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Jeuring, Jelmer; Diaz-Soria, Inmaculada

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Introduction: proximity and intraregional aspects of tourism

Jelmer Jeuring^a and Inmaculada Diaz-Soria^b

^aCultural Geography Department, Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands; ^bUniversity of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, CERTOP-CNRS, Toulouse, France

ABSTRACT

Tourism research often tends to overlook both the mundane of the exotic and the exotic of the everyday. However, when acknowledging that exoticism is not necessarily linked to geographical distance, it is similarly possible to attribute touristic otherness to and experience unfamiliarity in a geographically proximate environment. This entails a need to rethink the intertwining relationships of meanings of the exotic and the mundane, as well as the ways people make meaning of their everyday environment through processes of territorialization and identification in a tourism context. Following this idea, these articles focus on the intraregional scale level and on the concept of proximity as a way of studying meanings and practices of tourism near home. In an attempt to strengthen the momentum of proximity tourism research, a double session (sponsored by the Geography of Leisure and Tourism Research Group) was organized during the Royal Geographical Society (RGS)-IBG (Institute of British Geographers) Annual International Conference which took place in September 2015 at the University of Exeter (UK). The sessions form the basis of this collection of articles, in which various aspects of proximity and intraregional tourism are discussed.

摘要

旅游研究经常忽略奇异旅游体验的平常之处与日常旅游体验的奇异之处。但是,当认识到旅游体验的奇异性未必与空间距离有关的时候,在地理上邻近环境中,旅游者的他者感同样有可能源于环境的生疏,因而在邻近环境中同样有可能体验旅游的新奇感。这需要在旅游背景下重新思考奇异与日常的复杂关系以及人们通过领域化与认同感赋予日常环境以意义的方式。按照这个思路,这些文章聚焦于区域内尺度,把邻近性概念作为研究居家周边旅游意义与实践的方式。2015年9月皇家地理协会和英国地理研究所联合年度国际会议在埃克斯科大学举办召开,为了加强近邻旅游研究,休闲与旅游地理研究组主办了一个两个环节的分组讨论。分组讨论中的文章成为该专辑的雏形,这些文章讨论了邻近与区域内旅游的各个方面。

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关键词

邻近旅游; 区域内旅游; 熟悉感; 他者; 日常生活; 二元性; 旅游体验; 在家与离家

Introduction

During a trip to Canada, at the beginning of the 70's, a friend of mine, an Anglo-Canadian, offered to visit the 'French' Montreal with me by night. That evening, she prepared herself for

the ... expedition: she disguised herself, adopting an outfit which, from her point of view, should be typical for a proletarian, a student or a left-winger, fitting the dress code of the Francophone boisterous 'ethnic group' of that time (jeans, scarf, sneakers, etc.). This way, what could just have been another walk in the neighborhood, became a journey in the city. Like explorers or escaped spies from the English legation in Peking from the time of *the '55 days'*, we were about to see furtively the Other, melt in its crowd, yet only a few streets from here. (Urbain, 2002, p. 144)

This short anecdote exemplifies the complex relations between touristic experiences and the places where they occur. It shows how meanings that shape up the tourism phenomenon encompass more than individuals travelling towards countries far from home, where everything is exotic, different, and unfamiliar, where encounters with the Other are within easy reach – but only once arrived at a distance from the familiar everyday. On the contrary, during this evening walk in Montreal, exoticism is perceived 'a few streets from here,' not only by the visiting friend but also by the host who, possibly triggered by the sudden presence of a tourist in her house, felt the need to adopt a touristic mindset – and outfit – by herself and engage in an expedition into her own neighborhood, along the streets she had probably walked dozens of times before. In doing so, the mundane and the exotic blur in many ways, and a tourism researcher, schooled in using the mutually exclusive dichotomies which the field of tourism studies for long has nurtured so well, would have a hard time making sense of the touristic meaning of it all. Dismissing the whole scene as not being an example of tourism would not be the least likely way out.

