

Tales of Tourism

Global changes and tourism discourse

Karina M. Smed

PhD, assistant professor, employed by AAU since 2004, a member of the Tourism Research Unit at AAU and involved with the Tourism Master's Programme. Her main research areas are: tourist experiences, consumption and identity, with a particular interest in cultural aspects of these.

Host-tourist interactions and identities embody the very essence of globalizing processes. It is in communication with each other, in every particular instant of contact, that hosts and tourists also negotiate the nature of the tourist experience, the meaning of culture and place, as well as their relationship to each other and their own identities.

(Thurlow & Jaworski, 2010:9)

In the name of globalisation, tourism has become a world-wide phenomenon, and in the process, a dominant discourse of tourism and the tourist has developed. This discourse seems to be based on a particular world order and specific cultural values. It also seems, however, that what one would believe to be basic agreements within this discourse are perhaps not. In addition, new flows and developments in world tourism might change existing assumptions in tourism at large, and the question is whether or not discourse will change with these, particularly in the case of die hard terminologies?

In tourism studies, there is a tendency to assume that tourism is a global phenomenon, and it is, but only in the sense that tourism affects most people around the world in very different ways, and not in the sense that it carries the same meaning globally, i.e. to all people around the world, nor that it affects people in the same way

everywhere. Traditionally, although somewhat indiscriminating, it has been the privileged few of rich, developed countries touring poorer and less developed destinations, whereby perspectives and effects of tourism are very different across these actors in a tourism setting. The tourists are in a specific place at a specific time by choice, whereas locals¹, or so-called hosts, are often by no choice of their own part of a tourism product that tends to trivialise and commoditise the culture that these locals represent (Greenwood, 1989) - thereby reducing these locals to servants of the tourism industry. This relationship is underlined by the very discourse, hosts vs. guests, which places emphasis on the specific roles that tourists and locals are assumed to play. It is hereby articulated not as an equal but a very uneven relationship, in which power is distributed unevenly between the parties involved. This presumably affects the dynamics of tourism and the very way in which it becomes part of globalisation processes and the dominant discourse – among tourists, locals at tourism destinations, the tourism industry, as well as in academia relating to tourism.

The activity of actually being a so-called global tourist, the voluntary, temporary, guest role, has largely been a phenomenon reserved for certain people, although many communities around the world are involved in tourism and heavily affected by it. It has been assumed that tourists as well as local hosts have been fairly one-dimensional at a general level, and therefore, the dominant discourse has been self-explanatory, e.g. what the host/guest distinction implies. But current changes in economies and social structures, e.g. in China, India and Russia, which are at the moment viewed as the new emerging markets in tourism (WTO, 2010), have caused somewhat of a reversal in the traditional flow of tourists on a global scale. This means that flows are now increasing from these new emerging markets to the traditional tourism generating countries, and one could perhaps claim that there is no longer any specific flow in world tourism, as patterns of tourism have become much more complex. This could cause a broader spectrum of tourists/guests and possibly change the overall effects of tourism as well.

Although structures are now changing and people around the world take on different roles in relation to tourism, it seems that meanings of tourism will always be manifold and characterised by diverse relationships at various levels. It could be claimed that

European ethnocentrism² has shaped the dominant tourism discourse, since tourism has always existed at some scale, even in what would be considered poorer, less developed regions of the world, e.g. in the shape of pilgrimage, and therefore, the discourse exemplified here is very much shaped by modern tourism developments from a European/Western point of view, which may nonetheless have shaped a great deal of the existing perceptions of tourism and tourism literature.

Nevertheless, global tourism from this Eurocentric point of view is still to a great extent dominated by extreme inequality between the tourist and the toured, which is indirectly underlined by several of the core values of the tourism product, e.g. novelty in the shape of cultural difference and uniqueness, or authenticity, which inequality to some extent supplies. A classic contention in the authenticity debate in tourism entails that real, authentic ways of life, are to be found outside modern society, which is by definition unstable, superficial and fragmented, and consequently modern tourists seek reality in other places (MacCannell, 1976; Cohen, 2004). It is thus also implied that tourism contributes to upholding that sense of the other, which exists in different social and cultural environments than the tourists' home environment. Thereby tourism is contributing to globalisation processes around the world, while at the same time contributing to maintaining status quo in upholding a sense of difference from modern ways of life.

