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Latin American Scholars and the Heritage Tourism: a critical analysis.
Maximiliano Korstanje

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Maximiliano Korstanje
Department of Economics,
University of Palermo, Argentina
mkorst@palermo.edu

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Abstract

This paper explores the problems of Latin American scholars in tourism at the time of defining not only the meaning of heritage but also the valid policies to follow to protect the tourist destination. In consonance with the latest advances of cultural theory we hold that the obsession for heritage, not only within tourism but also in anthropology, exhibits a neocolonial discourse to commoditize the non-western others.

Key Words: Heritage, Tourism, Latin America, Consumption, Commoditization

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The onset of 19s century brought for first anthropologists the belief that the advance of industrialism not only would be irreversible but will erode primitive kinships and forms of organization, which means the disappearance of nonwestern cultures. As Harris puts it, concerned in questions of heritage, heirs, and inheritance the first ethnologists were lawyers (Harris, 2006). One of the aspects that defined the field-work of anthropology was the efficacy to collect the lore, customs and object of primitive societies before their disappearance. Indeed, the “Other”, far from being an independent entity, was subordinated to European-gaze. The European paternalism envisaged the world as an amalgam of different cultures, which evolved in different ladders depending on their economies or ways of production. Europe was conceived as the most evolutionary and refined form of civilization respecting to these “Others” who had not skills in arts and trade. This seems to be the context, when the conceptualization of patrimony and heritage surface. From that moment on, the relation of both with development took a material connotation that suggested further trade and commercialization would be beneficial for natives. Native backwardness was explained by their disinterest for economic progress, as it was imagined by Europeans’ travellers. If the colonial order connected the center with its periphery, travels paved the ways for the acceleration of colonization (Korstanje, 2012).

Nowadays, tourism and heritage seem to be inextricably intertwined. Tourism scholars echo the assumptions that the fresh incomes generated by this industry alleviate the poverty of natives or their living conditions. A fairer distribution of wealth, experts, and public account balance give to the community a substantial economic improvement. Tourism, of course, can help in such a stage. One of the benefits, these experts adhere, of tourism consists in its ability to exploit intangible assets (as heritage and patrimony) which have limited costs for investors. In parallel, abandoned cities or communities or in the bias of destruction can be revitalized by the introduction of heritage. The discourse of patrimony should be understood as an effective instrument to boost economies, communities, or even cultures. ¿What are the commonalities of first ethnologists and modern tourism policy makers?

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At the time of entering in the field, ethnographers defied the classic conception of science, which experimented at desks or in controlled conditions. B. Malinowski, the founder of modern ethnography, acknowledged a clear gap between what people overtly say and finally do. Therefore, for social scientists, the needs of moving beyond where the native laid, were associated to the idea of “being there” to validate empirically what senses often captivate.

Changing the epistemological basis of discipline, Malinowski and his seminal studies showed the importance of fieldwork to expand understanding of cultures. In this vein, two main assumptions cemented the western-gaze; the concern for some culture’s disappearance was conjoined to situate the supremacy of Europe as an unquestionable truth. It can be found in texts authored by many founding parents of the discipline as Tylor, Boas, Durkheim, Mauss, Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski Evans-Pritchard and other founding parents (Radcliffe-Brown, 1975) (Pritchard, 1977) (Mauss, 1979) (Boas, 1982) (Malinowski, 1986) (Tylor, 1995) (Durkheim, 2003). However, this sentiment of protection resulted in an uncanny obsession to understand (not to correct) the lives of these nonwhite others. Instead of correcting the factors that lead Imperial powers to exploit the periphery, heritage became in a social institution that mediates between the disciplinary violence of Europe and natives’ suffering. This does not mean that anthropology was conducive to imperial order, but many of the produced knowledge served for colonial administrators to discipline “indigenous customs”. This romantic view of the world, not only facilitated the expansion of colonialism worldwide but facilitated the conditions for the rise of anthropology as an academic discipline. Doubtless, in this process, the concept of backwardness and wealth played a crucial role.

As the previous argument given, between 1975 and 1985 two senior scholars, J Heytens (1978) and Gray (1982) used the term *patrimony* to denote *development*. In this respect, tourism enables social capital to optimize wealth and resources to the extent to attract more capital investment, which produces a virtuous circle. Underpinned by the proposition that further tourism equals to further development, scholarship in tourism and hospitality adopted a material conception of patrimony, as a new valuable resource to

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exploit that may very well help societies or human groups historically oppressed by nation-states (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).

