

THE MORAL ECONOMY OF TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

In this article I suggest that the global tourism industry is deployed around a nucleus, the tourist attraction, that is removed and protected from economic exchange. If tourism is, indeed, the world's largest industry it is because, and not in spite of the separation of its primary motivational and moral structure from the marketplace. I explore the implications of the fact that the global system of tourist attractions is a massive collection of democratic "free goods" open and available for all to see. The tourist industry depends on this endless supply of free access attractions maintained by governments, NGOs, and/or simply existing in society and nature. The global tourism industry can thrive only if its moral and motivational structure remains insulated from market transactions. The Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, the Parthenon, the Grand Canyon, the Statue of Liberty, the Karakorum Mountains, etc. are not for sale. Over a billion tourists spend \$1,5 trillion annually to travel internationally to things they cannot buy or have in any material sense; that no one no matter how wealthy can buy; often that they cannot even touch. The enormity of tourism today is possible only because the causal forces at the heart of the tourism economy are entirely imaginary and symbolic. At its core, the tourist economy is less economical than phenomenological. And the primary tourist drive, its deepest motivation, is not materialistic but democratic. Overtourism results from the industry aggressively exploiting the fact that it requires no raw materials, need not develop supply chains, needs no factories, and engages in no design, manufacture, assembly or distribution. The consumer works for free, indeed, pays to do the work of tourism, and becomes the product. These neoliberal efficiencies lead to overtourism. Overtourism can easily be controlled at the local level.

KEYWORDS

premodern and modern global tourist; tourist experience; modern
tourist compact; packaged tours; overtourism

A ECONOMIA MORAL DO TURISMO

RESUMO

Neste artigo, sugiro que a indústria do turismo mundial está mobilizada em torno de um núcleo, a atração turística, que está afastada e protegida do intercâmbio económico. Se o turismo é, de facto, a maior indústria do mundo, é por causa e não a despeito da separação da sua principal estrutura motivacional e moral do mercado. Aqui exploro as implicações do facto de que o sistema global de atrações turísticas é uma enorme coleção de "bens gratuitos" democráticos, abertos e disponíveis para todos verem. A indústria do turismo depende desta oferta interminável de atrações de livre acesso, mantidas por governos, ONG e/ou simplesmente existentes na sociedade e na natureza. A indústria do turismo mundial só pode prosperar se a sua estrutura moral e motivacional permanecer isolada das transações do mercado. O Taj Mahal, a Torre Eiffel, o Partenon, o Grand Canyon, a Estátua da Liberdade, as Montanhas Karakorum, etc., não estão à venda. Mais de mil milhões de turistas gastam 1,5 biliões de dólares por ano

para viajar internacionalmente e ver coisas que não podem comprar ou ter no sentido material; que ninguém, por mais rico que seja, pode comprar; que muitas vezes nem conseguem tocar. A enormidade do turismo hoje é possível apenas porque as forças causais que estão no coração da economia do turismo são inteiramente imaginárias e simbólicas. Na sua essência, a economia turística é menos económica do que fenomenológica. E o principal impulso do turismo, a sua motivação mais profunda, não é materialista, mas democrática. O *overtourism* (excesso de turismo) resulta da própria indústria que explora agressivamente o facto de que não implica matérias-primas, não necessita de desenvolver cadeias de fornecimento, não precisa de fábricas e não se envolve em qualquer conceção, fabrico, montagem ou distribuição. O consumidor trabalha de graça, na realidade, paga para fazer o trabalho do turismo e torna-se o produto. Estas eficiências neoliberais levam ao *overtourism*. O *overtourism* pode ser facilmente controlado ao nível local.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

turista global pré-moderno e moderno; experiência turística; compacto turístico moderno; pacotes turísticos; excesso de turismo

The world is so full of a number of things...

Robert Louis Stevenson¹

PREMODERN TOURISM

The 20th century Greek poet and Nobel laureate, George Seferis (1997, p. 92) tells us that already when Plutarch visited Delphi, he went as a tourist: “[i]n Plutarch’s time... the temple had become a tourist place with organized guides showing the sites to the crowds”. Seferis quickly cautions us not to assume that Plutarch and his fellow tourists bore much resemblance to tourists today. He said the earliest crowds of tourists shared a system of beliefs, a faith. It was a fragile and fading faith, but nevertheless a common world view that bound them together. Seferis writes, “today the common faith has been lost, and the people who come each have different personal myths” (1997, p. 92). He’s is right, of course: today each tourist brings his or her own personal myth to the site and leaves with his or her own unique impression. But what remains constant now as in Plutarch’s time is the tourists keep coming to Delphi and to all the other great global attractions.²

Tourism is demonstrably even older than Plutarch’s visit to Delphi. I find little reason to believe that tourism is not as old as humanity itself. Someone leaving home just to see what lies beyond, tour guides in the form of guardian spirits figure heavily in pre-historic myths. Every literature reveals that there have always been precursors of our distinctively modern, technologically enabled, contemporary type of tourism. What, after all, are Odysseus and Aeneas but prototypes of the kind of experience modern day tourism strives to provide: spiritually rich voyages of self discovery that results from encounters with “otherness” or what I would prefer to call “utter difference”?

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.kellscraft.com/childsversel.html>

² This is a revised version of a keynote address to the annual meeting of the International Forum for Economic Research (INFER), Athens, Greece, 2016.

