Tourist mobility: sociological theory and implementation practices

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Abstract. The article analyzes the connection between the sociology of tourism and the general sociological theory of mobility, which leads to an understanding of modern tourist mobility not as a process of revealing the will of individuals to learn about different cultures, but as a system of social constructions that exist in the form of tourism practices and are focused on maximizing profits for global tour operators.

1 Introduction

The concepts of tourist mobility and tourist practices, despite fairly extensive literature, have not yet received their sufficiently complete justification, and, consequently, a sufficiently complete terminological definition. It should be noted that the introduction of these concepts into scientific circulation is largely due to the fact that the sociology of tourism became the basis for the creation of a sociological theory, which can be called the general theory of mobility, one of the founding fathers of which was the British sociologist John Urry.

For example, if the first article on the sociology of tourism was published in 1972 and belonged to Erik Cohen [See 9], the first sociological book on the general theory of mobility was written by the British sociologist John Urry. It was published in 2000, with
tourism in the theory of mobility being considered as one of the components of the human mobile lifestyle, characteristic of the era of globalization. [See 14].

In other words, if the “old” theory of social mobility analyzed the vertical and horizontal movement of people in the social-role structure of society, and more broadly in social space, then in the so-called new paradigm of sociology they began to study almost any movement in society related to those or other social interests, the main of which are various ways of moving people in physical (three-dimensional) or geographic space. Tourism began to be viewed precisely from this angle, but, again, mainly in the context of theories of globalization and market-oriented sociological theories of economic life.

For example, even if some authors say that «the “new” model of hospitality is reconfiguring the processes of attraction, place-making and tourism practices at various scales» and «it is bound to produce a shift from an industry-centred model of place-making, largely estranged from the host communities and germane to the development of dual tourism spaces», «towards an alternative, unmediated community-centred model which offers greater opportunities for negotiation between hosts and guests» [3, р. 147], this does not explain:

– nor that the indicated double space (social differentiation of space for different groups of people) is the result of mutual alienation;
– nor that this alienation is a two-way process;
- nor that negotiations between «hosts and guests» actually take place either between «internal» and «external» tour operators, or between local authorities and tour operators, but in both cases, local residents do not take any part in them, although it is precisely in their living space is also integrated into the tourist space. This list can be continued.

All of the above requires emphasizing that the social construction of tourist mobility is a more complex process than that described in the literature, that tourist mobility itself does not always have obvious social consequences, that it is necessary to more strictly distinguish between commercial and non-commercial tourist mobility, while emphasizing the fact that they also differ in their inherent practices. And if so, then our task is to update all this and outline ways for further research.

2 Materials and Methods

When preparing and writing the article, the basic research method was the method of propositional analysis, aimed at identifying the main semantic units in texts written on the sociology of tourism and the sociological theory of mobility, one of the founding fathers of which was the British sociologist John Urry. This method allows us to study the connection between the logic of evidence used by certain authors and the subject of their research. Our task was to show that this approach made it possible to reveal that, despite their heuristic capabilities, the concepts of tourist mobility and tourist practices are not used by authors very often. Moreover, even if they are used in the title of works, they are most often not terminologically defined, that is, they are used at the level of the so-called intuitive understanding of the subject they denote.

3 Results and Discussion

It should be noted that as a result of the development of a «new paradigm» in sociological knowledge, namely the sociological theory of mobility, sociological science has been enriched with a huge number of new concepts such as:

cargomobility
aeromobilities, aquamobilities, automobilities and railway mobilities

hypermobility

mobile lifestyle

large- and local-scale mobility

where it appears. These are the books “Tourist Mobility and Advanced Tracking Technologies” by Noam Shoval and Michal Isaacson present in the title, and the book “Tourism, Mobility and Second Homes Between Elite Landscape and Common Ground”, edited by C. Michael Hall.

The first book raises questions about methods of studying tourist mobility as the behavior of tourists in time and space.

In the second book, this concept appears only in two cases and only in the section entitled “Dwelling Through Multiple Places: A Case Study of Second Home Ownership in Ireland,” written by Bernadette Quinn.

