

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOURISM AND COMMODIFICATION: A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

Burçin KIRLAR CAN*, Mehmet ERTAŞ**, Hülya YEŞİLYURT***,
Ebru GÜNLÜ KÜÇÜKALTAN****

ABSTRACT

By underlining the phenomena of globalization, cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity, this paper focuses on the positive and negative effects of commodification on culture, and tries to bring a comparative perspective on the relationship between tourism and commodification. The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between tourism and commodification, and propose a conceptual model to understand the leading patterns that cause commodification. The lack of a clear consensus in the literature makes this study's attempt for conceptual clarification significant. The research claims that both cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity create commodification, and that this cycle helps cultural values to revive, diversify, renew and remain on the one hand, while causing a loss of authenticity, deterioration or degeneration on the other.

Keywords: *Commodification, Cultural Homogeneity, Cultural Heterogeneity, Cultural Tourism*

TURİZM VE METALAŞMA İLİŞKİSİNE KAVRAMSAL BİR YAKLAŞIM

ÖZ

Bu araştırma, küreselleşme, kültürel homojenleşme ve heterojenleşme kavramlarının altını çizerek, metalaşmanın kültür üzerindeki olumlu ve olumsuz etkilerine odaklanmakta ve turizm ve metalaşma ilişkisine karşılaştırmalı bir bakış açısı getirmektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, turizm ve metalaşma ilişkisini incelemek ve metalaşmaya neden olan temel öğeleri anlamak için bir model önerisi sunmaktır. Alanyazında konu ile ilgili bir uzlaşma olmaması araştırmayı bu kavramlara açıklık getirmesi bakımından önemli kılmaktadır. Araştırma, hem homojenleşmenin hem de heterojenleşmenin metalaşmaya yol açtığını ve bu döngünün bir yandan kültürlerin canlı kalmasına, çeşitlenmesine, yenilenmesine ve devam etmesine; diğer yandan da otantikliğin kaybolmasına, bozulmasına ya da yok olmasına neden olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Metalaşma, Kültürel Homojenleşme, Kültürel Heterojenleşme, Kültür Turizmi*

* Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İşletme Fakültesi, İzmir, E-posta: burcinkirlar@gmail.com

** Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İşletme Fakültesi, İzmir, E-posta: mertas29@gmail.com

*** Adıyaman Üniversitesi, Turizm Fakültesi, Adıyaman, E-posta: hyesilyurt@adiyaman.edu.tr

**** Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, İşletme Fakültesi, İzmir, E-posta: ebru.gunlu@deu.edu.tr

INTRODUCTION¹

Modern capitalism, which eroded and removed ontological boundaries between near and far, has turned the world into a global home and paradoxically deterritorialized everything (Argın, 2003). Culture has been separated from its roots in parallel with globalization, and tourism contributes this deterritorialization process. Many people and places have drowned into the global tourism vortex and tourism has shifted from the borders into the center of globalism (Urry, 2009). Mass tourism has made tourism universalized and consumed cultural values in this regard. In the globalization process, structural changes in tourist profile, demand growth for tourist activities and intensive interaction between local people and tourists have led and speeded cultural differences in the structure of the society.

The impact of tourism on local culture, leading to the emergence of commodification has become prominent in international tourism research (Mbaiwa, 2011). There are in-depth discussions on the impacts of commodification among scholars. Major negative effects listed are that it reduces authenticity of cultures; destroys local identity and cultural values; leads to a standardization of culture; turns a local phenomenon into a global one, and all of these result in cultural conflicts (Goulding, 2000; Greenwood, 1978; Halewood and Hannam, 2001; MacCannell, 1992; Watson and Kopachevsky, 1994). Several researchers, on the contrary, underline that cultural values can be saved from extinction and traditions can be preserved thanks to an increase in demand; new cultural formations occur through the interaction between tourists and local people, and existing values gain new and different meanings; local people possess cultural self-consciousness and get proud of their own culture (Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007; Finn, 2009; Kroshus Medina, 2003; Su, 2011; Xie, 2003).

As there has been no particular study discussing the stages of tourism-commodification relationship, this study aims to fill this gap in the field. In the conceptual framework, the phenomena of globalization, cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity are underlined. The study discusses the positive and negative effects of commodification on culture and reveals a comparative perspective on the relationship between tourism and commodification. Finally, it proposes a conceptual model to understand the leading patterns that cause commodification.

