

1998

**5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON RETAILING AND SERVICES SCIENCE
AUGUST 25, AUGUST 28, BAVENO**

**TOURISM: THE RECOVERY OF THE VALUE AND THE MEANING OF THE PLACE IN A
GLOBAL ERA**

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Introduction

Tourism in the way that it is evolving today can help us better understand the emerging paradox introduced by the increasing popular paradigm of globalization and the inherent heterogeneity of the human condition. Increasingly mankind is being challenged in the form of institutions, economic enterprises and places of habitat to navigate a social contract between the economic pressure to subscribe to a homogeneous world on one hand and the biological necessity to be different for survival in the Darwinian sense on the other. In this paper we posit that the city as a tourist destination takes advantages of this contradictions. This means that the value of the urban place is being rediscovered along more humane dimensions.

This article starts by discussing the concept of globalization and its impact on contemporary urban management which include principles of urban productivity and economic development. Following this general outline the concepts of the city as a product to be recreated, managed and offered to both investors and visitors as a way to revitalize the urban economy is explored. The related concepts of place market and city marketing used in this process are introduced as well.

Finally this article tries to explain why eco-sustainable tourism can help a municipality improve its economic performance and face the competition of other urban centers of the same size by taking advantages of unique attributes of a geographic location whether man-made or occurring naturally.

Globalization. Is it a new process?

The word "globalization is a derivation of the word "global" which means "the whole". Having said this, being characterized as "global" depends on the one's adopted point of reference. That is, what is being considered as the "whole"? In this sense the perspective of globalization as an *economic* phenomenon (internationalization) is not a new process.

In terms of the modern business world it is possible to say that the globalization process started when the America was discovered in the 15th century. The discovery of America at the time promoted in a significant way the concept of geo/physical/mankind planet unity (although, the civilizations in that time were not be aware that there would not be more significant land to discover. The emerging philosophy of *commercial* unity was the result of geographic expansion searching for new resources to recover and new markets to sell to. Actually, economists today refer to this as the era of the mercantilism philosophy.

According to BEYHAUT, (1997), during this early period of global commercial capitalism, the attained level of internationalization of the economy was higher than it was thought until recently. It is now widely accepted that the pre-industrial economic cycles of the 15th century really affected the world as a whole. On a smaller scale the economy of the 15th century was transformed and became global. The main difference between these two distinct periods of economic growth is more a matter of the speed of diffusion of technology (ideas) than any fundamental economic philosophy..

Before the telegraph invention (19th century), information and news were basically transmitted person-to-person, at the speed of the existing transportation means, (ranging from pedestrian foot speed through to sailing ships and then later steam ships), none of which presented any revolutionary condition.

As showed by GORENDER(1997), economic globalization and technological revolution are converging and project to the future the possibility of a unique society. This trend leads us to pose some questions. Will the process of globalization be able to harmonize the many cultural differences found in peoples? Perhaps overcoming aggressive responses among nationalities, ethnic groups and races?

Will globalization be responsible for the end of the diversity, differences and idiosyncrasies of these same peoples as a result of losing their local identity?

Searching for the difference

Up to the end of the 19th century, strategic locations in terms of geographical aspects (weather, easy access to natural resources and capital formation), still gave advantages to some places in terms of economic development. The general condition of that moment was the heterogeneity, marked by the capacity of the *place* to respond to the fundamental needs of the production sector. In this way it was possible to observe changes in the importance of products and urban centers according to economic changes. (Vargas, 1992)

At the end of the 19th century the world had entered a new phase known as the II Industrial revolution. The inventions of this new era were not the sole result of improvements in tools and equipment as had happened in the first one. This revolution was more scientific and had an even more pronounced impact over people's lives by introducing automatic machines, mass production and an extreme work division in the fabrication process.

At this moment, the production decision did not come from the "sovereign consumer" any more. Otherwise, the production administration amplified its control field by wielding the use of modern management techniques such as: advertising , marketing , psychology of behaviour in order to help control the market which, it would be presumed to serve. Moreover, they went beyond, by creating new "necessities" and influencing the beliefs and values of an entire generation. (GALBRAITH, 1967)

All management decision were driven by the concept of a "standard man" (mass market). Economies of scale, standardized products; collective movements and model cities, centralized decisions and technocracy; became the bywords of the day.

Following all of these the efforts emphasizing the *production* of goods, an even more pronounced change was occurring as to how people should *consume* and use products. These efforts highlighted health, beauty, social status, sexual prowess and general happiness. On the whole, they emphasized aspects which came from the symbolic properties and the use of specific products.

At the same time of the birth of the consumption society, the locations of the production centers started moving in the same direction. That is, they jointed to the tendency towards the homogeneity of tastes, habits, values, beliefs by the creation of similar territories. The strategic infrastructure factors for the production sector started being constructed (roads, railroads, airports and city as a whole). The strategic locations could now be built .

The increasing process of the production and the market internationalization had as a result the saturation of its own market, during the seventies. Facing this new scenery and trying to maintain the accumulation process, the system invented a new way of producing known as flexible production.

