

# *Tourism, economic development and the global–local nexus: theory embracing complexity*

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## Abstract

In this paper we review the complex links that exist between the tourism industry and processes of economic development. A brief overview of the industry's economic role at the international and national scale leads us into a discussion of local and regional involvement in the tourism industry. We emphasize the need to develop a more rigorous understanding of the evolving tourism industry and how it influences processes of local economic development. Following a review of the major theoretical frameworks that have been applied to help us understand these processes, we highlight the ways in which current attempts to understand the links between tourism and economic development are embracing the complexity of the industry and its influence on everyday lives. We advocate 'new' ways of seeing and studying the economics of tourism geography, ways that reflect the cultural turn in the 'new' economic geography, and the increasing significance of networks and new information and communication technologies. We argue that a willingness to embrace complexity is essential if we are to unpack the 'glocal' nature of tourism development processes.

*Keywords:* economic development, globalization, regulation theory, new economic geography, complexity

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## Introduction

In this paper we review attempts to theorize the complex links that exist between the tourism industry and processes of economic development. We take the reader on a brief trip through the theoretical terrain of the past three decades and conclude with a discussion of the 'new' economic geography of tourism, in which cultural and economic boundaries are being transcended across a variety of scales.

Our discussion begins by underscoring the rise and increasing importance of tourism – locally and globally. A brief overview of the industry's economic role at the international and national scale leads us into a discussion of local and regional involvement in the tourism industry. We argue that communities and individuals that depend on tourism are faced with an over-arching problem: how can the industry be developed while also ensuring that local quality of life is maintained. In particular we are interested in how local economies can thrive, and unique socio-cultural and environmental resources survive, in a globalized environment.

We emphasize the need to develop a more rigorous understanding of the evolving tourism industry and how it influences processes of local economic development. We present a brief review of theoretical frameworks developed during the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on dependency, life-cycle and community approaches. We then analyse the influence of the so-called 'new political economy' (Teague 1990) that began to permeate the tourism literature during the early 1990s. We then highlight the ways in which current attempts to understand the links between tourism and economic development are embracing the complexity of the industry and its influence on everyday lives. We advocate 'new' ways of seeing and studying the economics of tourism geography, ways that reflect the cultural turn in the 'new' economic geography, and the increasing significance of networks and new information and communication technologies (ICTs). We argue that the cultural analysis of economic relations, and a willingness to embrace complexity, are essential if we are to unpack the 'glocal' (Swyngedouw 2000) nature of tourism development processes. It is only by embedding our understanding of the tourism economy in its broader cultural context that we can understand the economic role of tourism at global, local and intermediate scales.

### Tourism: from the global to the local

There can be no denying that tourism is a major global economic force. Hardly a day goes by without a new pronouncement about the wider significance of what many call the world's largest industry. International tourism has grown substantially in recent decades, with technological

improvements, rising living standards and broader processes of globalization leading to rapid increases in visitor numbers. Receipts from international tourism rose from US\$2.1 billion in 1950 to US\$445 billion in 1998. During the same period international tourist arrivals rose from 25.3 million to 625 million. In 1999, tourism generated some US\$3.5 trillion of GDP and almost 200 million jobs across the world economy.

World tourism GDP is forecast to increase in real terms by 3.0 percent per annum in the decade to 2010. As a result, the industry's share of world GDP will rise from 10.5 percent in 1990 to 11.4 percent by the end of 2005. In the same period, employment is expected to grow at 2.6 percent per annum. This equates to creation of over 5.5 million jobs per year over the first decade of the new century (WTO 2000; WTTC 2000). In its long-term growth forecast document, *Tourism: 2020 Vision*, the WTO (1999) predicts that the tourism sector will expand by an average of 4.1 percent a year over the next two decades, surpassing a total of 1 billion international travellers by the year 2010, and reaching 1.6 billion by the year 2020.

The economic and societal significance of tourism varies dramatically across the global stage. Twenty rich nations (17 European, USA, Canada and Japan) accounted for 81.8 percent of all tourist expenditure in 1995, with five nations (USA, Japan, Germany, the UK and France) accounting for almost half of all spending (WTO 1998). While the growth of international tourism from nations like China and Brazil is significant, there seems little likelihood that this uneven global division of expenditure will change dramatically in the near future (see WTTC/WEFA; WTO 1999, 2000).

Despite the relatively strong performance of the tourism industry in many western nations, most are characterized by travel account balances that are in deficit. With residents from developed economies generating the bulk of international tourist expenditure, it is not surprising that the travel account balance in developing economies has been persistently in surplus, widening from US\$4.6 billion in 1980 to US\$33.7 billion in 1989 and US\$62.2 billion in 1997. Indeed, it is estimated that in 1997 the travel account surplus in the developing world offset more than two-thirds of its accumulated current budget deficit (WTTC 2000; WTO 1999).

A key issue is the way in which these processes of global tourism expansion, uneven development and, in some cases, retraction, play themselves out at the sub-national levels of regions and communities. Urban communities and rural settlements are all influenced by tourism to some degree and also play important roles in shaping the structure and nature of the industry. To help us conceptualize the links that exist between the global and the local we adopt the notion of the global–local nexus (Alger 1988) (see Figure 1). We argue that it is essential to look carefully at how interactions between the global and the local shape development outcomes for individuals, households, communities and regions. Tourism, in simple terms, must be viewed as a transaction process which is at once driven

by the global priorities of multi-national corporations, geo-political forces and broader forces of economic change, and the complexities of the local – where residents, visitors, workers, governments and entrepreneurs interact at the industry ‘coal-face’.