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Globalization

Globalization is not a new phenomenon but there exist different perspectives regarding its philosophy (Oduwole, 2012). Giddens (2000) states that there are very few issues spoken as frequent as globalization but hard to conceptualize. According to Scholte (2002), it is difficult to agree upon a common definition of globalization and there have been many discussions on the dimensions, chronology and definitions. Therefore, there are many diverse definitions of globalization depending on the discipline, perspective, goal and ideology of the scholar. Another difficulty arises from the fact that globalization covers and affects a wide area including economics, politics, culture, and life styles.

Cohen (2012) claims that globalization dissolves economic, political, and cultural boundaries worldwide and provides a free flow of human, commodity, capital, information, communication, and life styles. It means contraction of the world according to Robertson (1999), whereas Giddens (1998) identifies it as the connection of remote places and people to each other, and concentration and tightening of worldwide social relations.

Yeates (2001) states that there are many terms used as a substitute for globalization such as; a) transnationalization², b) multinationalization³, c) internationalization⁴, d) universalization⁵, e) liberalization⁶, f) triadization⁷, g) westernization⁸, and h) regionalization⁹; yet it is not clear whether they are used as synonyms or in different meanings. Scholte (2005), on the other hand, defines globalization as "deterritorialization", which means the disappearance of territories. He further clarifies it as "supraterritorialization", which implies the growth and extensity of relations which are above the territorial boundaries between individuals and societies. This notion supposes that, no matter where in the world, physical, legal, linguistic, cultural, and psychological connections will be beyond the boundaries.

² The withdrawal of national borders in determining the boundaries of the economy or political economy

³ Sharing of production by multinational organizations

⁴ Exchange of factors like capital, labor, and ideas among two or more countries

⁵ Expansion of people and cultures at universal level

⁶ Removing legislation barriers in international exchanges or transfers

⁷ Concentration of economic, technological, and political developments in the world's most developed regions such as America, Europe, and Far-East countries in the axis of Japan

⁸ Homogenization of the world under the leadership of West or America

⁹ Development of regional blocks such as EU and NAFTA

Scholte (2007) assumes that globalization is related with deterritorialization and admits that contemporary society is just a part of it; and regional relations have been prevailed by global relations which leads to constrained cultural relations. According to Tomlinson (2004), culture is one of the fundamentals of country mark; however, it becomes insignificant and deterritorialized by globalization. Deterritorialization is one of the terms that changes contents of identities, people, and meanings in postmodern world system (Kaplan, 1987); and it is possible to say that the two main symptoms; cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity emerged within the framework of this concept (Marti, 2006).

Cultural Homogeneity and Heterogeneity

The tension between cultural homogeneity and heterogeneity has been one of the fundamental issues of current global interactions (Appadurai, 1990). Some researchers suggest culture becomes homogeneous (Ger and Belk, 1996; Giddens, 1998; Wallerstein, 1998), while others claim it gets heterogeneous (Berger, 2003; Friedman, 1994; Hall, 1998; King, 1995; Robertson, 1994; Said, 1995).

The main reason of homogenization is that the values of people become uniform as popular culture spreads certain values through social media to the whole world, and the distance between people and cultures disappears as technological developments creates resemblance in shared values (Çoban, 2010). Giddens (1998) defines cultural homogeneity as time-independent places, elimination of differences, and the emergence of a standard global culture. Same structures in shopping malls and hotels in distant and different cities (Holton, 2013), and standardized touristic experiences offered in various destinations are evidential results of homogeneity.

Ritzer (1998) explores homogeneity under the concept of "McDonaldization", based on the observation that fast-food chains apply the same service standards all over the world, sell their products on standard menus, and destroy authenticity and important cultural values. This has positive results for global companies; however, cultures trying to sustain their existence mainly suffer from the same circumstances. Global companies can offer their standard products for sale to any country without any kind of changes, but standardization of products destroys specific cultures and leads to the domination of a single culture. This can be called as "monoculturalism". Barber (1995), who agrees with Ritzer's McDonaldization concept, states that even the developed and self-sufficient nations no longer have the true sovereignty. Conservative

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Iranians, for instance, listen mullahs calling them for holy war, while overhearing TV series broadcasted through satellites above themselves. Chinese investors not only compete with each other to draw attention of political leaders, but also strive for opening KFC restaurants serving to hundreds of thousands of consumers in their cities. Russian-Orthodox church struggles to revive old beliefs, while participating a joint venture strategy with Californian businessmen to bottle spring water.

