



An Investigation of Modernist Utopias on Tourism and Postmodern Critique of Modernist Tourism Practices

*Ruhet GENÇ^a 

^a Turkish German University, Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, İstanbul/Turkey

Article History

Received: 26.07.2018

Accepted: 17.09.2018

Keywords

Modernism

Post-modern tourism

Utopia

Abstract

In general, the aim of this manuscript is to investigate the impact of modernism in tourism practices in detail and provide a sound critique based on the change of mentality with the post-modernist Age. The paper will start with a body of literature on the modernist utopias specifically in the context of tourism, and then it will provide a post-modernist point of view in order to critically evaluate the modernist practices taking place in contemporary tourism sector. The methodology will be literature review and critical evaluation of the findings on the possible impacts of modernism on tourism sector and motivation of stakeholders, local governments and states in tourism activity. In conclusion, the study aims to find that modernist ideals have a significant impact on touristic activities, especially those which take uniform tastes of individuals for granted and fail to capture the fact that different people may have different tastes, and therefore, search for a different and privatized experience for themselves, which they can evaluate based on the closeness to their self-images. Furthermore, the paper will argue that current applications in tourism are also subject to change as well. Therefore policies targeted to develop the effectiveness of tourism must be adjustable for possible changes in the future; otherwise they will perish soon given the rapidly changing technological and global settings in the world.

* Corresponding Author

E-mail: drgench@gmail.com (R. Genç)

Suggested Citation: Genç, R. (2018). An Investigation of Modernist Utopias on Tourism and Postmodern Critique of Modernist Tourism Practices, Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies, 6(3), 396-403

DOI: [10.21325/jotags.2018.289](https://doi.org/10.21325/jotags.2018.289)

INTRODUCTION

Understanding of the human interactions is subject to change by context, specifically depending on the place and time. Historically, major changes in the perspectives have taken place in longer periods, such as the impact of transition to agriculture, Classical Age or Renaissance took several hundred years. However recently, the duration for major changes has shortened to decades, or even a couple of years parallel to the rapid technological development, the advancements in the means of communication and globalization. For instance, modernism has started with the Fordist mode of production where the mentality of mass production reflected on the thoughts, perceptions and also practices of people in different areas, including the tourism sector (Ivanovic, 2015).

Modernism gave birth to new utopias for the governance of people, based on the assumptions that there is one single and objective truth, and for the context of tourism, uniformly produced tastes and experiences for tourists. Nevertheless, neither the affordable homes for the middle class designed by Frank Lloyd Wright called *Broadacre City* on the side of capitalistic utopia nor was the functionally classified structure of *Cite Radieuse* developed by Le Corbusier (Charles-Edouard Jeanneret) on the side of socialist utopia successful in terms of satisfying the needs and expectations of the individuals. The modern architecture and urban planning is associated by the modernism and post-colonial times of the countries where heavy governmental control and state monitored commerce as well as expression of nationalist and utopian ideals take place (Chalana & Sprague, 2013). The understanding of modernism therefore naturally reflected on the practices in tourism sector, which then lead to gradual accumulation of several fundamental social, environmental and individual contradictions (Xie & Sun, 2017).

On the other hand, post-modern social theory is a reaction against the grand theories addressed by modernism and their inclinations to conceptualize societies as totalities and masses, and post-modern tourism is mostly characterized by the multiplicity of motivations, experiences and environments for tourists (Uriely, 1997). As Cohen (1979) proposes that different people may desire different modes of tourist experiences, therefore the modernist mentality highlighting the standardized, uniformed tourist experience is not applicable for recent dynamics of tourism sector. Parallel to the emergence of small and specialized travel agencies, rise of nostalgia and “heritage tourism”, growing attraction of nature-oriented tourism, and the increase in the tourism-related environments (Uriely, 1997), post-modern tourism has started to take place of modernist point of view in tourism activity which fails to recognize the personal differences and multiplicity of tastes for tourism experience. The deconstruction led by post-modernism has critically questioned the practice in social sciences and has made an engagement with “non-representational” respects of the social, specifically the ways that are expressed in touristic activities (Minca & Oakes, 2014). Modernist drives of tourism activity should therefore be replaced by those which critically put forth by post-modernist point of view.

Even currently, post-modernism gives place to transmodernity which is characterized by four basic values these are equality of sexes, global culture & ethnic equality, sustainability and the survival of humankind, and individuality, globalism and interconnectedness (Ghisi, 2010; Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011). Educational, experiential, altruistic, spiritual and/or authentic aspects of tourism gained importance where authenticity is defined

as conforming to self-image of tourists and reflection who these tourists are and who they want to be in relation to how they perceive the world (Ivanovic, 2015). In the next sections, the modern tourism will be discussed in detail starting from its historical foundations, and then the focus will be turned into the impact of modernism on tourism industry in general. Furthermore, the post-modern critique and its effect on tourism will be briefly introduced, and finally a conclusion will be presented.