At the global scale tourism’s development outcomes are influenced by broad-based economic change, evolving structures of corporate governance and the unrelenting evolutionary pressures of demographics and technological change. Global institutions, such as the IMF and World Bank, play a vital role in shaping the economic environment for tourism investment and development in much of the world (Mowforth and Munt 1998). Multi-national trade bloc formation drives increases in business and leisure travel as restrictions to trade and human movements are relaxed. At the same time it is the transnational corporation that stands astride the global economy as the dominant form of enterprise in both the tourism industry and other sectors.

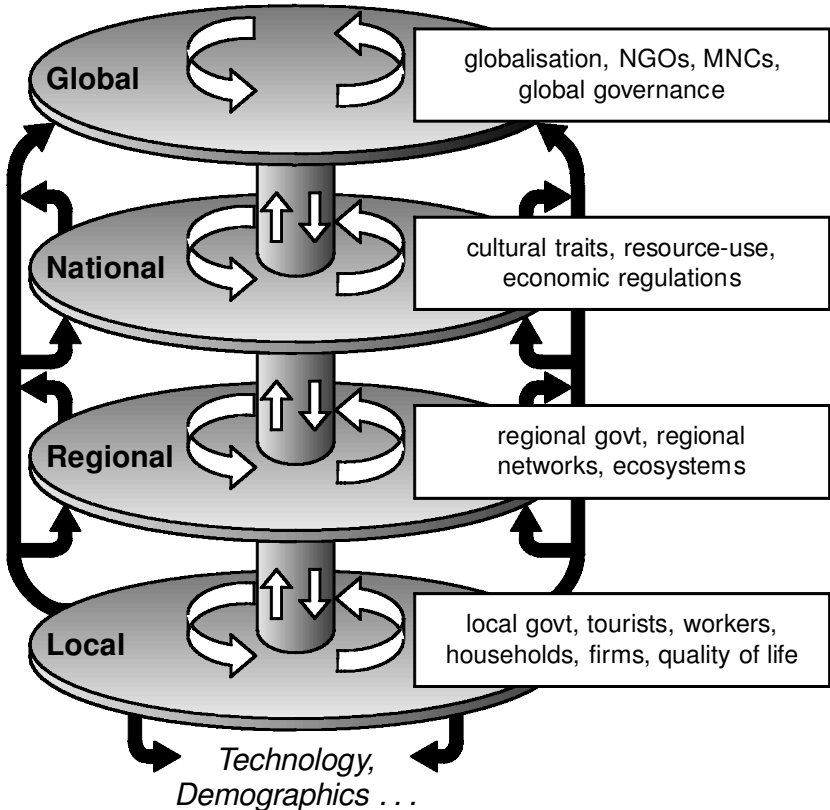


Figure 1 Tourism and the global–local nexus.

It is impossible to understand the global–local nexus unless we examine the prevailing discourse on internationalization and globalization (Hirst & Thompson 1999; Hutton & Giddens 2000; Peck 2000: 69). Peck (2000: 69) is highly critical of what he calls the prevailing conception of globalization in the business literature: ‘In this hyper-globalized world, transnational corporations call the shots, labour has to learn to be “realistic” and (globally) competitive, and the nation state shrinks to insignificance, both as a unit of analysis and as a political agent’. He argues that this notion of globalization is too simplistic and reduces the role of nations to one of de- and re-regulatory facilitation. At the same time regions and localities are discussed in terms of ‘learning networks’ and ‘reflexive institution forms’ and are simply, he argues, viewed as vital competitive assets on the supply side of the global economy (see also Swyngedouw 2000).

At the national scale macro-economic policy frameworks, infrastructure provision and issues of socio-cultural cohesion play a vital role in influencing tourism’s development outcomes. Some commentators argue that the role of the nation state has diminished as the ‘stateless’ multinational corporation has come to dominate global economic affairs and neo-liberal policies have led to a retreat of the welfare state (for a useful review and critique see Hirst & Thompson 1999). We argue, however, that the national scale remains significant to any understanding of tourism’s development outcomes. What is seen by many as a wholesale retreat, is argued by others to be more of a qualitative reorganization of structural capacities and strategic emphases (Amin & Thrift 1997). Indeed, from a tourism perspective national governments often appear to be playing a more active role in coordinating the tourism marketing campaigns and broad-based product development that play such an important role in shaping tourism demand and behaviour.

In recent decades the region has been seen to be an increasingly vital component in the global–local context of development (Storper 1997: 3). Notions of regions stimulating economic growth through a mixture of inter-firm networks, and cultural/political attributes have dominated much of the social science discourse on economic development since the early 1980s (Amin 1989; Sayer 1995). The Third Italy and Silicon Valley are known the world over as ‘smart regions’ that have managed to create the right mix of circumstances to enable economic growth. In tourism too the region has become seen as an important driving force in linking disparate segments of the industry and enabling destination networks to form (see Milne 1998). It is also, of course, true to say that many of the natural and cultural resources upon which the industry depends are regional in nature – ranging from complex ecosystems through to patterns of culture and economic identity.

