



## Understanding the tourist experience of cities



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### ABSTRACT

Economic, environmental and social forces have changed the way we are developing our cities. A range of theoretical constructs have been explored to provide direction for contemporary analyses of urban tourism experience. This paper engages with a feminist perspective in our understanding of the way tourists explore and experience cities. It achieves this by expanding current sociological frameworks that assume the tourist is simply a wanderer in the urban environment. Drawing on interactionist and post-structural critique and Wearing and Wearing's (1996) theoretical framework of the *flâneur* and *choraster*, this paper demonstrates how a more feminized conceptualisation of the tourist experience as a creative and interactive process could have a transformative effect on our understanding of tourists' experiences of cities.

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### Introduction

Very few studies have undertaken contemporary analyses of tourist experiences in cities (Ritchie, Wing Sun Tung, & Ritchie, 2011; Selstad, 2007) therefore their spatial behavior is not well understood. This combined with a lack of complexity in the development of theoretical constructs of the urban tourism experience has led to a need for more developed and nuanced understandings of the tourist experience, in, and of, the city. This paper seeks to examine the movement of tourists through the city to better understand their experiences because "an understanding of the ways in which tourists experience the places and people they visit is . . . fundamental to the study of the consumption of tourism" (Sharpley & Stone, 2011: 4).

Building on the work of Wearing and Wearing (1996), we examine the need to incorporate a more feminised understanding of the tourist experience of the city as much of the analysis in this area is limited by the exclusion of a feminist perspective. In support of this we draw on reviews of gendered approaches to research in tourism (Duffy, Kline, Mowatt, & Chancellor, 2015; Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan, & Villacé-Molinero, 2015; Small, Harris, & Wilson, 2017; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017) that argue the need for a feminist approach and also the need to engage in a more critical approach to tourism research (Bianchi, 2009; Bramwell & Lane, 2014; Ren, Pritchard, & Morgan, 2010; Tribe, 2008). In particular this paper will argue for an alternative to the conceptualisation of the urban tourist as *flâneur* or *flâneuse* (its feminine counterpart) (Elkin, 2016) due to limitations based on its inherent binarism. With this argument in mind we turn our attention to the feminist construct of *choraster* (Wearing & Wearing, 1996).

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We suggest that when someone moves around a city, they interact with the people and spaces they encounter and this is as central a part of their experience as Urry's (1990) 'gazing'. Tourists move through spaces, emotionally engaging with the physical dimensions, simultaneously experiencing and determining the contingent meanings of these spaces (Hayllar, Griffin, & Edwards, 2008a; Hayllar, Griffin, & Edwards, 2008b). Indeed, tourists often record their encounters and experiences with people and spaces using devices such as photography, diaries, travel blogs, social media sites such as Facebook, post-cards and emails home (Foltête & Litot, 2015; Lo, McKercher, Lo, Cheung, & Law, 2011; Munar & Jacobsen, 2014). Other research has been based around topics such as tourist types, tourist motivations, the interactions that occur between travellers, host destinations and the tourism industry. Much of this research has focused on impacts and outcomes in the context of local environments, economies, societies and cultures. We suggest, as does other more recent work that an examination of the nature of the tourist experience and how that experience evolves in the travel space requires a move to develop theoretical approaches that allow us to delve more deeply into the lived complexities of tourism experiences (see for example Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu, & Guo, 2016).

Hayllar et al. (2008a), Hayllar et al. (2008b) suggest that for a more in-depth analysis and understanding of the tourist in the city it is essential to consider their experiences, perceptions and activities in the context of the broader political, social and economic environments as these help create the travel experience. We would argue that tourism experiences need to be considered at both micro and macro levels and to achieve this we have sought to bring a stronger feminist analysis which has been used in other academic disciplines to provide stronger theoretical explanations and underpinnings at both a micro and macro level

