

# Alienation, a Concept for Understanding Tourism

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# **Alienation, a Concept for Understanding Tourism**

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## **Purpose of study**

Alienation is one of the most influential and widely debated topics over the twentieth century (Musto, 2010). Whereas it has its definition in many disciplines and takes a critical role in many disciplines, alienation has not received enough attention from tourism scholars to date. Few studies have referred to this concept in tourism studies; among the very few, some of them simply mention alienation as a word rather than add it as a theory. Furthermore, alienation is long considered being the opposite of authenticity (Heidegger, 1962; Ballard, 1990; Butt & Willinsky, 1990; Rae, 2010; Schmid, 2005), a concept that has influenced tourism studies for more than three decades. Introduce alienation theory to tourism context in the sense that authenticity has been so broadly adopted and discussed. The theory will further supplement the theoretical diversity of current tourism knowledge.

By analyzing the existing scholarship of alienation from both mainstream and tourism studies, the article attempt to bring alienation into the discourse of tourism and shows the way of how alienation as a framework relevant to the tourism world. From the perspectives of political economy and existentialist philosophy, the article will focus on how authenticity and alienation linked with each other in the context of travel and tourism development, and what knowledge alienation as an independent concept will add to tourism scholarship.

## **Literature review**

Alienation has its root in scholarly work of antiquity(Geyer, 1996), but was highlighted and theorized by young Marx in the 1800s. Derived from philosophical and theological contexts, alienation took its modern concept in Marx's (1972[1844]) early work and turned out to be a key theory in sociological inquiry. It has unfolded as a central topic of the three founders of sociology: Marx, Weber and Durkheim (Seeman, 1959). Seeman (1959), a predominant figure known for his studies on alienation, quoted Kahler (1957) by stating that "the history of man could very well be written as a history of the alienation of man."

Since the 1990s, a new round of debate on alienation has emerged in resonance with the new reality of the world. The advent of the post-modern society has created new sources of alienation, leading to various modern forms of alienation on individual and collective basis. Scholars are increasingly focusing on how the features of post-modernity, such as the postmodernism and ethnicity (Geyer, 1996), globalization (Archibald, 2009), terrorism (Mazarr, 2004), neo-liberalism (Harvie, 2000), and etc., exert influence on alienation. These new forms of alienation are felt by a small and growing minority (Graham, 2001). Whereas, the "classic" forms of alienation, i.e. labor alienation in work settings, are still prevalent, although with more emphasis in third world countries(Meijer, 2000).

Empirical studies on alienation draw inspiration from social psychology and extend the knowledge of alienation to a new territory. Social psychologists that show interest in this topic devote their efforts to administer their scales and chart the degree of alienation among different subgroups (kanungo, 1982). Mainly guided by Seeman (1975)'s framework (Table, 1), a plethora

of empirical studies were conducted to evaluate the degree of alienation of various underprivileged groups with the aid of various attitude scales (Nettler, 1957; Clark, 1959; Dean, 1961; Pearlen, 1962; Seeman, 1967; Burbach, 1972; Ray, 1982;). Alienation of different professionals was examined, such as blue-collar workers (Aiken & Hage, 1966), system analysts (Brill, 1974), white-collar workers (Kirsch & Lengermann, 1972) and other samples of America in general (Reich, 1970). Causative and contributing factors (Brown, 1970), manifestations (Brill, 1974) and means of reducing alienation (Walton, 1972) have been discussed. Contemporary studies concerning alienation direct to a new research field embodied by the study of Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS) (Baker, 2007; Kelly & Johnston, 2001), a new concept coined by Gardner (1998) indicating a syndrome of childhood disorder that arises in the context of child-custody disputes.

As outlined above, since the publication of Marx's thesis the concept has been a prevalent in the social sciences and was focused by numerous great scholars. Although the popularity of alienation varies over time, the concept is still relevant to the postmodern technological world and accordingly a new wave of alienation studies is emerging.

### **Proposed conceptual contribution**

Several usages of alienation in tourism settings deal with alienation and authenticity. MacCannell (1976), as the first tourism scholar outlining alienation (Korstanje, 2009), connected alienation with authenticity in his classic work: *The Tourist: A New Theory of The Leisure Class*.

