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REVISITING THE SOCIOLOGY OF CONSUMPTION IN TOURISM

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Introduction

The founding parents of sociology and anthropology have developed a pejorative meaning of market, industrialism and capitalism. As Professor Emile Durkheim puts it, the advance of industrial ethos would inevitably result in the creation of new institutions and negative effects on the integrity of social scaffolding. Several social pathologies would have been accelerated by the erosion of social trust (Durkheim 1976; 2014). In this respect, Max Weber alarmed that the rational logic and its effects of depersonalization would cause irreversible changes for the style of life of Europeans. Rationality in which case depends on the market will somehow monopolize the culture in order to commoditize consumers (Weber 2009). Unless otherwise resolved, money will mediate between citizens in the same way than language. More recent literature as Zygmunt Bauman recently suggests that the adoption of consumption as a main value of society paved the ways for workers to become in consumed goods (Bauman 2001). Doubtless, the attention which was drawn to the theory of consumption, from the inception of sociology, led towards some conceptual limitations which were univocally accepted by sociologists of tourism. At a first glance, theorists not only developed a romantic view of evolution, where primitive cultures will disappear in the hands of modern ones, but also trivialized the role of fear in the configuration of modern market. Secondly, consumers are not determined by rational goals, as literature suggests; rather, they are moved by emotional basis that sometimes are impossible to forecast. This behaviour can be associated to impulsive buying decision (Hadjali el al. 2012) (Beatty

and Ferrell 1998). In the first section, entitled from production to consumption, we discuss the reason behind the passage from a society of producers to a society of consumers. Secondly, in the consuming tourism section, three senior sociologists are placed under the lens of scrutiny in order for readers to expand its current view of consuming and tourism. This method can be to some extent compared to the Delphi method characterised by the interpretation of expert responses (Hammond and Wellington 2013). Although, the original negative connotation formulated by Durkheim and Weber was carried on by modern sociologists like MacCannell and Urry but not by others like Meethan, the idea that globalized consumption was prone to commoditize cultures, landscapes and peoples anyway resonates in the sociology of tourism up to date. The present chapter explores the ebbs and flows of theory of consumption in tourism as well as the most relevant guidelines to be investigated in the coming years. The crux of this discussion is to understand why these scholars have developed a negative connotation of tourism.

From production to consumption

Like sociologists, economists had a bad connotation of consuming theory. Not only by the chaos and social disorganization that uncontrolled consuming generates, but also because it represents a way of destroying wealth. By the upsurge of XXth century, economists and its different waves have serious doubts on the problems of consumption for productive system instilling the widespread belief that consumption would somehow bring progress and prosperity for all members of society (Heilbroner 2011). As senior lecturer Kathleen G Donohue acknowledges, no later than the address of Franklin D. Roosevelt where his four freedom *fear, speech, religion and want* were declared, economists felt the needs to conspire against the society of producers to accept consumption was a good aspect of economy. For this and to the moment, medieval and classic economies have developed a negative view of consumption. From Ricardo to Smith, scholars validated the concern that consumption would lead to bad habits that jeopardize the organization of labor as well as the rules of internal society. At a closer look, the age of consumers and liberal consumerism was introduced by the belief the demand was more important than offer. If classic economy materialized how significant labor and production are, modernity issued another discourse. Now, government focused its efforts in poverty and its effects on social scaffolding.

"Even the classical liberals turned their attention to eradication of poverty; they continued to emphasize production rather than consumption. If one was entitled to consume only what one had produced, then, classical liberal reasoned, the only way that government could eliminate poverty was by increasing productivity" (Donohue 2003: p. 4).

Theorists of economy observed a paradoxical situation since the frenetic quest for profits pressed societies to adopt a new consumer oriented system which was prone to produce what "Others" needed. The idea that production was only valid way to reach prosperity sets the pace to a new paradigm, where consumption would press the supply to offer a plenty of new products otherwise would never yielded. Instead of stimulating economy by production, this doctrine offered a different explanation where society will progress if economists stimulate consumption. The growth of economy undoubtedly would be helpful to prevent disastrous effects of poverty in households. US was proxy to face a radical change in the paradigms that ruled her economies. In doing so, the Keynesian policies fit like a glove. Strong regulatory measures as well as welfare programs disciplined the citizenship to understand the new dilemma of modern economy consumerism is the only valid way in order for poverty to be eradicated.