Tourist mobility – is the behavior of people temporarily staying in the historical space of other cultures in order to gain new knowledge and unconventional experiences, which has its social consequences both for the host culture and for the tourists themselves.

Tourist mobility is realized through various tourism practices that are related to the motives and goals of participation in tourism activities.

firstly

secondly
And if these movements are always socially oriented and motivated, and, therefore, are made by people with a specific purpose, then tourist mobility is one of the methods of such movements, which is always focused on its own goal, for example, this or that method of recreation, obtaining certain impressions or gaining new knowledge.

But this is an ideal situation. The fact is that tour operators, regardless of their size, are unique institutions of globalization, which is quite contradictory in nature. It is they, although they compete with each other, who take control of global tourist mobility, determining the directions of tourist flows. They are the ones who construct tourist destinations as centers for attracting tourist attention and implementing the tourist practices they offer. They are the ones who create the industry, which can be called the industry or economy of experience [5]. And it is as a result of their actions that the historical space of a particular culture degrades to the level of a reason for visiting it, ceasing to be a self-sufficient reason and source of new knowledge (information), and so on.

At one time, the German and American philosopher Herbert Marcuse introduced into scientific circulation the concept of dehistoricization, the opposite in meaning to the concept of historicization. In other words, if something can be recognized as having historical significance, it can also, for one reason or another, be denied it. For example, the construction of extreme tourism practices, sex tourism and the like does not necessarily require reference to the socio-cultural history of the places where they are practiced.

And if so, then there is every reason to say that traditional tourism in our time has moved into a state of post-tourism, distinguished by several characteristics.

Let's name the main ones:

‒ the presence of technologies for the mass mobilization (motivation) of people in various tourism enterprises, which (technologies) can simultaneously be considered as technologies for constructing relevant services, as well as the necessary methods of their consumption;

‒ the presence of processes similar to the above-mentioned dehistoricization, deterritorialization, as well as a change in the purpose of participation, i.e., the transition from knowledge to impressions;

‒ the construction of tourism fictions, entailing the erasure of the differences between reality and fiction—this kind of virtualization of reality;

‒ degradation of tourist interest with its inherent specific research component to consumer interest;

‒ the transformation of tourism into one of the relatively new ways of permanent social structuring of society and the subsequent legitimation of already existing social structures, etc.

For example, «plastic Eiffel Towers sold in the Paris gift shops around the “real object” are as interesting to the post-tourist as the thing in itself» [7, р. 69].
But there is also a more detailed description of tourism fictions, tourism bubbles, simulacra and virtualities, as well as corresponding reconstructions of the historical past. There is everything here aimed at attracting tourists:

‒ both harmless the Hawaiian imaginary in Las Vegas, Rio de Janeiro’s Little Africa;

‒ and rather tendentious reconstructions, for example, of the «slave past of Rio de Janeiro», recreated in the context of the so-called «white lies» [See, for example, the book 16]

We can say that dehistoricization, as if aimed at attracting tourists, for example, by falsifying history, is in fact a way of controlling interpretations of the past by manipulating memory, identity and heritage in order to control interpretations of the past [2, р. 19].

In other words, it is the tourism policy of tour operators that leads to:

‒ firstly, the above-mentioned deterritorialization of historical space, turning it into a global standard of socially differentiated comfort, the degree of which is determined by the solvency of the mobilized tourist;

‒ secondly, the formation of a post-tourist, whose dehistoricized consciousness loses the ability to understand actually occurring social processes.

Simply put, modern global tourist mobility is the result of highly developed mobilization technologies with their inherent methods of motivation to increase travel costs.

For example, William O’Brien and Wairimũ Ngarũiya Njambi explicitly write that «global tourism mobilities take place through mobilizations of locality and rearrangements of the materiality of places» [24, р. 219]. To be more precise, we need to talk about the mobilization of people into a tourism enterprise as, albeit temporary, control of their consumer behavior during travel. Here is what George Ritzer and Allan Liska write about this, based on the examples of Disney World, the Las Vegas hotel and the cruise ship.