Since the early 1980s the community level has also been viewed more seriously as a key factor in influencing economic development outcomes.

Community is of vital importance as an intermediate level of social life between the personal (individual/family) and impersonal (global/institutional). Community structures built around modernist cultural identity, architectures and work practices are frequently depicted as being in decay. The 'breakdown' of community is often highlighted by the media as being at the forefront of growing problems of lawlessness and family dissolution. Indeed, during the 1990s many governments placed community at the centre of attempts to create economic regeneration and remedy social ills. The theoretical underpinnings of such initiatives can be found in the work of the 'communitarian' movement, where scholars such as Amitai Etzioni (1995, 1997) have challenged the atomizing nature of free market liberal economics and its detrimental consequences for socio-economic well-being.

Tourism has not been immune to these trends. 'Community-based' approaches are central to many tourism development plans around the world and there is a growing realization that localized cooperation, trust and networking are essential ingredients in providing the right mix for successful tourism development outcomes. Indeed, tourism is often seen as a key element that can enable communities devastated by economic restructuring to regain and enhance their economic foothold in regional and national economies.

The complexity of the global-local nexus – and how its economic, cultural and environmental elements interact to create local development outcomes – is breathtaking. We cannot understand the context of local tourism development unless we grapple with this complexity and better understand how key stakeholders (government, industry, community, tourists) interact both within and between multiple 'nested' scales. We now turn to a review of how tourism researchers have attempted to theorize these issues over the past three decades.

### **Evolving theories of tourism and development**

It was in the 1970s and 1980s that tourism researchers first began to focus considerable attention on the broader context and outcomes of tourism development. The two approaches that dominated much of the discourse on tourism and development during this period were the dependency perspective (Britton 1982) and the life-cycle model (Butler 1980). While both emerged from quite different theoretical lineages (neo-marxism in the case of dependency, and modernization theory in the case of the life-cycle approach) they are based on the shared premise that the industry's mass variant represents its crowning height. Companies minimize 'unit costs' by generating economies of scale, destinations receive increased visitor numbers, and tourists fulfil their wanderlust cheaply and efficiently.

As a new nation or region is initially incorporated into the global ‘patchwork-quilt’ of tourism destinations the emergent industry is characterized by relatively high levels of local involvement. As visitor numbers rise and incorporation into the global tourism system increases, local industry structures soon become characterized by overseas or local elite ownership. Locals end up receiving few economic benefits, while having to carry the inevitable costs of rapidly increasing tourist numbers. Unfortunately, the high costs associated with the inevitable rise of mass tourism provide both the communities and localities that rely on it with little prospect for local control and limited potential to achieve more sustainable forms of local development.

Both dependency and life-cycle approaches have been criticized on a number of common grounds. Dependency theory is often accused of being ‘obsessed by the global level, and the world system’ (Corbridge 1986), therefore ignoring the possibility that what occurs within a nation/region may be just as important as those influences that originate outside its boundaries (Storper 1990; Lipietz 1993; Peet & Hartwick 1999). There is a failure, in the case of both approaches, to acknowledge the possibility that local government, industries and individuals can exert some degree of control over their own destinies. As Preister (1989: 20) notes: ‘locally-affected people are not shaped passively by outside forces but react as well, at times even changing the conditions of the larger system’. Preister argues the development outcome is a ‘negotiated process’ between local groups or individuals and structural forces. Both frameworks fail to consider the possibility that by empowering locals to have input into development plans, the deteriorating cycle of evolution might be minimized or avoided (Drake 1991; Priestly & Mundet 1998).

These frameworks are equally limited in their ability to grapple with the changing nature of production and accumulation. Technological change and shifts in industrial organisation are not dealt with effectively. In particular there is an inability to incorporate notions of capital’s ability (or otherwise) to cope with periodic episodes of profit down turn and crisis. As Lipietz (1987: 2) notes:

It [*dependency theory*] paid little attention to the concrete conditions of capitalist accumulation either in the centre or in the periphery. It therefore could not visualize that transformations in the logic of accumulation in the centre would modify the nature of centre–periphery relations.

Another approach to emerge in the 1980s emphasized local agency, seeing communities and their constituent members playing an active role in determining tourism’s outcomes (Murphy 1985; see also G. Taylor 1995). In dramatic contrast to the models just described the community approach views locals as being capable of planning and participating in tourism

development, of making their voices heard when they are concerned, and of having the capability to control the outcomes of the industry to some degree. Murphy (1994: 284) argues that if host communities can define the types of tourism they wish to attract and can accommodate over the long term, they can shape the type of industry that is most appropriate to their needs.

Unfortunately, proponents of community participation in the tourism development process have often ignored the tendency of local élites to appropriate the organs of participation for their own benefits (Brohman 1996). It is also often forgotten that factors such as gender relations and race will have an effect on power structures within communities, as will the ways in which these communities are embedded in broader socio-economic, political and environmental structures (Wells & Brandon 1992; Kinnaird & Hall 1994; Milne 1998).

