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Anthropology, tourism

Anthropology is the study of human commonality and diversity, past and present, anywhere in the world. It addresses human origins, cultural practices, societal structures, communication and meaning, and applies anthropological knowledge to solving human problems. Rooted in the era of European exploration and colonial expansion, initial studies devised unilinear evolutionary rankings of the world's peoples and cultures. Emphasis soon shifted to documenting the sites and lifeways of indigenous groups threatened by Western expansion before they disappeared.

Anthropology emerged as an academic discipline at the turn of the 20th century. Field research and excavations often occurred in colonies or annexed territories, including the Native Americas. Like explorers who preceded them and tourists who followed, early anthropologists were concerned with the untouched and exotic. Any presence of tourism was ignored in their publications, reflecting ambivalence that stemmed from embarrassing similarities between anthropologists and tourists, and from negative impacts of tourism on indigenous communities and material remains of past societies.

In the 1970s-1980s, anthropologists began to engage with political and social realities of the post-colonial world, including tourism, focusing on modernity, development, urbanization, and global South-North connections. An earlier focus on cultures as geographically bounded systems of shared ideas shifted to fluid understandings of culture giving meaning and shape to human experience, process, and practice. Today tourism figures into anthropological research on myriad topics, including local and global politics, economic development, social inequality, gender, ethnicity, nationalism, construction and performance of identity, cross-cultural communication, discourse, representation, diaspora, and globalization.

Anthropological approaches

Anthropology draws from social and life sciences as well as humanities, reflected in its four subdisciplinary areas: archaeology, biological/physical anthropology, sociocultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. Sociocultural anthropologists conduct most research on tourism, although the other subdisciplines contribute to shaping destinations, heritage sites, and museums, as well as to interdisciplinary research on tourist attractions and behaviors.

Anthropological analysis is fundamentally holistic, based on the premise that all domains of human life—such as politics, religion, economics, leisure, arts—influence and inform one another. To grasp interconnections across domains, anthropologists use ethnographic

methodologies developed by their predecessors over the past century and adopted more recently by other disciplines as qualitative methods. Chief among these is participant-observation, an extended period (often years) of participating in daily life of the people studied while continuously recording observations. The goal is to understand experiences and meanings from the people's point of view, while taking the researcher's own subjectivity into account. Additional methods include interviews, textual and visual analysis, life histories, and open-ended questionnaires, all interpreted in light of knowledge gained from participant-observation. This experiential immersion provides the basis for holistic analysis and is generally considered the defining element of anthropological research.

For anthropologists tourism is not a single thing, but a complex realm of behavior, representation, and interaction. As a loosely integrated social field, it includes (a) multiple actors with differing degrees of power and autonomy (tourists, workers, residents, expatriates, foreign and local guides, and other intermediaries including researchers); (b) characteristic practices (traveling, sightseeing, photographing, shopping, relaxing; or, conversely, marketing, selling, serving, guiding, ignoring); and (c) constituent institutions (travel agencies, airports, hotels/hostels, museums, heritage sites, souvenir shops). A web of relationships and interconnections integrate this social field, running the gamut from emotional to material, imaginative to environmental, interpersonal to financial. In order to capture disparate aspects of tourism, anthropologists draw on interdisciplinary theoretical paradigms, such as political economy, cosmopolitanism, discourse analysis, semiotics, feminist theory, phenomenology, embodiment, development studies, and applied/praxis approaches. The anthropology of tourism is consequently defined not by a unified theoretical approach, nor by particular topics, but by common interest in sociocultural phenomena that transpire in tourism-related settings.

Initial anthropological scholarship on tourism rested on three foundations: leisure, hospitality, and culture (Scott and Selwyn 2010). Social theorist Thorstein Veblen parsed leisure more than 100 years ago, distinguishing practices and conspicuous consumption of the bourgeoisie from the working classes. Today, tourism-as-leisure is studied through numerous social divisions besides class, including gender, nationality, and ideology. Hospitality, a primary aspect of human social relations, provided the framework for *Hosts and Guests*, title of a foundational volume and the dominant binary in anthropology of tourism for decades (Smith 1977). Applying concepts of hospitality to tourism as a form of development led to an early focus on the economic and social impacts on host populations, subsequently giving way to studies of complexities of tourist-toured interactions. Culture is anthropology's touchstone and burden, omnipresent and difficult to define, particularly as a marketable resource for local populations. Much of anthropological tourism scholarship now grapples with culture as heritage, commodity, identity, authenticity, performance, artefacts, monuments, and memory.

Current themes

Who is a tourist and what is s/he seeking? There is general agreement that a tourist can be defined as a person voluntarily using leisure time to travel away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change. In an early essay, Graburn (1977) argued that tourism is a form of secular ritual, a sacred journey that provides a restorative break from everyday life. While there is arguably no such thing as a generic tourist, Graburn's interest in the individual and the nature of the journey spawned a broad literature. Types of tourist can be understood and classified by a range of motivations linked to social and cultural factors. Ethnographic research counteracts the stereotype of the boorish tourist with more nuanced, sympathetic portraits of motivation and experience (Harrison 2003), as do phenomenological accounts of tourist encounters with diverse sites and populations. Investigations of relationships between tourist anticipation and experience in specific destinations shed light on the power of representation, imagination, and expectation in shaping the encounter. Embodiment theory may also inform experiential analysis. These perspectives have proven useful for analyzing sex/romance tourism, primitivist tourism, and others where culture, people, and place are marketed as myths and commodities to tourists seeking authenticity and alterity. Anthropologists also examine the gray area between tourism and pilgrimage, secular and sacred, revealing that the two blur together in practice.