DEMOCRACY AND THE MODERN TOURIST

Not tourism itself nor any of the recently hyped new “types” of tourism are actually new. Sex tourism, death tourism, extreme tourism, medical tourism, etcetera, all have their ancient variants. What is new is the ways we now frame the tourist experience; the moral, ethical and ideological dimensions of the relations between present day tourists and the peoples and sights they come to see. The first and still the best account of the renewed basis for our current “faith” in tourism remains Stendhal’s (1838/1962) *Memoirs of a tourist*.

Originally published in 1838, *Memoirs of a tourist* remains in print in multiple languages. A quick way to know the reason for its longevity and durability is simply to open the book at random. A sampling reveals what is crucial about the *Memoirs of a tourist*: it establishes a paradigmatic catalogue of objects of modern tourist desire. Stendhal’s fictional narrator, Mr. L is as enthusiastic about minor local details, like the unique way the women of a particular village braid their hair, as he is by A-list monuments and masterpieces. Mr. L has a distinctive voice; the voice of a person anyone would feel fortunate to have as a travel companion. He is knowledgeable, curious, liberal, opinionated and generous with his opinions but not pushy; a genial fellow traveler who always has something new to say. He eagerly looks about and remarks freely on the many ways places, monuments, etc. do and do not live up to their fame or reputations; or how differently he sees them from the ways they have been described in literature and guidebooks. He is especially keen to observe things and events that have not received prior notice.

My copy of the *Memoirs of a tourist* flops open to page 112. Mr. L is reporting on his arrival in Avignon. Let’s follow him for a moment. He has just seen a large basalt rock formation on the banks of the Rhone and noticed the beauty of the river and the meadows with the Alps in the background. He observes that the workingmen of Avignon are deeply tanned and have “fiery looks”, and walk with their jackets flung over their shoulders. He visits the tomb of Pope Innocent VI, and a famous tower and palace. He goes to the municipal museum filled with Italian paintings and enjoys the museum gardens. He is delighted by the sight of a young boy hitching a ride with a girl on a donkey. He notes that the streets are sheltered by canvas sails during hot weather – “I like the practice and the half-light it produces” (Stendhal, 1838/1962, p. 120). He was not much impressed with an object he was told he “had to see”: “the natural indolence of the traveler lost me an hour inspecting a certain ivory crucifix, much talked up, quite mediocre...” (Stendhal, 1838/1962, p. 120). He visits a home for old and infirm war veterans and wishes them good weather and healthy food. He is told by a shoeshine boy that a locked room in the inn where he is staying was the site of a famous murder; where Marshal Brune was killed in 1815. Against the wishes of the proprietor, he asks a worker at the inn to show him. “The floor was covered with fleas. This filth increased the horror of the act I was thinking about. I saw more clearly the grossness of the assassins” (Stendhal, 1838/1962, p.113).

Stendhal observed the France of his day; delved deeply into the ways a newly emergent, self aware democratic outlook tries to understand what it means to be a tourist, a

citizen, and, indeed, to be a new, modern type of human being who is free to be peripatetic by choice. Stendhal's tourist is not blinded by his own social standing or identity. He is aware of himself both as part of humanity, and a bemused observer of humanity at a slight remove. Mr. L describes an evening when he sat around with the servants at an inn telling ghost stories until one o'clock in the morning. "Heaven has given me the talent of making myself welcome among peasants. To do this you must talk neither too much or too little and above all not affect a complete equality with them" (Stendhal, 1838/1962, p. 208). The *Memoirs of a tourist* gives us a way of mapping curiosity and desire onto the human and natural world, and a way of being in the world, i.e., as a tourist. Only ten years after the term was invented, he taught us that the highest calling for a "tourist" is engagement with the entire range of human difference, to seek instruction from anything and everything that one might encounter away from home.

For their part, the people and places that Stendhal visits are interested in sharing what they regard as interesting and worthy about their communities, their region and their thoughts and lives. They do not want to pretend that Stendhal is one of them. He is regarded by them as a friendly and interested stranger. They willingly enter into an exchange of stories across lines of human difference. They are proud that he regards them as worthy of his interest. Often they are able to divulge secrets to him that could be devastating if he was one of them but are safe because he is a trustworthy stranger who will soon depart.

Stendhal's treatment of tourism is the first thoroughgoing reflection on it after the Enlightenment. In perfect synchronization with the important political movements of his day he carefully planted and nurtured the seeds of democracy in the attitude of his ideal tourist. Mr. L was very far from being a *grand* tourist.

Stendhal never implies that, as tourists, we should *like* everything we see, as more recent guide writers are sometimes wont to do. He only suggests we connect with what we are seeing, accept difference as interesting and normal, and come up with something of our own to say about our observations. Of course, as soon as someone describes the demands that a new type of mind makes upon itself, other minds will resist these demands. Stendhal simultaneously gave us a paradigmatically positive modern democratic tourist and also the grounds of its negation: no. I want to be told exactly what I am supposed to think about what I am seeing in such a way that I can leave with my prejudices intact. Wasn't this trip supposed to be fun? Stendhal explained the attitude we must adopt to be an ethical modern tourist. Rampant predictable resistance to Stendhalian insight is the basis for current pejorative meanings of "tourist".