Community participation can also be a double-edged sword (Drake 1991). Such approaches promote mutual responsibility between the state and locals, incorporate vital local knowledge into projects, and provide outlets for the channelling of local political discontent. Nevertheless, local participation is often expensive to run, may generate expectations that far exceed eventual outcomes, and may create new conflicts as marginal groups become more articulate and élites are able to gain a greater slice of participatory benefits through their own networks (Zazueta 1995).

The counter-position of community and the tourism industry which is often inherent in the literature on local interaction with the industry is a form of reductionism found in a range of other settings (see Sayer 1995: 186). Given the profound and complex nature of the global social division of labour we should not assume that the interests of a specialist group of residents are always in accord with broader local wishes and desires. While localities depend heavily on their local economic base this does not mean that local interests can simply be defined in these terms and treated as unitary. As Urry (1990) notes, the interests of people within a locality vary enormously in strength and kind, and it cannot be assumed that local attachments come first, so that people's interests can be represented territorially (see also Belsky 1999). Perhaps, most importantly, the community-focused approach tends to ignore the local implications of the evolving nature of capitalist accumulation at broader scales of resolution.

### *Regulation theory and 'new tourism'*

It has become a cliché to state that we are living in a globalized world, but whatever name is given to the present era (post-industrial, post-Fordist, 'new times') there is a widespread recognition that we are living in a world that has evolved considerably from a generation ago. This world

needs new theoretical tools to enable us to understand our rapidly changing times. One response to these changes has been the emergence of the so-called ‘new’ political economy (Teague 1990) and its gradual application to the study of the development process.

The flexible specialization approach (Piore & Sabel 1984) and the Regulation School (Lipietz 1987) have been particularly influential through much of the 1990s. As Peck (2000: 66) notes, researchers have often been guilty of combining concepts from these two, conceptually different, approaches and, as a result, it sometimes becomes difficult to disentangle concepts that may have quite diverse theoretical and political lineages and implications. Our focus here is primarily on regulation theory – which has arguably had the greatest impact on the tourism literature (Iaonnides 1995; Iaonnides & Debbage 1998). It is clear that the more production-orientated flexible specialization thesis has also influenced a number of tourism commentators (Poon 1993).

Proponents of the regulation approach argue that capitalism is an unstable, contradictory system that must restructure itself in order to resolve, albeit temporarily, its periodic crises. Each period of restructuring brings different regional and local economic impacts (Tickell and Peck 1992). Advocates of this approach maintain that a ‘regime’ of mass production and consumption, known as ‘Fordism’ dominated much of the past century. During the last quarter of the century, it is argued that Fordism has been yielding to a more ‘flexible’ and dynamic pattern of production and consumption, variously categorized as a ‘post-Fordism’, ‘flexible accumulation’ or ‘flexible specialization’ (Scott 1989).

Regulation theory introduces the concept of a ‘regime of accumulation’ – a social system linking production to consumption. The temporary stability of this system depends on a particular ‘mode of social and political regulation’ based on a ‘set of internalized rules and social procedures’ (Lipietz 1987: 15), including state action, social institutions, behavioural norms and political practices (Tickell & Peck 1992).

The emerging production paradigm is based on achieving flexibility, both internally and externally. Internally, firms must be able to produce a greater variety of specialized products and to change product configurations rapidly in response to variations in market taste. Externally, these shifts are associated with vertical and horizontal disintegration and the emergence of down-sized specialized firms often organized into spatially proximate networks (Teague 1990).

Several tourism researchers have borrowed from these frameworks in their attempts to understand the changing structure of the industry and its evolving role in local, regional and national development processes (Poon 1989, 1993; Urry 1990; Milne & Pohlmann 1998). For example, utilizing many of the basic tenets of flexible specialization Poon (1989: 93) sees the emergence of a new tourism ‘best practice’:

The economics of new tourism is very different from the old – profitability no longer rests solely on economies of scale and the exploitation of mass undifferentiated markets. Economies of scope, systems gains, segmented markets, designed and customized holidays are becoming more and more important for profitability and competitiveness in tourism.

The major characteristics of the new ‘best’ practice are its focus on product *flexibility* and variety – facilitated by the increased use of advanced technology. *Segmentation* results in the break-up of mass markets into cluster segments that display a diversity of needs and characteristics. At the same time, *diagonal integration* sees tourism firms move into new and different activities, seeking the tremendous synergies, systems gains and scope economies that can potentially be derived from such integration.

Regulation and flexible specialization approaches represent a major step forward in our attempts to theorize the complex links between tourism and economic development. Both approaches stress the need to understand broader processes of capitalist accumulation in order to understand the economic prospects facing regions and communities around the world. Another strength is the rejection of the fatalism inherent in the dependency/life-cycle frameworks described earlier. Thus commentators, such as Poon (1993), view the emergence of new tourism as offering an opportunity for less developed regions and small firms to achieve a greater degree of self-determination than they have managed in the past.

There has, however, been concerted criticism and debate concerning the ability of these ‘new’ political economy theories to address the processes of change affecting contemporary capitalism, in general, and tourism, in particular (Iaonnides & Debbage 1998; Milne & Gill 1998). The first criticisms revolve around whether Fordism ever existed as a dominant regime of accumulation during the post-war period of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, it can be argued that, ‘old’ or mass tourism, characterized by ubiquitous ‘sun, sand and sea’-based package tours, was in fact only ever dominant in parts of Europe, and was never as significant a mode of travel among, for example, North Americans (*The Economist* 1986; WTO 1990).