Considered from the viewpoint of tourism, people travelling through mass tourism are seeking their own lifestyles in hosting destinations (Cohen, 2012). Tourism movements expanding from west to east and from developed countries to undeveloped and/or developing countries result in the development of westernized tourism goods among unpopular and non-western countries to engage in tourism (Cohen, 2012; Shepherd, 2002). Mass tourism destroys the culture in hosting regions. The competition between destinations to attract more visitors and mass mobility leads to commodification of local identities, and creates competitive western-style regions (Urry, 1999).

Some scholars suppose that a number of destinations have been facing the danger of losing their attractiveness due to the cultural and architectural uniformity around the world (Cohen, 2012; Cole, 2007). According to Barber's (1995) "McWorld" approach, nations are commercially stuck in this homogeneous global network. Airports, shopping malls, and entertainment centers are examples for deterritorialized spaces (MacCannell, 2001). Local people are also another affected side of homogeneity stream. Intense interactions with tourists have caused some changes in clothing, speaking, habits, and attitudes of local people (Doğan, 2004). For instance, we can mention the wearing of cheap imitations of western clothes instead of original dresses, the shift from traditional eating and drinking habits to ready-to-eat food, and the development of an English-native mixed language.

Homogeneity is not the only consequence of globalization affecting locality. Globalization also causes the involvement of local cultures into the global culture. Differences do not disappear and "cultural diversity" enriches thanks to the interactions between different cultures. Said (1978) and Hall (1998) claim that globalization has not only made western culture prevail, but also has brought eastern cultures into the global picture. Said (1978) emphasizes that assuming the east as an imitation of the west is a huge mistake. Tomlinson (2004), similarly, opposes the opinion that globalization leads to cultural homogeneity, and states that this assertion

is as unrealistic as the assumption that one comes to a city and spends all the time in duty-free shops amongst global brands and does not go out of the airport. According to Taylan (2008), globalization symbolizes intercultural interaction; the local and the global are in an inevitable relationship and interaction, and it is a heterogeneous process resulting from the gradual interconversion of the global and the local.

Relationship between Tourism and Commodification

Societies with different socio-cultural structures interact by means of tourism and this may change some of their beliefs and norms (Erwin and Smith, 2008). This interaction, spurred by tourism activities, is one of the most important factors of cultural commodification (Shepherd, 2002). Cohen (1988) explains commodification as a process that objects and activities are initially evaluated according to their exchange values and categorized as goods and services in commercial context. According to Watson and Kopachevsky (1994), commodification is an all-pervasive feature of modern capitalism and it includes standardization of products, pleasure, and experiences. This process reifies the consciousness, which in turn causes the further spread of modern capitalism.

Tourism, as a complex socio-cultural dimension of modernity, has been similarly influenced by the capitalist consumer culture. Apart from its economic impacts, it causes the commodification of social environment in terms of sex, culture, and religion (Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Kitiarsa, 2008; MacCannell, 2001; Macleod, 2006; Poulin, 2003; Shepherd, 2002). For instance; young Asian women are perceived as sexual objects by male tourists visiting Southeast Asia (Urry, 2009); or, Muslim people wear cross necklaces or clothes with cross symbols (Erkal, 2000). Life styles, traditions, rituals, dialects, festivals, music, dance, and other attractions are also among the examples of commoditized values in this process (Cole, 2007; Gotham, 2002; Halewood and Hannam, 2001; MacCannell, 1999; Mbaiwa, 2011).

In tourism market, positive and negative consequences of commodification on local culture are quite controversial. In literature, however, the dominant opinion is that commodification reduces the authenticity of cultures (Cole, 2007; Halewood and Hannam, 2001; Kroshus Medina, 2003). According to Greenwood (1978), tourism that developed on the basis of western capitalism causes commodification which, in turn, ruins the values of local identity and culture.

