

How Tourism Is Shaping the Urban Realities

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Following the loss of heavy, manufacturing industry in many industrial areas in the 70s and 80s, tourism has featured extensively in urban and waterfront regeneration policy because of its ability to generate substantial economic benefits to destination communities. This, alongside a number of additional facts, has created a flux of mass tourism to certain cities, in which Lisbon is included. Mass tourism has created a parallel reality within cities and developed a very complex relation to cities' urban forms. But before we can discuss these relations, I would like to shed some light on the concepts of tourism and urbanity.

To be a tourist is one of the characteristics of the modern experience, for it is modern society that has provided the enabling factors for people to travel and for the supply of tourism destinations, services and amenities. Indeed, for the majority of people living in developed countries, tourism is feasible. Due to technological advancements, mass transportation, the provision of leisure time and increasingly high levels of disposable income, people now have the means and opportunity to travel and explore different places. Additionally, few places in the world today have not become either tourist destinations or in close proximity to them and, the overall number of people participating in tourism continues to grow. Thus, the demand for travel has increased

and the supply of tourist destinations, attractions and facilities has also distended to correspond with demand. In the past thirty years there has been a fundamental shift in consumption habits, including the consumption of holidays. No longer do we thrive for package beach hotel holidays but rather, these traditional holidays are being rejected for individualistic, personalized forms of tourism, for example, urban tourism (including short / city breaks), eco-tourism and heritage tourism. Consequently, new tourism destinations have emerged such as urban waterfront destinations like Lisbon.

Globalization can be characterized as the increasing connections (social, cultural and economic) that are taking place around the world. What is in effect happening in today's society is a wave of cultural transformation associated with a process of cultural globalization. As cultural products such as tourism are assembled from all over the world, they are turned into commodities for a new global marketplace. Thus, as cultures are thrown into immediate contact with each other, new geographies are formed with an emphasis upon the renaissance of locality. For instance, places attempt to revitalize the local as local cultures are overshadowed by a new global culture. Arguably, this new spatial aesthetic reflects postmodern culture with its emphasis on local and vernacular cultures, whilst its global orientation

1 Nuryanti, W. (1996) Heritage and postmodern tourism, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 249-260.

2 Dodson, B. and Kilian, D. (1998) From port to playground: the redevelopment of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, Cape Town, in D. Tyler, Y. Guerrier and M. Robertson (eds.), *Managing Tourism in Cities: Policy, Process and Practice*, England: John Wiley & Sons.

3 Law, C. M. (2002) *Urban Tourism: The Visitor Economy and the Growth of Large Cities*, London: Continuum.

4 Shaw, G. and Williams, A. M. (1994) *Critical Issues in Tourism: A Geographical Perspective*, Oxford: Blackwell.

5 Alves S. (2010) *O Social, o Espacial e o Político na Pobreza e na Exclusão - Avaliação de iniciativas de regeneração de áreas urbanas 'em risco' na cidade do Porto*. PhD Thesis, Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais, Lisbon University, Portugal.

tends to produce a new certainty in which place distinctiveness is etched out for the sake of achieving universally accepted standards of the cultural economy.

As international relations multiply and localities become similar to one another, such a loss finds its cultural expression in the theme of nostalgia: "A movement towards one's roots and a growing appreciation of tradition are aspects of relating to one's total environment. They reflect the interplay between the local and the global. Such trends can be viewed as manifestations of postmodernism."¹

During the Post-modern era, in areas where manufacturing industries have diminished and deindustrialization has occurred, as is the case of Lisbon, desolate sites have been redeveloped and reinstated with the injection of service industries and consumer-based activities. These new sites cater as tourist centers, where heritage and other forms of tourism have been used to transform the landscape. Spaces such as these embrace a postmodern orientation and arguably appeal to the lifestyle choices and consumption ethic of the new middle class. The creation of the new middle class is responsible for the gentrification of such areas and is connected to the growth of such developments.

The phenomenon of waterfront redevelopment is a highly visible example of contemporary urban restructuring. In many cities, efforts have been made and are currently being made, to renew the strengths of the waterfront through large scale renewal projects. These changes dramatically alter the original character and function of the port area from a site of production to a cultural landscape more readily associated with consumption practices. Perhaps one of the most striking characteristics of regenerated dockland vicinities is their distinctive postmodern appearance and appeal. For example, Dodson and Kilian² argue that processes of commodification and 'spectacle-isation' have been used to redevelop and forge a 'post-modern' waterfront destinations.

According to Law³ "the term urban tourism simply denotes tourism in urban areas". Shaw and Williams⁴ state that urban areas of all types act as tourism destinations and these areas have the potential to attract domestic and international tourists. They argue that tourism in these environments is a diverse phenomenon. First, urban areas are heterogeneous in nature as they are distinguished by size, location, function and age. Second, they are multifunctional as they offer a variety of facilities. Third, facilities are consumed by a whole range of users, for example, tourists and residents. Cities provide a great range of consumption opportunities for users. These and the facilities to supply their needs, define a range of different types of city which may all exist within a particular urban area, for example the shopping city and the historic city. For Law it is difficult to define urban tourism due to its diversity however, he attempts at describing the phenomenon of urban tourism have primarily focused on its demand and supply side characteristics, which enable the subject to be differentiated from other types of tourism.

Over the last three decades, tourism has had an important role in the regeneration of urban areas in Lisbon. It has contributed to urban revitalization with the recovery of old buildings and by bolstering the country's economy.

The historic center of Lisbon, experienced a negative development in the physical, social, and economic conditions throughout the 20th century. The problem of urban decline is related to a set of heterogeneous and interacting factors such as suburban sprawl and the freezing of rents (depriving landlords of the incentive to maintain properties and rehabilitate housing).⁵ The process of decline in historic city centers has been inseparable from the decline in the resident population.

The money tourists spent helps Portugal's economy, and the government heralded the flood of tourists as a sign that Lisbon is the place to be. For some residents, however, such flows risk ousting local inhabitants and

traditional stores from the city's ancient quarters as hostels and shops selling cheap trinkets and imitation handicrafts encroach.

The changes are most evident in the Baixa area, a grid of black and white cobblestone streets between two hills facing the River Tagus. An area once dominated by local boutiques has faced an influx of low-budget hotels, restaurants with menus in multiple languages and souvenir shops hawking cheap Portuguese-style products made in China. This new city center came as a response to the problems of degradation, loss of resident population, and ageing of vacant buildings that the city was suffering.

What happens when everything around you turns into shops selling souvenirs? Tourists who come to Lisbon will no longer be able to see the best of what we have to offer.

Lisbon, as many other cities transformed by the mass of tourism, has now a parallel reality, where the locals have one kind of experience and the tourists are led to believe in a different kind of city, a fabricated city for them to enjoy.

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