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# Between Attraction and Tourist Trap – Cultural Tourism Dilemmas in the 21st Century

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries we should note some essential shifts in the sphere of tourism. These chiefly derive from conditions external to tourism itself. This includes constantly arising changes in society, and observable trends – whether these are economic, social, or in lifestyle, they have a major impact on tourism. It is of immeasurable importance for the tourism sector to register these shifts promptly. The available strategies, including tourist products, services, marketing and investments in tourism, require relevant adjustment when clients' preferences or behavior begin moving in a new direction.[1]

The evolutionary path involves exchanging the "old," traditional model of tourism, defined by the three S's (*Sun, Sea, Sand*) for a new one, defined by the three E's (*Entertainment, Excitement, Education*)*.* Cultural tourism fits into this new model. UN WTO confirms that cultural tourism makes up 37% of world tourism, and is growing fast (Richards 2001). We can now speak of a cultural tourism phenomenon (Rohrscheidt 2008).  For the contemporary tourist, leaving his domicile means having a chance to develop his interests, meet new people, visit monuments and museums, take part in cultural events, festivals, and concerts, in other words, to increase the level of his own cultural development.[2]

Tourist attractions are one of the main objectives of a tourist's journey. According to Tourism Institute[3] research, they are the foremost goal of tourist trips to Poland. Almost half

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[1] The European Tourist Commission, Future Trends in Tourism, see: http://www.etc-corporate.org/ info@etc-corporate.org

[2] *Kultura i turystyka – razem czy osobno*. A collective work edited by A. Stasiak, WSTH Publishers, Łódź 2007, p. 5 and onward.

[3] T. Dziedzic. Survey research on the social profile of tourists visiting Poland (cities and tourist attractions). Research report, Tourism Institute, Warsaw 2005,

(45.2%) of Poland's visitors declare sightseeing to be the main aim of their trip. It is only in second place that we find relaxation, which means that monuments, museums, and cultural events are of increasing importance in creating cultural tourism products.

## 1. Tourist Attractions – A Review of Definitions and Division of Attractions

Cohen introduced the notion of "tourist attraction" to the professional literature in 1972. Since then, many definitions of this phenomenon have come about.[4] Lundberg defines attractions succinctly, as "whatever interests tourists" (Lundberg, 1985); this notion of attractions matches our concept of the virtues of sightseeing. Goodall describes attractions more colorfully, as "characteristic places, often unique, such as a natural environment, a historical monument, or such events as festivals or sports matches" (Goodall, 1990).

The notion of "tourist attractions" is thus wide ranging, including not only nature and culture, but also price ranges, the attitude of the locals toward tourists and tourism, the tourist set-up and the whole of the technical infrastructure (Podemski, 2004).

The systematic definition by McCannell brings a great deal into the discussion (MacCannell 2002). In his view, a tourist attraction is an empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight, and a marker (information concerning the place). This empirical relationship can be presented in the following way[5]:

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***Tourist –> Sight (Marker) –> ATTRACTION***

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The sight or object becomes an attraction only when the marker is added. Markers can generate information in various ways: through guidebooks, signboards, slides, readings etc. The role of the marker may be to promote the object, as promotion and advertisement are factors which create ever-new attractions. Markers play an essential role – attractions are often indistinguishable from less famous sights if they are not marked; a layman could not tell the difference between a moon rock brought to earth by astronauts and an ordinary

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[4] Tourist attractions have caught on in tourism practice; attractions have flooded the world, and the Google search engine lists over 12 million web pages that feature the phrase "tourist attraction" in English.

rock in a glass case based on appearance alone. The most developed form of markers are the various forms of heritage interpretations facilitating the reception of an attraction.

J. Swarbrooke (1995) proposes the division of attractions into four groups:

➢ natural tourist attractions,

➢ man-made creations which were not built to draw tourists, but which over time became attractions in themselves,

➢ places built and designed for tourists from their inception. Fun parks are an example of this. In 2007 these were visited by over 180 million people.[6]

➢ cultural, sports, and religious events, festivals, Olympic games etc.

Another classification Swarbrooke suggests is the division between **basic attractions** (the main reason we make the journey and where we spend most of our time) and **second-rung** – the "roadside attractions." Attractions can also vary in terms of their owner, scope, number of visitors, location, size, and also the potential visitors and their expectations.

The popular "Wikipedia" site created by Internet users defines "tourist attraction" as a place visited by domestic and foreign tourists, and adds definitions of what places these are. Apart from the above-listed attractions linked with cultural heritage and natural wonders, unusual sites are mentioned (e.g. skyscrapers), supernatural events (e.g. UFOs, Loch Ness, ghosts) and many others. The term "visitor attraction" is also used to define places aimed at visitors, i.e. a broader category of temporary migration than tourists.