Self and other distinctions are thus inherent in tourism and become very evident through tourism discourse. As Thurlow and Jaworski imply in the initial quote, communication and negotiation is at the core of the tourist's social world, because relations to others go through communication in tourism and of tourist experiences, which can then be extended to the everyday life world "at home". By the same token, Noy (2004) states it to be commonsensical that tourists are naturally talkative and that modern tourism makes the foundation for much conversation. Eventually, tourism discourse becomes part of the everyday life negotiation of identity, as tourism also becomes part of the discourse of consumption that serve symbolic purposes and adds to the construction and negotiation of identity – the idea of conspicuous consumption as presented by Thorstein Veblen in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), and at later stages a central notion in consumerism.

A relevant yet critical question to ask in relation to this discussion of negotiating self and other in a tourism context is, whether or not a “deal” is actually made in tourism discourse? Based on the arguments just mentioned, it is evident that negotiation takes place, thereby forming the basis for a specific discourse. But a contention may be raised that tourists’ self and other positions are somewhat deconstructive to the dominant tourism discourse, as they are not as one-sided as they could be assumed to be on this basis. It may be argued that the underlying agreements, i.e. the deals that are presumably made, are somewhat fluid in terms of what/who the tourist self is and what/who the other is. This leads to a central thesis that only very dynamic agreements exist of self and other in tourism, only partially reflecting current dominant discourse within the field of tourism. Moreover, global changes in tourism will supposedly reinforce this contention, because agreements will become even more dynamic with the changing tourism order currently underway.

These considerations will be the object of attention in this discussion of tourism discourse and global changes in tourism. In doing so, a great deal of emphasis will be put on this lack of agreement in underlying assumptions seemingly forming some sort of basis on which the dominant tourism discourse rests, and which goes into these tales of tourism. Not only does this dominant discourse contribute to the upholding of the hosts as the other in particular ways, but other guests as part of the social and cultural processes taking place in a tourism as well as in a home environment also play significant roles in various positions taken. Therefore the other tourists also need to be considered, particularly in the light of the current global processes and subsequent changes currently taking place. This means that a holistic approach is sought in exploring these tales of tourism.

Mass Consumption and Individual Tourist Experiences

Symbolic consumption as a means to identity construction is a well-established notion within consumer research (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Belk, 1988; Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Also the role of identity in relation to tourism has been explored by several authors who stress the importance of communicating past experiences for the purpose of positioning oneself in particular

ways (e.g. Desforges, 2000; Elsrud, 2001; Noy, 2004). In particular, Schulze (1992) determines a connection between tourist experiences and a meaningful social identity. To some extent it even seems that with increased globalisation – as sameness described above - the need for marking differences and embracing diversity is gaining more attention than ever before. As Østergaard & Jantzen state:

“[...] the consuming individual is conceived as a *tourist* who is looking for new experiences via consumption. This is not done due to a need for it or due to a need for fulfilling wants to get beyond a cognitive dissonance. Instead, it is based on a *desire* for a meaning in life (Østergaard, 1991) because the consuming individual, in this approach [consumer research], uses the consumption of products and services as bricks in the construction of a meaningful life. It is an ongoing project for the consuming individual to construct meaning, and it is based on emotions and feelings where the single consuming individual tries to create a coherent life” (Østergaard & Jantzen, 2000:17)

Hereby, consumption of products, and in the case of tourism, experiences, may be used to create a sense of meaning in life, because products may function as building blocks for constructing and understanding oneself and one's place in the world. The debate of homogenisation vs. diversity entailed in globalisation as a phenomenon contributes to this understanding, because both encountered similarities and differences contribute to this understanding, as both are needed in order to understand one's identity, which only makes sense in relation to others. The relations between the individual self and the group have been addressed through social identity theory developed by Tajfel & Turner in 1979, in which both the individual in the group and the group in the individual is considered. In this context, the social aspect of identity has been characterised as a type of tribe membership by Maffesoli (1996), exactly because of the need for membership and belonging to a social entity which forms and confirms identity through membership. Thus identity is directed both at individual/personal and collective/social levels of construction.

