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TOURISM, GLOBALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY: A PROBLEMATIC ALLIANCE

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Abstract

Travel and tourism has been one of the most dynamic, economic and social growth activities over the past few decades. Tourism has witnessed a phenomenal growth in the twentieth century and has become the largest industry in the world today. Tourism related activities are a central pillar of the service economy as they offer sustenance to people and also contribute to national income. Tourism is seen as both a vehicle and a symbol at least of westernization, of progress and modernization (Roche, 1992). It is promoted not only as a revenue earner but also for its environmentally friendly image. Referred to as a "smokeless industry", tourism is believed to offer a viable alternative to potentially damaging forms of development such as mining, logging, industry or exploitative use of wildlife. Historically, however, tourism has not been a positive experience for all parties engaged in the development process, or treated all stakeholders in the enterprise equally.

Tourism is believed to be an industry that has a massive growth potential. This industry is expected to record an annual increase of about 4% in international tourist arrivals and spending. This in turn suggests that, by 2020, international tourism will be generating up to US$2 trillion a year (cited in Sharpley and Telfer, 2002). International tourism alone generated over US$453 billion in 1998 (WTO 2000) whilst, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), global tourism - including domestic tourism – is a US$3.5 trillion industry, accounting for 11% of world GDP and a similar proportion of global employment. This proves that tourism has developed into a powerful, world-wide economic force.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is without doubt one of the major social and economic phenomena of modern times. In the early parts of the nineteenth century tourism was considered a social activity, therefore only the privileged few could engage in the tourism endeavor. However, today there are increasing opportunities to participate in tourism. The way in which tourism has come to be a part of our everyday lives indicates that tourism has become increasingly democratized (Urry, 1990). This can be attributed to two major developments; one is that the distinctions between both tourism destinations and modes of travel as markers of status have become less defined and second; mobility, vacations and travel are being recognized as social victories (Krippendorf, 1986). Tourism also 'accounts for the single largest peacetime movement of people across cultural boundaries in the history of the world' (Lett, 1989). Interestingly, tourism has reached significant proportions in many countries to such an extent that it has been referred to as the twentieth-century migration of nations.

Tourism as an 'industry' is influenced by the forces of capitalism. Contemporary tourism needs to be examined through an analysis of relationships of power, a process that is central to globalization. It would be pertinent to examine the varied notions of sustainability and who dictates how it should be achieved and evaluated. The issues relating to globalization and sustainability find reflection in the national as well as State tourism policies. The nature of tourism is thus influence by larger global trends and structures.

Tourism and Globalization

Tourism places before the developing world a number of challenges. Tourism is often advocated as a development strategy and is closely linked to the neoliberal development theories whose sole focus is market-orientation, such as liberalization, privatization and globalization. That tourism has been projected as an engine of growth is because of the resurgence of the popularity of modernization and neoliberal economics.

Globalization, sustainability and development are universalistic discourses, however they differ vastly in their interpretations and shared meanings. The three concepts are considered to be the standard bearers of western capitalist development and have irrevocable impact on the role and fate of tourism. Because of its sheer size and power, an examination of tourism must also include a critique of capitalism and of the globalizing forces it has created, which allow it to grow at an unprecedented rate. True to its nature, the globalizing forces often pursue profits over justice. In fact, tourism is one of the main products being globalized, while scholars such as Brown (1998) and George (2002) argue that tourism is one of the main forces driving globalization. Globalization impacts different groups in different ways; and an increasing interdependency between the First and Third world has prompted Stuart Hall (1992b) to term the situation as 'the West and the Rest', obviously inferring that the 'West' benefits at the cost of the 'Rest'. Crucially in the context of tourism, the Third World necessarily consists of tourist-receiving and not tourist-sending countries. Thus, one sees a situation where capitalism and commercialism have been taken to an extreme. McMurtry (1999) has gone as far as to refer to this stage of capitalism as constituting a cancer on the global social system.

It is imperative that a discourse on globalization includes a mention of Nation-State. Beck (2000:14) suggests that 'globalization means denationalization, which involves erosion of the nation-State and its possible transformation into a trans-national State.' The notion of early capitalism was characterized by a more mixed economy; which means there was a certain level of sovereignty of nation-States whereby they could create trade barriers, protect labour and subsidize industries. However, with the entry of global economic organizations such as the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO), that form of sovereignty has come to an end. Corresponding to this, Truong (1991:99) notes in her study of South-East Asia, 'there has been a high degree of external influence on the formation of tourism and leisure policies', a pressure exerted by foreign Governments, global financial institutions such as the World Bank, and by 'development agencies'.

