

Geography and Tourism

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Tourists are in search of experience different realities

Tourism and Geography are closely intertwined. Having as a main focus the exploration of the world as a means to know it, both disciplines can support each other on the condition that the respective specificities can be recognized and properly analysed.

The knowledge of the world as pursued by the tourist is essentially related to an interest arising from the need to approach an unusual reality. Tourists are in search of entertainment and amusement, trying to escape from daily life and work. In addition, the tourism process enables to experience different realities, with particular reference to unusual landscapes, lifestyle and even cuisine.

Although involving the tourist's whole personality, the approach to faraway places and cultures is essentially sensory and emotional. As such, the whole process is only partly rational, and does not require a regular or systematic methodology. Moreover, the tourism experience aims in most cases to produce positive sensations or, at least, to enhance personal growth.

Once restricted to a limited number of wealthy and privileged people, tourism enjoys today a wide popularity, with particular reference to industrialized countries, due to the improved revenue conditions and increased amount of leisure time. Tourism growth is also subject to existing transportation and hospitality facilities.

Geography has as its main purpose the pursuit of knowledge

In a similar way to Tourism, Geography has as its main purpose the pursuit of knowledge, which can also be considered as an essential cognitive need perceived by single individuals, with reference to familiar and work places as well as faraway territories. Eventually, the process shall involve the whole earth surface, as the prefix (*geo*) of the word geography implies.

Additional tools and methodologies can also provide a progressive understanding of what lies below the earth surface or even support the exploration of the solar system as well as of the most remote galaxies. These topics are the focus of in-depth studies carried out within specific subjects.

The thirst for knowledge originates from the need to understand the sense of one's life by comparison with unknown realities. Yet Science and Geography in particular have progressively replaced a random and spontaneous approach with a more systematic method, which relies on research methodologies and paradigms delivering an increasingly complete vision of the world.

Originally, Geography methodologies essentially included the mere observation of facts. Over time, a more complex framework of classifying methods has been added, with later involvement of measurement and statistical patterns. Nowadays, Geography makes use of a differentiated analysis dealing with dissimilar contexts, also relying upon closely related disciplines both in the scientific and humanistic field. From an historical perspective, the process was exemplified during the early

stage by sheer trip notes, which gradually evolved into regional descriptions (as the term *geography* suggests), that is of local landscapes and settlers.

At first, the oral tradition prevailed; then came writings and also drawings, later replaced by photos and films. Names were given to people and places. The introduction of toponymy intertwined with the invention of cartography, meant as the description of territories viewed from a zenith position. This approach delivered a more or less detailed representation of the territory, depending on the selected scale. Significant changes have occurred over time with reference to cartographic and real points of view, as the human eye is now supported by aerial and even satellite images.

By contrast with other scientific disciplines, like Physics and Chemistry, the introduction of new and improved geographic schemes and interpretative models did not imply the rejection of previous knowledge paradigms. On the contrary, the different analysis methodologies have proven to be suitable to support each other. For example, the observation and intuition used in the past still play a relevant role as cognitive instruments useful to explore relationships and effects linking different categories of territorial phenomena, even in the presence of factorial analysis or information systems.

Tourism and Geography research both a comprehension of the whole reality

During the second half of the XVIII century, especially thanks to the research work carried out by Alexander Von Humboldt and Emanuele Kant, Geography expanded its research area beyond the mere description of regional, environmental and human elements, in order to achieve a better comprehension of the whole reality.

During his journey across Southern America, eminent scientist Von Humbolt attempted to explain analogies found in plants distribution at different altitudes and latitudes conditions. Geographer Emanuele Kant even became a philosopher in order to interpret human behaviour, which he had studied in Germany. He also focussed his studies on the world diversity, which he knew from the tales of the travellers he used to invite to his house.

Thus, contemporary Geography is a tool useful to both explore and understand the world. Obviously, different results can be obtained according to the resource availability, with special mention to personal resources, tied to the cognitive capabilities and cultural patterns of each individual.

The mutual contribution that Geography and Tourism can give to each other originates from their respective nature, attitude and research field. In particular, Geography can share with Tourism a wide range of knowledge and interpretations linked to those environments that are indeed valorised by tourism. On the other hand, Tourism is likely to arise interest in unknown cultures and places, on which Geography (alongside with other disciplines) has accumulated over time a huge knowledge.