In the book, MacCannell (1976) proposed two forms of alienation in modern society mainly from two different resources: one is Marx's classical alienation of workers technically caused by the division of labor and the ownership of private property; the other refers to the alienation of individuals "interested only in the model or the life-style, not in the life it represents" (p, 32), which was a result of cultural production of modern community. The former inherited from industrial society and the later modernity. Disagreeing with Boorstin's (1961) "pseudo-event", MacCannell believed that it was the feeling of alienation that has as its result a longing for authenticity and wholeness beyond the day-to-day of routine work and daily environment. However, given that sightseers have allegedly failed to penetrate the real life of a given place they visit, MacCannell (1976) pessimistically concluded that alienation could not be alleviated by travel. In contrary, "the alienation of the worker stops where the alienation of the sightseer begins." (p, 6) He further criticized tourist as "an early postmodern figure, alienated but seeking fulfillment in their own alienation---nomadic, placeless, a kind of subjectivity without spirit, a 'dead subject'". (p, xvi)

After MacCannell, some scholars took alienation as a form of motivation and related it positively to the quest for authenticity (Cohen, 1979; Mellinger, 1994;Olsen, 2002). For Dann (1977), alienation is the embodiment of anomie which is one motivation of travel. Cohen (1988) further theoretically developed the connection between alienation and authenticity. He treats the pursuit of authenticity in tourists as a reflection of their alienation from artificial and machine-made products. However, he argued that the extent of alienation and people's awareness of alienation was unequally distributed. Some people felt more alienated from the society than others. For instance, he claimed that "Curators, ethnographers, and anthropologists" alike are generally more alienated or more aware of their alienation. On the other hand, he believes, the rank-and-file middle classes or lower middle classes are less alienated since they still strive to attain the material gains in the real world.

Some other scholars, however holding a critical viewpoint, agreed with the failure of tourism's function in de-alienation. Watson & Kopachevsky (1994) maintained that "the sense of

alienation seems to follow the travelers into their touristic adventures.” (p, 649) He proposed that the alienation was a form of restricted choices framed by a "staged" consumption pattern. Hamilton-Smith (1987), by dividing tourists into four categories, point out there existed a group of tourists in whole alienation condition –“with no sense of personal and intrinsic satisfaction, freedom, or involvement, no structural rewards, need to complete anything, or even the standing of being seen as ‘work’.” (p, 341). Butler (1990) treated alienation one of major problems of tourism development alongside price rises (labor, goods, taxes, land, etc.), change in local attitudes and behavior, and pressure on people, crowding, disturbance and others.

### **Expected outcomes**

In light of both the mainstream alienation theory and the so-far usage of alienation and authenticity in tourism settings, a framework can be sketched to guide as well as call for future studies on this topic.

First of all, the relations of consumption and production in tourism system are viewed and analyzed. On the dichotomy, it is believed that consumption was more considered relevant to tourism phenomenon. Watson and Kopachevsky (1994) have argued that “modern tourism is best understood in the context of the commodification process and contemporary consumer culture” (p. 657). Tourism production, on the other hand, has been less thought of and a relatively neglected area (Agarwa, et al, 2000). However, consumption and production are components of integration and the paper will suggest that both alienation and authenticity go through the whole process of production and consumption in tourism settings.

Second, consumption and production is believed as one of the dialectical characteristics of authenticity and alienation. This dialectical component was in another way addressed by Wang (1999) who in his paper synthesized the past progress of authenticity in tourism studies and divided the whole authenticity into objective, constructive, and existential authenticity. On the other hand, going back into the history of alienation, a trend is generally agreed on that, with the advancement of capitalism, alienation was turning into a state of consumption from the original state of production on which Marx’s theory has been largely based (Baudrillard, 1970; Adorno, 1991). Given the centrality of consumption in postmodern society, alienation on production side has been overlooked and deserves a new close scrutiny.

Third, alienation and authenticity focus on different aspects. Authenticity had been more focusing on cultural and symbolic aspects of toured objects and travel experiences, while alienation inclined to the social and economic construction of tourism. Thus, alienation linked itself to the issues of tourism development and the context of contemporary global economic and political processes. In this respect, alienation might be more applicable than authenticity and leads to more managerial implications for tourism industry.

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**Table1: Seeman's Six Dimensions of Alienation**

Dimensions	Descriptions
Powerlessness	The sense of low control vs. mastery over events
Meaninglessness	The sense of incomprehensibility vs. understanding of personal and social affairs
Normlessness	High expectancies for socially approved means vs conventional means for the achievement of given goals
Cultural-estrangement	Called value isolation in an earlier version; the individual's rejection of commonly held values in the society (or subsector) vs. commitment to the prevalent group standards
Self-estrangement	The individual's engagement in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding vs. involvement in a task or activity for its own sake
Social isolation	The sense of exclusion or rejection vs. social acceptance