While globalization may appear to be comprehensive, in a way incorporating social and environmental costs, its absolute and clear agenda is that of big business which focusses exclusively on issues of trade and movement of capital. It has affected social and political stability because of its demand for the removal of trade barriers regardless of social and environmental costs. Globalization has in fact led to disempowerment of people living in many communities across the globe simply because there are very limited policy options available to the nation-States for their protection from the onslaught of trans-national companies.

The global economic restructuring and development are the most significant factors in the study of globalization. While one feature has been the rapid growth in the world market, a process referred to as internationalization, another feature is the relatively rapid First World deindustrialization, with an equally rapid growth in the service sector.[3] This dramatic increase in service sector industries is perhaps best understood as part of an ongoing process of the international division of labour at a global scale. These shifts also provide insights into the changing patterns of consumption of services, such as holidays. A grasp of this is essential for understanding how growth, development and consumption of tourism takes place in the First World. It is also equally important to understand how capitalism has penetrated into the Third World and drawn the Third World into a global capitalist system. While tourism must be understood with the context of capitalistic development and the dynamics of capital accumulation, it is nevertheless necessary to avoid deterministic reasoning and acknowledge that such development is locally conditioned and differentiated.[4]

Several forces drive the global economic processes. A structuralist understanding of the growth of new tourism would locate it firmly within the developing needs of global capitalism. The most penetrating analysis has been offered by Marxist geographer David Harvey. Harvey presents the concept of time-space compression, which provides valuable insights in understanding the growth and development of Third World tourism. The time-space compression thesis is presented in his widely cited The Condition of Postmodernity (Harvey, 1989b). Earlier geographical distance was considered a major barrier to expansion of business. Harvey argues that

[3] Deindustrialization has been necessitated by the long-term fall in manufacturing profit margins in the advanced capitalist economies (Daniels et al. 2001; Lash and Urry 1987)
[4] The form that tourism development takes and the respective roles of relevant stakeholders is not predetermined and will vary greatly from place to place.

globalization in its present form involves an increase in the pace of economic life and a phenomenal acceleration in the movement of capital and information. This is reflected in the way in which capitalists aim to overcome the barriers of distance and stretch their economic relationships to all parts of the globe. In other words, as a part of the ongoing expansion of capitalist relations of production the objective of globalization is to reduce the turnover time and to quicken the circulation time of capital, thereby helping to sustain profits. In order to achieve this goal, both new markets and new products are sought. This process is clearly reflected in the way in which an increasing number of holiday destinations are drawn into the global tourism industry. Harvey States that it is not only capital that is circulated in an accelerated rate, but places too, as destinations come in and out of fashion and tourism moves on elsewhere. Indeed, the growth and development of the Third World tourism may be another manifestation of time-space compression with the logic of capital accumulation driving the global spread and expansion of tourism.

Interface between Power and Tourism

All forms of tourism, whether; mass or alternative forms, are tied into the growth and expansion of capitalist relations of production, with economy as the driving factor. It is widely understood that the levels of consciousness and mobilization surrounding global environmental issues have been generated and are being followed in the First World, and in that sense sustainability serves the interests of the First World. Discourse and ideology are considered to be complementary to each other. Indeed ideology is a matter of 'discourse', a 'question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes' (Eagleton, 1991: 9). Not only does the notion of ecological sustainability bring some kind of scientific validity with it, but also it suggests that some places (in this case Third World environments) are more suited to its application than others. In this way, a notion of sustainable tourism as discourse transmits and translates power.

This difference in perspective is also reflected in the fact that there is no agreement over the exact nature, content and meaning of sustainability. It is a contested concept in all senses of the word. Different interests – supranational and transnational organizations, INGOs, socio-environmental organizations, social classes have adopted their own definition and defend their own language (discourse) of sustainability. Foucault's ideas may lead to the conclusion that knowledge in tourism is produced by competing discourses. Discourse, therefore, is a useful concept in emphasizing how a certain subject or topic is talked and thought about and how it is represented to others. Most importantly, discourses are 'part of the way power circulates and is contested' (Hall, 1992b: 295).