In some sense, this can be directly transferred to a tourism context, where mass and niche tourism have been discussed extensively and often put in opposition, probably because mass tourism initiated the first boom in tourism in modern times, and thereafter niche tourism has emerged as a sort of counter-reaction to standardised products in the marketplace, along with a subsequent increase in market demands for uniqueness and individuality. Niche tourism definitely also plays another role in catering to various social trends such as environmental responsibility, which is often associated with specific types of niche tourism (Cole, 2010; Butcher, 2010). The growth of tourism has meant that the supply of various tourism products, services, experiences etc. has become very diverse, and the competition of finding that unique selling point for the tourism businesses as well as for the individual tourist – seeking individual and social recognition - has become very difficult and extremely important to keep market shares intact. For these reasons, variations in tourist perceptions of self and other have also become more nuanced.

At the same time, there has been some debate about whether or not these niche tourists are actually more responsible than mass tourism, because they tend to be much more intrusive to places that are less prepared for them than would be the case in many traditional mass destinations (Butcher, 2010). Likewise, tourists seeking these responsible ways of travel are perhaps led to believe – through media and marketing - that niche tourism is morally superior to mass tourism, when in fact there are many opposing arguments to that particular notion (Wheeler, 1993; Cole, 2010; Butcher, 2010). In addition, Wheeler (1993) suggests that this belief functions more as an ego booster for the so-called “thinking” tourist, who will feel morally superior by travelling in presumably more responsible ways, rather than it actually being more responsible, or sustainable if you like, from a destination or host community point of view. Hereby, it becomes evident, that the conceptualisations of mass versus niche tourism function as tools for positioning oneself in a certain way, in this case as a responsible, thinking traveller rather than a mass tourist, a *turistus vulgaris* travelling in herds (Löfgren, 1999). At the same time, this distinction may function as a way of positioning oneself as an individual, craving niche products to cater to very particular needs, but also a way of gaining social recognition through some kind of perceived moral superiority. Thereby, both

personal and social factors play into the positioning of the tourist, as implied by social identity theory mentioned previously.

The Other Tourists

When it comes to positions that involve elements such as moral implications and social recognition, things become more complicated. It is my claim that the dominant tourism discourse is based on simple distinctions at various levels, e.g. the host/guest distinction mentioned above, which has to do with the obvious other in the environment visited, but certainly also between what is desirable and undesirable as a symbolic contribution to the self, particularly between different types of tourists. Clearly, the *turistus vulgaris* image is not a desirable one, but it may be defined in many ways by the individual tourist, according to the social and cultural context in which the tourist exist. The following table illustrates dominant contentions of the touristic self and other, which are reflected in the previous discussion, and which are moreover based on previous empirical work (cf. Smed, 2009):

Tourist Other	Touristic Self
Cultural insensitivity	Cultural sensitivity
Passivity	Activity
Travelling in herds	Independence
Ignorance/inability	Knowledge/ability

(Source: Smed, 2009:220)

Although desk research as well as empirical work hereby indicate that there are some agreements on the desirability (or the opposite) of these different elements at a very general level, it is also indicated when explored more thoroughly that the interpretation of these are quite different. For example, what is cultural insensitivity/sensitivity and how is it performed by tourists? One could imagine it to be quite different depending on ones cultural background, as well as ones level of knowledge of the culture visited. Pearce has developed the travel career approach (see e.g. Pearce & Caltabiano 1983; Pearce 1988, 1991, 1993; Pearce & Lee 2005) in which it is claimed that travel experience makes a great difference to people's motivations to travel. It must therefore also be assumed that experience

changes one's outlook, and thus the sense of self and other may be more dynamic than the dominant discourse suggests. Pearce & Lee (2005) furthermore suggests patterns of motivations rather than the hierarchical system that Pearce started out with. This supports the contention of dynamic agreements that may change over time, rather than actual deals obtained in negotiations of self and other. Another example is a classic contention that backpackers tend to be viewed as more independent than let's say the package tourist, but in fact travel just as much in herds as package tourists (Maoz, 2006). This suggests that the undesirable other for some backpackers may be the package tourist as the personification of dependency, even though they may themselves become the object of undesirability for other tourists much for the same reasons.

