

# Tourism – Consumerism

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*This is a brief unpublished article illustrating the processes through which current tourism is being converted into a sophisticated industry of consumerism. Special emphasis is given to "Disney-fication"*

In our region, and perhaps everywhere, no one visits the cities any more. Let's look at this trend in the case of Jalisco, Mexico. Walking through the main urban areas, we see myriads of shopping centers, all types of transnational companies, upper class restaurants; stores filled with brand poster, bright avenues, and clean streets. A walk through Guadalajara's center, through Tlaquepaque or Port Vallarta Street, to mention just two, is a pleasant, even attractive experience, though somewhat artificial.

To convert spaces into tourist attractions in today's times means to *Disneyfy* them. Through this process, a sense of security is created at the cost of excessive control accompanied by an increasing caution of people and their behavior. Security cameras, alarm systems, public and private police services; they are in place to ensure that the tourist will not be bothered by the negative realities such as poverty and begging, environmental deterioration, solitude, family or job problems... The ugliness of the world does not fit into this shaped multi-colored environment. Next to all these material entities put in place to protect these centers of comfort are the powerful symbolic mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization.

The four axes defining Disneyfication are: the creation of themes, merchandizing, work that manipulates the emotion and random consumption. In the tourist cities of Jalisco one can easily observe those four processes in action. The creation of themes doesn't require much explanation; certainly, as soon as we hear the word Guadalajara we think of a visual universe composed by equestrians and mariachi (musicians), tequila and typical candies, hats, boots, in short: the western Mexican in a modern city. It is no wonder then that continuing to use these symbols as products and services denigrates their meaning. Next comes the development of merchandising items

which dehumanize the images used and are praising the importance to carry them home (this supports the notion that nowadays a trip is incomplete if one does not bring souvenirs home or at least take photographs that prove one was there...).

On the other hand, to work in the magic centers requires not only that staff has to spend many hours for cleaning but also always have a smile for every client. A shop seller is just playing the part of an extra: each morning the mariachi musician disguises himself as a mariachi. And the best way to become an accomplice in these sanctuaries of consumption is to supplement or - even better - base all your salary on the tip money you get with the sweat on your forehead while perfectly controlling your emotions.

All this for the existence of indiscriminate consumption: in restaurants one buys memories, in souvenir shops guided tour books and during the trip a lot of food is purchased. Each moment of the tour turns out to be an opportunity to buy products or service, the tourist has been transformed into a consumer. It's no longer enough pleasure to travel; travel is propped up by another more instant pleasure, that of consumption.

With this, the city visited by a modern tourist is not the authentic one but a version sanitized, McDonald-ized as much as predictable, controlled and softened. Diversity gives way to efficiency and the local culture is re-shaped towards a global culture. Just like in the theme parks, the enclaves of postmodern tourism and consumption places in general seduce tourists the illusion of infinity and diversion. The equilibrium between obvious novelty and familiarity creates an appearance of surprise and adventure, an experience of "risk without risk".

According to Freud, culture causes discomfort when it permits access to the necessary drugs to escape from it. Consumption is the modern drug. In order to not get lost in the paradises of evasion, in "bread and games" (Zaida Muxi), it is important to recover the sense for authenticity. The streets are more vivid than entrepreneurs of the tourism industry make us believe. Fact is that today one doesn't visit or know the cities; one consumes them.

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