Starting from the premise that the wealth of nations was a question of equilibrium, economists thought that the only manner to boost the economy of a country was at the cost of another country. In this viewpoint, a strong commercial relationship among nations should be organized in view of trade. Whenever, exports supersede imports the economy raises. However, consumption was one of the main threats of well-being simply because it reduces the goods available for exporting. Here is one of the ideological pillars of modern capitalism (Donohue 2003) that explained the current prone for globalizing trends and economies.

After 1940, *this freedom from want* was associated to one of human basic needs and expanded to the world as an unquestionable right of citizens. Additionally, the financial crisis in 1930 paves the pathways for nations to embrace this paradigm without resistance. Liberals formulated "the new deal of liberalism" to transform American

society, even mingling the discourse of consumption with democracy. As Donohue puts it,

> *"This new liberal system was not without its detractors. Critics became increasingly concerned that freedom from want was being equated with a right of plenty. And they worried that material plenty was being treated as a precondition of democracy"* (Donohue 2003: p. 277)

Ideologically, Americans have felt "superior" to other nations because they are enthralled as the main democratic and prosperous society; although more egalitarian at the surface, American citizens are subject to more work and consumption but less leisure. Worker unions and workers not only enjoyed from vacation and tourism, but also are subject to a plenty of products that are visually sold by television (advertising). This happens because, in a pro - consumer society, workers are bombarded with emulation and advertising creating the needs to buy. This not only jeopardized their real liberty to choose, but affects seriously to democracy. Detractors of capitalism, who pushed their focus on the arbitrariness of producers, were involuntarily responsible or conducive to the formation of a global society of consumers. Those denunciations on an economy that protect the interests of producers as well as the needs to adopt consumption to break the material asymmetries among classes, were two guiding concepts to embrace a globalized version of capitalism, prone to mass-consumption. At a closer look, Donohue explains, if the current system of consumption was a result from the fear some left-wind scholars faced after experiencing one of the worse financial crisis of world history, so this begs a more than interesting question, is fear enrooted in the logic of market?

Consuming tourism

For the reason we have already discussed in earlier sections, the theory of consumption in tourism fields is multi-layered but reaches some interesting traces. From sociology to marketing, many voices have focused on consumption as one of the pillars of globalized tourism (Richards 1996) (Hall and Williams 2013) (Woodside and Dubelaar 2002) (Tzanelli 2004). The recent technological breakthroughs after WW-II conjoined to substantial working benefits that resulted in mass-tourism. On this complex background, the sociology of tourism draws its attention to understand the main

guidelines of modern consumption, an idea inscribed in how or what people consume, what are their preferences, hopes and fears (Woodside and King 2001) (Korstanje and George 2012). Considered as an economic - centred activity, academy developed a great interest by consumption. Although many scholars have focused on this issue, in this chapter we discuss only three of them, which to our end, are the most authorative voices: *Dean Maccannell, John Urry and Kevin Meethan.* No less true is that others important sociologists have studied tourism but with less foci on consumption than they. If MacCannell (1976) delves into staged-authenticity and alienation as the main bulwarks of his project, Urry (2002) understands that tourism is defined by the economies of sign, which are determined by symbolic allegories. Rather, Meethan (2004) emphasizes on the *genealogy of tourism* that mediates between self and its sense of place. Whatever the case may be, one of the most limitations these studies show, is related to the trivialization of fear as the co-founder of market. Here is the starting point from where this chapter will contribute.