Among tourists as a socio-cultural entity in itself, it is quite evident that positions are taken according to what is perceived to be acceptable and desirable among different types of tourists. Members of the receiving community are indirectly involved in this positioning, as they are the objects at hand, i.e. part of the tourism product and consumption, although they are excluded from the discursive process of becoming the other, the object being spoken of. This does not mean of course that they are not positioned in this type of discourse, nor that they do not themselves position the tourists in particular ways, but considering the European ethnocentrism mentioned before, they become somewhat silent in this dominant discourse, and thus not contributors to the general positioning of self and other among tourists.

It has hereby been proposed that tourists tend to put themselves in direct comparisons with other tourists (e.g. Noy, 2004; Desforges, 2000; Elsrud, 2001; Smed, 2009), which must be considered a natural way of understanding one's identity. However, the immediate other, i.e. locals, who one tends to assume forms the other in a tourism environment, and who is often claimed to be what we are seeking as part of our tourist experience, is perhaps less important than one would think. Noy states, when speaking of Israeli backpackers' discursive accounts of their tourist experiences...:

[...] beyond their positive quality and wide scope, most of the descriptions [backpacker narratives] carry a hue of newly acquired openness, tolerance, and patience. These

virtues were attained during the trip and are outcomes of meeting the authentic “Other”; consequently, they are signs of selfgrowth and maturity (conveyed in a new age parlance). Such a striking similarity, in traits that they themselves describe as “deeply personal” and “intimate”, is yet another indication of the existence of a tightly shared, collective discourse among Israeli backpackers, of which a beneficial self-change is a component (Noy, 2004:90).

Hereby, both the other - as the immediate other in the destination visited, which here serves as the object for change - and the self as part of a common collective among backpackers are addressed and considered a valuable component in self-perceptions of this kind. It is thus implied that the collective, i.e. the tribe, sets the standard for desirable and acceptable positions, in this particular case self-change is a must for confirming membership. It just so happens that these backpackers are of a certain nationality, but in fact this has less to do with the collective being formed than with the fact that they all adhere to cultural norms that are global in nature and set within the backpacker community at large, which other studies also confirm (see e.g. Maoz, 2006).

Global Tales of the Other?

The other has many forms and many roles to play in tourism due to the fact that several representations of the other come into play when self is explored in tourism, i.e. in the local other at the destination, as well as the other among tourists themselves. However, there is an obvious bias towards a perception of a rich, dominant tourist self and a poorer, more inferior, local other, mainly because the local other is stigmatised as part of the tourism product. The tales of tourism are thus told by the tourists, which then represent a strong voice in the literature as well as general tourism discourse. The superiority of the tourist obviously has a lot to do with the inevitable fact that this is where the money is. With emerging new economies affecting tourism markets, economic power may shift, and subsequently, the dominant discourse of tourism may change with it and move away from a foundation of agreements that become more and more distant from reality – at least the static form that discourse on this topic currently suggests.

In conclusion, it seems that global tourism discourse up to this point has been based on a world order with a superior power of tourists from rich, developed countries engaging in frivolous and hedonistic tourist activities, and poorer, less developed and somewhat co-dependent inferior locals, which by necessity aim to provide such demanded activities. However, with a changing world order in terms of e.g. emerging new economies setting the agenda for tourism development, and the subsequent fact that more people take on several roles in tourism (as host and guest, to stay within this discourse) could it be that such relationships may change? And if so, will tourism discourse be less culturally biased? The answers remain to be seen, but it must be assumed that because this current order is disturbed by these changes, eventually various aspects of global tourism and tourism discourse will be affected.

Simultaneously, it may very well be that the symbolic consumption of certain tourist products and services, which demands a specific other as a measure for a specific self as previously demonstrated, may bring forth new touristic selves and others in tourism discourse. This is due to the fact that the values used for positioning oneself in this landscape have so far been one-sided, i.e. socio-culturally standardised to a great extent. With the new emerging markets and thereby also new tourists and new demands - not to mention possibly new effects of tourism in the receiving communities - it may very well be that the tourism industry will change as well. This is obviously a globalisation process in itself, and certainly a significant factor in terms of the tales of tourism actually being told by the new world tourists. Lastly, it seems necessary to state that the relationship between tourism and globalisation is reciprocal, since tourism contributes to globalisation, but globalisation certainly also contributes to tourism, which makes these very processes even more complex and more relevant for further research.