Disconnecting otherness from geographical distance

Our contemporary globalized world however is in many ways exactly like this scene, signified by hybridized spaces and temporalities, paradoxical meanings, and interconnected aspects of tourism and the everyday, hereby challenging conventional dichotomies with a need for reinterpretation. However, as already noted by Franklin and Crang, '[t]ourism studies has often privileged the exotic and strange, reflecting anthropological legacies, to speak of dramatic contrasts between visitors and locals' (2001, p. 8). Hereby, tourism research often overlooks both the mundane of the exotic and the exotic of the everyday. Also, due to what some call an 'international bias' (Eijgelaar, Peeters, & Piket, 2008), more proximate tourist activities, where tourism is both produced and consumed by people living within a region, are often overlooked (Canavan, 2013). Indeed, while to engage in tourism is often to engage in travelling and going abroad, for many regions tourism is mostly a domestic, or even intraregional activity (UNWTO, 2014), juxtaposing the hypermobility discourse so warmly embraced by the tourism industry.

One of the implications, or rather opportunities, of this change of paradigm pertains to a discussion of aspects of proximity tourism. When acknowledging that exoticism is not necessarily linked to geographical distance, it is similarly possible to attribute otherness to and experience unfamiliarity in a geographically proximate environment, close to what we call 'home.' Consequently, tourism scholars have to develop a new vocabulary to deal with this blurring of tourism and everyday life. This entails a need to rethink the intertwining relationships of meanings of the exotic and the mundane, as well as the ways people make meaning of their environment through processes of territorialization and identification in a tourism context. Following this idea, this collection of papers focuses on the

intraregional scale level and on the concept of proximity as a way of studying meanings and practices of tourism near home. In an attempt to strengthen the momentum of proximity tourism research and to gather tourism scholars who engage in research on the intertwining of (un)familiarity, mundanity, and exoticism of tourist places in the geographically proximate environment of everyday places and activities, a double session (sponsored by the Geography of Leisure and Tourism Research Group) was organized during the RGS-IBG Annual International Conference which took place in September 2015 at the University of Exeter (UK). The sessions form the basis for this collection of articles, in which various aspects of proximity and intraregional tourism are discussed.

Highlighting proximity and intraregional aspects of tourism practices

The articles collected here cover a range of examples of tourism practices in a context of geographical proximity where home and away, everyday life and tourism intersect. While the settings, methodologies and concepts vary considerably, each contribution is an attempt to rethink the hegemonic linear framing of tourism in dichotomies such as familiar and unfamiliar, nearby and far, host and guest, mundane and exotic.

The first two papers focus on blurred meanings of everyday and tourism spaces in the context of tourism development. Chen and Chen (2016) explore the construction of meanings of tourism places by analyzing the case of two tourist zones in Sanya, China. They argue that tourists use their own experiences and background to interpret and give meaning to a place, thus incorporating everyday life meanings of places into the tourist experience. They highlight the continuous construction of everyday meanings which affects how tourism places are perceived and how they develop and, in turn, how meanings attributed to tourism places affect everyday engagement with such places.

Second, Biddulph (2016) analyses intraregional and micro-level socioeconomic processes working in the physical periphery of tourist and everyday places. Through the case of a tourist backstreet in Siem Reap (Cambodia), Biddulph juxtaposes tourism front and back regions in order to be able to explain how local economic actors can subsist facing tourism development in hybridized spaces at the edge of mass tourism development.

Next, three articles shift the attention to individual tourist experiences, zooming in on touristic mobility and intraregional tourist activities which strongly influence everyday life aspects like sociocultural integration, spatial identities, and domestication. Griffin (2016) explores the experiences of immigrants with intraregional travel when they host friends and relatives in Toronto, Canada. His narrative analysis shows how hosting VFR (visiting friends and relatives) guests facilitates integration and place making in the new homeland. Hosting VFR guests also enhances intraregional travel, through which a hybrid experience is constructed of being simultaneously a host and a tourist, allowing for an expansion of the geographical space with which both immigrants and their guests become familiar.

Studying cross-border mobility, Szytniewski (2016) analyzes the case of Dutch shopping visitors in Kleve, a town just across the border in Germany. In what could be called an international example of proximity tourism, Szytniewski et al. neatly point to the multidimensionality of sociocultural proximity and distance. In their article, it becomes clear how symbolic spatial separations such as state borders can enhance a sense of exoticism and feelings of attractive unfamiliarity, within close geographical proximity to home.