Foundations of Modern Tourism

Historically, tourism activity has emerged among the middle-class as a phenomenon of modernity. Between 16th and 18th centuries, grand tours were organized by young nobles for educational purposes, marking their high level of social status and the end of their childhood that lasted one to three years and tourism is accepted as “an art”. However, leisure and pleasure have become the main motivations over time, especially after the spread of capitalism where tourism industry creates its own demand, and the understanding of tourism turns into “an end in itself” (Gyr, 2010). These are the times when mass production in the firms was dominating the economy at a global scale and workers were forced to work enormously. In order to secure the maintenance of worker’s productivity, leisure time activities such as tourism are introduced to enable the restoration of workers’ energy along with preventing them to revolt against the system. In other words, as long as they complete their job, they will be rewarded by leisure time, which becomes the main motivator for them to keep working while they pay less attention to the question whether they enhance themselves with the work they are doing on a daily basis (Bianchi, 2010). The evolution of the expectations regarding to the use of leisure time and hence “tourist behavior” as a form of market-oriented production system, tourism and hospitality have become major economic activities all around the world (Williams, 2006:483).

The demand of modern tourism has grown rapidly from the 1990s parallel to the collapse of Eastern Bloc, and the acceleration for this growth has even increased after the 21th century (Csapo, 2012). However, the type of demand has always been dependent on the social, political and economic context of the era. For example, studies suggest that, especially during the difficult political and economic times, the demand for spiritual tourism tends to increase (Walton, 2009). In today’s world, tourism activities are mostly centered on the differentiated demands of individuals who engage in tourism activities as a part of learning process. Parallel to the change in the demand, tourism agencies are mainly offering holiday plans which will give tourists an opportunity to experience new tastes, cultures, places and people. This non-standardized tourism service characterizes the tourism sector in current global economic structure. Moreover, the effects of marketization under the dominance of neo-liberalism, the social, cultural and environmental benefits of tourism lead their way to solely economic considerations, which despite increasing the degree of innovations for economic activity on a profit-oriented mechanism, diminishes the scope of potential gains (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

Impact of Modernism on Tourism

Considering the main discourse of modernism, “progress” and “reason” appears as the key words within the context of an anthropocentric understanding, as seen in the pioneering works of Bell, Luhmann and Habermas

(Cooper & Burrell, 1988). The organization of the society as well as industries is therefore considered as a social tool and an extension of human rationality. This mentality behind the organization also reflected to the tourism industry in modern world. For example, previous studies on home and mobility argue that tourism is a form of mobility which encounters the dissatisfaction of modernity (Su, 2014), since in modernist production sphere, people are restricted to a single place where they repetitively do the same piece of job and therefore life is mostly mechanical, while tourism provides an opportunity for individuals to experience new tastes, encounter new faces, temporarily change the habits and find a motivation for living by increasing the quality of life. In addition to this, Modernist design aesthetic is also claimed to increase the quality of life of residents, as the rational white, geometrical building as designed by Josef Hoffmann (1870-1956) for Purkersdorf Sanatorium, seeks to cure disasters and contribute to healthiness and happiness of the society (Smith, 2010). The general aim of the modernist practices in tourism is therefore providing comfort for the tourists, which is mostly differentiated from everyday life in the urban areas where tourists are coming from. After the distressing life of city, a compact tour in five-star hotels where tourists do not need to spend effort to reach food, entertainment and so on with full of comfort seems as delightful, and parallel to the development of consumerism, a new demand for this type of comfort and relaxation is created.

Modernist practices behind the types of tourism create their own characteristic segments in the society. For instance, modern heritage tourism is characterized by tourists in their middle ages without children, coming from more urbanized areas and developed Western world, with higher educational background, higher-than-average spendings. Besides that, the duration of travel became shorter whereas the frequency of travels has increased (Csapo, 2012). The whole industry of tourism then becomes segmented and these segments characterize themselves as providing suitable and comfortable tourism opportunities for the targeted groups. At first glance, it seems that modernism enhances the variety of touristic activities, but rather it only leads to limited segmentations for more effective marketing purposes. For example, the demand for a “family holiday” is most of the time sharply distinguished from a holiday plan for young people without children, therefore the offers of tourism agencies should be differentiated accordingly. However, in essence, both type of holiday plans refer to consumerist practices, where tourists are considered as constantly consuming agents whose needs must be satisfied in a short time, so that they will prefer the same tourism organization, as the holiday services are standardized with respect to modernist production system and tourists are able to finish their holidays without leaving the hotel to explore what is outside.