THE MODERN TOURIST COMPACT

It is not possible to categorize the stuff that tours are made of by attempting to sort the objects of tourist attention by "type". I will only go so far as to propose that we call the aggregate of objects and events noticed by Stendhal's tourist, and all of us who came

after, the modern tourist compact. Today this compact covers a vast and growing symbolic set of social, cultural, and natural phenomena marked as worthy of the tourist gaze. Why worthy? Stendhal makes this clear. Everything Mr. L notices is a potential phrase in the largest story of human kind; the great democratic embrace of who we are – all of us. They are particles of our collective skills and wisdom; concrete reminders of past and current human acts and their results; literally “object lessons” that point to insight and error, everyday knowhow, perseverance and overreach, sung and unsung truths, guilt and innocence, smugness and uncertainty, brilliant accomplishment and stupidity, beauty and ugliness, heroism and cowardice. I have already argued (MacCannell, 2011) that the catalogue of themes, values, and relations that can be mapped onto the global system of attractions is coextensive with the discoveries made possible by the psychoanalytic opening of the human unconscious. And here, I want to add that the inclusiveness and openness of the modern tourist compact is twinborn with the modern project of democracy. I do not mean the mechanics of democracy – who may and may not represent us, who does and does not get to vote, etc. – these are always flawed and must be subject to constant vigilance and improvement. I refer to the ineluctable democratic impulse in the human soul to which all such mechanics must ultimately answer.

THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE IS OPEN TO ALL

It is exactly here that we need to pay very close attention to the economic structure of contemporary tourism. If we follow Mr. L for day after day or page after page and read all his quirky observations of the most minute details of local life and the great monuments he encounters along the way, we soon learn that nothing he does or observes *qua* tourist costs him even one centime. He pays for transportation, lodging and meals, and personal services (like the shoeshine), exactly as one would while traveling to the same places on business. Every ten pages or so, Mr. L complains bitterly about thuggish porters who grab his baggage and insist on carrying it for a fee, or “money grubbing” inn keepers who conspire to make him miss his coach so he will have to pay them for an extra meal or to spend an extra night. But *as tourist* he pays for nothing. Most of the things he writes about were (and still are) out in the open where anyone can see them. But even at places where there was the possibility of controlled access, he was admitted gratis. French museums, including the Louvre itself were open and free to the public six days a week until well into the 20th century.

THE MACROECONOMICS OF TOURISM TODAY

Fast forward one hundred and eighty years to the present day. Already some are claiming that tourism is now the world’s largest “industry”. Whether or not that claim is true, tourism has clearly become a very large component of the global economy. International tourism alone now accounts for nine percent of global GDP. After 2012, there have

been annually more than one billion non-business international border crossings involving overnight stays. In 2015, tourism employed one out of eleven job holders worldwide. For the past 25 years, in every region of the earth, year over year, tourism has been the most rapidly growing economic sector. In 2015, tourism generated more than \$1,5 trillion in foreign exchange. This last figure does not include receipts for domestic tourism which, in developed nations like the United States and Japan, accounts for more than the foreign receipts.

THE MICRO ECONOMICS OF THE MODERN TOURIST COMPACT

On the micro level, the modern tourist compact stymies standard economic theory. When a consumer in California buys a car made in Japan, it is not difficult to assign reasons for the purchase: she needs a car to commute to work; her old one is becoming undependable; or she wants to upgrade to a better one; she chose the Japanese car because she believes it is the best value for her money. Now consider the decisions she makes as a tourist. When a tourist in California wants to see Delphi and the other wonders of Greece, and is sufficiently overcome by her desire that she actually makes the trip, there are no similarly clear and simple economic reasons. The day-to-day practicalities of her life will not be improved on her return. When we try to determine what, exactly, it is that she purchased, the difference becomes stark and inexplicable. The tourist cannot bring (Delphi) home and park it in her garage, or use it to get to work every day until it wears out and she eventually sells it or trades it in. The memory of her trip, all she has left of it, serves no economic or practical purpose. It has zero “use value”. It will not get her a promotion at work. And unlike other luxury purchases like diamonds, gold, furs and Ferraris her memories cannot be re-sold if times get tough.

Let me return to the brackets around Delphi in the last paragraph. They are technically phenomenological brackets. All the tourist can ever possess is her fleeting image in her mind, or lasting image in her photographs, of the various sights she saw. What she has “purchased” is an after-image of the sites and their surroundings and her memories of being-there, memories that eventually reside only in her consciousness and her box of souvenirs, shared with others in symbolic, not economic, exchanges.

Let me also return to the quote marks around “purchased” in the previous sentence. I have placed them there because no tourist actually pays to see Delphi, at least not in a way that is commensurate with his investment in getting there. *Fodor's Greece* (Fisher, 2012) tells me it still costs the same as when Juliet Flower MacCannell and I visited several years ago, €10 to enter the Delphi complex, inclusive of a visit to the museum. The tourist compact today retains the essential structure that it had in Stendhal's day. Most of what tourists come to see and experience is free or nearly free.