Dean MacCannell

One of the well-read scholars in the sociology of consumption (in tourism) who does not need presentation is Dean MacCannell. Basically, his original idea is related to the legacy of structuralism, with other new approaches as interactionism and Marxism. It is important not to lose the sight that tourism is for MacCannell a modern activity, resulted from the acceleration of capitalism. At some extent, he retains the same concerns of Durkheim respecting to the advance of capitalism. The sociological work of MacCannell is strongly influenced by five clear-cut boundaries. From Durkheim (1976), he took not only the division between sacred and profane space, but also the role of totem in the social cohesion of primitive mind. Goffman (1959) plays a crucial role by configuring his conception of staged authenticity, while Karl Marx provides a much deeper discussion about the notion of class struggle, desire, and alienation. With this background in mind, MacCannell proposes that tourism fulfilled the gap left by secularization in post-modern societies. Since totem plays a crucial role by enhancing the social cohesion of tribal societies, authenticity mediates between citizens and their institutions in industrial forms of organizations (MacCannell 1973; 1976). A much deeper symbolic matrix that forges a tourist consciousness works in similar way to totems in the primitive minds, documented by the founding parents of ethnology. He is

strongly interested to understand the expansion of capitalism, which is based on the theory of alienation, in revitalizing the frustrated experiences of peoples. At a closer look, Marx was in the right side by confirming that in order for the oppression suffered by Workforce does not result in a collapse of social order, an ideological mechanism of control should be adopted. Consumption and tourism are parts of these mechanisms of control that (on one hand) prevent the disintegration of society, but at the same time (on another) developed a more radical interest for "the Other" (MacCannell 1976; 1984) that Andrews and Leopold (2013) would assimilate to social capital. In sharp contrast to the thesis John Urry held, MacCannell understands that the goals of tourism not only are the leave from ordinary life as Urry precludes, but the formation of a meta-discourse towards a new consciousness. It was unfortunate that digital technologies and mass consumption are undermining the attachment of people to their cultures and traditions. This leads to MacCannell to contend that tourism is reproducing "empty meeting grounds" (MacCannell 1992; 2001; 2011; 2012). While touring, the "Other" not only is invisibilized, but silenced. This happens because native are exploited to fulfill the wishes of mobile consumers. This assumption places MacCannell in the line of French philosophers as Virilio (2006) or Augé (1995). At times, the social bondage among citizens is undermined by postmodernism, the "emptied spaces" surfaced. The quest for the "ethnic difference", which defines modern tourism today, only is valid if reinforces my own supremacy. The stereotypes of West are depicted to mark the "Others", in so doing, the white elite is unmarked. The sense of freedom given to tourists leads us to think they are privileged citizens or take part of a selected group. At a closer look, we will realize their obsession for "Others" are marked by egoism and individualism. Reluctant to be in contact with other tourists, modern sightseers move as cannibals reducing the presence of "Others" to their imagined desires (the eternal lack). The needs of discovery as well as the quest for other cultures precede a much profound sentiment of guilty by the extermination of aboriginal world. Since West never has asked for pardon for the Conquest of Americas, it was enrooted in its consciousness in a pathological mode (MacCannell 2001; 2011; 2012). To correct this problem, we must adopt a new ethics that facilitate our being in this world. Instead of covering the "Other" using our mechanisms of discipline, we ought to reconsider the current obsession for authentic experiences. Most likely, accepting the difference is the best way to get a genuine and authentic experience. The ebbs and flows of individualism, or the

negotiation between agents and structure was one of points MacCannell leaves behind but very well it is continued by other scholars as John Urry.

John Urry

The critiques on Dean MacCannell are aimed to show that his diagnosis applies for Disneyworld alone or the consumption of mass-tourism, but it is limited to other practices. This leads to John Urry to propose his diagnosis about the complexity of tourism. Rather, he adopts the Foucaultian term, "gaze" to denote the fascination of West for vision - Oculacentrism. The term is often associated to discourses, allegories or even practices of seeing consuming contexts. The act of gazing is connecting to a much deeper cultural matrix that gives meaning to what is being watched. Studying how this matrix is formed, is a valid way of approaching different gazers and gazes. This means that tourist-gaze varies from culture and time. To wit, Urry distinguishes three types of gazes, *romantic, individual and solitary* (Urry 2002). As he noted, *"I call the romantic gaze, solicitude, privacy and a personal, semi spiritual relationship with the object of the gaze are emphasized. In such a cases, tourists expect to look at the object privately or at least only with significant others"* (Urry 2002: p 150).

The gaze transforms areas of terror, fear, into commoditized landscapes that are engaged to an "imperial economy". In order for the gaze to be consolidated, distance from gazers to their object, is of paramount importance. As this backdrop, Oculacentrism is vital to accelerate the necessary conditions for the expansion of tourism. Three questions facilitates the understanding of Urry`s conceptual model, why modern citizens are prone to travel?, to what extent not only persons but cultures are mobile?, is mobility the platform towards contemporary citizenry?.

