Tourist industry and migration

International migration and tourism have many things in common. To start with, both involve imaginaries about the world around us and involve explorations of new horizons in the most literal sense. In addition, both are forms of human mobility and are consequently subjected to a wide array of national or international rules and regulations. Finally, after landing, a host of what can be labelled integration issues may emerge: uprootedness, cultural misunderstandings, and even racism and exploitation; but there are also new political and economic opportunities, novel ways to interact with others, and the expansion of one's cultural horizons.

There are also differences between international migration and tourism: the time perspective being the first that comes to mind. While tourists move around for a relative short period, varying from a few days to a year or so at most, migrants move across borders for longer periods or even permanently. In addition, migrants move out to improve the quality of their lives or seek safety, something that typically involves the exploration of new economic opportunities, whereas tourists are trying to escape from their daily (work) routines and the pressures and stress that come with that; as a rule, tourists do not join the labour force in the country of destination (holiday workers being the exception). As permanent citizens, migrants usually enjoy more rights than tourists do, such as the right to work or set up a business, the right to home ownership, and sometimes even the right to vote and to stand for office. Finally, different infrastructures of reception have been established to cater to these two categories; the wide variety of hotels and restaurants, travel agents and tour operators are cases in point.

What is interesting is that migration and tourism sometimes interfere with each other, or even strengthen each other. Firstly, the 'sunset migration' of numerous *pensionados* from colder and wetter countries in the northern parts of Europe or the United States to areas with a more attractive climate such as France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Florida, often boils down to a much extended holiday. Secondly, what once started as a touristic trip may evolve into something different, due to the discovery that jobs or business opportunities are more readily available in the tourist destination, or the luck to find a new love or new life partner while travelling abroad. Thirdly, a great deal of the tourist industry is largely dependent on migrant labour. This is especially the case in the lower tiers of the tourist labour market in which many poorly educated, lower-class immigrants have found employment, for instance as chamber maids, bell boys, waiters, carriers, kitchen helps, cleaners and cab drivers. As tourism is highly seasonal, many of these jobs are flexible and precarious. Fourthly, migration and settlement may result in the formation of migrant communities that foster new forms of tourist traffic between the sending and receiving countries, or to other countries alike. An entrepreneurial ethnic niche may even proliferate to promote this, for example to facilitate the visits of Asian parents to their studying children in Canada, or to offer (hotel and catering) services to Chinese tourists using the Chinese infrastructure in the country of destination. The annual *hajj*, the pilgrimage of Muslim immigrants or minorities to the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia, is another case in point.

Fifthly, the presence of an ethnic infrastructure with spatially concentrated visible businesses may, under certain conditions, transform into a tourist attraction for co-ethnic and mainstream visitors alike. Traditional countries of immigration have long witnessed the emergence of Klein Deutschlands, Chinatowns, Koreatowns, Greektowns, Manillatowns, Little Italys, Little Turkeys, Little Odessas and Little Saigons. Many have meanwhile disappeared from the public eye, mostly following the assimilation of these immigrant minorities, but cities such as Jakarta, Calcutta, Manila and Mexico City in the Global South, and New York, San Francisco, Toronto, Vancouver, Perth and Sydney in the Global North, still feature such districts or precincts amongst their leading tourist attractions. Once the run-down neighbourhoods of the marginalized, these spatial and commercial expressions of ethnic diversity are now promoted in colourful visitors' guides and websites. Increasingly, we are witnessing such developments in recent countries of immigration too. There we can observe the rise of ethnic neighbourhoods – notably their shopping areas – as sites for urban

tourism, leisure and consumption. Brick Lane (Banglatown) in London, Kreuzberg (Klein Istanbul) in Berlin, la rue du Faubourg Saint Denis (Quartier Indien) in Paris, and the Zeedijk (Chinatown) in Amsterdam, are just a few examples of such districts that attract numerous visitors from all corners of the world.

Authors theorizing about the commodification of ethnic diversity tend to conceive such developments in terms of ethnic enclave development. According to them, these districts function as migration hubs and as spatial manifestations of ethnic identity and binding, partly due to continued racist exclusion and social marginality, and partly due to the mobilization of (transnational) ethno-social networks and the concomitant rise of other mutual support systems. The development of such ethnic enclaves would typically start with the appropriation of otherwise unattractive urban places. Those places would gradually become ethnically inscribed, partly due to the migrants' entrepreneurial drive, and evolve into residential and commercial nodal points of the migrant community concerned. Theoretically, the emergence of such spaces would be conceived of in terms of minority–majority relations and as a stepping stone in an assimilationist trajectory of sorts.