The huge global tourist economy is composed of a vast spectrum of goods and services ranging from the mundane like sunscreen to the ridiculously sublime like 10 thousand euros per night hotel suites. Economists who focus on tourism limit their

modeling to the penumbra of goods and services that surround and support the tourist act: restaurant, hotel, and transportation receipts. No economist has ever addressed the question of why tourists leave home in the first place. Alberto Sessa raises the differences in the first pages of his groundbreaking book only to set them aside immediately as impossible for economists to deal with:

the product of any other industry is... something tangible, something that strikes us by the imposing nature of its construction, its colors, the packaging adopted. Only this sort of product seems to have economic value. (Sessa, 1983, p. 15)

He almost apologetically explains that he will be dealing only with economically tertiary phenomena tourism facilities, hotels and restaurants, pre-paid packaged tours, air travel, and infrastructure development that facilitate tourist movement toward their objective. But the objective, the “destination” is taken as a given and remains outside his equations. Other economists, have provided some models of the role and contribution of destination management, and destination marketing, but they seem to be referring to business planning in the hotel and travel industry, not to any improvements that might be made to the Mona Lisa to make her more attractive.

The economists’ focus on the spectrum of tourism goods and services is justified in purely economic terms. Our tourist coming from California to Greece paid at minimum several thousand dollars for air travel, travel attire, travel insurance, guidebooks, camera, roaming fees, international and local transportation, meals, lodging, souvenirs and perhaps some enhancement like privately guided tours. But the thing she came to see, the thing that caused all of this travel spending, Delphi itself, is €10. The tourist “purchases” Delphi for €10 and after she “acquires” it she does not possess or control even a small part of it, except as it fades in and out of consciousness in her mind.

Of course, she will leverage her investment in the trip to visit other sites for which she also pays token fees. Or nothing at all. And, like Stendhal she will carry away additional cherished and disagreeable images and memories of myriad sights, sounds, smells that she experienced free of charge. In the end the total *direct costs* of her cherished tourist memories is a minute fraction of the cost of the trip. Given the stratification of tourist amenities and services the difference between direct and indirect costs can be astonishingly high.

Delphi is certainly far from alone in its aloof role in the tourist economy. At the heart of the motivational structure of global tourism are Delphi’s many relatives: the pyramids of Cheops at Giza, the Great Wall, the Grand Canyon, the Matterhorn, the Eiffel Tower, the Leaning Tower, the Tower of London, the White House, the Acropolis, the Golden Gate Bridge, Hagia Sophia, Angkor Wat, Sugar Loaf, Teotihuacan, etc.. And, of course, the pleasures of simply soaking in the ambiance of walking through a forest or wandering through a foreign market. It makes no difference what criteria we use to put

an attraction on this list. Any such listing of attractions in the modern tourist compact will be enormously long and highly overlapping with every other list. What the attractions have in common is first, they magnetize tourist desire and set millions (now more than a billion) tourists in motion. And second, they can all be seen and experienced first hand for free or for no more than a token fee, usually less than the cost of a movie ticket.

Permit me to draw one more line under the point I am making: At the heart of the massive and growing global tourist economy is a very special type of object that is defined by its hold on the tourist imagination and the fact that it exists beyond the reach of economic exchange. No one can buy Delphi. And no one can pay for the exclusive right to experience it.

To the extent that an attraction is thought to belong to everyone on earth, it cannot be owned by anyone. Some physically smaller objects that might be included in the tourist compact, notably the fraction of extant paintings by old masters that are not in museums, are bought and sold by the wealthiest one percent. Bill Gates was able to purchase Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks from the Vatican. But most of the world's great attractions were definitively removed from the marketplace centuries ago. They are said to be components of our common human heritage. Knowing they were not for sale, Disney Corporation did not attempt to buy Gettysburg and other Civil War and Revolutionary War battlefields. But it did try to obtain exclusive concession rights. The United States Congress would not permit any commercial encroachment, even by a popular and trusted entertainment conglomerate. George and Martha Washington's bed is not in the guest room of some billionaire. It remains at Mount Vernon, where you can see it if you pay the \$17 entrance fee (plus \$7 if you want to bring your dog to see it).

Every modern attraction is shrouded in a strong democratic morality that holds it *should* be open, accessible and free for all. If an entrance fee is charged, it should only cover maintenance and not result in profits. As a matter of strict policy, in the United States, visitors are not charged for White House tours, or to see the Liberty Bell and other National Monuments. Every year someone proposes that the ten million people annually who walk across the Golden Gate Bridge should be charged one dollar. And every year the proposal is defeated. Unlike automobile commuters, the people who walk onto the bridge are there *as tourists*. They came to see it, experience it, and to feel what it is like to be there; they are not using it to get to Marin or San Francisco. They set foot on the bridge to make it a part of their own memory, a memory of an experience that might be shared with millions of others in potential. For more than 1.700 at last count, stepping off the bridge was their last memory³. Even if a dollar charge would only keep a minute fraction of the tourists off the Bridge, the moral structure of the compact holds that this ultimate kind of shared experience and memory should be available for free. Or so the argument has been made successfully for the past decade.

A strong morality suggests that no one who wants to should ever be precluded from seeing Mona Lisa's smile or the other masterpieces in the Louvre. Ergo, everyone

³ Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-golden-gate-bridge-to-get-a-suicide-net/>

who is unemployed, a teacher, a student, or under 18 years old is admitted to the Louvre for free at all times. And *everyone* regardless of their status or ability to pay, is admitted for free on the first Sunday of each month. If I pay €250 for a scheduled, personal guided tour of the Louvre I am paying for convenience, companionship, commentary, and champagne. But I am not paying to see the Mona Lisa. If I can wait until the first Sunday, she's mine for nothing.

