

Planning and Management of Sustainable Tourism Spaces

Assignment 10

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How Tourism Accelerates Cultural Homogenization in Host Communities

Tourism, while a vital economic engine for many destinations, can act as a powerful catalyst for cultural homogenization—the process by which unique local cultures become diluted and increasingly like a globalized, often Westernized, norm. This occurs through several interconnected mechanisms driven by the commercial logic of catering to tourist expectations.

Firstly, tourism often leads to the commodification and standardization of culture. To efficiently market and sell experiences to a broad audience, complex cultural practices, rituals, and arts are frequently repackaged into simplified, easily digestible products. A sacred dance may be shortened for a hotel dinner show, or a spiritually significant ceremony may be performed on a fixed schedule for tour groups (Cole, 2007). This process strips these practices of their original context and meaning, transforming them into mere entertainment. Over time, the "staged authenticity" presented to tourists can begin to supplant the original, living culture, as community members may start to alter traditions to better suit market tastes.

Secondly, the economic power of tourism fosters architectural and commercial homogenization. In response to tourist demand for familiar comforts and aesthetics, local built environments are often transformed. Unique urban landscapes give way to generic infrastructure: international hotel chains, fast-food outlets, and souvenir shops selling mass-produced goods replace local businesses and architectural styles. This creates a "tourist bubble"—zones within a destination that are nearly indistinguishable from any other resort area worldwide. The economic incentive to develop these spaces can overpower efforts to preserve indigenous architectural heritage, leading to a loss of place identity.

Finally, a subtler form of homogenization occurs through demonstration effects and value shifts. Prolonged exposure to tourists' wealth, consumption patterns, and behaviors can shift local aspirations, particularly among younger generations. Traditional lifestyles may come to be seen as less desirable or economically viable compared to the modern, consumerist norms displayed by visitors. This can lead to a decline in the intergenerational transmission of indigenous languages, crafts, and knowledge systems, as communities increasingly orient their values and economic activities towards the global tourism market (Sharpley, 2020).

In essence, tourism accelerates homogenization by creating a powerful economic feedback loop. Communities, seeking tourism revenue, progressively modify their cultural expressions and physical spaces to meet a perceived global standard. This slowly erodes the very cultural distinctiveness that attracted tourists in the first place, leading to a paradox where the industry can undermine its own long-term appeal by making destinations less unique.

References

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- Sharpley, R. (2020). *Tourism, Tourists and Society* (6th ed.). Routledge.