Notes

- 1 Which can be represented by many different people, that is anything from actual local inhabitants, not necessarily involved in tourism, or seasonal tourism workers, who may be perceived as “local” by tourists.

- 2 Most often reduced to Western Europe, since it is the history and development of Western Europe that is said to mark the major shifts in tourism as we know it (Weaver & Lawton, 2006).

References

- Belk, Russell W.**, "Possessions and the Extended Self" in *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, 1988
- Butcher, Jim**, "In defence of the masses (on holiday)" in *ATLAS Reflections on the ATLAS Annual Conference*, Limassol, Cyprus, Nov. 2010
- Cohen, Erik**, *Contemporary Tourism – Diversity and Change*. Elsevier, 2004
- Cole, Stroma**, "Mass, niche and masquerading", in *ATLAS Reflections on the ATLAS Annual Conference*, Limassol, Cyprus, Nov. 2010
- Desforges, Luke**, "Traveling the World - Identity and Travel Biography" in *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 27, 2000
- Elsrud, Torun**, "Risk Creation in Traveling - Backpacker Adventure Narration" in *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 28, 2001
- Gabriel, Yiannis and Lang, Tim**, *The Unmanageable Consumer*. second edition, Sage Publications Ltd., London, 2006
- Greenwood, Davydd J.**, "Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization", in Smith, Valene L. (ed): *Hosts and guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (2nd edition), Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989
- Grubb, Edward L. and Grathwohl, Harrison L.**, "Consumer Self-Concept, Symbolism and Market Behavior: A Theoretical Approach" in *Journal of Marketing*, 31, 1967
- Löfgren, Orvar**, (1999). *On Holiday. A History of Vacationing*. University of California Press
- MacCannell, Dean**, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York: Schocken Books, 1976
- Maffesoli, Michel**, *The Time of the Tribes. The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, Sage Publications, 1996
- Maoz, Darya**, (2006): "The Mutual Gaze" in *Annals of Tourism Research* 33 (1). pp. 221–239.
- Noy, Chaim**, "This trip really changed me - Backpackers' Narratives of Self-Change", in *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 31, No. 1, 2004
- Pearce, Philip L.**, (1988): *The Ulysses Factor – evaluating visitors in tourist settings*. New York: Springer-Verlag

- Pearce, Philip L.**, (1991). "Analysing Tourist Attractions" in *Journal of Tourism Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 46-55
- Pearce, Philip L.**, (1993). "Fundamentals of tourist motivation" in Pearce, Douglas G. & Butler, Richard W.. *Tourism Research – Critiques and challenges*. UK: Routledge
- Pearce, Philip L. & Caltabiano, M. L.**, (1983). "Inferring Travel Motivation from Travellers' Experiences" in *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 22(2)
- Pearce, Philip L. & Lee, Uk-II**, (2005). "Developing the travel Career Approach to Tourist Motivation" in *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 43
- Schulze, Gerhard**, *Die Erlebnis-Gesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* Frankfurt/Main New York: Campus Verlag, 1992
- Smed, Karina M.**, *Tourism & Identity - Accumulated tourist experience and travel career narratives in tourists' identity construction*, SPIRIT PhD Series, No. 23, 2009
- Tajfel, Henri; Turner, John**, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", in Austin, William G.; Worchel, Stephen. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole, 1979
- Thurlow, Crispin and Jaworski, Adam**, *Tourism Discourse, Language and Global Mobility*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010
- Veblen, Thorstein and Banta, Martha**, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007
- Weaver, David & Lawton, Laura**, *Tourism Management*, Third edition, John Wiley & Sons Australia Ltd., 2006
- Wheeler, Brian**, "Sustaining the ego", in *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 1 No. 2, 1993
- World tourism Organisation**: *UNWTO Tourism Highlights*, 2010 Edition
- Østergaard, Per and Jantzen, Christian**, "Shifting Perspectives in Consumer Research: From Buyer Behaviour to Consumption Studies", in Beckmann, Suzanne C. and Richard H. Elliott (editors). *Interpretive Consumer Research. Paradigms, Methodologies & Applications*, Handelshøjskolens Forlag, Copenhagen Business School Press, 2000