In theory, the current cultural values of postmodern societies confer to their citizens of certain autonomy to travel to any geographical point of the globe. The rights of mobilities are legally associated to the organization of labor. We work hard during all year, in order to obtain our vacations. Far from being naïve, this idea represents the connection of labor and leisure. As a mechanism of escapement, tourists get away from their home to reach new outstanding experiences, which are based on ongoing negotiations that changed the ways and how people gaze. Since tourism seems to be open to the logic of escapement, leisure allows the liberalization of all social

constraints. Consumption would play a crucial role by fulfilling the gap left by the liberalization of rules. If starting from the premise that gazing represents a way of control, maintained by West during XIXth century, to expand the imperial hegemony over periphery, no less true is that this process culminated in the consolidation of tourism industry. Gazing is a way of possessing what is being gazed but he said, this can be only done in an hyper mobile context, where cultures and their peoples are marked by the sign of central economies. The process of commoditization proposed by tourism can be materialized only because objects are conferred of a sign, which is exchanged in the market. We do not consume products by their features as a couple of centuries ago, but by the imposed sign over them. Coffee from Colombia, Whisky from Scotland, Wine from Argentina are only some examples that validate Urry`s worries. Referring to events and more particularly cultural events, Séraphin and Nolan (2014); Andrews and Leopold (2013) explained how tourism contributes to their commodification. This exchange can be accomplished only in a context of extreme mobility. Today, airport officials recognize that almost 600 million arrivals are recorded worldwide, while this amount was 25 million in 1950. The evolution of tourism as a mass-industry reflected profitable revenue for international investors, which paradoxically, were unable to promote a fairer distribution of wealth in underdeveloped countries.

In fact, Urry is convinced mobility is often based on the dominance of esthetic over the rest of senses. This not only explains the main reason as to why people recur to mass-transport as a mechanism of evasion but also the growing importance of travel photography in recent decades. In a globalized society characterized by the predominance of spectacle, multiculturalism encourages the displacement as a vehicle towards happiness, development and emotional commitment. From this angle, nation-states are reinventing their boundaries and identities constantly supported by the interchange of tourists, migrants and workers. These new forms of movements are part of social memory and broader acculturation processes which fieldworkers should explore in their studies (Urry 2007).

Though mobilities are key factors to define tourism, is not the only one. The eternal quest for happiness and novelty are salient factors that tourists often pursue but never reach. For Urry, MacCannell did the correct step in affirming tourism stems from a

macro-structural matrix (staged-authenticity) but he failed to give further explanation on how different gazers connect to different cultures. Rather, it is interesting not to lose the sight on the micro-sociological dynamics of tourism where psychological experience is orchestrated as a mere reflection of self. To put this in bluntly each tourist seeks what they want, but this sentiment is not independent of its cognitive system. At this stage, *curiosity* (not staged-authenticity) helps in understanding how tourist gaze is formed. Albeit modernity imposes some stereotypes and portraits, the individual attachment of self to space gives different profiles which are fulfilled with different products. There is nothing like an all-encompassing matrix of what tourism means or a tourist-consciousness but a fluid trade-off between agency and its structure. The project of structuralism where MacCannell departs put the chart before the horse. For Urry, instead, the tourist-experience not only is enrooted in a mobile context, but aims at transforming the routine into a new cultural experience which cannot be obtained at home. In this respect, tourism recycles the boredom into commoditized forms of entertainment.

In his seminal book, *The Tourist Gaze* (Urry 2002), Urry notes that geographies, persons and landscapes can be organized through gazing. Far from being a disorganized activity, tourist-gaze stems from the configuration of a cultural model. In order for the economy of signs to expand, mobilities connect needs with commodities. This is exactly the point of discussion shown in *The Economies and Spaces,* a project which is co-authored with Scott Lash. The current atmosphere of multi-culturalism is unable to find the division between high and low-mobilities (Lash and Urry 1993)