We read: «Disney World, the Las Vegas hotel, and the cruise ship—have many of the characteristics of Erving Goffman’s “total institution”. Recall his definition of total institutions as places “of residence and work where a large number of like situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life”. A Disney theme park, a Las Vegas hotel and a cruise ship fit perfectly under this definition; they are total institutions» [11, р.106].

It is true that this is «post-modern, gentle, subtle, “soft”, rather than the modern, “hard”, form of control», because, for example, «no one accompanies the visitors to Disney World and insists that they go through Main Street at least twice, or that they disperse themselves throughout the park. They do so because the park is structured to lead them to do so». [11, р.106].

Here the authors refer to Michel Foucault, who argued that namely “gentle and subtle forms of control can be far more troubling than the blatant and brutal forms” [11, р.106].

So, if there is an “expansion of social science interest in mobility, in the mobility of peoples, cultures and objects” then now this happens not only for the reason that “peoples, cultures and objects migrate”, and not only for the reason that there is a historically formed, but in a certain sense, natural desire of people for knowledge, but also due to the desire of tour operators to obtain the maximum possible profits [8, р.1].

Technologies for soft mobilization of people into tour enterprises have yet to be studied. By the way, back in 2010 it was noted that «travel and tourism make up the largest industry in the world, worth in excess of$7 trillion annually. The number of international flight arrivals nears one billion. People today are traveling further, faster and (for some at least) more frequently» [1, п.IX].

According to a large-scale study conducted by the World Travel & Tourism Council –
In other words, the problem of travel and tourism can be considered one of the components of what many of these authors classify as mobile lives, which, in turn, are defined by them as «a lifestyle based on intensive travel, transport and tourism». Taking into account the above, it should be added that although tourist mobility is largely fueled by a mass desire for exoticism and difference from one’s own way of life, tourism itself, and precisely because of the already mentioned mobilization technologies, is gradually moving from the category of exotic mobility into the category of usual mobile practices, that is, de-exoticized. And to put it more broadly, tourist type travel is moving from exotic to the stage of «desirable and necessary».

It sounds nice, but there is one rather sobering observation made by another, and also British, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. We read: «The way present-day society shapes its members is dictated first and foremost by the duty to play the role of the consumer». The norm our society holds up to its members is that of the ability and willingness to play it.

The above confirms that the significant increase in tourist mobility observed at the beginning of the 21st century is not a direct result of the increasing internal need of earthlings for cultural development through familiarization with the characteristics of other cultures, but with the artificially created artifact of the duty to play the role of the consumer, that is, responsibilities associated with the mobile status of an individual or group in society and the corresponding identity, which can be called mobile identity.

Consequently, participation in a tourism enterprise, or even better, periodic participation, becomes an indicator of status and prestige. It should encourage other (non-mobile) people to participate in the same way.

In other words, if the field of one’s own freedom, which always required one’s own living space, limited, according to the logic of the ethical teachings of Immanuel Kant, by the field and, therefore, the living space of other people, then it is commercial tourism that allows not only the exchange of freedom and space, which occurs during the period of non-commercial tourism enterprises, but also trade them. Simply put, commercial tourism, and especially international tourism, is a unique way of gaining access to the living space of other cultures, acquired for money. Moreover, a very large total amount of money.

More precisely, when the host tour operator exchanges other people’s money for his right to provide access to the cultural achievements of his people to representatives of other cultures, he thereby encourages them to do this at least one more time. As a result, «there is in the modern world an accumulation of movement analogous to the accumulation of capital – repetitive movement or circulation made possible by diverse, interdependent systems of movement».

We draw a conclusion. High tourist mobility, enriching the corresponding experiences, is a form of capital: mobile capital and tourist experiences, converted into status and prestige.