An important contribution of anthropological work has been attention to the constructed markers of commonality and difference that tourists consume, as well as the role of touristic representation in constituting local populations and engaging them in self-commodification. Ethnic customs, heritage sites, "traditional" dance, music, dress, rituals, environmental adaptations, and unfamiliar social norms are attractions packaged to draw tourists to specific destinations. Local arts and handicrafts produced for souvenirs may be simplified, mass-produced *simulacra* catering to tourist expectations or new expressions of a changing cultural aesthetic. Recent research emphasizes the role of local (tourist) arts as a mediating factor in tourist-toured interactions and central player in local and global identity politics (Adams 2006).

The important concept of the touristic border zone, developed by Bruner (2005), captures the interstitial, fleeting quality of the narrow slice of community life in which performers and other tourism workers interact with tourists. Studies of people working in the tourist trade, from sex workers to hotel clerks to native guides, shed light on the manifold ways that their presentation of self and society is bound up in tourists' expectations and desires, as well as widely circulating imaginaries of paradise, authentic culture, adventure, discovery, and transgression (Salazar and Graburn 2014).

Worldwide, tourism is promoted as a job-creating, income-generating industry for development. Anthropologists examine the circulation of such discourses, the forms of transnational collaboration they entail, and the outcomes of implementation. In some cases tourism development displaces resident populations; in others it creates new channels of labor migration, or opportunities to recreate tradition in the face of modernity. Toured populations

perform their identities simultaneously for tourist consumption and political recognition, documented by anthropologists attending to the legitimization of cultural forms and ideas in a world shaped by global interconnection, balkanization, and waves of collective sentiment.

Tourism studies

There has been a sharp bifurcation between anthropologists whose work primarily addresses tourism scholars in other disciplines and those whose writings engage solely with anthropologists in other subfields (e.g., ethnicity, transnationalism, gender). However, since the turn of the 21st century that distinction has begun to fade; tourism-related institutions and behaviors are increasingly common subjects of anthropological research, leading to debate over whether “anthropology of tourism” should be considered a coherent subdiscipline or whether it remains simply anthropology, in that the majority of studies address theoretical and ethnographic concerns common to the discipline as a whole (Leite and Graburn 2009).

In recent years several international anthropological organizations have established tourism subgroups, including the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, the American Anthropological Association, and the Society for Applied Anthropology. Anthropologists also join networks organized by sociological and geographical societies (e.g., International Sociological Association RC-50), as well as interdisciplinary organizations like ATLAS, the International Academy for the Study of Tourism, China’s International Tourism Studies Association, and the UK’s Critical Tourism Studies group. They publish in an array of topical interdisciplinary journals, including the longstanding *Annals of Tourism Research*, founded by anthropologist Jafar Jafari. Others publish in discipline-specific journals, addressing audiences more interested in theoretical insights than tourism *per se*.

Interdisciplinary tourism studies draws extensively on anthropology’s qualitative methods, ethnographic case studies, and theories, with substantial overlap in topical interests (Roberts and Andrews 2014). Tourist motivation, intercultural communication, social hierarchies, cultural change, heritage discourses, identities, the politics of representation, and constructions of place and people are some research arenas shaped by anthropological insights; and the discipline’s theories of transnationalism, diaspora, global interconnection, exchange, value, and commodification also appear throughout tourism studies.

Toward the future

Once considered a detriment in ethnographic fieldwork, the ubiquity of tourism activity worldwide now shapes anthropological theory about globalization, in terms of cultural flows of information, people, and imagination, as well as power relations grounded in cosmopolitan discourse about global citizenship, cultural diversity, and world heritage. At a moment when anthropologists are broadly concerned with cultural representation, cosmopolitanism, and border-spanning assemblages of practices, objects, actors, and discourses, tourism has emerged

as a particularly fruitful and influential research focus. Embodying both localizing and globalizing tendencies, tourism generates a unique “brand”—local tradition, landscapes, heritage—framed in terms of generic, widespread imaginaries of tropical paradise, lost homeland, or exotic Other. It also brings diverse populations together in unprecedented numbers, generating ever-thickening networks of imagery, cross-cultural contact, and exchange.

While tourism settings provide a microcosm of many issues of anthropological interest, anthropologists undertaking holistic fieldwork face methodological and epistemological challenges. International tourism constitutes a reticulated field of infrastructural and interpersonal nodes, images, and acting subjects. Tourists are by definition mobile, making long-term, single-site participant-observation difficult, and they often view anthropologists as local fixtures to be toured or as authenticators of cultural performance. Tourism workers, though often stationary, may mistake anthropologists for tourists and interact with them accordingly. Anthropologists of tourism have consequently been pioneers in multi-sited ethnography and reflexive analysis of positionality.

As “natives” in international travel and cross-cultural interaction, anthropologists are enmeshed in a web of diverse stakeholders and power dynamics that influence the production of anthropological knowledge (Swain 2004). The ethical, methodological, and epistemological stance of the anthropologist as professional stranger can no longer be taken for granted. Like all inhabitants of this unprecedentedly interconnected world, anthropologists are influenced by and implicated in imaginaries of global commonality and difference, social roles and responsibilities, and emergent forms of cultural representation. With their close attention to complexities of global-local relations, method, and positionality, tourism researchers are increasingly charting provocative paths for anthropology as a whole.

See also: Critical studies, cross-cultural study, culture broker, ethnography, host and guest.

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