On the other hand, one of the main characteristics of modernism is its opposition to commercial interests, and although modernist writers have considerably criticized the insufficiency of market mechanism, they contributed to development of tourism industry in particular regions, by emphasizing the significant local or national values and taking the national-wide attention (Oliphant, 2017). The emphasis on national values and ideologies eventually becomes a part of marketing efforts of tourism sector, since modernism creates an identity on the basis of mutually shared values of the societies, and the identity may be pursued by those who engage in activities shaped by modernism. For example, modernist architecture in tourism is not limited to functionality, but rather it embodies

social and ideological ideals which creates a requirement for modern infrastructure, futurist aesthetics and utopian national desires, as it showed itself in the examples of hotels in British Mandate Palestine from the late 1920s through 1930s (Smith, 2010). By adding the value of national identities, it serves the marketing purposes of tourism organizations while distorting the actual aim of an identity. Therefore, the opposition of modernism to commercial interest is not self-sustainable and the sentimentality of individuals towards an identity is abused within the competitive nature of market mechanism. As a result, under the impact of modernism, individuals are limited to standardized holiday services where the dynamics of mechanization are in effect and the national ideals can be emphasized by profit-oriented organizations which do not even have any national bounds with those ideals appearing as a reflection of modernism.

Critique of Post-modernism and Beyond

As opposed to modernist discourse, postmodernist discourse refutes the human agent as the main actor of rational control and understanding, rather it considers the social life with respect to paradox and indeterminacy, as exemplified in the works of Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari, and so forth (Cooper & Burrell, 1988). The organizational structure has limited connection with planned thought and calculative action, but rather appears as a defensive reaction to the problems stemming from intrinsic forces of social life that threatens the stability of organized life. Parallel to the cultural regime change from modernism to post-modernism, along with the transition of economic regime from Fordism to post-Fordism, the new forms of tourism activity alternative against the mass tourism have emerged such as pro-poor tourism, community-based tourism and community benefit tourism initiative (Mowforth & Munt, 2003; Ghasemi & Hamzah, 2014). The reflection of post-modernist point of view in tourism shows itself in the divergent services for differentiated tastes of tourists rather than standardized package holiday programs with one-fit-for-all mentality service.

Most noticeably, new concepts such as authenticity, creativity, co-creation, flexibility, etc. have gained prominence, and the changing demand has led to the emergence of a brand new economic and social relationships. For instance, authenticity in tourism refers to the discovery of places which last untouched by modernism and have not changed the traditional way of living in especially rural or remote areas (Petroman et. al., 2010). Following to the spread of authentic practices, tourists start to focus on tourism plans where they can be in touch with nature, engage in alternative activities, encounter with different people and cultures and derive new experiences out of it. The activity of tourism is no longer understood as a “do-nothing-all-day” practice but rather an opportunity for increasing one’s life experiences, and learning new things by being in different places, eating different foods, or talking with different people. An example for this can be considered as the discussion of Childers (2015) on “Alpine modernism”, which points that the reflection of modernism in the activities such as sport, leisure and tourism are not limited to capitalist consumption, rather the activity creates an opportunity for individuals to contact with nature in an active and critical manner. Additionally, the influence of modernism is adaptable for further demands. The milking of a cow by a farmer in front of the tourists but keeping the milk in plastic recipients is one of the clear examples of how the elements of modernism can involve in touristic activity even in the places which continue to be untouched by modern civilization (Petroman et. al., 2010). Taking all of these into

consideration, the previously modernist marketing practices result in futile attempts due to the enormous heterogeneity in consumer motivation and behavior (Williams, 2006:483).

Concluding Remarks

In short, although modernist tourism is offered as an alternative for mechanism of everyday life in urban areas, the activity becomes a part of mechanization over time. The creation of duality between uncomfortable and tiring work life in the cities vs. relaxing and enjoyable leisure time in touristic destinations could emphasize the value of leisure time, but the standardized way of holiday services would not effectively refresh the minds of individuals. Parallel to the change in the understanding of the world and the economic system, from mass-production to personalized, unique creation, the importance of creative value of tourism has increased and the services regarding to tourism industry needs to be organized to meet this new demand. The example of this discrepancy can be visible in the previous studies. For instance, the study of Higgins-Desbiolles (2006) implies that modernist tourism practices as a form of neo-liberal economic model limits the social and cultural benefits of tourism such as social inclusion of disadvantaged people, encounter of different cultures, self-development of tourists by various experiences and so forth. Besides that, the study conducted by Shaw and Coles (2004) reveals that the inclusion of tourists with disabilities have considerably increased parallel to the rise of post-modernist applications in tourism which refrain themselves from modernist aesthetic-oriented point of view to incorporation of spatial and temporal structures and indicate that disability is a social construction as all other social constructs which prevent large scale of tourists from social inclusion.