Cultural heritage tourism also leads to cultural standardization and conversion of a local phenomenon into global (Watson and Kopachevsky,

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1994). Some of the local people accept commodification of their culture as a tourism product, whereas others reject it (Kaygalak et al., 2013; Mbaiwa, 2011). Cultural commodification, by changing human relations, adversely affects social capital of local people which consists of values such as hospitality (Cohen, 1988; Mbaiwa, 2011). It, therefore, causes cultural conflicts. A study conducted in the village of Şirince shows that sustained cultural values such as handicrafts, old business branches, and food culture caused a revival in cultural sense, yet some of these values were commoditized due to high popularity gained as a touristic destination and faced with the danger of losing their authenticity. In this case, local people provided economic benefits from the commodification of cultural attractions; however, they were also anxious of losing their cultural values (Kırlar and Sünnetçioğlu, 2013).

Local people who perceive tourists as "money" (Doğan, 2004) make their own culture ordinary by selling monotype souvenirs everywhere and directly contribute to commodification. MacCannell (1999), resembling tourism to worshipping, treats tourism goods as "sacralization", and calls it as both a "social and mechanic reproduction". Tourism patterns turn into commodities in terms of demonstrations of traditions and replications of attractions through photographs, sculptures, and many other souvenirs.

Commodification of cultural values for the sake of tourism development causes cultural conflicts among local people. In a study conducted in Botswana, middle aged people were reluctant about the development of tourism due to the fear of losing authenticity of cultural values; the young, on the contrary, supported tourism development considering its socio-economic effects such as business opportunities and employment (Mbaiwa, 2011). Another study examining the relationship between local culture and tourism in the rural areas of Ireland shows that the process of commodification of local culture and heritage brought an increase in the gap of social relationships between individuals and groups living in urban and rural areas (Kneafsey, 1998).

It is widely agreed that commodification that results from globalization has negative effects on culture; however, its positive effects are worth spelling. Demand for cultural attractions enriches these values and saves traditions from extinction (Cohen, 1988). It also strengthens cultural bonds. Interaction between tourists and local people creates a number of new cultural forms and gives different or new meanings to the old values (Cohen, 1988; Kroshus Medina, 2003).

A study on Mayas reveals that even though the majority of the villagers abandoned their local identity, they tried to reach traditions through new channels in order to meet the growing demand for tourism. Touristic demand for Mayan culture, therefore, especially triggered tourist guides, stone carvers and potters to track studies of epigraphers and archaeologists working in the area in order to learn Mayan cosmology and use relevant patterns and symbols on their products. They tried to learn native language and native speakers also started to use their own language (Kroshus Medina, 2003). Another study on Viking cultural heritage tourism suggests that commodification can be considered as a process containing both rejection and embracement for the development of cultural values (Halewood and Hannam, 2001).

Finn (2009) and Xie (2003) also indicate that commodification has some positive socio-cultural effects like providing the survival of cultural identities and traditions. For instance, local people of Visby Island in Baltic Sea have a tradition of wearing Medieval clothes for once a year, which enables the survival of Medieval theme and contributes to the maintenance of this tradition (Urry, 2009). Another study in Lijiang, a World Heritage site in China, also reveals that commodification brought the revival and diversification of forgotten ethnic music and attracted young individuals' interest in ethnic music (Su, 2011). Cole (2007) supports that, in Indonesia, commodification resulting from tourism has many advantages for the local community such as economic benefits, utilization of touristic facilities by local people, and the opportunity of making new friends. The most important contribution of commodification is that local people gain cultural self-consciousness and become proud of their own culture.

There are many cases in Turkey reflecting positive and negative aspects of commodification associated with tourism; however, very few studies address the issue in the literature. For instance, construction of incompatible modern buildings, shopping malls, or hotels serving mass tourism in order to increase tourism demand in competitive tourism destinations, such as Alanya, Bodrum, and Kuşadası cause these destinations to lose their authenticity and attractiveness. Although handcrafts have started to stand out after tourism development in Mardin, shaping cultural values such as clothes, activities, and rituals according to tourist demand may jeopardize the authenticity of the region (Kaygalak et al., 2013). In Şanlıurfa, one of the most important centers of cultural tourism, presentations of traditions like sıra nights¹⁰ in new formations to

¹⁰ A kind of event that features a gathering of people to eat and sing with traditional musical instruments.