Thus, a good geographer focussing his studies on a particular area can also have a relevant role as a tourist group's *tour leader*, provided that he can use the language and understand the people's specific interests. On the other hand, an intelligent tourist proves to be a geographer's best companion in field surveys, by combining his curious attitude with the researcher's interests. One might think that this is just imagination, hard to turn into reality. Yet some directions can be provided in order to integrate the tourism experience with the knowledge Geography has to offer.

Increasing information sources related to the case study area

In this sense, improvement in tourism experiences can be achieved by increasing information sources related to the case study area, and this should be done before, during and after the planned encounter. Tourism guides (and today even hand-held computers) are especially conceived for this purpose, yet there are also additional and easily accessible tools, like the Internet and a wide range of publications.

Encounters and conversations with the resident community, as well as the reading of local newspapers and the exchange of impressions with traveller companions or individuals otherwise involved in the local reality are extremely useful to examine and understand the selected case study. Considering different points of view usually fosters – though does not guarantee – an increased objectivity and knowledge depth.

In depth-study is supported by the writing process, also enabling later reflections on the selected topic. In this sense, the memorisation of experiences and encounters as well as sensations –which are easy to forget- is essential both at the emotional and cognitive level.

The identification of hypothesis likely to be confirmed or denied

The identification of hypothesis likely to be confirmed or denied during the journey represents an additional, useful analysis tool. The process is subject to a previous examination of the case study, carried out by studying different types of sources (books, newspapers, documentaries, tales from friends).

For example, a region known for its ethnical homogeneity shall provide the chance to verify the truthfulness of such statement. In case of proven inconsistency, the research will unveil and describe the ethnical features found in the area. During a field survey carried out in a valley described as a glacial terrain, the researcher shall verify such interpretation, searching for evidence in this sense. Case studies are obviously extremely varied.

The island of Taiwan (or Little China), began modernisation 40 years before China. Hypothesis claim how the area anticipated a good number of economic and social phenomena affecting the mainland 40 years later. This process enables to predict facts that will probably take place in the next future. Visiting the new, huge tourist complexes like those in Cancun (Mexico), Sharm el Sheik (Egypt) or Bali (Indonesia) can be the starting point of a research project carried out with the scope to assess the role played by tourism in encouraging local economic growth.

In this perspective, Tourism implies methods which are commonly used in scientific research. The formulation and verification of hypothesis is particularly useful to achieve a better comprehension of the case study. Such approach does not deny the emotions related to tourism discoveries. On the contrary, new suggestions are added, for better comprehension enriches one's mind with knowledge. Thus, careful tourism is in some way synonymous with geographic research. In the same way, geographic field surveys turn out to be an intense careful tourism experience.

Tourism and Geography are currently concerned with the environmental responsibility

Although approaching the topic with different methods, both Tourism and Geography are currently concerned with the environmental responsibility. Environment has always been a Geography's priority issue. Over the last decades,

major environmental changes have occurred at an unprecedented speed, with particular reference to fragile areas but also at the global level.

Physical Geography specialises in monitoring both changes and possible deteriorations occurring to the atmosphere, climate, biodiversity, global temperatures, ice coverage and oceans level. As a scientific discipline centred on facts observation, Geography boast a long tradition in interpreting specific phenomena, the origin of which has been ascribed from time to time to human activities or to natural causes.

Human Geography has long focussed its research on environmental changes induced by human activities. Environmental transformations produced by agriculture, industrialisation, urbanisation, waste disposal and consumption increase undermine the natural equilibrium at the global scale and are cause of serious concern, as their effects are likely to affect the future of the whole humanity.

The Industrial Revolution has accelerated the massive transformation of the earth surface. Over the last decades, nature conservation as well as the preservation of the historic heritage has become a priority for geographers. Thus, a good number of geographic studies are concerned with the conservation and valorisation of the natural, historic and cultural heritage, also taking into account the memory of valuable monuments or places.

In this sense, Geography intertwine with Tourism activities dealing with the knowledge of cultural, historical and natural heritage. Scenic landscapes, rare animal and vegetal species, cities of arts are at the core of in-depth geographic studies, as well as being remarkable highlights attracting an increasing number of visitors. In some cases, the above mentioned attractions become *cult* objects or assume the nature of a *status symbol*. Unfortunately, tourism resources getting too much attention are constantly threatened by deterioration and unsustainable fruition.