A second set of criticisms concerns the ‘crisis’ of Fordism. Evidence of a relative decline in rates of output and productivity in mass production industries is inconclusive at best, with some classic mass production industries growing rapidly while others have been declining (Hirst & Zeitlin 1991). The same can be argued for tourism. While we have seen rapid growth in the number of small tourism firms, archetypal mass tourism firms continue to prosper and thrive. Mass tourism’s convenience, price and travel style remain attractive to many consumers, making it an important mainstay for the tourism industry. As Williams and Montanari (1995) attest, care must be taken not to over-simplify changes. While small firms may develop and thrive in this environment, we still know little about

how they will interact with their larger counterparts, and what future exists for less flexible organizational structures (Wanhill 2000).

A further important shortcoming of these theories lies in their treatment of different spatial levels of analysis. Regulation theory focuses primarily on the underlying structures behind a regime of accumulation and modes of regulation at the national level, without providing a similar analysis at the regional level or theorizing the relationship between scales. Thus it is unclear whether the mode of regulation which stabilizes a particular regime of accumulation at the national level can be reproduced at a regional or local level.

The difficulties that post-Fordist theories present, when attempts are made to move from a local level of analysis to the global level, are also attributable to the fact that empirical research has been carried out in only a few, usually developed countries (Storper 1990; Peet & Hartwick 1999). In addition, most sectoral research has focused on the manufacturing arena – with little attention being paid to services, in general, and tourism, in particular. It is also fair to say that in much of the ‘new’ political economy literature of the 1990s it is difficult to situate the role of culture and the environment (Taylor 1995b). In the post-Fordist tourism literature, for example, one struggles to find detailed attention being paid to the impact of tourism on the condition of the natural environment, cultural attributes and people’s broader quality of life.

Despite these criticisms we argue that a regulationist approach provides a useful base from which to build a more complete understanding of the global–local relations that influence tourism’s concrete development outcomes. We now move on to examine ways in which additional elements can be grafted on to this model to enable it to embrace the complexity inherent in the tourism development process.

### **Embracing complexity**

Sayer (1989, 1995) argues that organizational forms are discoveries, worked out in specific historical and geographical contexts. This complexity must be addressed and embraced if we are really to gain an understanding of the links that exist between tourism and broader processes of development. Tourism must be viewed as a transaction process, incorporating both exogenous forces and the endogenous powers of local residents and entrepreneurs (Chang *et al.* 1996). There is a need to strive for a balance between structure and agency, rather than highlighting one at the expense of the other (Milne 1998).

There is also a sense that cultural and environmental dimensions must be more effectively grafted onto attempts to understand the development processes and outcomes associated with tourism. We also argue that we

must acknowledge the impacts that rapidly evolving information and communication technologies have on the industry and those whose lives it influences. We now move on to address some of these issues – focusing in particular on dimensions of culture, consumption and the rise of what Castells (2000) calls the network society.

### *Culture and consumption*

In recent years there have been growing attempts by economic, cultural and social geographers to reconceptualize their subdisciplines and embrace the ‘de-differentiation of economy and culture’ (Crang & Malbon 1996; Amin & Thrift 2000; Sayer 2000). Of particular relevance here is the rise of approaches that attempt to account for both the material condition and specific experience of individuals, while at the same time situating the individual within political and economic structures of power, conflict and resistance (Ateljevic 2000). The crossing of boundaries and the integration of cultural politics into the formation of knowledge have been marked as the ‘cultural turn’ in human geography (Chaney 1994; McDowell 1994).

To accommodate these concerns, ‘new’ fields have begun to emerge that increasingly recognize the difficulties inherent in the separation of economic, cultural and social geographies, and which acknowledge the dialectics of structure and agency. Thus we have seen the emergence of the ‘new’ regional and economic geography (Thrift 1994; Sayer 2000) and the ‘new’ geography of leisure (Mansvelt & Perkins 1998; Aitchison 1999). The term ‘new’ does not imply creation of new sub-disciplines, but rather it is used as a label to ease the classification for a broad range and diversity of work that crosses the boundaries to improved knowledge construction. It is important to note that traditional issues of inquiry in economic geography (production, circulation and exchange) have not (and should not have) been abandoned, but rather reshaped to embrace the cultural and social construction of economic geographies (Sayer 2000).

This combination of approaches has allowed us to take a fresh look at place and its role in shaping (and being shaped by) tourism. As Massey (1993: 155) notes, space is: ‘constructed out of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interrelations and interactions at all spatial scales, from the most local level to the most global’. The collections of essays edited by Ringer (1998) and Rojek and Urry (1997) highlight the active role of tourism in the social construction of space through place. Place, therefore, is not just historically constructed in space, it is actively mediated upon and acts in conjunction with ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ factors at all times. In the same way, Oakes (1993) sees the social spaces of modernity as being as much cultural as economic constructs.