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both foreign and domestic tourists may also damage the authenticity. On the other hand, commodification of almost forgotten local handicrafts like carpet weaving, ceramics, pottery, and stone dressing in terms of tourism development can contribute to local culture (Akbulut, 2013; Kurgun and Yumuk, 2013). Following tourism development in Cappadocia, commodification of cultural values such as pottery attracted local people working in the area and contributed to the survival of culture. Increasing interest in gastronomy tourism, in recent years, has also made local food culture to gain importance in some regions such as Gaziantep and Hatay.

THE PROPOSED MODEL

The analysis above reveals gaps in the existing theoretical framework about the relationship between tourism and commodification. A model proposal may certainly contribute to the literature by offering a novel comprehension of the relationship between tourism and commodification. The suggested model in this study combines the previous theoretical insights into tourism's effects on culture, and discusses the leading patterns of commodification process.

According to the proposed model (Figure 1), a mutual interaction exists among globalization, technological developments, and tourism. Along with globalization, technology is one of the most important factors that provides and accelerates the removal of borders. People can travel to distant and different destinations at a cheaper price in a more secure and comfortable way, and they can also easily access and spread information thanks to technological developments. Under the favor of these advances more people are traveling and this leads a continuous increase in tourism activities and types. Changes in tourism and demand structure, on the other hand, can shape technological developments. For instance, existing or new technologies are adopted regarding the needs arising from tourism demand. Mobile applications of hotels, travel agencies, airlines, or tour planning can be embodiments of tourism's effect on technology.

