

## COMMODIFICATION IN TOURISM

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**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.*

**Key words:** *commodification, tourism, tourism commodification, touristification*

### 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 [8,13,31]. Terms such as economization, financialization, marketization, and monetization have also been used as euphemisms for commodification [6,21,26,32].

Commodification ("the action or process of treating something as a mere commodity [a useful or valuable thing]" [12] and commoditization are synonyms [7].

Almost anything (produced or not) can be commodified in the never-ending process of global commodification [21,25,29]: 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 [4,22,23,24,30,31] etc.-which made Williams [33] 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. [2,5,18]

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The material used 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.

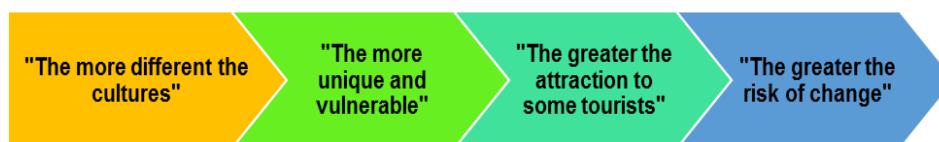
### RESEARCH RESULTS

In his theoretical article on commodification, culture and tourism, [9,10,18,19,27] posits that "an acceptance of a cause and effect relationship between tourism and cultural commodification requires an acceptance of a problematic notion of 'authenticity'". What

the scholar wanted to say is that the essence or authenticity of culture “is undermined and disrupted by market force”: the result, two dichotomies—“original-as-natural and copy-as-degrading” (idem, 189) and “culture-as-commodity and commodification-as-a-destroyer-of-authenticity” (idem, 192). In fact, what counts as authentic for a tourist “depends on the cultural lens of the seeker [tourist], which in turn guides the direction in which authenticity is sought” (idem, 191). Cole [3] also focused on authenticity and commodification: the scholar examined authenticity from three perspectives—government, tourists, and villagers. Thus: Governmental efforts (though aiming at protecting material traditional culture to attract tourists): benefits from the economic growth of tourism, denies villagers the rights to have electricity and windows in their homes, reifies and consigns villagers’ megaliths to the past, turns villagers into a political capital to manipulate, and turns villagers into a tool for development; Tourists: describe villages as “spoilt”, make judgments about authenticity in relation to poverty, reify and consign villagers’ megaliths to the past, and view the commodification of culture (paying to take photographs, sales of souvenirs, ticket sales, etc.) negatively; Villagers: are created a new identity, are proud of their culture, become more aware of their traditional culture, become more self-conscious, become politically legitimate, believe that tourism will reinforce the importance of tradition, can affirm their identity, can tell their own story, and establish the significance of local experiences.[15,16,17,30]

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 [5] started, in his analysis of the commodification of culture in Bali, from Butler’s [4] 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. [6] 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). Though tourism has a positive impact on the country in terms of economics, it also has negative effects on the Bhutanese: “it erodes the major policy in shaping Bhutan’s contemporary image to the world (especially among younger generations who interact with foreign travellers),” impacts the culture and society, and increases the process of social change. Pamungkas, Wanto & Mugijatna [14] analysed the commodification of Breksi Cliffs in Indonesia and found that it impacted three aspects: cultural (locals tend “to dress in modern way, starting to acknowledge both traditional and modern arts as well as changing their perspective as rural people”), economic (locals change their main profession as miners or day-labourers and become tourism guides or merchants), and social (“society tends to use Bahasa Indonesia in the daily conversation and accepts more and more the technology development”). At the time of the analysis, commodification was still in its prime. Nurhadi et al. [11,24] also studied the socio-cultural consequences of commodification in tourism on the traditional rites of the Osing Community (an indigenous ethnic group native to easternmost part of the Java Island, Indonesia). They found that commodification in tourism follows the roadmap represented in Figure 3, where the emphasis is on ethical issues. Ilhami & Soehadha [4] explored “the cultural commodification that occurs in the Bau Nyale” (catching nyale worms, which appear only once a year, in February) tradition the Sasak community of Lombok, Indonesia, and found that “commodification causes a shift in orientation, raising social problems (fights, gambling, fights, murder, etc.).”



**Figure 1. Scenario of commodification of culture in Bali**

Source: [4]

*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**

Source: [4]

*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**

Source: [4]

Dance. Raya, Fanggidae & Fanggidae [3,17] described “the modern dance commodification strategy in promoting cultural tourism in East Nusa Tenggara Province,” Indonesia. They found that “the most appropriate strategies for the modern dance community in developing cultural tourism are creating online competitions through social media (e.g., during a pandemic), innovating with culture (presenting new things about the culture of the province),” organising independent events (without waiting for government intervention), and working together with various parties (internet technology, tourism office).

History. Adu-Ampong & Dillette [2] explored the conceptual question “How is ‘balance’ achieved between commercialization [commodification of a destination tourism product rooted in a less-than-desirable past] and commemoration [of a less-than-desirable past, i.e., 400 years since the first enslaved Africans arrived to Jamestown, US, in 1619]?” and found “three emergent themes along this commodification-commemoration continuum: eventification and festivalisation of slavery heritage tourism, celebrity co-production of the Year of Return 2019 experiences through social media, and pivoting from a predominantly slavery heritage destination to a destination that focuses on other touristic and business travel.” The authors conclude that “commodification in slavery heritage tourism does not inherently destroy cultural meanings but provide new commemorative meanings for a new generation of Black travellers searching for more than just their roots” (idem, 1).

Nature & Religion. Saraswaty et al. [20,25] studied the commodification of the sacred natural sites in Bali, Indonesia, a process “strongly related to spiritual values assigned to traditional sacred sites, associated with a specific place of worship in rural areas” (e.g., holy water resources), religious belief, or religious tenet. In this case, the commodification of sacred water resources is motivated by the expectation of the future value of economic factors (increased revenue, job creation) and of cultural and social factors (desire to promote tourism, desire to preserve cultural heritage).

Space. Adom et al. [1] examined “the impacts of land-use changes as factors that influence tourism space commodification in Northern Iran” and found that the influence of the political economy in the areas of the banking system, government policies, and tax system exacerbate tourism space commodification.

Subculture. Spracklen & Spracklen [28] examined “the phenomenon of the Whitby Goth Weekend, a modern Goth music festival, which has contributed to the heritage tourism marketing of Whitby as the holiday resort of Dracula.” The commodification of Whitby Goth Weekend caused it to become less attractive to older Goths, and this led to the loss of a subculture.

## 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.”

The study of literature on commodification shows the following:

- Commodification affects a wide range of fields, among which some are tourism-related: culture, dance, history, nature & religion, space, and subculture;
- Commodification is closely related to authenticity;
- The study of commodification of culture shows that it can lead to the downfall of cultural tourism; it can have both positive and negative effects on the locals' life, on cultural, economic, and social aspects, and on ethical issues;
- The study of commodification of dance allowed the development of specific strategies in developing cultural tourism;
- The study of commodification of history allowed the identification of emergent themes along the commodification-commemoration continuum;
- The study of commodification of nature & religion focused on sacred natural sites and on the commodification of sacred water resources;
- The study of commodification of space focused on the influence of the political economy in the area;
- The study of commodification of subculture shows that it can lead to the loss of a subculture.

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