The emerging consensus is that tourism geography has to take both its economic and cultural dimensions seriously (Squire 1994; Crang 1996; Cloke & Perkins 1998). It is vital that we transcend the boundaries between economic and cultural consumption if we are to understand the continuous recycling of commodities beyond the act of simple monetary exchange. It is essential that we delve 'into the social relations of production and forward into cycles of use and re-use' (Jackson & Thrift 1995: 205; see also Burgess 1990).

Crang and Malbon (1996) suggest there are two ways of pursuing de-differentiation between culture and economy: (1) the 'cultural regulation of the economic'; and (2) the 'cultural materialization of the economic'. The former relates to the discursive construction of organizational identities and spaces of work (social relations of production) while the latter relate to social relations of consumption 'in which culturally meaningful goods and experiences become the objects and subjects to be provided and consumed' (Crang & Malbon 1996: 709).

There is a burgeoning geographical literature addressing issues of leisure, consumption and social identity (for example, Jackson & Holbrook (1995), Pred (1996), Wrigley & Lowe (1996) and Aitchison (1999)). Tourism needs to be placed in the context of the contemporary cultural economy, within which groups and individuals increasingly attempt to construct their identities by certain consumption preferences and lifestyle practices which signal taste and position in society. As the 'culture of consumption' evolves in terms of 'you are what you buy' and 'where you go away' (Featherstone 1987, 1995), there will inevitably be impacts on the tourism industry.

These trends have been widely related to the emerging 'new middle class' of so-called cultural producers (Bourdieu 1984; Knox 1991; Zukin 1991). The emerging cultural intermediaries of 'late' capitalism are the marketers, advertisers, public relations representatives, radio and television producers and presenters and magazine journalists. Bourdieu (1984) asserts that providers of symbolic goods and services shape consumption as an arena for social differentiation as they seek to associate more closely particular consumption preferences and lifestyle practices with class segments.

The issue of consumption and identity becomes even more problematic when advertising begins to recognize 'multiple identities within the same individual' (Jackson 1993: 215). Glennie and Thrift (1992: 424) argue that individuals become 'increasingly fragmented, following particular lifestyles that may or may not chime with one another, but which require the adoption of particular persons to follow those'. In the same way, Jackson and Thrift (1995: 227) seek 'to rethink conventional approaches to "identity", emphasising its fluid and dynamic nature rather than assuming identities to be in any way fixed or singular'.

The new cultural and economic geographies provide ways of re-conceptualizing traditional views of tourism and providing alternative 'ways of seeing' the industry and broader patterns of leisure, as Aitchison (1999: 30) claims:

It is from this era of post positivist geography that the new cultural geography has emerged and become merged with sociological and cultural studies analyses which are now combining to investigate the multiplicity of behaviours, meanings, consumption trends and identities constructed in and through leisure and tourism.

Indeed, as Thrift (2000: 693) notes, some of the most interesting work on the cultural geography of economies has begun to emerge from within the tourism arena. Crang's (1994, 1997b) work on performativity in restaurants and the broader tourism industry, and Crain's (1996) analysis of performative aspects of women's role in the Ecuadorean tourist market, have provided us with new ways to view the role of culture in the shaping of and, in turn, being shaped by, touristic experiences.

Perhaps, most importantly, given the global-local focus of this paper, we argue that the cultural analysis of economic relations gives us a new theoretical gaze through which to unpack the 'glocal' (see Swyngedouw 2000) nature of tourism activity. Ethnographic and case-based accounts of the way in which the tourism economy is embedded in cultural contexts allow us to move beyond some of the pessimistic and reductionist readings of globalization effects discussed earlier in this paper. It is essential that we continue to evaluate the place and role of culture in our discussions of the economic development dimensions of tourism 'whether its cultural place be the individual (as representative of some wider spatial scale), the firm, the region or the nation-state' (Crang 1997a: 12).

### *Networks and information technologies*

In the newly evolving production environment the most efficient relationships are based on the creation of alliances, partnerships and networks between firms (see Beamish 1998; Castells 2000). These can be attained through a number of mechanisms including mutual dependency and adaptation, discussion and negotiation, honesty, long-term commitment, quality control and shared knowledge. Networks may also be created and enhanced by the emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs).

The apparent association of growth in regions and of industries with conspicuous networking activity has encouraged suggestions that successful regional economies in the world economic system must be 'intelligent' or learning regions (Feldman 1994; Clark *et al.* 2000: 8). Networks are thus part of the dynamic of organizational creativity, directed towards building and maintaining competitive links to the global economy, and based on strengthening existing competitive activities (Hansen 1992; Castells 2000).

A central theme for future exploration is the degree to which networks play a role in influencing the structure, economic success and sustainability

of the tourism industry. If networking and networks are, indeed, a general response to pressures in the global economy (see Hansen 1992), increased knowledge of networking activity and network formation amongst key stakeholders within and between different scales of analysis is needed.

Destination communities and regions also rely on network formation (between businesses, between the private and public sectors) for the development of competitive tourist products. At the same time the sustainability of the industry may well be tied to creating effective alliances between the private and public sectors. One of the central questions that must be addressed by tourism researchers is to what extent does such activity translate into localities being able to engage more effectively and sustainably with the global economy and wrest more control over their economic destiny from outside forces?

