

Can analysing the phenomenon of globally thriving tourism help us in understanding the human nature?

Czy analiza globalnego rozkwitu turystyki może być przydatna w zrozumieniu fenomenu ludzkiej natury?

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Abstract

The current post-modern period in which we live is not only a time of unprecedented mobility, it is also an age when people travel mostly for reasons other than vital necessity. It is estimated that, by the end of 2030, 1.8 billion people will have travelled abroad, all the while tourism and recreational travel remain and will remain the predominant reason why people decide to leave their usual place of residence. Taking all this into account, an attempt was made at a more thorough investigation of the phenomenon of tourism. Certain characteristic features of tourist travel were examined in the context of particular elements of tourism. The fact that the travel and tourism industry has been thriving for some time now coupled with the presence of a widespread tendency for tourists to spend their non-leisure time indoors could be used to support the claim that human nature is ambivalent and that this particular feature of it does not change with age. (*Gerontol Pol* 2023; 31; 55-60) doi: 10.53139/GP.20233106

Keywords: tourism, human nature, ambivalence, lifestyle

Streszczenie

Epoka post-nowoczesności, w której żyjemy, to nie tylko epoka przemieszczania się ludności na niespotykaną nigdy wcześniej skalę, ale również okres, w którym większość wyjazdów to podróże z innych przyczyn niż życiowa konieczność. Biorąc pod uwagę prognozy, które zakładają, że roczna liczba osób podróżujących za granicę swojego kraju osiągnie do 2030 roku liczbę 1,8 miliarda oraz że wyjazdy wypoczynkowo-turystyczne dominują i nadal dominować będą w ogólnej liczbie przyczyn podróży, podjęto próbę opisanie obserwowanego obecnie fenomenu turystyki. Patrząc na to globalne zjawisko poprzez pryzmat niektórych z jego części składowych, dokonano przeglądu wybranych cech charakteryzujących wyjazdy turystyczne. Pozwoliło to na przypuszczenie, że trwający już od pewnego czasu rozkwit przemysłu podróży i turystyki przy jednoczesnej, również szeroko rozpowszechnionej tendencji do spędzaniu niezwiązanego z turystyką czasu w przestrzeniach zamkniętych, może wspierać założenie, że naturę bytu ludzkiego cechuje ambiwalencja, która pozostaje niezmienną również w wieku starszym. (*Gerontol Pol* 2023; 31; 55-60) doi: 10.53139/GP.20233106

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka, natura ludzka, ambiwalencja, styl życia

Introduction

Globalisation and tourism are not two related but essentially separate phenomena. They are two aspects of the same complex and intertwined process. The broadly understood tourist industry consists of several sectors: there is tourist information and promotional activities, travel agencies, tourist attractions, accommodation and

catering for travellers on the one hand [1] and the social practices related to tourism and the emerging awareness of tourism on the other. In other words, tourism is to be perceived as a global amalgamation, a hybrid of sorts [2] comprising multiple structures which, together, are capable of growing and self-replicating all across the world. The mobility of this peculiar hybrid is similar to the mobility of other similar structures, such as the Internet or

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the Global Financial Market, which continue to spread and develop, always keeping one step ahead of our definitions of globalisation [3]. Consequently, any investigation of tourism could be considered a part of a broader investigation of the manifestations, types, and consequences of globalisation.

Even though tourism is now the most common type of travel, there are still other travellers who are seen as the opposite of tourists. The role of a tourist is perceived as different from that of a traveller. Similarly, a person travelling in an air-conditioned vehicle is not the same kind of traveller as one who trudges along the side of a road in blistering heat, breathing in the dust stirred up into the air by a tourist car passing by. The difference here is in the fact that what is commonly referred to as tourism are forms of travel which are “closed” or “fixed,” i.e. with fixed destination, a pre-determined list of places to be visited, and the exact time of arrival and departure. Travelling, on the other hand, is an “open-ended” experience because the traveller chooses the destination and route on their own, also selecting the places, events, and environments they would like to interact with. In modern times, however, it is not always possible to apply such strictly divisive terminology as both tourists and travellers usually include some degree of exploration or sightseeing in their activities [4], which, technically, makes them both tourists. As a result of this, the terms “tourist” and “traveller” are now used interchangeably or “tourist” is used exclusively to designate both.