In Latin America, scholars ushered the idea of patrimony in order to preserve landscapes, environments or with others sustainable purposes. Local resources, unless otherwise resolved, should be protected from the exploitation or the interests of market. That way, the theory of patrimony suggests, natives receive the good (eluding the negative) effects of tourism. At a second viewpoint, heritage plays a crucial role by cementing the local identity. Locals not only acquire a self-consciousness that will facilitate potential negotiations respecting to the proposed programs, but they administer their own resources (Vitry, 2003) (Aguirre, 2004) (Dos-Santos and Antonini, 2004) (Mondino, 2004) (Espeitx, 2004) (Toselli, 2006). As Korstanje pointed out, though in different contexts of production and times, the spirit of colonial order respecting how the “other” is constructed, lingers (Korstanje 2012). It seems worth noting that the channels for scientific discovery and “the concept of the Other”, are inextricably linked. The empirical research findings in tourism fields, far from questioning this connection, validate earlier assumptions in regards to heritage. While tourists seek authenticity as a new form of escapement from the alienatory atmosphere of greater cities, natives offer their culture as a product to be gazed. Dean MacCannell and other followers offered a good description of the role of tourism in a society of mass-consumption. MacCannell conceives that tourism consolidated just after the mid of XX th century, or the end of WWII. Not only the expansion of industrialism, which means a set of benefits for workers as less working hours and salaries increase but the technological breakthrough that triggered mobilities were responsible from the inception of tourism. There was nothing like an ancient form of tourism, Maccannell notes. Taking his cue from the sociology of Marx, Durkheim, and Goffman, Maccannell argues that tourism and staged-authenticity work in conjoint in order for the society not to collapse. If totem is a sacred-object that confers a political authority to chieftom in aboriginal cultures, tourism fulfills the gap between citizens and their institutions, which was enlarged by the alienation lay people face. The current industrial system of production is finely ingrained to expropriate workers from part of their wages. A whole portion of earned salaries is spent to leisure activities, even in

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consuming tourism. As Krippendorff, Maccannell believes, industrialism forged a “tourist consciousness” that revitalizes the glitches and deprivations produced by economy. Tourism would be a type of totem for industrial societies that mediates among citizens, officials and their institutions. In this context, tourism, like the totem in primitive communities, revitalizes psychological frustrations and alienation proper of urban societies. Not surprisingly, Maccannell adds, Marx was in the correct side at denouncing the oppression suffered by the work-force. Nonetheless, leisure, far from being an ideological mechanism of control (as in whole Marxism), prevents the social disintegration (Maccannell, 1976; 1984). Over recent years, he was concerned by the lack of ethics in tourism consumption. Coalescing contributions of Giddens with Derrida, he points out that globalization entails to type of mobilities. Nomads who are defined as forged-migrants are pitted against tourists who are encouraged to consume landscapes and exotic cultures. Since tourists are conferred by a certain degree of freedom, this leads them to think they are part of a privileged class, a sentiment that is reinforced by the quest of “the local other”. Reluctant to contact others, tourists affirm their own self-esteem enjoying the precarious conditions where natives live. If this is not controlled tourism may produce a progressive process of dehumanization (Maccannell, 1973; 1976, 1984; 1988; 1992; 2001; 2009; 2011; 2012). It is interesting to discuss to what extent, the discourse of heritage never left behind the idea of rationality, as it was formulated by the founding parents of anthropology. The Other (good savage) is conceived in opposition to civilized European. While Europeans have reached their stage of civilization because of trade, the legal jurisprudence which is based in the principle of right and property and an organized way for concentrating derived surplus, natives developed economies of subsistence (Posner, 1983). This allegory suggests that problems of international commerce are fixed by further investment. Therefore, aborigines who have been pressed to live in peripheral and desert areas believe in the market as a platform to launch towards prosperity. The needs of revitalizing tourists’ destinations by the adoption of loans and international financial aid not only validates this assumption, but aggravates economic problems simply because solicitant is unable to accrue their higher tax of interest imposed by central nations. This is exactly the resulted denounce issued by sociologists

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of development as Escobar (1997) Viola (2000) and Esteva (2000). Historically, the term development was coined after American President Henry Truman in 1949, when he claimed on the needs of helping others towards the trace of development. From that moment onwards, the world was divided in two, developed and underdeveloped nations. At a first glimpse, pundits asserted that development would be helpful in contributing to enhance the living conditions of underdeveloped groups. The financial aid was the touchstone in order for West to expand their cultural values to the rest of the world. Needless to say, things do not turned out as planned. Financial assistance was issued without any type of control to governments which failed to obtain fairer levels of wealth distribution. Instead of accepting the liability, international business organizations as World Bank, International Monetary Funds and Development Bank chose for using a blaming the victim tactic. They, rather, replied that cultural incompatibilities between developed and underdeveloped cultures were the main reason that explains why the original promise of theory of development diluted (Esteva 2000; Escobar 1997).

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