Discourse is also an essential feature of hegemony[5] in the power dynamics. Both these concepts though interrelated, need to be differentiated from each other. Hegemony is essentially about the power of persuasion, while ideology, by contrast may be imposed by force (Eagleton, 1991). This is evident within the discourse on tourism development through the way in which the IMF structural adjustment policies are imposed. The concepts of the Third World; development, sustainability and tourism are examples of hegemony in practice.

The structural dependence of the Third World on the First World is reflected in a number of studies. Two principal forms of global domination that resonate with structural dependence are colonialism and imperialism. Global tourism industry is characterized by the First World ownership of much Third World tourism infrastructure and the origin of tourists from the First World countries. This has prompted several scholars to compare tourism development as a new form of colonial and imperial domination. It would be apt to State that the dependency theory that elaborates the unequal relationship between a First World core and Third World periphery is part of a more general theory of imperialism. Nash (1989) argues that tourism will last as long as the metropolitan core generates the demand for tourism and the tourists themselves. He concludes: 'it is this power over touristic and related developments abroad that makes a metropolitan center imperialistic and tourism a form of imperialism' Nash (1989: 35). Similarly, van den Abbeele (1980) States that tourism is imperialistic, but with a double force. First, because it turns Third World cultures into a commodity and second, it provides hedonistic practices for wealthy First World tourists.

[5] Hegemony was a concept developed by the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, to emphasize the ability of dominant classes to convince the majority of subordinate classes to adopt certain political, cultural or moral values; a more efficient strategy than coercing subordinate social groups into conformity (Jackson, 1992).

A number of commonalities exist between globalization and imperialism. In this sense, globalism is not a new phenomenon. Some scholars look upon globalism as an extended version of imperialism. Nowhere has the processes of commodification and intervention been so evident as in the development of international mass tourism. With the penetration of capitalism into Third World societies, tourism has also had the effect of turning Third World places, landscapes and people into commodities. In other words, we consume elements of a holiday in the same way as we consume other objects or commodities.

Gonsalves (1993: 11) observes that modern tourism has all the attributes of a master-slave relationship. Therefore, the very presence of tourists leads to the 'view that modern tourism is an extension of colonialism'. This is an increasingly widely shared opinion within the Third World. Chung Hyung Kyung's (1994) observations illustrate the passion and conviction with which these are expressed: 'Colonialism has many faces. Third World tourism, an advanced form of "post-colonialism", is a disease which destroys people's bodies and souls... Third World tourism carries a major symptom of colonialism: "Domination and Subjugation"' (Chung 1994:21).

It is not just academics that are drawing parallels between tourism and colonialism. Srisang (1992), a former Executive Director of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT), the world's largest NGO on tourism suggests that, 'tourism epitomizes the present world economic order - which is inherently unjust - where the few who control wealth and power dictate the terms. As such, tourism is hardly different from colonialism'. In a similar vein, Allen and Hamnett (1995:252) argue that 'just as some "Third World" countries have thrown off the yoke of colonialism, they have taken up the yoke of tourism', indicating a continuation of the imperialistic pattern of domination.

Tourism and Sustainability

It is necessary to take a broader view of tourism and sustainability. Sustainability is a political issue and therefore it needs to be examined through the wider processes in economics and politics in the First World. From the environmental perspective, tourism is viewed as a means through which issues of the environment and sustainable development are addressed. It is not referred to as the subject of development, instead, the subject is the environment, and tourism is the mechanism through which the objective of conservation can be achieved. This method of defining tourism sees its role as that of a support to the larger goal of sustainable development and environmental protection, and not as an end in itself. This also explains the unfailing support to tourism development.

The notion of sustainability is considered a contested concept, a concept that is 'socially and politically constructed' and reflects the interests and values of those involved. The examination of tourism and sustainability may appear incomplete if not supported by the notions of ideology and hegemony. The word 'sustainability' has entered public usage on a seemingly global level. This is in fact an indication of the hegemonic properties of sustainability. The critical questions that need to be asked are: Who defines what sustainability is? How is it to be achieved? Who has ownership of its representation and meaning? The answers to these questions are found in the First World: in businesses, Governments, transnational institutions, scholars, environmentalist and new socio-environmental organizations.