The purpose of this article is to present some of the paradoxes associated with tourist travel worldwide to exemplify the ambivalent character of human nature.

Does tourism thrive due to the post-modern lifestyle?

The current post-modern period in which we live is not only a time of unprecedented mobility [5], it is also an age when people travel mostly for reasons other than vital necessity [6], which facilitates the development of international tourism [7]. It is estimated that in 2019 1.46 billion people travelled. This is roughly every fifth person in the world [8]. In 2015, Europe was the destination for around 600 million tourists. At the same time, tourists seeking alternative destinations more and more often decided to visit Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Near East [9]. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourist and travel industry was responsible for 320 million jobs worldwide [10] and, especially in many countries of the global south, it was the leading, if not the only, factor of economic development [11]. The pandemic – the first one of such magnitude in our age of globalisation – had

only a temporary impact on this by means of reducing the number of travellers. The year 2021 saw a re-emergence of the Travel & Tourism industry. In view of the lower level of Covid-related threats, the strict regulations related to travelling were somewhat relaxed and it can safely be assumed that the number of tourists will soon be the same as before the pandemic or even greater [12]. It is estimated that by the end of 2032, the travel and tourism industry will generate almost 8 million new jobs compared to 2022 [13] and that the total number of people travelling abroad will have reached 1.8 billion by 2030 [14]. For the elderly, rest and sightseeing are some of the main reasons to travel [15]. Research carried out in Poland indicates that a trip for recreational and tourist purposes was planned, in 2022, by 62% to 68% of the respondents. It should be pointed out here that older respondents tended to plan their trips for summer. The reverse is true for the winter season: the older a respondent was, the less likely they were to plan a trip for winter [16,17]. Trips planned and undertaken by the elderly are bimodal in nature and this is related to the age of such travellers. On the one hand, people aged between 60 and 74 travelled extensively and planned longer trips, likely on account of having more free time due to having retired. On the other hand, people aged 75 and more travelled less (in proportion to their numbers in the overall population), likely on account of health-related issues or decreased desire to travel and explore [18].

The average person living in Europe or the USA spends 90% of their time in various buildings, a further 5% of their time is spent in means of transport (public transport or a vehicle of their own). This means that they can dedicate only 5% of their overall time to outdoor activities [19,20]. For elderly people who are no longer professionally active, the majority of that 5% is spent at home which makes it even more difficult for them to engage in any kind of social interaction with other people [21]. It may be that a considerable portion of the world's elderly population considers travel and tourism one of the few opportunities for social interaction and spending time outdoors – at the beach, at a swimming pool, on walks.

Beneficial results and detrimental consequences of travel

When we travel, we are surrounded by people who are not familiar to us. Being a stranger in a strange land affects the traveller and such separation from the known ceases to be an obstacle hindering various forms of participation because it allows a special kind of belonging. An outsider becomes a part of a larger group on special

rules [22] and the journey itself becomes a ritual of sorts. Said ritual comprises several parts: exclusion of the individual from their usual community, a period of transition where they remain outside of their usual community, and re-integration of the individual into their community. As a result of this process, the traveller acquires certain new and beneficial characteristics [23]. There is a saying that travel broadens the mind and it does indeed make the traveller wiser, more open, and more creative. The reason why even shorter trips are so beneficial is a certain cognitive estrangement which allows us to perceive problems close to us – and their proximity to us could be physical, temporal, or even emotional – in a more down-to-earth way. Consequently, when we think about things that are near, our thoughts are limited to only the most basic associations. Even though such mode of thinking makes it possible to focus on facts, it does hinder our imagination. When we leave the place to which we are accustomed, though, our mind ceases to be bound by that which is familiar and we find ourselves thinking thoughts which would otherwise not even cross our mind in a more cosy and familiar environment. If our brain is to function effectively, it has to, quite paradoxically, make considerable effort to select the things which it should ignore. Efficiency is achieved at the expense of creativity and the typical patterns of convergent thinking [24] replace divergent or creative thinking. While we travel, also as tourists, we move away from our usual life, acquiring a new outlook on it. This could help us loosen cognitive chains of reasoning, making it easier for us to discover new solutions to old problems or notice new ways in which everyday events can be interpreted [25]. At the same time, the culture shock travellers experience, resulting from unfamiliar sets of normative and directive beliefs within different communities [26], makes it possible to extend the scope of their “cognitive input data” because a traveller is not satisfied with the first answer or assumption that springs to mind. It has been proven that tourism tailored to the elderly can have a positive impact on their well-being thanks to changing their daily routine due to them travelling to a different place [27]

