

COMMODIFICATION IN TOURISM

VĂDUVA LOREDANA^{1*}, ALBULESCU MIHAELA², MARIN DIANA¹, PETROMAN CORNELIA¹, VĂLUȘESCU DANIELA², PETROMAN I.¹

¹ Banat's University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I", Faculty of Management and Rural Tourism, Timisoara

² Development Research Station for Raising Sheep and Goats, S.C.D.C.O.C. Caransebeș

*Corresponding author's e-mail: loredana_heber@yahoo.com

Abstract: Commodification refers to considering / treating somebody / something as a commodity (i.e., a product that can be bought and sold); exploiting somebody / something for profit; transforming goods, services, or ideas that have no economic value into goods, services, or ideas with economic value; or turning somebody / something into an item that can be bought and sold. This process goes together with touristification, a process in which (urban) spaces are changed / turned into tourism commodities to attract visitors, to improve tourism competitiveness, to promote tourism. This paper presents a few cases of tourism commodification and solutions to avoid it.

• Introduction

According to English language dictionaries, commodification refers to considering / treating somebody / something as a commodity (i.e., a product that can be bought and sold); exploiting somebody / something for profit; transforming goods, services, or ideas that have no economic value into goods, services, or ideas with economic value; or turning somebody / something into an item that can be bought and sold. The terms extension of the market (Karl Polanyi), commodity fetishism (Karl Marx), and reification (Georg Lukács) refer to the process of commodification (Özel, 2019). Terms such as economization, financialization, marketization, and monetization have also been used as euphemisms for commodification.

Commodification ("the action or process of treating something as a mere commodity [a useful or valuable thing]" – Oxford Languages) and commoditization are synonyms.

Almost anything (produced or not) can be commodified in the never-ending process of global commodification: arts, communication and information (Google, Internet, media, online communities), creativity, culture (holidays, indigenous cultures, subcultures), dance, distribution, economy, education, everyday activities, funerals, history, innovation, investment, knowledge, labour, land, language, life (animals, humans), human affects (love), money, music, nature, production, public goods, religion, research, science, society, space, subculture, tangible objects (books), tourism, etc. – which made Williams (2004) ask if we live in a commodified world. A closer look at these fields shows that culture, dance, history, nature & religion, space, and subculture are most often commodified in tourism practice.



Figure 1. Scenario of commodification of culture in Bali

• Material and method

The material use in this study consists in books and articles on commodification (in tourism) – particularly on the commodification of culture, dance, history, nature & religion, space, and subculture in tourism practice. The method used in this study is bibliographic.

• Results and discussions

Commodification in Tourism

Commodification in tourism has focused on culture, dance, history, nature & religion, space, and subculture.

Culture. The commodification of culture in tourism has been investigated in several Asian countries – Bali, Bhutan, and Indonesia. Indrianto (2005) started, in his analysis of the commodification of culture in Bali, from Butler's (1992, in Indrianto, op. cit., 153) graphic of the second type of commodification of culture scenario (Figure 1). According to the study, the downfall of cultural tourism in Bali follows the roadmap represented in Figure 2. Kaewkhunok (2018) investigated "the relationship between tourism and the commodification of culture in Bhutan in the context of globalization." Using the qualitative research method, the scholar reached the conclusion that, "When the Bhutanese culture becomes a commodity, the culture serves the society more than the traditional ways of life that people practise." (idem, 152).

Development of tourism industry → Increase of national and regional income → Transformation of tourism into the major economics factor → Increase of demand for tourist attractions → Use of culture as attraction by local society → Commodification of culture to accommodate tourist demand → Occurrence of social problems → Cultural degradation because of loss of originality → Downfall of cultural tourism

Figure 2. Commodification of culture in Bali

Osing community's economic activities (relying on collective utilitarianism) reflect cultural commodification (widening social networks) → Cultural commodification expands social networks in the relational embeddedness (in personal relations) and in the structural embeddedness (among government institutions, private sectors, and Osing community) operated by trust among the actors.

Figure 3. Roadmap of cultural commodification of the Osing Community

• Conclusions

Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde once said "They know the price of everything and the value of nothing." This seems to be the truth about tourism commodifiers because "commodification of tourism removes local culture from the foreground," "replaces local culture with profitability from non-residents" (entertainment, food markets, souvenirs, etc.), and transforms local (indigenous) cultures and heritage into marketable goods "making people return from visits with partial ideas and representations of those cultures."