into a completely different world in terms of cultural values is diminishing as wherever they may be they will not be far from a shop, restaurant or fast food chain that they can

easily find at home. From previous trips abroad, I have found that before I have exited the airport of the host country, I am surrounded by the exact same shops and eateries from the airport I flew from. This cultural homogenisation impacts both identity and culture and in turn creates a mixture of different cultures as people become aware of each other's cultures and adopt elements of these (Ritzer, 2004).

Furthermore, if homogenisation is to blame for the merging of cultures, what has caused homogenisation? Globalisation is typically associated as the main cause of cultural homogenisation. Tomlinson (2003: 269) argues that "before the era of globalisation, there existed local, autonomous, distinct and well-defined, robust and culturally sustaining connections between geographical place and cultural experience". He believes identity was simply something people just 'had', an existing possession that continued from the past, not just a description of cultural belonging but more of a collective treasure of local

communities (Tomlinson, 2003). But it could also be lost if it was not protected and preserved, and due to the corrosive power of globalisation, the differences between locality defined cultures which constituted our identities have been obliterated. As previously mentioned, many Westerners and those from the United States can notice a standardised version of their culture being exported across the world. Many tourist resorts can be found to cater to Western tastes, primarily when it comes to food and entertainment. Chain companies can be found all over the world, but even in smaller resorts many pubs and bars are found to offer English food and Television, suggesting that although people enjoy the experience of travelling to somewhere new, they still seek to enjoy certain home comforts whilst away from home.

As well as globalisation the concept of tourism can also be related to consumerism. The industrial revolution brought about the rapid growth of a capitalist society, which marked major changes in the rate, nature and promotion of consumption. Hall (2010) states that tourism is seen as part of economic, cultural and lifestyle concerns, that centre on economic, social and mobility capital. He believes that this aspect is deeply embedded within contemporary capitalism, with this notion often being appealed in suggesting that a new phase of capitalism has succeeded the historical features and class struggles of previous ones (Agliette, 1979). Tourism was previously limited to middle classes who were able to afford such trips, but in contemporary society, is it now accessible to all classes. Tourism continuously encourages consumption and although the notion is there for people to have fun, relax and enjoy themselves in a new environment, fundamentally it is always getting people to consume more.

Subsequently although tourism will bring in revenue for host countries, due to mass consumerism, there are also dangerous impacts, for example waste development. Dubai, since its supplies of oil started to diminish, has now transformed itself into one of the most exceptional tourist destinations in the world, creating spectacular islands, hotels and attractions. Stimulated attractions that are nearly as real as the original they are copied from are just some of the fascinations that attract tourists to Dubai (Urry, 2011). Not surprisingly however, Davis and Monk (2007) called places such as Dubai 'evil paradises', due to the building of these places involving a prolific amount of water, oil power and building materials thus creating a place of high carbon 'consumption' (Urry, 2011).

With Dubai creating attractions to entice all walks of life, other tourist hotspots do exactly this to encourage the audience that they cater for. The holidays that people pay for is in effect a particular social composition of other consumers (Urry, 1995) and this is what creates a particular 'ambience'. Take for example, holidays aimed at the youth culture. During summer months it has become extremely common for young people to visit resorts aimed specifically at 18- 30 year olds that offer sun, sea and plenty of alcohol fuelled fun. This appears to be a prime example of how tourism is shaping the world, as different places cater for different needs. If places are catering for needs and wants of tourists, surely this is not representing their actual culture, possibly defeating the purpose of travelling to another place to experience something different. Similarly many resorts in countries such as Spain are offering similar packages, catering to needs of families. Upon arrival, from previous experience, many hotels, attractions and even the natives themselves are extremely Westernised. The natives of the host country are the ones that speak our language, even

though we are the visitors, and unsurprisingly you usually find yourself surrounded by many people with the same nationality as yourself. This makes it hard for anyone to get to grips with the culture of the country as it is so 'de-exoticised' (Edensor, 2007; Larsen, 2008). Urry argues that central to tourist consumption is the individual or collective view upon distinctive landscape or townscape, which signifies an experience which contrasts with everyday life (Urry, 1995). Upon reflection there appears to have been a significant change in the nature of tourism, and with the tourism industry expanding more than ever, this begs the questions: Are tourists possibly destroying the purpose of tourism in which people travel to explore new cultures and way of living?

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Picture 1:

http://www.123rf.com/photo_20676868_happy-tourist-sightseeing-city-with-map.html

(Accessed 30/4/2015)

Picture 2:

<http://www.ladsholiday.com/destinations/malaga/> (Accessed 30/4/2015)