



POSITIVE TOURISM¹

My own formation in Marxist Studies led me to think that positive tourism was a term, at the least, confusing, if not naïve. In fact, Marxism historically held the thesis that tourism should be understood as an instrument of control and cultural alienation. With a preface written by Philip L. Pearce, *Positive tourism* changed my mind offering a valuable insight on the phenomenology of tourism. The book is structured in five sections, each one containing an interesting debate revolving around positive tourism. The first section offers an introduction to readers where editors discuss the nature of positive tourism and its evolution over the years. To some extent, the concept derives from the rise of humanism as a philosophical project which dates back to the fourteen and fifteen centuries. Humanism, which was born in Italy, confronted the already-established Monarchies adding the value of egalitarianism as never before. Those thinkers who embraced humanism exerted a radical criticism not only against the Monarchy but also the Catholic Church. As the editors put it, humanism was after all a “new experience” that gradually appealed to the plurality and anthropocentric view of the universe as two of their main cultural values. With the benefits of hindsight, humanism not only influenced and resonated in the scholastic philosophy but also was in “social sciences”. This raises a more than interesting question: why is important humanism in human history?

This book underscores the significance of humanism, which from its inception struggled for turning the earth into a safer and better place. Its transformational nature resonated and mined the epistemological core of social sciences. The positive psychology was a result of humanism, and as Filep, Laing & Csikszentmihalyi put it, the confusion was given by the different meanings, interpretations, and applications around the term in the threshold of time. The second section delves into the nature of positive tourism, which was

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traditionally confronted to negative tourism. For example, the fifth chapter shows dark tourism may be recycled in positive forms of consumption that revitalizes the society, understanding that the old opposition between positive and negative should be left behind. This happens because tourism should be understood –behind the profit-centered paradigm– as a vehicle towards social cohesion and communal well-being. As editors overtly state,

Positive tourism is a humanist-inspired study, principally grounded in theories, models and perspectives from psychology, especially positive psychology. Positive tourism knowledge is created through a diversity of approaches incorporating both, quantitative and qualitative research methods, depending on research questions and research needs, which bridge strict divisions between positivism and interpretivism (p. 10).

In consonance with the above-cited text, much of the produced knowledge alternates a business-based view, which embraces an economic definition of tourism, with the perspectives of social sciences, more interested in explaining tourism as a social fact. In this respect, for some reason which is hard to precise now, sociology and anthropology have adopted a pejorative connotation of tourism, which per their views, helps commoditizing cultures and persons, in forms of products that led towards acculturation, kinship con-

flicts, violence and alcoholism among many other social ills. Rather, the notion of positive tourism combines some solutions and answers oriented to cure social frustrations. Following the legacy of Jost Krippendorf, positive tourism posits as an ecological and epistemological option that ascribes into the “true discovery”, a subjective experience aimed at mutual understanding.

As the previous argument given, the third and fourth sections, formed by two chapters each one, explore how tourism engages positively with locals reducing host-and-guests` discrepancies. In a nutshell, editors devote their efforts in discussing an old tension between two epistemological positions, the profit-oriented paradigm and tourism as a social institution. This book, surely, opens the doors towards a new fresh and fruitful epistemological discussion, which follows on Krippendorf`s insights. This work, which reavivates the idea that tourism should be defined as a rite of passage oriented to foster the social cohesion, represents a recommendable product for fieldworkers, epistemologists and tourism-related researchers interested in overcoming the current epistemological crisis that the discipline today faces.

Reference

Filep, D., Laing, J., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (eds.). (2016). *Positive tourism*. Abingdon: Routledge.