It is important to stress here that networks themselves are fundamentally based not on spatial proximity, or shared interests, but on notions of trust and reciprocity. The future competitiveness of destinations, and the development performance of tourism, will not simply depend on a destination's natural and cultural resource base, its ability to harness new technologies, or its depth of human capital. Success will also depend on the ill-defined attributes of trust and reciprocity (Fukuyama 1995).

Given our focus on what kind of action is necessary for localities to engage effectively with the global economy it is worthwhile examining what some commentators feel is the empowering potential of new information and communication technologies. In particular we want to explore two issues – how ICTs are likely to influence the structure and organization of the tourism industry, and whether these technologies may assist localities to work more effectively within the bounds of the global–local nexus.

While there is plenty of 'hype' about what IT can do for various elements of the tourism industry, it is still not easy to find comprehensive accounts and reasoned analyses of the key issues associated with the adoption of ICTs. Online resources are proliferating and fewer and fewer components of tourism products are willing to risk being invisible in cyberspace. At the same time, numerous governments are implementing policy frameworks to foster ICT adoption by the industry, and tourists everywhere are beginning to see the potential for new technologies to improve their ability to make travel plans (Sheldon 1997; Smith & Jenner 1998).

The literature focuses on a number of ways in which the structure and performance of the tourism industry is being influenced by the adoption and development of IT (see Buhalis & Schertler 1999; Frew 2000):

- *Knowledge management.* In addition to reducing communication and transaction costs the internet is also changing the shape and nature of traditional global distribution and destination marketing systems in the tourism industry (French 1998; Milne & Gill 1998; Morrell 1998).

- *Changing consumer behaviour.* While it is difficult to quantify the internet's ability to shape consumer perceptions and decision-making, processes it is clear that the internet is already a force to be reckoned with in moulding visitor behaviour (Beirne & Curry 1999). The internet also provides a vital (and unparalleled) set of information to support consumer choice and skills development.
- *New product development.* The internet offers the industry improved possibilities for price differentiation and also enables greater networking between disparate elements of the industry. In simple terms the Internet is said to improve the ability of the tourism industry to provide a flexible array of product choices. In effect the tourists themselves have a greater opportunity to create their own 'customized' packages. It can be argued, however, that online travel players will not see significant customer growth unless they create online product offerings that simplify the purchasing process and exceed the value of traditional offerings.
- *The empowerment of small and medium enterprises through IT.* There is an expanding body of work dealing with the potential for e-commerce to 'level the playing field' for smaller businesses that have difficulty accessing traditional tourist distribution channels (Buhalis 1999). It is also clear that the data-mining potential of e-commerce holds great benefits not just for larger firms but also their smaller counterparts (Schertler & Berger-Koch 1999: 26). The internet has several key elements that make it an important alternative to traditional marketing approaches: web sites are flexible, the images and text they present can be readily changed; it decentralizes and democratizes access to the customer; there are cost savings in distribution, service, marketing and promotion.
- *Labour market impacts.* Several commentators are now beginning to focus more closely on the impact that the adoption of the internet and e-commerce strategies can have on labour use, training regimes and service quality delivery in a broad range of tourism sectors (see Milne & Ateljevic 2001).
- *Disintermediation.* There is a growing interest in the impact of the internet on components of the tourism industry that have previously acted as intermediaries between the industry and the consumer (especially travel agents) (Reinders & Baker 1998; Wardell 1998). Some commentators have predicted the demise of the travel agent unless skills are upgraded effectively (McNeill 1997). Nevertheless, despite falling commissions and increased competition, travel agents have conceded only one percent of the US online travel market in the past two years (Jupiter 1999).

The increasing technological dependence of the industry and processes of industrial concentration are likely to lead to the further strengthening of large enterprises, while also potentially opening opportunities for small

flexible firms. The use of networking and strategic alliances will become increasingly important. For small firms this will provide opportunities to overcome the disadvantages (most notably access to technology) associated with their size.

Extreme arguments suggest that cyberspace may even replace tourism as virtual travel technologies mature. What is of immediate concern, however, is how representation of tourist destinations in cyberspace will affect travel patterns. For some, virtual travel may be nothing more than a fancy digital travel brochure. For others, the post-modern virtual travel experience may not be that far off. Indeed we are now able to travel the globe in real-time visiting different locations via the web. The impact of virtual travel in this sense is powerful and some argue that by mixing real and virtual travel we may enhance the possibility of achieving sustainable tourism by replacing impacts on real environments and cultures with virtual experiences (see Dewailly 1999). At the same time there are potential dangers inherent in the ability to manipulate representations of tourist products to a greater extent than was possible in traditional travel brochures. The ultimate fear of the tourism industry in its traditional (non-cyber) guise must, however, be that: “Speed kills color: the gyroscope when it spins quickly turns gray”, wrote Paul Morand in 1937. . . . The tourism of long journeys celebrated by Morand is complemented henceforth by a sort of “tourism on the spot” of cocooning and interactivity’ (Virilio 1992: 188).

