

Anthropology of Tourism

Anthropology of tourism is concerned with the social and cultural nature of tourism and the behaviour of tourists.

The anthropology of tourism offers an insight into the socio-cultural dimensions of tourism, such as the behaviours of cultures and societies. International tourists in the second half of the twentieth century started to visit those locations in which many anthropologists had carried out their fieldwork. The interaction between tourists and local people provided a new source of anthropological enquiry (Holden, 2005). Therefore, traditionally in tourism studies, anthropology tended to deal with the impacts of tourism on the lifestyles, traditions and cultures of local people, residents or 'hosts'. Over the past few decades, anthropologists have started to shift their focus from largely negative ethnographic critiques of the cultural impacts of tourism to a more balanced discussion of travel and tourism as a social and cultural phenomenon.

The anthropology of tourism has strong connections to sociology, development studies and behavioural psychology. Anthropology and **sociology of tourism** are two sides of the same coin. Both study the qualitative aspects of the experience of tourism, the former at the individual level of perceptions and aspirations, and the latter at the level of social community analysis. Both anthropology and sociology study identity, differentiation and sense of place. In addition, they focus on the tourist's motivations, attitudes, reactions, relations, interaction with the locals and socio-economic and cultural impact on a resort and its people. As reflected in other Key Concepts (e.g. **self and other, identity**), the anthropology and sociology of tourism look at questions of acculturation, authenticity, identity construction and consumption theory as applied to the tourism industry and activities. Perhaps where anthropology, sociology and economics show potential overlap is in marketing studies, branding, image and consumer psychology. However, the economic focus is on the industrial perspective of scale economies

and profit margins, whereas the anthropological/sociological focus is on the social and cultural changes and impacts produced, for example by globalisation. However, anthropology has its own specific characteristics, and tends to be more focused than sociology, which often examines general social phenomena rather than specific ones relating to individual communities or tribes.

Nuñez's 'Tourism, Tradition, and Acculturation: Weekendismo in a Mexican Village' (1963) is often credited as the earliest tourism-related article in American anthropological literature, and Valene Smith's seminal work, *Hosts and Guests* (1977/1989), was to mark the course for the anthropology of tourism to follow in the future, together with Margaret Mead's valuable work in the field of visual anthropology. In 1983, the academic journal *Annals of Tourism Research* devoted an entire issue to anthropological submissions. The work of anthropologists such as Nelson Graburn (1977) focused on tourism as a personal transformative experience, and Dennison Nash (1977) discussed tourism as a form of modern imperialism. Influential too has been the work of Victor Turner on rites of passage (1969), that is, rites that accompany the passage of a person from one social status to another in the course of his or her life. Tourism is seen as a ritual or sacred journey, and its traditional associations with pilgrimage have also been discussed. Turner (1978) describes how the ritual process involves three key stages: the first is the 'separation' stage from the routine of everyday life; the second is entry into a state of 'liminality', where the structures and order of everyday life cease to exist; and the third involves a state of 'communitas', where the normal structures of social differentiation disappear and people are brought together.

Selwyn (1996) identified three main strands within the anthropology of tourism:

- social and cultural change
- semiology of tourism
- tourism's political economy.

Social and cultural change includes the process of acculturation. Anthropologists have been studying acculturation for decades, and it is recognised that tourism is only one of many factors that can lead to permanent cultural change. It is an inevitable fact of tourism that cultural changes occur primarily to the indigenous society's traditions, customs and values, rather than to those of the tourist. This is particularly prominent in the case of tribal or **indigenous tourism**. There are fears that host

culture and identity may be assimilated into the more dominant or pervasive culture of the tourist. The homogenisation of culture is often exacerbated by tourists whose behavioural patterns are sometimes copied by local residents. Although tourism may be intermittent and seasonal in some destinations, the constant levels of visitation over time can have a considerable impact on the social and cultural fabric of the host society. Mathieson and Wall (1992) differentiate between acculturation and cultural drift, stating that cultural drift is a phenotypic change to the hosts' behaviour which takes place only when they are in contact with tourists, but which may revert back to normal once the tourists leave. Genotypic behaviour is a more permanent phenomenon whereby cultural changes are handed down from one generation to another. This is most likely to occur where tourism is non-seasonal, its influence is strongly pervasive, or local people are favourably disposed towards its development.

The semiology of tourism relates to signs and symbols. Dean MacCannell was one of the first to make an explicit application of semiotics to the study of tourism. MacCannell (1976) argues that signifiers are the first contact that a tourist has with a site, even though they are merely a representation of the site. This can include travel media, guidebooks and other information sources. The creation of myths, dreams and fantasies is also an important part of semiotics. Myth and fantasy have always been central to the tourist experience. As stated by Rojek (1997: 52), 'Mention of the mythical is unavoidable in discussions of travel and tourism', and by Tresidder (1999: 147), 'tourism at its most simplistic level is concerned with the production and consumption of dreams'. Iconic images, such as the Mona Lisa or the Taj Mahal, are common in tourism marketing. However, the reality may be somewhat disappointing compared to the representation.

The political economy of tourism studies can refer to tourism as a new form of imperialism (see **neo-colonialism**). It can relate to the power relationships in tourism, such as host-guest relations, but also core-periphery and dependency theory. Mowforth and Munt (1998) describe how Western capitalist countries have grown as a result of expropriating surpluses from developing countries, which are largely dependent on export-orientated industries. The notion of core-periphery relationships is used within dependency theory to highlight this unequal, often exploitative relationship. Economists have focused traditionally on core-periphery theory and the growth-dependency relationships between host nations and their Western 'benefactors', but this is

also a subject of interest for anthropologists. It is especially significant in neo-colonial countries and developing countries which are dependent on tourism. It is also important to consider who owns culture and in what ways it is appropriated by non-indigenous agencies.

Anthropology of tourism uses qualitative and intense participatory processes to be able to understand what makes a community work, and an individual within that community fit, through extended life histories, participant observations and personal interviews, plus content analysis. Ethnography has become an established methodology in the anthropology of tourism studies. Sociology of tourism does the same on a less subjective and more generalised level, through social and statistical surveys of populations and the reasons for their choices of movement within a determined structure.

See also: *authenticity, identity, indigenous tourism, neo-colonialism, self and other, sociology of tourism, tourist gaze*

FURTHER READING

Apart from Valene Smith's classic, *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (1977 and the updated version 1989), the work of Dennison Nash, Nelson Graburn, Tom Selwyn and Peter Burns, to name but a few, has been valuable towards the consolidation of the field of study.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

- Burns, P. (1999) *An Introduction to Tourism and Anthropology*. London: Routledge.
Nash, D. (1996) *Anthropology of Tourism*. Oxford: Pergamon.
Nash, D. (2006) *The Study of Tourism: Anthropological and Sociological Beginnings*. Oxford: Elsevier.
Smith, V.L. (1989) *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*. Oxford: Blackwell.