“FREE GOODS” IS THE SECRET TO THE PROFITABILITY OF GLOBAL TOURISM

While the attraction itself is free or very nearly free, large sums of money may be required simply to transport oneself to be in its presence. Moreover, economic stratification of transportation (first class and “tourist” class), lodging and meals, ensures that wealthy travelers can spend as much as they wish moving between the global attractions they believe they “must see”. A five night stay in the least expensive suite at the Grand Bretagne Hotel in Athens is €3,500, breakfast included. After they have arrived at an attraction, tourists may pay for increased, or enhanced, or more convenient access to it. That they can, and do, pay for “extras” does not alter the basic terms of the tourist compact.

WHY PACKAGED TOURS ALWAYS PROFFER MORE THAN A MERELY “TOURIST” EXPERIENCE

By far, the most common form of commercial exploitation of tourism's free goods is based on their offer of a “special” experience, always said to be more special than a merely tourist experience. Today, at major attractions, the way the industry inserts itself into the compact usually works something like this: I can see the Louvre on the outside for free any time of day and any day of the week. I can enter the museum and visit its collections (i.e., actually see the Mona Lisa) for free, or for a token fee of €10 if I don't want to wait for “free Sunday”. If I pay an additional €20 I can jump to the head of the line. If I pay an additional €200 I can have a private guide who might pretend to befriend me and serve me champagne at the end of my visit.

I can go for a long walk in Yellowstone National Park by paying my share of a \$25, seven day, automobile use fee. Or, I can pay several thousand dollars for a Tauck “Culturous Tour” of Yellowstone. Tauck's glossy brochure states: “right now...you could be hearing the snow crunch beneath your feet as you walk through a sun-dappled kaleidoscope of lodgepole pines in Yellowstone”. What is the difference between your Yellowstone walk for which you might have paid between zero and \$25 and the walk you take on a Tauck \$4,690 Yellowstone Tour⁴?. On the Tauck tour, you don't have a choice of your path or your companions, or the option of walking alone or stopping whenever you wish. But mainly you don't need to come up with fanciful phrases to explain to yourself and others

⁴ Cost as per Tauck's website (<https://www.tauck.com>), accessed June 12, 2016 but indicated as “sold out”.

the marvelousness of what you are experiencing on your walk. An important part of what you buy from the tour company is over-the-top rhetorical framing of your experiences and their memories. According to customer testimonials in the Tauck brochure, “how you see the world matters... Anything can be unforgettable... Yes, it was a vacation... But more of a life-changing experience. This was an emotional experience, not a sightseeing experience... We never settle for tourism”.

Of course the package tour company would never ask you to “settle for tourism”. The modern tourist compact does not require that money change hands. Not today any more than in Stendhal’s day. Each tourist, no matter how little he or she spent getting there, feels the same snow crunching and sees the same sun dappled pines. And every tourist feels the same internal demand while in the presence of the attraction: it ought to mean something. The difference is the poor tourists and the cheap tourists must figure out for themselves what to think about their experience. The wealthy tourists pay someone to do their thinking for them. The glossy brochure has assured them in advance that they will associate with socio-economic near equals and hear “life-changing” site-specific commentary appropriate to their class position and preconceptions. The enormous range of costs of different ways of getting there do not alter the tourists’ essential aloneness and equality before the attraction. That path through the pines is utterly indifferent as to whether the footprints in the snow were made by one who is rich or poor, man or woman, gay or straight, black or white, a president, a king, a CEO, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Jew, etcetera *ad nauseam*. And the attraction is utterly indifferent about whether the tourists walk, hitchhike or beg to get there, or arrive as a paying “guest” of the “Tauck family travel Yellowstone ‘culturious’ world experience” (remember, they don’t do “tours”)⁵.

COMMERCIALIZING THE COMPACT

Given that vast majority of attractions in the massive global aggregate of tourist itineraries are democratic “free goods”, 99,99 percent of the money that changes hands in “the world’s largest industry”, must change hands off site. Those who make a business of tourism must convincingly add value to the core tourist experience by promising their paying customers “unique”, “behind the scenes” access to the “true” life of the region they visit, “as it is lived” by the local peoples. The tour company may also claim to have reduced the inconvenience of travel to the point that “getting there is half the fun”. Almost every brochure makes multiple use of the term “authentic” to describe the quality of the tour they are selling. Even before the tourists step out the door on the way to the airport, the tour company will have provided them with positive language to characterize every aspect of experience they are about to have.

A ratio of the cost of the things the tourist comes to see versus what the tourist pays for the value added by the tour operator can be calculated by closely examining the cost

⁵ Retrieved from de <https://www.tauck.com>

of the stops in any tour itinerary. E.g., the previously mentioned Tauck tour, “Treasures of the Aegean”. “Treasures” charges \$8.290/person. In addition, you will need to come up with the airfares to the tour’s origin point in Athens and return from its endpoint in Istanbul. Most of the itemized attractions Tauck tells its prospective customers they will “experience” on their island hopping “small boat” cruise are completely free of charge (ala Stendhal) once the tourist arrives in their presence whether on a Tauck Tour or on their own. These would include shopping in the famous Istanbul underground bazaar, walking around Santorini gazing at the famous blue domed buildings, walking in the medieval old town at Rhodes, etc. The costliest site the Tauck tourists will “experience” is the Acropolis at Athens which charges a €12 entrance fee. The cheapest controlled access site they will see is the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus where entry is €1. An internet search (July 5, 2016) for the cost of a single admission for each of the sites visited while on the “Treasures of the Aegean” tour yields a total of €60 for the entire tour. This includes the Unesco sites at Mycenae (€8), Delos (€5), and Topkapi Palace, Istanbul (€9). To sum up, if I fly with Juliet Flower MacCannell from our home near San Francisco to Athens, take the “Treasures” cruise and fly back from Istanbul, the total cost of our trip would be \$21.000, inclusive of the approximately \$200 which would have been our total cost of admission into every listed site on tour – all the sites that are not free of charge, that is.