As for the social distribution of profits, we do not now raise the question that only interest rates from the excess income of tourism companies go to the country’s budget, because this is no longer a subject for the sociology of tourism, but for the sociology of economics or the economics of tourism. By the way, in 2021, i.e. before the pandemic, the top five largest tour operators in the world having annual revenue in millions of US dollars included:

- TUI AG (19,564, Germany)
- Expedia Group Inc (11,667, United States of America)
- China Tourism Group Duty Free Corp Ltd (8,090, China)
- The Walt Disney Co (6,410, United States of America)
-...
These examples clearly demonstrate what sociologists call the phenomenon of cultural expropriation, that is, the degree of control by global tour operators over the historical heritage of various ethnic groups that have become attractive to tourist attention. Cultural expropriation is the alienation of cultural heritage from the indigenous peoples who created and their «copyright» to the intellectual property, called indigenous knowledge, in favor of corporations dominating the tourism market.

Of course, the rapidly developing non-profit targeted tourist mobility (including both development and entertainment tourism) is not going anywhere. Moreover, the modern transport industry contributes to their development, making it possible to travel long distances for different purposes and practically all over the world. In such tourist mobility there is a place for scientific (academic or research) tourism, volunteer tourism, tourism focused on self-improvement and self-testing, and even a kind of aimless wandering (nomadism or even vagrancy) as an end in itself.

Here you can also recall exotic and historical tourism, eco- and ethno-tourism, adventure and extreme tourism, etc. It is worth recalling tourism enterprises carried out either with the aim of helping other people, for example, slum dwellers or endangered peoples, or with the aim of purifying nature or protecting virgin forests from deforestation, which can be classified as one of the forms of ecotourism, combined with eco-volunteering, and so on. But one cannot but note the global penetration of global tour operators into this area in order to commercialize them, reconstruct them in accordance with the rules of consumption policy, and change their socio-cultural essence accordingly. And we talk mostly about this policy.

But there are also forms of tourist mobility that can be classified as intermediate, because there is room for both independent «tourist creativity» and commercial initiative. One of these is slum tourism or simply slumming with its characteristic «travel» practices. A very indicative book in this regard is called «Slum Tourism. Poverty, power and ethics».

It's already said in the annotation: «Impoverished urban areas have always enticed the popular imagination, considered to be places of “otherness”, “moral decay”, “deviant liberty” or “authenticity”. “Slumming” has a long tradition in the Global North, for example in Victorian London when the upper classes toured the East End. What is new, however, is its development dynamics and its rapidly spreading popularity across the globe. Township tourism and favela tourism have currently reached mass tourism characteristics in South Africa and in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In other countries of the Global South, slum tourism now also occurs, and providers see huge growth potential».

So, if in the time of Jack London the British elite, living in the West End, located to the west of the City Wall or the London Wall, with an active theatrical and concert life, museums, universities and colleges, i.e. everything that belongs to the elite culture, visited the proletarian districts located behind this wall in the East End out of interest, today the city slums, despite loud accusations of immorality, have been turned by tour operators into a very popular object of tourist interest, involving many tourist practices: from flying above them to climbing on roofs (including parkour), basements or digging "traveling" through sewer systems.

We do not have the opportunity here to analyze in detail all the socio-cultural consequences of mass slumming, which has become global slumming, but the fact that an entire and quite interesting book is devoted to this problem should attract the attention of readers. But this example itself suggests that tourist mobility and its inherent tourism practices require serious research of the changes that occur in them.

4 Conclusions
In conclusion, it should be noted that not only the sociology of tourism, but also sociological theory as a whole, together with the development of the sociological theory of mobility, received new opportunities for their development. The concept of tourist mobility, embodied in a huge variety of—sometimes quite controversial—tourism practices, is one of the results of this development. However, not everything is so simple. The fact is that, as in the "old" sociological theory, most of the efforts of sociologists turned out to be aimed not at finding opportunities for the development of the essential forces of man, but at finding ways to mobilize (involve in participation) quite large masses of people from various social strata in tourism activities and the construction of consumer behavior controlled by large tourism corporations. This situation had an immediate impact on, although in a rather specific way, the entire tourism process, which in a fairly short period of time moved into the stage of so-called post-tourism as a relatively new way of reproducing already existing social structures and their subsequent legitimation.

References


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