This feminist analysis is able to develop a more nuanced and flexible understanding of the tourist experience of cities and to highlight ways in which different bodies of thought intersect to provide the basis for further research in exploring the tourism experience of the city. It has been argued that in researching cities attention should be focused on the "expectations, experience and behaviour of tourists within [urban] precincts" (Hayllar et al., 2008a; Hayllar et al., 2008b: 372). In order to achieve this there is a need to "turn to the experience of precincts amongst visitors and other consumers of 'place' ... [as] the experience of tourists within these spaces has been somewhat neglected" (Selby, Hayllar, & Griffin, 2008: 183). Further, to "understand the important features of experiencing tourism precincts, it has been necessary to consider tourists' entire 'mode of existence' in relation to the precinct" (Selby et al., 2008: 196). In summary, to understand the tourist experience to the level that integrates the individual experience and the influence of social relations and intersubjective knowledge, we need to provide a stronger theoretical base around the notion of the tourist experience.

In pursuing a stronger theoretical base we address the need for a move to a feminist approach and also for a critical turn in the theoretical understanding of the tourist experience of cities. Numerous authors have drawn our attention to a need for a gendered approach to theorisation in tourism studies (Bianchi, 2009; Bramwell & Lane, 2014; Butler, 2015; Franklin & Crang, 2001; Hall, Williams, & Lew, 2014 and Tribe, Dann, & Jamal, 2015) in order to provide a more complete understanding of tourism. To pursue this we draw on concepts from interactionist and post-structural feminist theory and explore the conceptualisation of the urban tourist as *flâneur*, revealing its limitations for theorising the urban tourism experience. We are also critical of the idea of the *flâneuse* (Elkin, 2016), a feminine form of *flâneur*, as we maintain that it does not provide for a critical turn in understanding but only resituates the underlying male bias and binarism (this argument can be aligned to the feminist critique of man/women which suggests the need for the a definition that is womyn, see Steinmetz, 1995). With this argument in mind we turn our attention to the feminist construct of *choraster* (Wearing & Wearing, 1996).

By incorporating a more feminised conceptualisation of theorizing the tourist experience, sociological analyses are expanded beyond frameworks which sometimes assume the tourist is a *flâneur*, an implicitly male wanderer in the environs and with a disassociated 'gaze', and also of the *flâneuse* (Elkin, 2016), the feminine form of the "*flâneur* [*flanne-euhr*]". We argue even the concept of the *flâneuse* still fails to sufficiently reveal an active engagement by the tourist in the city necessitating the introduction of the concept of the *choraster* to the analysis of the urban tourist experience. The *choraster* (the *choraster* is a person who practices place, who uses it, experiences it, and gives it social meaning, see Wearing & Wearing, 1996) better acknowledges the creative and interactive role of the tourist; who, we posit, experiences cities in a more complex way than previously constructed, incorporating all the senses as well as both the imagined and real (Wearing, Stevenson, & Young, 2010).

In achieving this we also challenge the reductive dualism of host-guest (e.g. disempowered host-empowered tourist) as Franklin and Crang (2001: 5) and Bianchi (2009) have done. We suggest conceptualising the tourist as *choraster* disrupts the dominant construct of the traveller to, and inhabitant of, a city as host-guest and tourist-resident. The concept of the creative, interactive *choraster* invites acknowledgement of the diverse relationships and complexities of the city and the urban tourist experience. The limitations of current work on tourism and cities (Kolb, 2006; Spirou, 2011) is that they are based on dichotomies of convenience; *choraster* assumes that power is multi-directional and not exclusively located with the tourist (Bianchi, 2009: 489; Cheong & Miller, 2000: 376; Wearing & Wearing, 2006). Further, by deconstructing the host-guest dualism we can accommodate the complex web of host-guest relationships that exist in contemporary cities; including, for example, diverse occupational structures where workers are brought in to the city from other areas or are themselves travellers, and the diversity of tourism types where we may have a volunteer tourist who lives in the city but stays elsewhere in that city whilst volunteering.

By reviewing the theoretical perspectives of Wearing and Wearing (1996) and linking this to Hayllar et al. (2008a), Hayllar et al. (2008b), and Edwards and Griffin (2013) this paper seeks to explore and link theoretical ideas that might enable the development of our understanding of this area and also couple these ideas to the practices of the tourist in exploring the

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