WHY TOURISM GROWS SO FAST

Economists and tourism researchers of an empiricist bent have neither contemplated nor attempted to comprehend the far from subtle differences between the tourist “core commodity” and the other commodities known as “consumer goods and services”. It is the imaginary, ubiquitous and polymorphous nature of tourism’s core commodity that makes the rapid growth of the tourism industry possible. Economists should have been tipped off that something is radically amiss about their assumptions when they classified tourist dollars as income from “exports”.

Foreign tourists on the receipt side are considered “exports”. In other words the currency receipts are considered surplus items. National tourists who travel abroad are considered “imports”... and placed on the debit side of the ledger (Sessa, 1983, p. 133).

The designation makes sense insofar as tourism generates foreign exchange the same as selling products abroad generates foreign exchange. But all similarities end with the color of the money received. Nothing of value was “exported”; the tourists were “imported”. Modern Greece did not go to the trouble of manufacturing Delphi and shipping it abroad to be sold to consumers (Though a case might be made that something like this occurred in the infamous case of the so called “Elgin Marbles”.) Nothing tangible leaves Greece where it is re-sold, used until it’s worn out, crushed and recycled. The tourist pays to transport herself to Delphi. After she experiences it, she leaves it behind for other tourists to come and see. Delphi, or the Parthenon, or the Oedipus crossroads, or

the blue domed buildings and the beaches at Santorini are the key motivating factor for all the economic transactions that are required to put tourists in their presence, but the attractions themselves are not “consumed”. They continue to transcend the economic laws of production and consumption”, independent and unaware of the machinations that put millions of tourists in their presence.

The current size and growth of the tourist economy marks the beginning of the end of economic relations as described by Marx and fully operationalized under late capitalism. Global markets based on being able to calculate monetary equivalencies between units of labor and the value of material goods produced by labor are not sustainable. Personal electronics and pharmaceuticals are the only globally important industries remaining that are based on products that require proprietary extraction and processing of natural resources, periodic re-engineering or reformulation to remain competitive, purpose-built factories, specialized packaging, global transport using trucks, rail, container ships or tankers, coordinated networks of wholesalers, advertising, retail outlets, and specialized post-consumer service including technical support and re-cycling. But pharmaceuticals and electronics don't come close to the global economic impact of tourism. Future growth will likely be modeled on tourism and the parts of the internet where consumers also become the product.

Tourism is the harbinger of an economic revolution based on an entirely new kind of “product”. What is purchased is nothing but a configuration of images and symbols in human consciousness and discourse. This new product has no materiality whatsoever. It exists only in the human mind and in language. No one understands the desire for this new product, only that it is powerful and nearly universal. This desire stands dialectical materialism on its head. With few (sometimes zero) prompts, the consumer herself undertakes product design and periodic re-formulation. The consumer transports herself to the material representation of her desires. The consumer assumes so much responsibility for the logistics of its conception, manufacture and distribution that she herself increasingly comes to resemble one of the products of old fashioned materialist capitalism. Now an existing vast, disarticulated, horizontal network of services moves these consumers-as-products along a mainly open air global assembly line. No business is so small or out of the way that it cannot contribute. A kiosk that sells a pair of sunglasses or a petrol station that sells a tank of fuel, a map, and a cold soda could make an important contribution to the finished product. Assembly does not require coordinating complex technologies. Final assembly is just that, e.g., tourist throngs “assembled” on the island of Santorini at Oia beach for the sunset.

The startup costs for tourist enterprises never include the cost of the attraction. Anyone can make a room available to Air B and B visitors and keep it filled every night because it is walking distance to the city's art museum. They didn't have to purchase, house, and protect the artworks in the museum in order to sell out their room. The only dangers to the attraction, and to those whose business depends on it, are posed

by its popularity. A constant risk to an attraction and its surrounding environment is its success. Sheer numbers of tourists might unwittingly damage it by their contaminating proximity, by breathing on it or leaving litter behind, or in- and of-themselves become annoying and distracting to their local hosts and more crucially to the other tourists. The Liberty Bell had to be removed from Independence Hall in Philadelphia because the vibration of the visitors' footsteps was threatening the structural integrity of the Hall, almost as precious and famous as the Bell it once contained.

Compared to other so-called "sustainable" resources, however, tourist attractions appear to be nothing short of miraculous. Wood products are said to be sustainable because cut forests can be replanted and grow back. Imagine a magic forest that grows back in less than an eye blink after being cut, with every tree more mature than it was the moment before. That is the essence of the attraction as resource. Each visit only serves to enhance the reputation and desirability of the attraction. Visits to the popular Oia sunsets do not involve using them up as a finite resource so they slowly disappear. The sunsets and the tourists dependably return night after night. Each "use" of the sunset only adds to its power and fame and contributes to its future "production".