Moreover, scholars argue that further research on tourism must be based on both modernist notions as science and post-modernist considerations as philosophy since the philosophical thinking as well as scientific thinking contribute to development of tourism to a great extent (Xie & Sun, 2016). As all other aspects of social and economic life, tourism sector is not independent from the major changes in the global world, therefore understanding the dynamics of tourism can be only achieved through investigating the reasons behind the scene. Previous studies indicate that, modernist tourism can also contribute to the emergence of alternative tourism branches especially around the notion of “culture” such as cultural thematic routes, heritage tourism, cultural city tourism, traditions / ethics tourism, event and festival tourism, religious tourism and so forth (Csapo, 2012). On the other hand, post-modernism enables both “hyperreal” and “real” aspects to become the target of tourism sector, as discussed in the previous literature (Uriely, 1997). Hence, a compromise between modernist and post-modernist contributions on tourism will increase the scope of tourism as an important economic activity at a global scale, along with realizing some hidden benefits that have been long suppressed under the impact of marketization (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006). All in all, contributions of modernism and post-modernism to the development of tourism is not only important for tourism in an academic area, but it also has a considerable importance for tourism policies developed by political authorities, as the effective tourism policies are those which have the best understanding for the ever-changing demands coming from the market.

REFERENCES

- Bianchi, R. V. (2010). Tourism, capitalism and Marxist political economy. In *Political Economy of Tourism*(pp. 41-62). Routledge.
- Chalana, M., & Sprague, T. S. (2013). Beyond Le Corbusier and the modernist city: reframing Chandigarh's 'World Heritage' legacy. *Planning Perspectives*, 28(2), 199-222.
- Childers, M. (2017). Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History par Andrew Denning. *Histoire sociale/Social history*, 50(102), 457-458.
- Cohen, E. (1979). A phenomenology of tourist experiences. *Sociology*, 13(2), 179-201.
- Cooper, R., & Burrell, G. (1988). Modernism, postmodernism and organizational analysis: An introduction. In Parker, M., & Burrell, G. (Eds.). (2015). *For Robert Cooper: Collected Work*. Routledge.
- Csapo, J. (2012). The role and importance of cultural tourism in modern tourism industry. In *Strategies for tourism industry-micro and macro perspectives*. InTech.
- Ghasemi, M., & Hamzah, A. (2014). An investigation of the appropriateness of tourism development paradigms in rural areas from main tourism stakeholders' point of view. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 144, 15-24.
- Ghisi, M. L. (2010). Towards a transmodern transformation of our global society: European challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 15(1), 39-48.
- Gyr, U. (2010). The history of tourism: Structures on the path to modernity. European History Online. Retrieved from <https://d-nb.info/1020543884/34> on 07.03.2018
- Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2006). More than an "industry": The forgotten power of tourism as a social force. *Tourism Management*, 27(6), 1192-1208.
- Ivanovic, M. (2015). Deconstructing the authenticity of transmodern cultural tourism experience. *Innovative Organisations and Global Management: Issues and Policies*, 30.
- Minca, C., & Oakes, T. (2014). Tourism after the postmodern turn. *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Tourism*, 294-303.
- Mowforth, M., & Munt, I. (2003). Sustainable tourism in developing countries: Poverty alleviation, participatory planning, and ethical issues.
- Oliphant, E. L. (2017). Marketing the Southwest: Modernism, the Fred Harvey Company, and the Indian Detour. *American Literature*, 89(1), 91-119.
- Petroman, I. M., Sărăndan, H., Csosz, I., Trișcău, I., Lala, V., & Amzulescu, O. (2010). Defining tourism authenticity. *Agricultural Management/Lucrari Stiintifice Seria I, Management Agricol*, 12(3).

- Pritchard, A., Morgan, N., & Ateljevic, I. (2011). Hopeful tourism: A new transformative perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(3), 941-963.
- Shaw, G., & Coles, T. (2004). Disability, holiday making and the tourism industry in the UK: a preliminary survey. *Tourism Management*, 25(3), 397-403.
- Smith, D. O. (2010). Hotel design in British Mandate Palestine: Modernism and the Zionist vision. *The Journal of Israeli History*, 29(1), 99-123.
- Su, X. (2014). Tourism, modernity and the consumption of home in China. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 39(1), 50-61.
- Uriely, N. (1997). Theories of modern and postmodern tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 24(4), 982-985.
- Xie, Y., & Sun, J. (2016). Science and philosophy: two different approaches in tourism research. *Tourism Tribune*, 31(4), 24-32.
- Xie, Y., & Sun, J. (2017). Reflection and re-reflection in tourism study: a review on the modernism and postmodernism paradigm in Aramberri's framework of criticism. *Tourism Tribune*, 32(2), 13-21.
- Walton, J. K. (2009). Prospects in tourism history: Evolution, state of play and future developments. *Tourism Management*, 30(6), 783-793.
- Williams, A. (2006). Tourism and hospitality marketing: fantasy, feeling and fun. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 18(6), 482-495.