

**Experiential Tourism and Self-Concept  
Formation: A Traveler's Ecstasy to Rediscover**

# Introduction

- ▣ We exist, not the way we percept our existence but what we engender out of our life processes. It would not be factual to articulate that the self is deemed as exclusively vacuumised of content.
- ▣ Self-understanding is subordinated to the more inclusive and fundamental aim of building/rebuilding a coherent and rewarding sense of self- identity.
- ▣ The involvement of such reflexivity with travel, social and psychological research is striking and a pervasive feature.
- ▣ Protracted absence from domestic environs is embedded with the potential to force a self-centric modification in the travellers who are seeking for rediscovery and life changing experiences.

- ▣ Experiential tourism evolves from a confrontation with a new culture into a rendezvous with the self.
- ▣ Reality tourism assists the traveller to undertake an expedition centered around self exploration as removal from the comfort of the familiar forces him to test and stretch his resourcefulness and to revisit his self-understanding.
- ▣ The lecture proposes to revive and focus on the linkage between detachmental cum experiential travelling and personal change as is reflected in the attention recently paid to the subject by tourism psychoanalysts who use the term 'voluntary' or 'existential migration' to refer to extended trips abroad and who use psychoanalytic theory to understand the process of change undergone by the travellers

- ▣ It is argued that so great can be the change in the self-concept that the returning home can be a source of apprehension, as travellers may face similar difficulty in adjusting to the home culture as they did upon arrival in the new culture.

# Experiential Tourism

- ▣ Experiential tourism has become the current term that encompasses a variety of tourism and traveler categories, including the following: cultural tourism, ecotourism, educational travel, experimental tourism, heritage tourism, nature tourism, ...
- ▣ where activities are environmentally sensitive, displaying respect for the culture of the host area and looking to experience and learn rather than merely stand back and gaze. Experiential tourism involves active participation, involvement, even immersion.

- ▣ People create meaning through direct experience.
- ▣ The experience includes the people met, the places visited, the activities participated in and the memories created.
- ▣ The experience includes pre-departure trip planning and post-trip follow-up.
- ▣ Experiential tourism draws people into local nature, culture and history.
- ▣ Experiential tourism is low impact, low volume, and high yield.
- ▣ Experiential tourism is very personal, unique and individual for each visitor.
- ▣ Quality, memorable visitor experiences are a shared outcome between the visitor and the experience provider.

- ▣ Experiential tourism opportunities allow for personal growth and reflect the values and interests of the individual visitor.
- ▣ Experiential tourism provides diverse experiences that match the visitor's interests and provide a sense of personal accomplishment, thereby creating their own unique memories.
- ▣ The desired outcome of experiential tourism is to achieve a complete participatory experience that provides new knowledge and authentic experiences.
- ▣ Experiential tourism opportunities encourage the meeting and coming together of different cultures, their problems and potential.
- ▣ Cultural elements are shared in an atmosphere of traditional ways of life.
- ▣ Experiential tourism shows rather than describes.
- ▣ Experiential tourism opportunities expand personal horizons.

- ▣ Experiential tourism engages all five senses.
- ▣ Experiential tourism tells “the story of the place.”

However, these standards are presented as a suggested beginning point for further research and consideration.

## Self-concept Formation

- ▣ What happens when disenchanting or alienated individuals become growingly aware of their state of alienation, and the meaninglessness and fatuity of their daily life, as many younger members of the middle classes in "postmodern" society have become?
- ▣ One direction in their search for meaning might take is the attempt to transform their society through revolution; another, less radical alternative is to look for meaning in the life of others – tourism. The renewed quest for meaning, outside the confines of one's own society, is commenced

- ▣ The Identity of Self-concept assumes Reflexivity.
- ▣ Reflexivity is the capacity to generate an understanding of events that have happened in the past in order to normalize future action.
- ▣ Self-concept formation is a process of reflexive communications among the subject( tourist), the world, and the people around him or her. Self-identity(soul) is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual.
- ▣ It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography.

- ▣ Narratives dedicated to experiential tourism are neither true, nor false, but simply forms of reality representation.
- ▣ The language chosen by the individual, via which they relate their narrative, reflects how that individual sees the world.
- ▣ The individuals' construction of past events and actions serves to enable them to claim identities and construct their self-concepts.
- ▣ The narrator (tourist) becomes a vessel of "capital" of which is disseminated through stories to form self-identity.
- ▣ These stories of identity are real in the sense that they are disseminated by the narrator and therefore valid as an empirical observation.

## Transformation of Self

- ▣ Self as a vessel of transformation shaped by Experiential Tourism.
- ▣ Intentional Transformation: meaning that the traveler intends for a transformation to occur before departing on the travel experience.
- ▣ Unintentional Transformation: meaning that a transformation of "Self" would occur unbeknownst to the traveler during the travel experience.
- ▣ The great journey, potentially supplies more than mere recreation and even more than a profound experience per se: rather, it is downright transformative.

## Ego Factor

- ▣ The ego is the bedrock of every identity project.
- ▣ The ego is neither positive nor negative; rather a reflexive entity useful in identity construction.
- ▣ The “Ego Factor” category is divided into three sub-groups:
  - ▣ “Idiosyncratic Differentiation” in which the traveler sets themselves apart as being unique or different to create a sense of “Otherness”.
  - ▣ “Self-Enhancement”, meaning to experience, gain knowledge, or travel for the purpose of self-improvement.
  - ▣ “Anecdotes”, where stories of travel experiences are shared with acquaintances before, during, and after the journey.

# Self-Actualization

- While most people do not reach the stage of self-actualization, many travel to experience a sense of inner bliss and self-fulfillment.
- Two sub-categories are outlined:
  - “Morality/Spirituality”, where moments of deep reflection and pure being are reflected spontaneously through experiential travelling.
  - “Self-Fulfillment”, where travelers set out to achieve a personal goal/challenge and reflect upon accomplishment.
  - “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy.
  - What a man *can be, what he must be*. This need we may call self-actualization and potentially translates into a travellers ecstasy.

# Self-Esteem

- ❑ Leisure-like pursuits, in this case experiential tourism, can provide a context for people with different cultural customs to improve self and social identities which are strongly linked to self-esteem and spirituality.
- ❑ Tourism presents an opportunity for self-discovery just as freedom from household constraints allows tourists to develop a stronger sense of self.
- ❑ Two sub-categories emerge:
  - ❑ “Perceived Freedom/Independence”, relating to the “Self” as one making decisions on his/her own terms and the perception of being solely responsible for one’s self.
  - ❑ “Escape” where individuals create self-identity through disconnect from life, home routine, job, and mental state.

# Nostalgia

- ▣ Remembering the past is not only instrumental in the creation and preservation of a personal identity, but it can also be a very enjoyable process.
- ▣ Two sub-categories of nostalgia emerge:
  - ▣ “Personal History” which relates to the “Self” in terms of personal background/history.
  - ▣ “Family History”, relating to “Self” in terms of one’s ancestry.

- ▣ The concepts of “Self” and “Identity” have puzzled researchers for centuries, and recently to psychologists, sociologists and very recently to tourism researchers.
- ▣ The question of self identity and the potential role of tourism in identity construction continue to remain an enduring research question in tourism studies.

▣ *End*