TOURISM'S FIT WITH NEOLIBERAL ECONOMIC SCHEMES

Tourism, leisure and travel are the fastest growing and most profitable sectors of the global economy because of their easy adaptability to neoliberal economic schemes that seek to transform every aspect of human existence into a commodity. As suggested in the previous section, the only real threat to the generic tourism business model is its own success. I.e., too many tourists spoiling the tourist experience. Global tourism is beginning to spiral out of control by destroying the quality of life and the quality of tourist experiences in the places tourists most desire to visit.

But tourism's growth is not just a matter of over exploiting the existing global system of free attractions: e.g., stuffing thousands of people onto enormous cruise ships, charging them for an "all inclusive" holiday, and dumping them onto Venice where they pay no admission and trash the Piazza San Marco. Davis and Marvin (2004) have provided a superb study of the Venice case of over tourism. In addition to self-cancelling established tourism, there is an almost universal belief in tourism's magical transformational powers; that tourism is the one fast-track to saving failed or under-performing regional economies.

If a region's manufacturing sector has failed, or if its agricultural sector remains stuck in centuries old production practices, tourism can come to the rescue. Anything and nothing in the local scene can be reframed for tourist consumption. A place that is completely undeveloped with no amenities can be hyped as "pure", and "untouched". A place that is overrun by tourists can be hyped as "popular", or "must see".

A farmer has the option of refusing to buy modern equipment and refusing to pay his workers a living wage. Situated in a picturesque region, a farm is only a quick-print

glossy brochure and a web-page away from getting tourists to pay the farmer to bring in the harvest using traditional (“sustainable”) methods. If the farm kitchen still has a wood-burning stove, the guests will pay to cook their own meals as a part of an “authentic” traditional rural experience.

If an industrial region has fallen into economic and physical ruin, once again, it is tourism to the rescue. Lena Tegtmeier (2016) has given us an excellent case study of Detroit which has become a pilgrimage site for tourists who come to witness the ruins of industrial capitalism. As often happens, post apocalypse Detroit was initially discovered by artists, photographers, explorers, poor students who could not afford commercialized attractions, and well-heeled hipsters in search of the exotic. Only then, according to Tegtmeier, did the Detroit Tourist Bureau and tourism developers began to grasp the allure of the rusted and derelict assembly lines of the old abandoned auto factories. Tegtmeier’s main point is that ruin tourism has the power to reframe physical evidence of disastrous economic “failure” into service (tourist) economy “success”. As neoliberal economies increasingly understand and control tourism and try to shape its ideological underpinnings, they vastly expand their capacity to make money out of anything, even negative economic conditions, even nothing at all.

Airlines have figured out how to charge their customers double or more for not using their services. How does this work? A passenger books and pays for a three legged flight, e.g., San Francisco, Amsterdam, Paris, San Francisco. On her arrival in Amsterdam, she is offered a ride to Paris and decides she would like to travel by car with a friend instead of flying. If she didn’t read the fine print in her booking contract with the airline, she will be shocked to discover that her Paris to San Francisco return ticket was cancelled when she failed to get on the flight from Amsterdam to Paris. “Sorry, there is no possibility of a refund. You will have to pay for that leg of your trip again”. So she has left her Amsterdam to Paris seat empty for the airline to re-sell to a stand-by passenger. And she must pay double for her Paris to San Francisco flight. Or, if she did read the fine print she would know to call the airline to cancel the Amsterdam to Paris leg of her flight. If she calls she can prevent her return to San Francisco from being voided by the airline. But she will receive no refund for the unused leg. And there will also be an additional \$300.00 cancellation fee. The airline pockets the original full fare plus three hundred, and gets to sell her seat to another customer. The airline increases its profit from her *not* flying from Amsterdam to Paris by several hundred percentage points over what it would have been had she actually taken the flight. Not all air carriers engage in this practice, but I know from personal experience that many do.

OVERTOURISM

Overtourism has emerged in the past several years as an awareness on the part of host communities that tourism can become too much of a good thing. Some destinations

are becoming super-saturated with tourists, straining local institutions and amenities to the breaking point and making life unbearable for local people. Once the basic outlines of the modern tourist compact are clear, it should be relatively easy to understand the causes of overtourism and address solutions.

The modern tourist compact is not, in and of itself, the source of overtourism. It is the many ways airline charters, cruise ships, oversized busses filled with packaged tourists, resort chains, etc. exploit the compact that leads to super-saturation in places like Spain's Costa del Sol and Venice. Fodors can double the numbers it brings to the Mona Lisa without painting another Mona Lisa. Freddy Laker can quintuple the numbers it drops on a Spanish beach without manufacturing more beach. The industry can exponentially increase the number of tourists it squeezes into a region without contributing anything to maintain the attraction beyond token entrance fees.

But it is not just the ruthless exploitation of the global system of attraction as "free goods" that causes overtourism. Successful monetization of the tourist experience involves retention of the form of the original compact while getting rid of its substance. The industry encourages a frenzy of going places as the essence of tourism. There is little industry interest in the tourist who wants to go to Greece to see Delphi. The compact tourist, motivated by specific curiosity, has many options and can shop for travel services. The main drive of the industry is to shape and control tourism by reducing the importance of site specificity in destination selection. The ideal tourist from an industry perspective is someone who responds, "okay, sounds good", to the offer "here is an itinerary we have selected for you in your price range, all-inclusive". Mainly, what this tourist will experience is his fellow travelers also valiantly going through the motions of being tourists.