Globalization is characterized by unequal and uneven relations. This fact has seeped into the global environmental debate and has resulted in conflict between the First and Third Worlds: conflicts that came to the fore at the Rio Summit in 1992 and the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002. In the 1990s the idea of sustainability began to permeate discussions of development in the South. At the global level it was declared that those development strategies that minimize their negative impacts on the environment should be encouraged. Debates about environment and development finally crystallized around the Brundtland Report of 1987. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as 'meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p8). However, there remains a great deal of disagreement over what this really means. Beck argues that our technologically advanced society is characterized by situations in which large scale environmental hazards have been forced upon citizens by States, and the management of these hazards has led to confusion (Beck, 1995, pp 1-13). This confusion is clearly demonstrated by differing views over the definition of sustainability and the kinds of strategies that will be required to achieve it.

The distribution of power in society and also within the environmental movement determines the nature of decisions relating to the environment. Differing interest groups have varied views about how the environment needs to be protected. The deep ideological divisions within the environmental movement are a proof of this. On the one hand, there are those who do not challenge the existing global structures, while on the other, there are those who advocate a basic restructuring of society on every level. In terms of political ideology, the environmental perspective can be divided into three strands: blue-green (or light green), red-green and deep green. Each proposes different policies designed to protect or manage the environment. These distinctions point to the fact that the 'environment' is a social, cultural, economic and political construct. A brief examination of these strands would be necessary to understand the origin, growth and proliferation of alternative forms of tourism and also locate the new forms of tourism within these strands.

Blue-greens can be found at the conservative or right-wing end of the environmental spectrum. These ideas certainly constitute the reformist side of the environmental movement. They are often associated with concepts of weak sustainability or light green policies which are intended to ensure environmental protection within existing social, economic and political structures (Miller, 2000). These ideas are characterized by the belief that man-made capital is a perfect substitute for natural capital (Dobson, 1996, pp406-409). Blue-green methods of environmental care are drawn from utilitarianism, liberalism and free-market principles.

Red-greens can be found on the left wing of the environmental debate. However, both the blue-greens and red-greens share a commitment to sustainable development. In general, red-greens argue that the environment is a social construct. They do not approve of the idea of authentic nature that is untouched by humanity. Current debates centered on social ecology and ecosocialism tend to be more homogenous than blue-green ideas, but red-greens do include diverse groups such as ecofeminists (McIntosh, 1996). The red-greens argue that the State of the environment is determined by the social organization. In terms of the development debate, social ecologists point to over-consumption in the North rather than population growth, poverty or industrialization in the South as the source of global environmental problems (Drummond and Marsden, 1995. pp58-62).

Ecosocialists such as Andre Gorz argue that a radical movement away from economic rationality and capitalism is necessary. For Marxists and ecosocialists, over-accumulation is the problem for the environment, and this involves a situation where the level of capital needed to produce the same goods is so high that they cannot be reproduced at a normal level, and so there is a decline in productivity. Over-accumulation may occur among certain groups at different scales, at a national or regional scale, or at the global scale along the North-South divide. The only way to tackle the problem of over-accumulation is thought to involve the search for new markets or more sophisticated goods (Gorz, 1980, pp 20-28). For ecosocialists, there is an urgent need to invert the capitalist logic. This would put an end to over-consumption and help maintenance of an environment that is capable of supporting human life. Unlike Marxists, ecosocialists argue that the root of hierarchical human societies lies in human domination of non-human nature (Eckersley, 1992, pp179-186 cited in Duffy, 2002). This anthropocentric approach divides red-greens from deep greens. The deep green position claims to be a third way in the environmental conservation spectrum. Deep greens are associated with a belief in strong sustainability. This position involves a radical break with existing social, economic and political structures in order to give environmental protection the highest priority. There is also a light green position, which shares some elements of other green thinking but remains committed to the principle that humans are only one part of the ecosystem and do not have special licensee to exploit or dominate non-human nature (Sterba, 1994). James Lovelock's 'Gaia hypothesis' has been very influential in the deep-green debate. He suggests that the whole planet and its components is a living organism (Gaia), which is a self-regulating, self-organizing system and is the greatest manifestation of life. Lovelock is thus interested in preserving the health of the whole organism rather than one component of it (human being) (Lovelock, 1988, pp181-182; 1979). Much literature on radical sustainable development in relation to the South is influenced by the Gaia hypothesis, because it insists on relooking and redefining of humanity's relationship with the Earth.