The process by which **"tourist traps"** – sites and activities meant to draw money from tourists (Kruczek 2009) – have come to be deserves a closer look. Apart from recognized attractions, such as Niagara Falls or Monument Valley National Park, there have also evolved numberless kitschy sights – wax statue museums, houses filled with figures from well-known horror films, or with dubious exhibits once belonging to Elvis Presley or fairy-tale figures. These attractions often have accompanying merchandise – from food and hotel services, to a monstrous trade in souvenirs. The largest concentration of tourist traps is in the world's gambling capital, Las Vegas. And right before our eyes, a new world tourism center – Dubai – is being created in the United Arab Emirates, studded with countless traps.

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[5] See: Kruczek Z., *Methods for Studying Tourist Attractions, Tourism in Scientific Research*, Krakow – Rzeszów, 2005

Las Vegas – interior of the Venetian Hotel (photo Z. Kruczek)

What differentiates a tourist attraction from a trap? The essence of the tourist trap is in the following attributes:

- it should draw tourists at all costs,

- it appeals to primitive tastes,

- the tourist trap is kitsch, a site or event with no cultural value, or situated in the sphere of low culture,

- the aim of the trap is to draw money from the tourist,

- products based on traps are the opposite of the notion of "cultural tourism"

"Haunted attractions" are the personification of kitsch, and play on visitors' emotions. Examples of these are entertainment options such as "haunted houses," "dark rides," or "shooting dark rides." The owners of these blood-curdling attractions vie with one another to invent the most terrifying and repulsive scenes, and to scare their guests as much as possible. To this end they use the latest technological marvels, including computer animation, and animatronic, computer-run figures and scenes. *Son-et-lumière* effects are an indispensable part of the route, and many of the ghosts, vampires and blood-soaked victims

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[6] "Fun Park Ranking." In: *Atrakcje. Magazyn czasu wolnego*, no. 3/2008 pp. 8-9.

are played by hired actors. The guest often participates in the event.

What explains the popularity of these dreadful, kitschy attractions? This might be explained through an analysis of human response psychology. Fear is an inborn emotional response that occurs in a situation of real, recognizable danger, accompanied by defined physiological reactions. The effect of fear on our body differs depending on whether the danger that occurs is unpredictable, and when we consciously choose to feel this emotion. With these "horror attractions" we know that it will be terrible, and also that the horror won't last long, that nothing will happen to us. This is a special sort of entertainment, which – like extreme sports or roller-coaster rides – releases adrenaline, measured doses of which (some claim) are essential for normal functioning, as is the case with stress.

The creation of a "trap" requires many organizational tactics, a creative program and technical support. This is an advanced stage of activity, including:

- the creation of animations, scenes, and animatronic figures,[7]
- the use of costumes and interior arrangements,
- the assignment of roles to actors,
- ensuring safety to guests and to personnel,
- promotion,
- ticket sales organization,
- updating or building a web page,
- fire safety and lighting installation etc.

These haunted houses sometimes use old ruins, buildings, and prisons, which they set up for ghost-hunting and macabre scenes. In America, the belief is that if people pay to be frightened, then there is money to be earned. The average profit-geared haunted house is a family environment, with an average attendance of 8000 guests, who pay around 13 dollars for a ticket, and much more than that for sweets, costumes and scary merchandise. It is

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[7] A concept taken from cinematography, meaning the creation of special effects, based on steering dummies and other inanimate creatures with electronic devices.

estimated that Americans shell out around seven billion dollars on candies and gadgets for Halloween every year. For many entrepreneurs, a week's work at haunted houses during the Halloween period covers their salary for the rest of the year.

The first "dark rides" were invented in America, and were part of the classic fun parks as "tunnels of love." They are called "dark" rides because they always take place inside buildings. The interiors are often illuminated with black light. In fact, every large fun park in the USA and in Europe has its own "dark ride" attractions. Most of Disneyland's original attractions were "dark rides," and the list now includes "Pirates of the Caribbean," "It's a Small World," and "Peter Pan's Adventure." In the USA – the home of the tourist trap – there are over 1,200 haunted houses organized at family entertainment centers, 300 scary attractions in fun parks, and over 3,000 similar sites in charity organizations. The American companies are unbeatable when it comes to frights during the Halloween season, and such entertainment parks as Universal in Orlando with its "Horror Night" or Disney's "Magical Halloween" are the best examples of this sort of entertainment. These are prime examples of the phrase "tourist trap."