The negative aspects of travelling can be seen if one considers travel as a tool for describing the problems of contemporary world [28]. A reference could be made here to the figure of *flâneur* (from French, verb: “flâner” means “to loiter about, to stroll, to wander”), an observer and seeker [29] whose attention is more and more drawn away from the authentic object and towards its simulacrum [30], and it then becomes clear just what influence products of the “Heritage Industry,” which manipulates and perverts our natural and cultural heritage, exert on

the traveller. By absorbing meaning inscribed within simulacra [31] which contribute the “McDonaldization” of societies, the traveller assists in the widespread process of erasing both external and internal differences whose result is referred to as the “globalization of nothing” [32].

The process of cultural adjustment itself could also have negative consequences. Challenges associated with adapting to a different culture; altering one’s social identification and identity; accumulating new knowledge and skills; accepting new culturally defined roles are not easy to tackle for everyone. Loss of familiar patterns, breakdown of interpersonal communication, identity crisis, physical and emotional discomfort, feeling homesick and finding it difficult to adjust to one’s new environment – all this could lead to an identity crisis which could, in turn, have serious consequences regardless of one’s age unless one manages to overcome one’s culture shock [33,34].

Tourist attractions – a romantic or a collective perspective?

Even though paying a visit to a different culture could not be reduced to mere visual experiences and the rule of a single point of view, according to which oculo-centrism reigns supreme, ceases to apply [35], it would be difficult to contest the opinion that the concept of a “tourist gaze” is one of the keys to understanding tourism. The eye of the tourist sees and discerns with particular clarity especially those places that differ from what a given tourist is used to seeing on an everyday basis [36]. This phenomenon could be discussed using an example of a superior tourist attraction – the Sigiriya architectural complex [37] in which a visitor could see: a palace and defensive complex erected at the request of King Kashyapa; the holdings of a monastery where Buddhist monks used to live; or the ruins of a settlement built by the mesolithic pre-historic inhabitants of Sri Lanka. This way to a person deriving their knowledge of it from a tourist guidebook, Sigiriya is a fortress straight from an Oriental legend; to a religious person, it is first and foremost a sacred facility, a place of worship; and to a historian interested in ancient history, it is a fascinating source of knowledge about the prehistory of the Lion Rock. Yet others, mostly people interested in art, will focus their attention on the gallery of frescoes depicting beautiful girls captured in graceful poses while others still, those with an interest in landscape architecture, will find themselves attracted to the excavation site at the foot of the Lion Rock where a network of rectangular terraces with streams, fountains, drains, and underground canals has

been revealed. Notwithstanding the above and even though objects considered tourist attractions can be perceived differently depending on the interests, knowledge, and expectations of particular tourists, it is still possible to distinguish two types of tourist gaze which do not depend on the age of the tourist [38]. The romantic gaze and the collective gaze.

The former requires solitude, privacy, and a personal, somewhat spiritual, approach to the object being viewed. The romantic tourist wishes to be left alone with the object they are viewing, though the presence of their significant others is allowed. They want to contemplate the beauty and serenity of the scene striving to find a personal, almost spiritual, link to their environment. The presence of other people or a crowd diminishes that experience. The romantic gaze is drawn to “unspoiled natural beauty” and the romantic tourist never ceases to look for new objects for such solitary contemplation, be they empty beaches, desolate mountaintops, forests far from the haunts of other men, or abandoned ruins.