Responsible Tourism?

Geography – as well as History, Historic Criticism and many other disciplines - provides Responsible Tourism with tools useful to know and properly understand most popular tourist attractions, also identifying limits to the sustainable fruition of the resources. The philological research carried out on single natural and cultural resources also suggests possible new approaches, which can be related either to use alterations or to the valorisation of the resources, to be performed through the introduction of innovative technologies.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is an instrument especially conceived for this type of analysis. In many countries, projects likely to have an impact on the natural and cultural heritage can be undertaken only when preceded by a compulsory EIA procedure. The Tourism Itineraries Assessment is a similar methodology which is gaining ground within the tourist sector. This procedure estimates both features and impact of tourist packages on the territory and local communities, as well as on tourists, or the protagonists of the leisure experience. Major public institutions are currently elaborating and have already introduced evaluation schemes in order to assess every single stage of the tourism process.

Reflections on both changing environment and developing tourism areas essentially originates from geographic paradigms, whereas their enforcement as rules has a political and entrepreneurial nature and fall under the competence of local authorities and tour operators. It becomes more urgent and significant as modifications in lifestyle and required technologies accelerate.

Geography can change and possibly improve tourism activities

The widespread interest in environment protection gives hope for an ever increasing integration between Geography and Responsible Tourism: Geography can change and possibly improve tourism activities. Yet there are also reasons to believe that Tourism can change Geography as well, with reference to both territories and populations.

Indeed, Tourism has undoubtedly modified the most popular travel destinations throughout the world. The Romagna coast, and more generally, the whole Italian shoreline, provide a few examples on how Tourism can impact the territory within a few decades. It is also important to stress the striking difference existing between the peak season and the rest of the year. A good number of Alpine regions, as well as the major art cities faces a very similar situation.

In some cases, brand new cities have been exclusively built for tourism purposes. New tendencies also include the emerging – in both industrialized and developing countries- territorial marketing process, aiming to increase incoming tourist flows and support the local economy. In many medium and big-sized cities, territorial marketing is becoming increasingly significant in political terms to gain support from city-dwellers and local stakeholders. Indeed, tourism-induced income is in many cases of primary importance within the local economy.

Geographical modifications produced by Tourism also include alterations in the local communities' behavioural patterns and lifestyle, as well as inducing changes in the tourist's attitude. The influence exerted by tourism on local communities can be easily found everywhere, from Papeete to Venice, from Cortina d'Ampezzo to Bali, from Miami to Capri. Mixed lifestyles originates as a consequence, characterized by the presence of local features and imported behaviours.

Likewise Tourism, information technologies and mass communication convey new habits and lifestyles. Yet tourists can effectively demonstrate how such tools are suitable to convey real information and not only "fiction".

The tourism experience has an impact on tourists too. An example in this sense can be provided by ethnical music, which is becoming increasingly popular in industrialized countries. More generally, tourists tend to approach life in a more relaxing way when they are on holiday; back to their countries, they often try to bear the experience in mind. This is also evident in the emerging presence, in work places, of leisure facilities resembling those initially experimented in tourist areas.

In Japan, golf courses are often found in the city centre. European cities often host gym and wellness plants exactly reproducing schemes experimented in tourist areas. Sea and even mountain sport facilities are in some cases built at the heart of the cities, enabling to practise activities usually experienced during the holiday period.

Tourism and Geography can actually support each other

Tourism and Geography can actually support each other and exchange knowledge. They can learn from each other how to improve the human life and promote environmental and cultural awareness. Above all, Tourism and Geography have the potential to ensure that the unceasing changes occurring throughout the world may be inspired by a respectful attitude towards man and his environment.

References

In recent decades the Tourism scientific literature has increased everywhere in the world, coinciding at a global scale with the explosion of this phenomenon. It has been studied by economists, psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists and geographers from its course, among the first in Italy Umberto Toschi, already in the pre-war years. A complete bibliographic review would be too broad. It seems more useful to report, in addition to a contribution of Toschi, joints collation of a few recent texts, which refer to more comprehensive insights.

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