Will virtual travel alter the desire for people to travel, and the ultimate seduction of ‘real’ place? Will small communities or firms that are non-existent in cyberspace become non-existent in the real world? In particular, there are gaps in our knowledge about how the Internet and tourism will mix in less developed settings, where telecommunications infrastructure and human capital bases are limited (Milne & Mason 2001). It is, indeed, sometimes easy to get caught up in the hype of the new knowledge economy and forget that the bulk of the world’s population, and much of its travel destinations, still remain unwired and outside these new networks.

New technologies and the global reach of media are also forcing researchers, to some extent, to reformulate long-held concepts that space and proximity are central to the formation of community. As Zeldin (1994: 467) notes, the Earth is being ‘criss-crossed afresh by invisible threads uniting individuals who differ by all conventional criteria, but who are finding that they have aspirations in common’. Thus ‘traditional’ localized communities have new tools through which to disseminate their concerns, and may, via global networks, gain new ‘community members’ that can represent their interests around the world (see Gurstein 2000; Rheingold 2000). Other commentators argue that the very technologies that are being heralded by some as providing the basis for a resurgence

of community life may, instead, simply reinforce existing power structures and inequalities, and lead to social discord and individual isolation (see Haywood 1998; Castells 2000). While there are no clear answers to these debates, it is clear that tourism researchers ignore them at their peril. If we are to understand better the role of the local in the global we must grapple with ICTs impacts on the evolving notion of community and the seductive power of place. We need to be fully aware of the fact that these fundamental technological shifts will have profound impacts on the perception, consumption and construction of tourism spaces, and their local development outcomes.

### **Where do we go from here?**

Tourism is a phenomenon that comprises a collage of producing and consuming moments. It is essentially a global process, which manifests itself locally and regionally, and explicitly involves the construction of place. As such, the study of tourism provides great potential to reveal the dialectics of production and consumption, the tensions between the global and the local, and core issues associated with social and spatial polarization.

The creation of meaning and experiences is becoming a key avenue for capital accumulation, with leisure and tourism at the forefront of this trend. The identities of geographically defined places, namely tourist destinations, are endlessly (re-)invented, (re-)produced, (re-)captured and (re-)created by the simultaneous coexistence of global and local forces. Tourism activity not only gives shape to the land, and provides jobs and income to local peoples, but also produces meanings and representations. Tourism promotional material creates and projects powerful social, cultural and psychological meanings of place, in turn increasing and reproducing its value. For their part, consumers collect, read, interpret, compare and communicate these meanings (re-)producing processes of place (re-)construction.

In this paper we have shown that over three decades our attempts to understand the links between tourism and local economic development have evolved considerably, from the development of largely 'top-down' theory, to attempts to conceptualize more fully the complexity and nuances of the tourism development process. This complexity is manifest in several dimensions. Consumers are increasingly viewed as 'a highly diverse set of actors who react in grounded and contextual ways' (Thrift 2000: 697). At the same time it is increasingly apparent that we cannot, and should not, assume that shifts in industry structure and local development outcomes can be 'read off' from patterns predicted by conceptually 'neat' theories of global economic change, as Peck (2000: 76) notes:

From a geographical perspective, it can therefore be anticipated that institutions will routinely be associated with different (economic) effects in different places; that their forms – and certainly their effects – will be difficult to replicate; and that they are unlikely to travel well. . . . This inescapable spatial indeterminacy in institutional forms, dynamics and outcomes, coupled with the necessity for extra-economic regulation of market systems, means that uneven development and local differentiation will remain fundamental features of the real economy.

This complexity and uncertainty is only enhanced by the fact that e-business may be about to transform consumer behaviour, value chains, business organization, notions of community and resultant development outcomes.

A new configuration of articulated economic spaces and scales of governance is emerging in the tourism industry. Our challenge as tourism researchers is to embrace this complexity, and not to shy away from dealing with a world of constant evolution and change. We cannot afford simply to view nations, regions and communities as being largely powerless in a globalized world and having to take the ‘path of least resistance’ in responding to processes of economic globalization. As Amin and Thrift (1997: 155) note so succinctly, the real question is ‘not whether globalization allows scope for national or local action, but what kind of action is necessary for positive engagement with the global economy’.

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**Résumé: Tourisme, développement économique et la lien globale–locale: la théorie embrassant la Complexité**

Dans cet article, on critique les liens complexes qui existent entre le tourisme et les processus de développement économique. Une brève vue d'ensemble du rôle économique de l'industrie au niveau international et national nous mène à une discussion concernant la participation locale et régionale dans le tourisme. On insiste sur le besoin de développer une connaissance plus rigoureuse du tourisme qui continue d'évoluer, et comment il influence les processus de développement économique locale. Suivant une revue des théories majeures qui ont été appliquées pour nous aider à comprendre ces processus, on a souligné les tentatives de comprendre les liens entre le tourisme et le développement économique qui embrassent la complexité de l'industrie et ces influences sur la vie quotidienne. On recommande 'nouvelles' façons de voir et d'étudier l'économie de la géographie touristique, façons qui reflètent le tour culturel dans la 'nouvelle' géographie économique, et l'importance croissante des réseaux et les nouvelles technologies d'information et de communication. On dénote qu'une bonne volonté est essentielle pour embrasser la complexité si en veut débattre la nature 'globale' des processus de développement touristique.

*Mots-clés:* développement économique, globalisation, théorie de régulation, nouvelle géographie économique, complexité