The collective tourist gaze is on the opposite end of the spectrum. Companionship is one of its characteristic features. The very presence of a crowd proves that the trip taken to get to a place was worth it. Other people are necessary because they liven places up and create a unique vibe, making it possible for the tourist to experience the feel and companionship of a carnival in places teeming with other people [39]. There is nothing to see there if there are no other people also looking. Holiday on Mallorca or in Las Vegas, visiting the centre of Tokyo or Shanghai, a walk on Saint Mark’s Square in Venice – those are good examples of what the collective approach to tourism is all about [40].

Discussion

The term “human nature” is here taken to mean a feature or a set of features defining the identity of a man. Within the framework of pre-Socratean natural philosophy (Heraclitus, Pythagoras, Parmenides), human nature was perceived as a portion of a larger cosmic nature of the world itself. There was an assumption that grasping the nature of the physical world (*phýsis*) and the rules that govern it will make it possible to discern universal principles applicable to all human life [41]. The sophists, on the other hand, stopped treating Nature as the source of rules and, instead, sought rules of good life in a social agreement. They believed that children are born with “animal nature” and that young people need to be have, through a system of discipline and punishment, a “second nature” consistent with the standards of social life imposed on them [42]. Under the influence of Socrates,

Plato, Aristotle, the stoics and the followers of their doctrine in the middle ages and modern times, the human nature was defined to be a standard making it possible to define a set of features characteristic of a given species and distinguish man from other creatures (such as plants or animals). In that context, the human nature was seen as something above culture and social agreements or conventions, it was the foundation and source of all virtuous action [43].

An important consequence of making ethical norms a part of human nature was the emergence of the concept of the natural law (*ius naturale*) which was then developed in the middle ages and early contemporary philosophy as part of the natural law school [44]. The classical outlook on human nature described above was changed by contemporary philosophy, mostly due to the influence of Thomas Hobbes who strove to find the principles of a good life in a social agreement or convention rather than in nature itself. Our contemporary grasp of human nature indicates that the characteristic features of a man may change under the influence of their external environment. Evolution does not limit itself to the body, it also affects consciousness [45]. Trying to define human nature is an attempt at finding balance between the aporias related to human strengths and weaknesses and reconciling those. Applying the principle of difference makes it possible for one to consider oneself distinct from one’s human nature while at the same not denying its existence [46]. It is no surprise that seeking the essence of what makes a man, also known as human nature, leads to a great number of important questions [47] related to, among other things, the phenomenon of ambivalence which seems to have been considered a portion of human nature since time immemorial. Human nature could be viewed as the mental condition of an individual co-existing with their incongruous behaviour, often without the individual in question even being aware of such paradoxes and discrepancies [48]. The only thing left to be considered is the question of what the ambivalence of human nature is. According to Simmel, the phenomena of conflict, disharmony and dissonance are as important for the process of shaping an individual as unification and merging are. In his article “Das Problem der Sociologie,” he notes that the development of all capacities of an individual takes place thanks to an internal antagonism to which Kant referred to as “asocial sociability” (*ungesellige Geselligkeit*) [49]. Humans tend to form collectives and live in groups because they are only able to thrive in a society. In spite of this, humans also have an inclination towards isolationism and imposing their own will on others in the name of personal goals. The resistance which an individual meets in the course

of pursuing such goals forces them to develop their abilities and, in turn, promotes the development of a “culture of ability” [50].

Conclusions

Based on the opinion of Søren Kierkegaard who believed that it is ridiculous to understand everything without understanding oneself first [51], the authors attempted to

investigate the phenomenon of tourism by means of analysing that global phenomenon in the context of some of its elements. The presented examples of internal paradoxes which can be seen in the thriving travel and tourism sector could be seen as confirmation that the human nature remains ambivalent even in elderly people.

Conflict of interest

None

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