The trajectory (exchange) of goods and humans (by stimulating consumption) has created an empty space accelerating the decline of trust and social bond among persons. They appeal to the Maussian development of gift's theory to explain why trade affects seriously the human reciprocity. Lash and Urry explores the role played by the tour operator, as professional actor who is trained to mould its clients` experiences. The function of travel agents consists in finding and absorbing the potential risk a traveller may face during its holidays. Today, there is a tension between experts and lay-people to fix the ways these symbols should be interpreted or decoded. This explains why some tourist destinations are selected by consumers while others are surely discarded. At time of travelling abroad, the decisions made by consumers are influenced by a broader

symbolic platform, conformed to virtualized information which is not palpable unless by the impose sign, on the consumer's mind. These allegories not only mould the personal experience but also expectances posed on the dream destination. The personal experience and mouth-to mouth recommendations set the pace to new ways of indoctrinating consumers` mind, *the advertising.* In West, during XIX and XXth centuries, a new type of re-flexibility has been expanded worldwide, causing an aesthetic romanticism of the "Other". The possibility for travellers not only to experience new sensations and landscapes, but to classify diverse geographical natures was, jointly to tourism, conducive to the assertiveness of cosmopolitism. But this ethnical other became in a mere commodity to be elaborated and exchanged by other commodities (Lash and Urry 1993).

Last but not least, the economy of signs evolves conjoined to the economies of desires, which are visually stimulated by modern tourism. In this respect, the mobile-modernity cements the conditions for the monopoly of desire to be established as a mediator between citizenry and social institutions (Lash and Urry 1993: 369-371). His efforts to integrate mobilities into a coherent paradigm or clear-cut epistemology situate Urry as a leading scholar within the sociology of tourism.

Kevin Meethan

In the middle of the discussion between MacCannell and Urry we come across with Senior professor of University of Plymouth, Kevin Meethan who argues convincingly that modern capitalism shapes more permeable geographical boundaries and process of identities. Let's explain that his initial studies come from a much deeper analysis centered on the study case of York, England. In this respect, tourism and consumption should be taken seriously into consideration as something else than a mere optimization of pleasure (Meethan 1996). Through consumption, travellers keep open to new experience but retaining their own identity. The concept of fluidity is vital to understand Meethan´s development. Over years, he developed an all-encompassing model of modernization and sense of place, which introduces the legacy of John Urry. Not only consumption and its patterns have changed by the advance of tourism, but also the ways cultures are certainly decoded. In an ever mobile and globalized world, the conformation of identities and cultures are being recycled in more fluid ways than other times. As the previous argument given, one might speculate that consumers accept a

process of production, which is previously determined by a dominant ideological discourse. Unlike other consumers, tourists should abandon home to materialize their consumption. The sense given to obtained experience is previously conditioned to a cultural matrix. However, in contrast to other scholars, this matrix for Meethan, seems to be replicated in the practices of tourists and their itineraries as well as the accumulated images that are later disseminated by mass media. As an on-going negotiation with others, places, persons and goods are exchanged in order to create an imagined landscape of visited place, which does not correspond with the theory of alienation. Quite aside from what specialized literature precludes, which means that consumers are passive receptors of marketing and advertising, Meethan adds, under some conditions commodities are received or used in different manners they have externally designed. Nor Marxism neither structuralism are enough to explain the micro sociological selectivity of consumers in a hybridized world. The concept of co-production and interpretation is one of the key factors that distinguish Kevin Meehan's development from other scholars as MacCannell, Augé or Virilio (more pessimists). The sense of place in humans is not only given in their attachment to the site, or territory but in the ways they interact with others, which lead towards the hemisphere of identity. Though conducive to the reproduction of *narratives of self*, tourism is enrooted in a specific history and territory which is elaborated from generation to generation. The experience tourists feel, after consuming, entails an *"active engagement in the memory work"* (Meethan 2006: 9). We think often that metaphors, ideologies, imaginaries and gazes created by services consumption is not the end, but a starting point for new studies to expand the current understanding of what a narrative of place means. In this vein, Meethan gives to readers a substantial insight which merits to be discussed. Peoples are not passive agents that maximize their pleasure or reduce their pain, as some psychologists of consumption stressed. The circularity of modernity is not given by a unilineal movement where subjects act as passive agents; they behave, rather, in the middle of cyclical contexts, where culture is being changed day to day. The concept of "hybridity", in this vein should be placed under the lens of scrutiny, because it escapes to individual understanding of things (Meethan 2003). This belief is useful for Meethan to apart from Urry. We do not live in a mobile culture, as Urry originally alerted, but in the roots of a complex intersection in what he dubbed as *"the genealogy of tourism"*. What type of connection is this?

