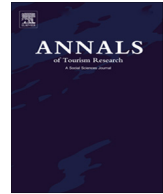




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Cultural literacy, cosmopolitanism and tourism research

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ABSTRACT

Cosmopolitanism has been approached from a multitude of perspectives yet it continues to pose theoretical challenges in application. This paper assumes a post-disciplinary approach to critique these writings and analyse the intersections of tourism/cosmopolitanism/worldmaking. Through these means a philosophical platform is built that advances *cultural literacy* as the defining principle of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism encompasses the *both-and*, and has much to do with cosmopolitics, worldview, cultural orientations and compossibilities of tourism populations. Tourism is at the coalface of inter- and intra-cultural exchange and cultural literacy provides an innovative tool to operationalize worldmaking and address the complexities of an increasingly cosmopolitanized world. These ideas constitute an ontological shift in thinking about tourism and its many contexts.

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Introduction

Travel has never been so urgent, even necessary, as it is today... Travel is how we put a face and voice to the Other and step a little beyond our secondhand images of the alien... we all live in the same neighbourhood now, even if the differences and distances between us remain as great as ever. (Pico Iyer *The Necessity of Travel* 2002:80)

In early writings about tourism as a social science, Bruner (1991:246) said travel is broadening because it “leads to a more cosmopolitan perspective”. Thinking about cosmopolitanism and tourism has largely stayed in that space and only recently has the concept re-emerged in tourism research. This paper creates a philosophical platform to advance *cultural literacy* as an interpretive analytical

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tool, originating in tourism studies, to study cosmopolitanism. A focus is placed on the social, cultural and political prisms of the concept and, while a wide range of literature is reviewed from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, which is by no means exhaustive, it is indicative of how the term has been applied in political science, sociology, cultural studies, comparative literature, anthropology, and how these perspectives inform tourism studies. A critical analysis of this literature formulates a case for cultural literacy as an analytical tool for tourism research applications. The aim is to provide a fresh perspective, in the form of a new ontological approach, to address an age-old concept. In this, it is the theme of cosmopolitanism that is important, not the discipline from which the ideas originate. Thus, the approach taken here is post-disciplinary to reflect “flexible modes of knowledge production, plurality, synthesis and synergy” (Coles, Hall, & Duval, 2006:293) by adhering to the axiom that social worlds and tourism worlds cannot be separated.

What emerges from this literature at first glance is that a conundrum exists in positioning cosmopolitanism as a social theory with practical application for tourism research. For example, Beck (2002b:25) views cosmopolitanism as a “large, ancient, rich and controversial set of political ideas, philosophies and ideologies”, an abstract “kingdom of the air”. In these terms the concept lacks materiality and, although researchers have applied the concept in various ways, there is little agreement on measurement (Skrbis, Kendall, & Woodward, 2004; Swain, 2009). Robbins (1998:2) once said, “situating cosmopolitanism means taking a risk”—the term may be easy to define if you look it up in the dictionary, as an adjective it means ‘belonging to the world’ and as a noun ‘citizen of the world’, but as an scholarly concept it is a politically charged idea, notion, ideology, process, condition of globalisation, a disposition—to name a few. Clifford (1998:363) sees it as a site of academic contestation: “before we even begin to speak of ‘cosmopolitanisms’ we are caught up in the unmanageable, risky work of translation”, not unsurprisingly, because of the array of abstractions and disciplinary perspectives used to conceptualize it. A post-disciplinary perspective discards rigid disciplinary perspectives to focus on a theme and bring it to a logical conclusion. This approach transcends disciplinary boundaries to provide a space to better understand ‘the complex interconnections between the natural and social worlds’ (Jessop & Sum, 2010:89). This is a process of knowledge building; a process that Coles, Hall, and Duval (2009) consider should be a requisite to study tourism, and its contexts, in the twenty-first century.

From a tourism perspective, critics have “called for a more material analysis of the way cosmopolitanism is performed in people’s everyday lives” (Germann Molz, 2006:2; Swain, 2009), and this paper addresses these concerns by positioning the “understudied” concept of worldmaking as multi-operational in the makings of culture and place (Hollinshead, 2007:185). Cosmopolitanism maintains salience in a globalized world, where increased mobility and global flows replace monocultures with hybrids. Citizenship is now a cultural intersection of the inter- and intra-domestic and/or inter- and intra-national. *Multiple cosmopolitanisms* (Robbins, 1998) may be a way of providing political, historical and geographical contexts, but the term remains vague, unwieldy and abstract. Thus, we need to formulate ways to unpack the concept, and *cultural literacy* is key to the process.

Cultural literacy has traditionally been used to define a mono-culture to locate the parameters of nationalism. The discussion which follows departs from the traditional usage to reposition the term as multicultural and central to locating the “reality of attachments, multiple-attachments, or attachments from a distance” (Robbins, 1998:3). Cosmopolitanism is defined here as an embodiment of one’s identity: a composition of literacies including background (ethnic, national, cultural) and accumulated cultural capital through experience (travel, kindred/ethnic ties, and historical ties) that can explain processes of knowledge transfer and provide insight into cultural positioning (and cultural distance). This reformulation of the term positions cultural literacy as a fundamental principle of cosmopolitanism—to refer to a composition of literacies that reflect compossibility (or -ies) of identity, cultural locatedness, and reflexivity. Compossibility recognizes the diversities and contradictions of individuals, human relations and the pluralities of the world we live in (Venn, 2006), it takes all properties, alternatives, and futures into account concerning an entity’s existence (which could come in a variety of forms such as an individual, a society, and so on). Cultural literacy has the potential to deepen understanding of the cultural compossibilities that characterize cosmopolitanisms in a globalized world.

To begin, this paper explores how cultural literacy has been used in the past to advance a case for its reformulation. The discussion moves on to discuss how tourism and cosmopolitanism intersect

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