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Tourism as an Engine of Neighborhood Regeneration? Some Remarks Towards a Better Understanding of Urban tourism beyond the 'Beaten Path'

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Excerpts-

...."Over the last decade an extensive amount of research has been dedicated to the **massive growth of urban tourism** and its manifold impacts on cities around the globe. While academic interest with regard to urban tourism in the past has concentrated primarily on the inner city – the areas commonly "hit hardest" by tourism –, it is only recently that scholars focus on the development of tourism in urban neighborhoods "beyond the beaten path". Particularly edgy, transitional and allegedly authentic urban settings such as industrial and warehouse districts, ethnic or immigrant enclaves and other neighborhoods where people on the margins of urban society live and work are today part of a growing number of tourists' travel itineraries. **This is a consequence of a broader trend towards a more individualized and differentiated mode of traveling, a significant diversification of tourists' interest and desires as well as an increased desire of travelers to transcend the areas primarily dedicated to, or taken over by tourism.**"

....."However, empirical evidences suggest that tourists don't only "push" into neighborhoods beyond the beaten path but are also increasingly "pulled" into these areas. On the one hand, policy makers and other actors concerned with urban development, **tourism marketing and planning have started to recognize the potential of places left over from tourism, i.e. places normally not inhabited by tourists and therefore lacking the infrastructure common to tourist areas**, as tourist infrastructure has become a critical asset in the heightened competition among cities to position themselves in what Harvey calls the "spatial division of consumption". On the other hand, actors concerned with neighborhood development pay increasing attention to tourism – along with other consumption based strategies – as a potential means to contribute to the regeneration of neighborhoods in disrepair"....

...”A review of the literature suggests that particularly critical urban scholarship has in the past either been conspicuously silent or upfront **dismissive with regard to the rising significance of tourism in neighborhoods beyond the beaten path**. The phenomenon was thus apart from a couple of noteworthy exceptions, either ignored or criticized mostly for its alleged negative effects for local communities. Frequently embedded in broader critiques of contemporary urban development policies and practices and their emphasis on competitiveness and entrepreneurialism, tourism development on the neighborhood level has been attacked for commodifying and exploiting local communities’ culture and heritage for the benefit of developers and other private sector actors, fuelling processes of gentrification and paying little, if any, attention to the needs of the urban poor and other vulnerable population groups”....

...In this paper, we argue that these and similar claims are not unsubstantiated, but that it is unfortunate that the dangers inherent to tourism-induced changes (named e.g., “tourist gentrification”) seem to make **scholars overlook the potential benefits tourism can bring for neighborhoods that are isolated and cut off “mainstream” economy and society**. Building on more recent research by US-American scholars,⁸ this article aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of tourism’s effects on neighborhoods in disrepair.

We argue that an increased influx of tourists into neighborhoods beyond the beaten path should neither be conceived as generally “good” nor “bad” but that its effects are instead shaped by:

1. the kind and extent of tourism entering a neighborhood;
2. the institutional and regulatory context (national and city politics, as well as their underlying power relations etc.);
3. the way tourism development is planned on the local level as well as
4. the host communities’ particular (social, ethnic, spatial etc.) characteristics tourism impinges upon.

Rejecting one-sided boosterish or overly dismissive interpretations of tourism development, and conceiving the phenomenon instead as a double-edged sword involving different and sometimes even contradictory characteristics and effects, we believe that there are two simple reasons that demand for greater scholarly attention towards the ways tourism enters and alters disadvantaged neighborhoods:

1. **Tourism is**, depending on who you read, either the **world’s largest industry or on its way there, and represents one of the few urban economic sectors with growth potential** within reach of many neighborhoods struggling for economic opportunity.
2. A priori rejections of tourism development brush over the fact that many of the negative effects of tourism development are not inevitable. Tourism has despite its risks and pitfalls not only the potential to **encourage economic development and physical improvements within a community**, but can under certain circumstances also contribute to neighborhoods’ long term and sustainable regeneration in other ways.

....."Can the "tourist city" be a social city – to paraphrase the main concern of our inquiry?

Our research has only been a first step towards a better understanding of tourism's manifold effects on deprived neighborhoods. More theoretical input and empirical data is needed to determine how exactly tourism's effects in deprived neighborhoods should be evaluated. That said our preliminary findings nonetheless suggest that tourism can as a matter of fact contribute to the **regeneration of neighborhoods in disrepair if tourism occurs within an institutional and regulatory context which doesn't exacerbate but instead eases social and political inequalities**, and if the actors involved in tourism development on the local level show a commitment to an integrated mode of tourism that places the interests of local residents and businesses at the core of their efforts. **Neighborhood tourism that truly benefits local residents and businesses moreover requires in our opinion and incorporation into a broader set of policies tailored at the specific needs of deprived neighborhoods and depends on the involvement of the community itself.** Only sensitive and participatory strategies of neighborhood tourism on terms defined by local actors and involving the input of local residents and businesses are able to fully exploit the potentials tourism brings about, provide new opportunities of integration, and keep tourism's potential pitfalls at bay."

Research on Tourism in Urban Areas – A Better Understanding.....

Off the Beaten Path