While varieties of such a perspective may be fairly popular, there are empirical flaws and theoretical problems. As for the latter, the theory is biased towards ethnic group thinking, ignoring other structural determinants and processes. It can namely be argued that such ethnic districts are first of all economic spaces – or more specifically, themed shopping areas – in which different types of entrepreneurs compete with each other for a piece of the pie and the right to leave a mark. Such a theoretical orientation is for example rooted in the mixed embeddedness approach which emphasizes the interplay between (ethnic) entrepreneurs and their resources, the development of economic markets and concomitant emergence (or disappearance) of opportunities, and especially the way in which state and non-state regulatory forces affect those markets and their accessibility. Business opportunities – including the proliferation of ethnically themed shopping areas – are to be explained by the interaction of these components. These processes do not only involve other small entrepreneurs – mainstream and ethnic minority entrepreneurs alike – but also the city, housing associations and other institutional actors. Also, they have spatial dimensions as ethnic diversity, economic development and urban regeneration articulate in spatially confined areas. Theoretically, therefore, it does not suffice to analyse the emergence of these spaces in terms of minority–majority relations, as this is first and foremost about urban economic development. And such, developments are always embedded in wider social, political and economic relations.

Conditions that may propel such tourist economies include the 'right' supply of cultural markers (familiar exotica). In the case of Chinatowns, one can think of the numerous restaurants and grocery shops, on the one hand; and signage in Chinese characters, the colour red, a gate, sculptures of lions, red balloons, particular sounds and smells, and a set of other architectural elements, on the other hand. Districts that serve as nodal points of ethnic social networks and that consequently have a lot of traffic on the streets may also enhance sentiments of authenticity, whatever they may be, which is often seen as a pull factor. Another important condition pertains to the position of the district in the wider economy. Being connected to a larger urban tourism and entertainment industry, in which the festivalization of urban spaces is being appreciated, most likely serves to boost the commodification of ethnic diversity. In the same vein, regulation must be favourable to, or at least not negatively interfere in, the ethnic district economy; that is, rules and regulations with regard to accessibility, cleanliness, safety, zoning, and so forth. It goes without saying that marketing matters as well, and not just the marketing of individual businesses. Sharon Zukin (1995) has pointed to what she calls, a 'critical infrastructure' of individuals and institutions that connect cultural production and consumption. It comprises a broad spectrum of connoisseurs, cultural mediators and marketing bureaus, business associations, tourist boards, and parts of the national and local governments, and is capable of influencing public taste and the popularity of cultural products. In the end of the day, these are the actors that entice consumers to engage in cultural consumption and in tourism.

But there are also risks involved. These forms of place promotion may reduce multiculturalism to the (economic) consumption of a sanitized ethnic Other and may also

reinforce stereotypes about them. Also, the commodification of ethnic diversity may be interpreted as cases of cultural appropriation, or even as a challenge to the ethnic minority's autonomy and purity. Moreover, new social divisions may emerge or existing ones be deepened in the form of cleavages and strife within and between ethnic groups. Next, the commercial success of these tourist activities may induce a gentrification of sorts, which may subsequently affect the ethnic character of the district, and undermine the very existence of the ethnic tourist economy. Another risk pertains to the uniformization of ethnic diversity. The spatial manifestation of these types of diversity can at some point become rather predictable, and therefore dull and unattractive.

Finally, there are risks related to the governance. As has been stated, the regulation of these local economies needs to be favourable, although too often municipalities and other governing bodies confine themselves to lip service. But as well as such underregulation, there can be overregulation. In various cities, such as Vancouver, Sydney and Melbourne, the very existence of these ethnic districts, their historical significance, and their potential for the tourist economy, has been protected by a set of zoning laws. But the result is to some extent a disruption of natural economic-geographic processes, and the fossilization of urban landscapes. Any change, any new building or structure, needs to fit particular historical imaginaries, and this may hinder a further expansion of ethnic business activities or the emergence of new lines of business.

Last but not least, the biggest risks for the commodification of ethnic districts are integration and assimilation, and the upward social mobility of the immigrant ethnic minorities concerned. Such processes, that are quite likely to occur, will usually result in the gradual disappearance of the ethnic district, and the tourist economy that proliferated in that particular space.

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