11

One of the aspects that determine tourism consumption is the motives behind tourists made the decision to leave home, likely thousands of mileages, by feeling some experience which is still unfamiliar for them. The *quest of otherness* plays a crucial role enabling a connection between hosts and guests. The sense of place seems not be the site where one stands, but the idea of home, one asks for. No matter the interests, people struggle to find their home during all their life. This is the reason why diaspora alludes to an imagined past-time one seeks but never reaches. Travellers may be very well subject to multiple locations, identities and landscapes. For Meethan and his follower tourism is something else than a space of hedonist consumption where travellers maximize their pleasure, in the extent any travel represents a movement for self-discovery (as a rite of passage) between normalcy and exoticness (Meethan 2004).

Whether after MacCannell, sociologists criticized the nature of tourism as a mechanism of control conducive to commoditize ethnicity is an open question, but Meethan goes on the opposite direction. Ethnicity and mobilities have helpfully contributed in connecting geographies with economies and peoples into a much broader allegory of the pastime (identity). As a part of human history, travels and place-making were inherently associated to the conquest. Nowadays, the affordable technology allows new interpretations of past, representing different products (allegories) for different travellers that range from migrants who forcefully should abandon their families to global tourists (Meethan 2014). If Meethan can be questioned, it is for his over valorization of culture over others factors of analysis.

With the benefits of hindsight, Frederick Buell places the problem of mobility, culture and globalization under the lens of scrutiny. He advocates for a new theory of globalization that understands the pervasive position of culture in the threshold of time. West not only colonized the peripheral world by introducing the idea of white superiority, but also the beliefs of "commonalities" in heterogeneous aboriginal landscape. As it has been formulated by colonial powers, culture serves for two diverse purposes. On one hand, it appealed to forge a sentiment of "we" against "they", who were portrayed as "inferior". On another, the process of decolonization post WWII created the inverse stage. However, the meaning of culture never was questioned. Today, culture is sold by tourism and global industries. His main thesis is that culture as an invention of colonial West expanded globalization to worldwide (Buell 1994).

Conclusion

This chapter has certainly addressed the negative view of founding parents of sociology on industrialism. These pejorative beliefs over industrial ethos were influential in modern sociologists as Dean Maccannell, John Urry even Kevin Meethan, all who concerned on the aftermaths of mobility and globalization in cultures. One of the aspect that coadyuvated to form a negative view of consumption and tourism was related to the fact that sociologists (in tourism) did not pay attention to ancient history. For them, in sharp contrast to archaeologists, tourism is modern issue which was never present in other ancient civilizations. Needless to say this is a big problem for them to see beyond the boundaries of Middle Ages. The term *feriae* which was used for ancient Romans to give a relief to their citizens by 3 months still is an example old forms of tourism were precedent than modernity. Even, it mutated to the modern terms ferien (German) and feriaes (Portuguese) which denotes "holidays". Important archaeological evidence suggests that ancient empires as Assyrians, Romans, Sumerians and Babylonians developed mechanism of escapement like "tourism". Imperial structures need from expansion to survive. This process not only indexes another cultures and territories but also concentrates a lot of resources in its core. In order not to collapse, temporal leave should be conferred to citizens to return to their homes. That way, their daily frustrations not only are revitalized but also they renovate the trust in the imperial power. This explanation suggests that we have to mind in tourism as "the maiden of empires"; a social institution older than sociologists of tourism preclude. Most certainly, the role of history was trivialized by English literature because of two main reasons. One of them is the lack of interests for Anglo-Saxons in ancient history which is useful to explain the current function of contemporary World. Secondly, they are subject to Middle Age which was a period of low-mobilities, and therefore no further efforts to see ancient history are done. It is safe to say that current tourism is resulted from the surge of Anglo-Saxon Empire (initiated by UK and continued by US). This does not mean that other similar forms of tourism and consumption were enrooted in the past.

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