All of this was well-understood by Walt Disney when he conceived of the first ersatz attractions the "It's a Small World", "Rivers of the World", "Mainstreet U.S.A." and "Matterhorn" rides at the original Disneyland. They are all suggestive of the possibility of having an almost tourist experience. The same strategy is employed by the casino owners in Las Vegas who have built copies of the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, the Golden Gate Bridge, the canals of Venice, King Tut's tomb, etc., into their gaming establishments. The casinos assiduously follow the compact formula even if they know it is beside the point of their basic business model. I.e., they charge their visitors nothing to see their replicant attractions. The tourists' dollars are spent off to the side at the gaming tables.

In a recent study of 17 Scandinavian tour operators (Wall-Reinius, Ioannides & Zampoukos, 2019) the authors found that destination does not matter, or matters very little, in both the production and consumption of "all inclusive" tours. What is important to the customers is the price, the fact that it is "all inclusive" so there are no surprise expenses, and they will go *somewhere*, but where exactly is not important. The customers express almost no interest in the particular destination. Wall-Reinius et al. (2019) find that "all inclusive" is more profitable for the operators, it is more flexible in that the

destination can be changed without modifying the experience or the way it is marketed, and it is desired by a growing class of clientele who want to minimize unexpected expenses and risks while on vacation. The customers for this type of tour mainly want to reduce the unexpected to near zero.

There is a stark difference between the “all inclusive” tourists and “compact tourists” who are motivated by precisely an opposing set of desires; who crave the unexpected, demand direct contact with site specific “otherness”, and are willing to put up with myriad expenses and hardships to put themselves in the physical presence of the objects of their touristic desires. This begs the question of whether the kind of compact tourism where “place matters” is the same order of human experience as tourism where “geography doesn’t matter”.

Cruises, theme parks, and isolated vacation resorts variously offer leisure, relaxation, entertainment, pampering, and socializing, in closed environments. They do not expose the tourist to difference, but cosset them with social familiars. These and other anti-enlightenment leisure packages are usually based on formalistic repetition of the accidental and surface features of tourism and are no longer connected to the modern tourist compact, democratic ideals, or curiosity. A symptomatic example would be “cruises to nowhere”. The ship leaves port, heads seven miles out to sea, drops anchor for five or seven days, serves up food, drinks, gambling, shopping opportunities, dancing and other entertainments, then heads back to port to resupply for the next load.

The desire to take a cruise to nowhere is diametrically opposed to what animated Stendhal’s Mr. L’s curiosity and observations. Cruisers (the ones who actually go somewhere) in ports of call are offered side-trips to local compact attractions. And any major attraction that they incidentally see, even from afar, will likely figure in their pre- and post-travel accounts. But opportunity for an occasional brush with compact attractions need not be their primary motive for taking a cruise. The emphasis in the descriptions of Tauck Tours 14 day “Treasures of the Aegean” cruise is the kick-off cocktail party at the Grande Bretagne Hotel in Athens and socializing with fellow cruisers; “playing board games on deck”, “or just relaxing in the boat’s hot tub”⁶.

At least the cruise to nowhere doesn’t disrupt the life of local people. Other packages that are indifferent to the places they visit add insult to injury. No one wants to be over-run by thousands of tourists who don’t care where they are, who would be just as happy destroying the quality of life of some other place.

There are a number of possible solutions to overtourism. Before they are considered, it is helpful to understand that modern democratic compact tourism, the tourism that Stendhal first described, will not go away. Nor will it result in most places becoming super-saturated with tourists. Without the industry gathering up and dropping off massive numbers of tourists, every place on earth will continue to be visited by those interested enough and curious enough to go there and motivated enough to find their way. In

⁶ Retrieved from <https://www.tauck.com>

the 1980s my young sons stayed and watched the rolling end-credits to a film they loved to find out where it had been made. When we visited Scotland shortly after, they insisted that I drive them to the very remote highland village named in the credits. As we were enjoying tea and scones on the café terrace, I asked the teenaged waitress if this was “where the movie *Local Hero* was filmed”. She smiled and answered in a light Scottish brogue, “sure, but you’re the first one who’s ever asked us”. Without the industry’s mass transport of tourists and force-feeding tourists into “must see” bucket list destinations, every place on earth would get exactly the kinds and numbers of tourists it deserves.

There are straightforward solutions to the problem of overtourism. Local restaurants, inns, etc. could collectively and systematically raise their rates to maintain income levels while reducing numbers served until a tolerable “sweet spot” is reached. Governments at all levels could impose head taxes on air charter landings, cruise ship dockings, tour bus parking. The taxes could be increased until the numbers of arrivals dropped to acceptable levels. The revenue from the taxes could be used to meliorate the economic losses to the local tourism sector. Local police departments could rigorously enforce littering, loitering, public intoxication, drug, noise and lewd behavior laws on tourists who believe that “getting away from it all” means throwing off all social constraint. There are numerous tools for reducing the impacts of overtourism if it is genuinely regarded as a serious problem. But that is a discussion for another article.

In conclusion: there has always been tourism. And there always will be. It does not need to be hyper-tourism that reflects the surface features but not the substance of the modern democratic tourist compact.

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