Tourism

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What is it?

Tourism is a form of mobility that comprises all voluntary journeys ending when the tourist returns home. It excludes migrations or exiles but includes business or medical trips, and educational journeys. Although often described from an economic point of view, tourism is also a setting for intercultural encounters.

Who uses the concept?

Links between tourism and interculturality were initially pointed out by scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Recently journalists and other practitioners have highlighted the potential of this dimension for building a more peaceful world. This perspective has also received critique due to the unharnessed tendency of the tourism industry, often backed by governments, to commodify human relations. This pattern has permeated voluntary work and other goodwill activities.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Tourism puts people from different social and cultural backgrounds into contact. This leads to intercultural encounters that may develop into intercultural dialogue or cultural clash. Encounters through tourism may challenge beliefs around stereotypes, thus working against ignorance and prejudice, so long as the tourist has enough tools to face the situation and the situation itself feels safe enough for the integration process to happen.

Host-guest relations are an important topic at this moment in many parts of the world, from cities in Southern Europe to locations in Southeast Asia to the Caribbean. Aside from economic, spatial, and environmental impacts, receiving tourists may spark sociocultural transformations. However, not all impacts are good. Intercultural contact may lead to an over-commodification of cultural expressions and artefacts, thus erasing their profound meaning.

What work remains?

The intercultural dimensions of tourism have been explored extensively in academic research. However, practitioners still need to integrate these considerations in their activities at all levels (from political decisions to marketing strategies) for the benefit of both hosts and guests. The sociocultural impacts of tourism and social justice have yet to be effectively addressed.

Resources

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