On the British Isles things look much the same. The main recreation business undertakings in this sort of entertainment are:

- "5$^{th}$ Dimension" at Chessington Park World of Adventures,
- the "Haunted House" in Alton Towers,
- the "Ghost Train" at Blackpool Pleasure Beach

Producers in the "Haunted attractions" line of work create countless quantities of terrifying bloody masks, gadgets and costumes. This is a massive market of entrepreneurs and consumers, and the demand for this type of service is continually on the rise. Plans are already underway to build a theme park in Romania entirely devoted to the most famous of vampires, Count Dracula.

"Tourist traps" are institutions that specialize in separating tourists from their money. These strategies include:

- casinos,

- miniature parks,

- inauthentic attractions,

- copies of famous objects elevated to the status of attractions on the basis of their image (according to MacCanell, the final step in making something sacred).

Considering that cultural tourism is based on original, authentic sites and virtues, the process by which miniature park is created makes it a tourist trap. Instead of looking at the authentic object itself, we admire its image, stripped of its geographical and cultural surroundings.

The history of miniature parks reaches back to the beginnings of the 20th century, when single architecture or train miniatures began to appear on private properties. In 1929 the first miniature park came to be – Bekonscot Model Village in Great Britain – presenting the beauty and atmosphere of the English villages. In 1952 the second commercial miniature park was made: Madurodam, i.e. Holland in miniature. This park chiefly concentrated on the most attractive buildings of Holland. In the years that followed, practically every European state had its own public miniature parks. Among the most well known are: Italia in Miniature near Rimini, and in Poland, Pobiedziska (Wielkopolska), Kowary (Dolny Śląsk), the Jurassic Park in Bałtów, and Inwałd near Wadowice, where the "World of Dreams" miniature park was recently created.[8]

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[8] G. Micuła, "Miniature park in Inwałd," *Atrakcje. Magazyn Czasu Wolnego*, no. 3/2008 p. 16

Miniature Park in Inwałd ([www.parkminiatur.com](www.parkminiatur.com))

The Wild West towns in Poland are much the same. We find them presently in Karpacz, Kosina in the Lubuski Township, Łeb, Sosnowa Góra (near Płońsk), Warsaw, Tuszyna (near Łódź) and in Rudnik (near Grudziądz). These are entirely foreign cultural intrusions, tasteless entertainment imported directly from the world of American Westerns.

The same category of tourist traps can be used to describe the creation of copies of the world's recognized works of art, monuments, and buildings. A Sheik in Dubai has created a copy of the famous Chinese terracotta army, and in Świebodzina a copy of the famous Christ the Savior monument from Rio de Janeiro is being made.[9] The copy of the monument in Świebodzina will be 33 meters high, making it taller than the original. Why 33 meters? The height of the monument is meant to allude to the length of Christ's life. If we add on the mound, his height will exceed 50 meters. His crown has a diameter of 3 meters. It will be

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[9] The monument in Rio de Janeiro, whose value as a work of art is considered dubious, was even inscribed on the list of the seven new wonders of the world after the President appealed to the nation, encouraging them to collectively vote for this object with their text messages and e-mails in the ranking competition.

entirely covered in gold. The monument will be visible from over a dozen kilometers away, and in good weather, even from Zielona Góra, i.e. from a distance of 42 kilometers.

A similar trap is made in rooting out exceptional spots on the globe. Poles, tropics, the equator, the furthest ends of continents or the highest points on the globe no longer suffice. In the USA a peculiar attraction has been invented – a trap made out of the only point of convergence of four states – Utah, New Mexico, Colorado and Arizona. This place has been named "Four Corner," and has of course been specially marked and put on display. Standing on a special circle, the tourist can twist his/her body into such a position that every hand and foot is in a separate state for a souvenir photograph (young Afro-American and Native children do this best). This has become a merchandise site (with souvenirs and services, casino and recreation center) operated by Navaho people, who draw gigantic profits from this trap.



Four Corners in the USA (photo: Z. Kruczek)

The basic dilemma of cultural tourism (owing to the above examples of tourist traps,

which have reached mass proportions) is whether the creators of these attractions and tourist offers are meant to cultivate trash, kitsch and low culture – because this is what sells and can turn a profit – or if cultural tourism should be geared toward creating valuable tourist products on the basis of real attractions, aimed at consumers of "high culture." There is probably no way to avoid the further development of tourist traps, and yet surely we ought to be supporting the creation of valuable, authentic products of cultural tourism. An enormous role is played in this by tourism organizers, who are interested in creating new attractions and new products, local governments who earn on these novelties, and above all, the institutions responsible for both cultural and tourism policies in various countries and regions.

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