Kaaristo and Rhoden (2016) aim at understanding everyday life practices performed on vacations in narrowboat trips on canals of Northwest England. Kaaristo and Rhoden focus

on mobility at the micro level, where physical proximity with other people is unavoidable in a very restrictive space and boaters try to make the boat homely through practices of domestication, with strong emphasis on daily routines. The mundanity of everyday activities is either given a new and different significance when put in a tourism context or is providing the necessary comfort and confidence that come with perceptions of familiarity.

The final two papers return to the essential motivation in which this collection is grounded: furthering the conceptual thinking about the subjectivities of proximity and how these work through in the construction of touristic otherness in familiar environments. In her paper on the experiences of residents of the city of Barcelona in Spain who join guided walking tours, Diaz-Soria (2016) shows how it is possible to be a tourist in your own city. Residents choose to join a guided tour in order to learn about their homeland, not the least because they realize that many tourists choose to discover the city this way and feeling that they know less about their own city than do these tourists. In other words, proximity tourism is here understood as a mean to satisfy the curiosity about the own region and residents play an active role in the creation of otherness by what Diaz-Soria calls 'distancing'.

Finally, Jeuring and Haartsen (2016) focus on residents' perceptions of their home region as a potential tourist destination for them and for others. In the context of the province of Friesland in The Netherlands, they analyze proximity and distance as relative values encouraging or dissuading intentions to engage in intraregional tourism. From their research, it becomes clear that meanings attributed to proximity and distance play an important role in how people negotiate home and away, familiarity and unfamiliarity, and the type of (touristic) activities their home region can facilitate and for who.

We hope these papers highlight the paradoxes and relations that are so strong and often signifying how people engage with the places they inhabit in an era of global mobility. In doing so, we think this collection of papers provides valuable input to an augmented understanding of tourism, in which conceptualizations of proximity, familiarity, and the everyday are more than opposites of the distant Other: they deserve explicit attention in tourism policies on various spatial levels, but similarly can provide attractive alternative starting points for marketing and branding tourism destinations. Moreover, the fossil fuel dependent tourism industry becomes increasingly unsustainable and strategic changes or technological innovations might take too much time before they will be pursued. Therefore, a shift in thinking about the meaning and value of tourism and incorporating proximity as a touristic asset is becoming increasingly timely.

Even in a relational world where everything depends on everything, we need mental and physical anchors to make sense of our place in the world and world's places within us. So, while various dichotomies are challenged by these authors, they are not thrown overboard, discarded as ontologically obsolete. Rather, we hope to highlight how they can be employed in a multiplicity of ways to understand our increasingly fluid and mobile world. Yet, through processes of institutionalization and re-production, dichotomies too often become absolute truths, reconfirmed through discourse and behavior, undisputed in their applicability. It is this almost unavoidable process, strongly evident in the context of tourism, that we are particularly critical about. The examples, findings, and conclusions of the various authors are thus not 'better' truths of the geographies of tourism, but rather should contribute to an understanding of tourism that is multiple and relative, to an open-minded and critical attitude towards the institutionalized anchors of our society – in which tourism takes such a prominent place that it has almost become ordinary.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Jelmer Jeuring is a Ph.D. researcher at the Cultural Geography Department of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, The Netherlands. His research focuses on tourism and socio-spatial identities in the Dutch province of Friesland. Particularly, in his Ph.D. research, aspects of 'proximity tourism' are explored, where people engage in touristic activities nearby of within their places of residence. Jelmer has an M.Sc. degree in social psychology and an M.Sc. degree in leisure, tourism, and environment. He has previously published also on topics around the role of weather and climate in tourism.

Inmaculada Diaz-Soria is a Ph.D. researcher at the Research Centre on Work, Organizations and Policies, CNRS, University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès (France) as well as a member of TUDISTAR research group in which she has participated in several projects. She has graduated in geography and in tourism studies and her research focuses on tourism impacts on individual's relationships with places. In her Ph.D. research, she explores the case of proximity tourism.

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