The central element of this new process is the flexibility concerning products, mix, size, designs, work process, equipment and so on. (GATTO, 1989) With microelectronics driving this new process (also known as mass customerization), firms were now able to generate extra advantages from the diversity of goods, without compromising the economic advantages of the mass production. It became also possible to offer customized products in terms of cost, time and quality to the specific and smaller demands. This permitted attention to smaller, highly segmented markets just by making simple (in relative terms) adjustments in equipment or software. (GATTO, 1989)

According to TOFFLER (1970), the imposed homogeneity as a byproduct of industrial society, was to be replaced by an immense diversity of living styles emerging from the post-industrial society. Now it would be easy to find and profitably *serve* an enormous variety of atypical consumer groups: hippies, homosexuals, vegetarians, athletes, and environmentalists economically. During the seventies and the Great Society of President Johnson, America came very close to achieving this Utopian consumer society. Toffler also believed in a great quantity of products that would be seen as enabling the modern consumer, in contrast to Galbraith's more dismal outlook (1967). This point was reiterated by Cross (1980), who made the point that more time could now be acquired only if the free time were spent by commercial amusing activities using sophisticated technologies. In this new way of production some aspects can be highlighted: increasing importance of the tertiary sector with emphasis on tourism; the elimination of the time gap; and the existence of a unique territory with no close substitutes.

Concerning the first aspect, while the industry diminishes its need of jobs, the tertiary sector increases these needs in numbers and in different fields like: education, urbanism, leisure, researches, medicine, arts and tourism. The economy of the services became the synonym of the post-industrial society.

The necessity of introducing diversifying selling formats to segmented markets, added to the newer and higher sophisticated techniques to induce consumers, started arousing latent consumer wishes which were far from being considered essential needs in the traditional economic sense. These wishes were not limited only to the condition of owning goods; they also invaded the field of service activities (doing things) as well. These leisure/service activities took on a life of their own—and now required jointly consumed products and merchandise. In the classic example, the universal appeal of sports participation and active leisure (gave rise to Nike's infamous and universal call to a action—"Just do it") This slogan became the seminal example of our generation. Modern advertising bombards us with the endless search for emotion and pleasure, to take part in events of all sort, the will to improve the cultural level, the necessity of social contacts, gave to tourism the condition to become a motor industry.¹

Regarding the time gap, the evolution of our modern communication system permitted everyone to watch what happens all over the planet and, some times out of it, at the exact moment that it is happening. Individuals start receiving all kind of influence coming from everywhere in the world. But at the same time that this situation potentially interferes with consumers' existence and ways of living, it also promises the possibility to attain better choices by the increase use of information

The future promise of a unique territory is, as mentioned before, the result of the improvement in communication and transportation systems, the development of new, cheaper and sustainable sources of energy coupled with advances in biotechnology and many other technological innovations. That is to say, where the natural condition does not exist, municipalities can help create it.

¹ The concept of motor industry was first mentioned by François Perroux (1961) in his theory about development poles. These studies try to demonstrate the capacity of some industries to generate a strong industrial concentration throughout their backward and forward linkages with so many other industries.

This uniformity of location factors is easily observed by the competition among developed countries and cities around the world to attract companies, events and people. In this sense, we are facing a big paradox: The fact of being unique, global, homogeneous, seen from a different perspective standardization viewed in a negative way (i.e. lacking uniqueness or confronted with many similar possibilities (boring), against the human reality of being unique, exclusive, and different. In the language of modern competition – being different adds value.

This difference does not only concern physical spaces and their attributes but, products and activities offered to different groups of individuals. This condition goes beyond when it considers the existing subjectivity of the individuals who receive, look, feel and offer according to their own repertoire of living. Actually, it must consider all the actors involved in this market game searching for the differences.²

At this unique moment in the world economy, one that is characterized by virtual corporations, flexible production, satisfying highly segmented markets the trend toward homogeneity is replaced by the necessity of being unique, exotic and even eccentric to create a difference. Accompanied by postmodern ideals, plenty of diversity, and communications driven by a multitude of symbols and signs, the *virtual* attributes of a geographic place, coupled with regional conditions and ethnic values may acquire a higher value. Therefore, tourism of the future may be borrowing from their virtual manufacturing counterparts; combining a wide variety of different elements that give an expanded meaning to the simple term "place" This is the new mindset and these are the new tools and precious inputs to city management in the future.

New ways of urban management.

In the eighties, the decrease of public resources, added to the increasing interest demonstrated to other questions, like public budget and public debt, modified the profile of urban research. At the same time, the dramatic changes in urban growth and the composition of urban activities put much of the earlier work out of date. The new questions posed emphasized themes which talk about urban productivity, economic development and the role of the local authorities.

According NIENTIED (1993), it is possible to include the reasons for these changes in two sort of tendencies. One belongs to a macroeconomic scale which links all the small cities to the world market. Then, the competition among countries is complemented by the competition among cities. The impact of all these mega factors on cities are only superficially known at this point in time

The second strong tendency pointed out by NIENTIED (993) makes reference to the new ways of city "Governance" (control). These new questions include the discussion on government as an enabling government, the failure of decentralization, the partnership between government and private sector, as well the issues of efficiency and effectiveness. The discussion about Urban Governance, at least in Brazil, is very embryonic, far from any near term implementation. Perhaps, its political reach, for some, is still imperceptible.

The lesson of the last quarter century is that local governments have discovered that they cannot act as agents of the welfare state. They must adopt pro-active attitudes to improve the performance of the local economy in order to achieve their social goals even though tangible results will be delayed. It is known that for the disadvantaged income and job security become the priority instead of housing and urban services demands. Unfortunately, the local governments have never responded and even were not concerned about job creation, urban productivity and economic development, leaving these questions to the central government. Frequently, when the municipalities prepare their City Planning, they only think of organising

² Concerning tourism URRY, (1996, pg 16), writes that it does not exist a single looking of the tourist. It changes according to the society, the social group and the historical period. These lookings are built throughout the difference. It does not exist a true universal experience for all tourists, in all moments. Actually, the tourist looking, any time, is built with the relationship with their opposite, with non-touristic forms of experience and social conscience.