This proves that discussions about how to manage the environment clearly have important social, political and economic dimensions. These are not confined to a depoliticized scientific discourse and neutral decision making. As Gorz suggests, although these discussions are presented to the public as matters for science and technology, this is based on erroneous assumptions about the nature of the debate (Gorz, 1980, pp17-20). Most

environmentalists and conservationists agree that the main purpose of policy should be to encourage a sustainable relationship between humanity and the environment (Caulfield, 1989, pp13-57). This relationship forms the core of debates about the potential for ecotourism as a means to sustainable development.

From the above discussion it is evident that the idea that environmentally sustainable tourism can contribute to the development in the South is clearly related to blue-green environmental concepts. In applying the principles of blue-green position to the understanding of ecotourism, it can be said that the policy of ecotourism does not challenge existing political, economic and social structures. Instead, the blue-green strategy of ecotourism operates within current norms and crucially, within existing business or market logic; specifically the capitalist logic. Ecotourism also relies on the individual exercising power through choices about consumption, rather than acting as a citizen engaged in collective and organized protest. In this way ecotourism, as a subset of the global tourism industry, is firmly embedded in green capitalism, where the individual bears responsibility for environmental conservation or degradation rather than Governments or private industry.

Mass tourism has been considered to be culturally, economically and environmentally damaging, and this has led to an interest in alternative forms of tourism. However, Mowforth and Munt (2009) believe that the association of the growth of new forms of tourism with the problems arising from conventional mass tourism is misplaced. Instead, they State that this growth has come about more as the 'natural' continuation of the historical inequalities between First and Third World countries (Fernandes 1994). As Fernandes (1994:4) argues, much of what are now seen as new forms of tourism have arisen because 'the mainstream tourism industry has in fact merely tried to invent a new legitimation for itself – the "sustainable" and "rational" use of the environment, including the preservation of nature as an amenity for the already privileged. Ecotourism has been proposed by a number of interest groups as a new way forward for environmentally sustainable development. Its supporters believe it provides the answer to complex conflicts surrounding resource use and management. While ecotourism does not represent a radical departure in terms of development strategies, it is a significant shift in emphasis for the private sector and State agencies involved in tourism management.

Theorists, such as Harvey (1989b), explain the general character of post-industrial change as an effect of the over-accumulation of capital. He argues that profitability crises are an expected and routine aspect of market capitalism because it is in the nature of capitalism, through competition and a tendency toward market saturation, to threaten profit margins and market demand. Hence, in the interests of maintaining profitability, new markets have to be continuously created to maintain and accelerate the pace of consumption. Products, fashions, ideas and technology become increasingly ephemeral and consumption increasingly instantaneous. Things are disposed off long before their natural life is complete. Adapting Harvey's general analysis would thus suggest that the growth of new tourism is a reflection of the changing needs of the market. New, more differentiated and profitable, types of holiday product have had to be introduced to counter the immense competitive pressures upon the standardized and price-sensitive package holiday. The consumer, following the dictates of fashion, has simply responded to these new market opportunities (Hughes, 2004).

CONCLUSION

All along development has been equated to modernization and modernization to westernization. One of the accompanying features of globalization is that local flavours and peculiarities are being stressed. Globalization stimulates localization, it would appear. Or rather, globalization leads to cultural interpenetrations which, in turn, lead to a multiplication and the growth of new 'local' cultures. Here there are diverse elements at work; hence it is important to capture the totality of the systems. This model emphasizes on 'globalization with local characteristics' instead of a universal development model that emphasizes on a 'top-down' approach. There is a need to understand indigenous knowledge systems so that various alternatives to Eurocentric economic model which encourages popular participation can be introduced. The focus of planning often should be from the bottom up. It needs to be understood that 'one size cannot fit all', and therefore each country should adopt a tourism model that is different from the conventional Western-centric construct.

All the above concerns are reflected in the concept of sustainable development which is criticized for being vague and therefore there is no consensus on its definition. Policy-makers are in a dilemma as they are forced to decide

what constitutes sustainability criteria and also decide the level; whether regional, national or global, it should be applied. Researchers agree to the fact that it needs be defined differently in terms of each culture; however, this is too simplistic to be true. Despite the fact that sustainability is the key feature distinguishing alternative tourism from mass tourism, it must be borne in mind that sustainability is not an inevitable outcome of alternative tourism and efforts must be made to achieve it.

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