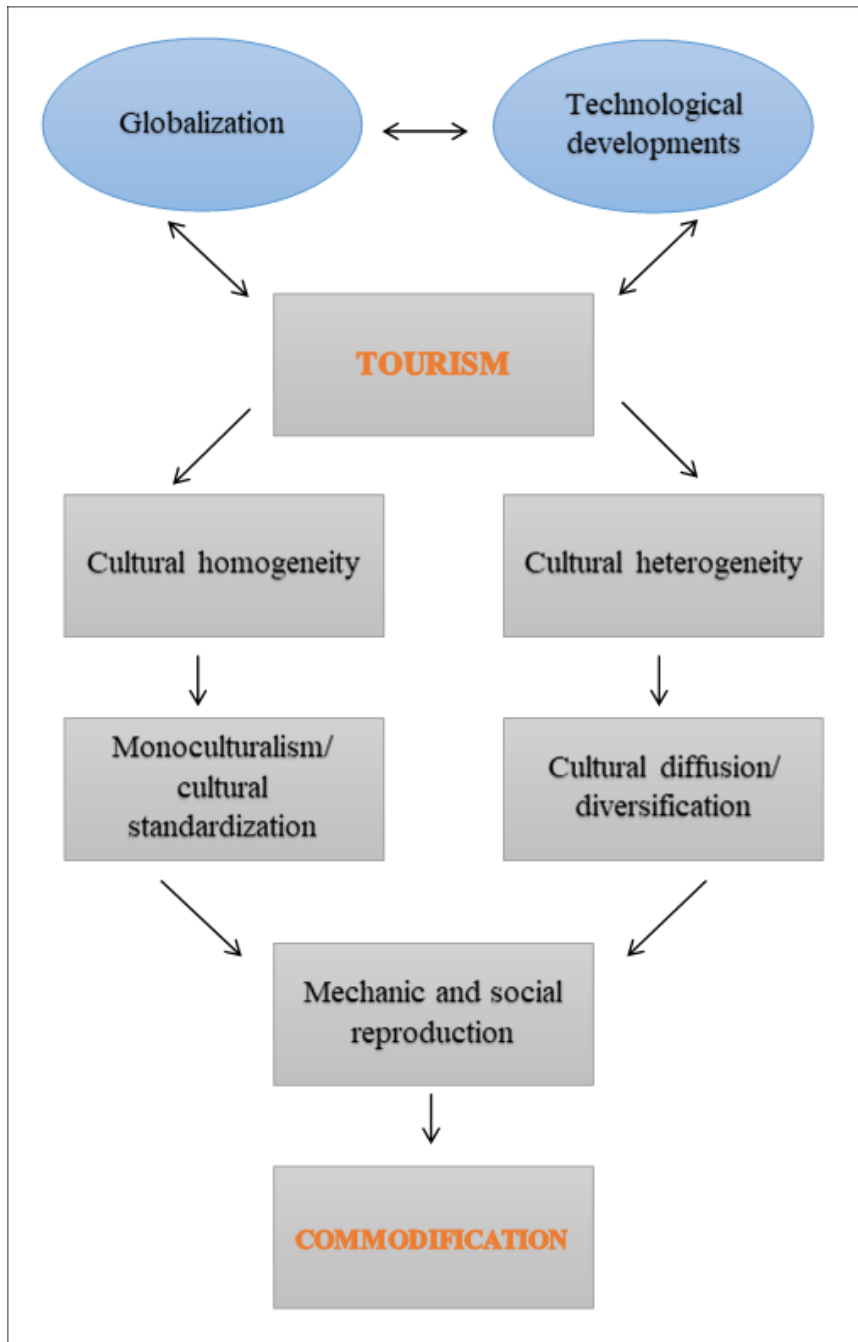


Figure 1: Proposed Model for Tourism-Commodification Relationship

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While globalization affects tourism, tourism itself accelerates globalization owing to the travels of people to every corner of the world through mass movements. Mutual interaction among globalization, technological developments, and tourism has two different effects on culture. Tourism leads to both homogeneity and heterogeneity in the cultural context. Places become time-independent, differences disappear, and a standard global culture emerges with cultural homogeneity (Giddens, 1998). Homogeneity results in monoculturalism or cultural standardization in this context (Hay and Marsh, 2000; Mazur, 2010). One of the most obvious examples of this is the fast food chains even running in the smallest villages. Western style restaurants, stores, or museums can also be considered within the same perspective.

Cultural heterogeneity thesis opposes the idea of disappearance of differences. It points out the idea that interaction with different cultures increases cultural diversification or diffusion (Iwabuchi, 2002). As well as resembling to each other and correspondingly contributing the emergence of a single global culture, societies define and express their own differences as a result of interaction with different communities (Keyman and Saribay, 2000). Along with local cuisine, hotels and restaurants serve foods and drinks specific to different cultures; tourists travelling to Far East start eating their own food by chopsticks which is a part of Far Eastern culture, or they wear Far Eastern clothes after returning to homeland. Although there are unique stone house hotels in Alaçatı, operations of chain hotels which have the same standards all over the world are the examples of cultural homogeneity in terms of not considering local texture of the town. On the other hand, serving Mexican food or other world cuisine to a German tourist in a stone house hotel in Alaçatı exemplifies cultural heterogeneity.

The view that cultural homogeneity and in turn monoculturalism/standardization leading to commodification is dominant in the literature. However; in the suggested model not only homogeneity but also heterogeneity, which reveals cultural diversity, generates commodification. Commodification is the process of considering objects and activities primarily with their exchange values and turning them into goods or services (Cohen 1988). In terms of tourism, presentation of local values such as local traditions, rituals, festivals, or handicrafts causes the commodification (Gotham, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2011).

Local values presented to tourism experience are commoditized by mechanic and social reproduction. Mechanic reproduction means copying

tourism attractions mechanically; whereas social reproduction is the association of groups, cities, and regions through famous tourism attractions. For instance; tourists buy uniform souvenirs -e.g. magnet, sculpture, t-shirts- from local people in Alaçatı and use them in their hometown, or give these souvenirs as a gift to families and relatives; or tourists embrace, practice, or present traditional foods or habits -e.g. lifestyle, philosophy, clothing- of the visited destinations and share these values with their families. Presentation of local food or customs -e.g. traditional village weddings, local dance or music shows, religious rituals- only for tourists is another way of mechanic and social reproduction. Trading cultural values also brings about staged authenticity (Mbaiwa, 2011). As a conclusion, while local people and other suppliers create commodities by replicating and staging cultural values, tourist demand on these reproductions increase and sustain the commodification process.

CONCLUSION

There are two different scholarly views on the relationship among globalization, tourism, and local culture; with the contribution of tourism, globalization is supposed to cause both cultural homogeneity and emergence of different cultures by means of cultural heterogeneity (Urry, 1999). Although cultural homogeneity and monoculturalism/cultural standardization is widely assumed to lead to commodification, according to the model we suggested in this study, not only homogeneity but also cultural diffusion/diversity resulting from heterogeneity prompts commodification. As mentioned by MacCannell (1999), tourists replicate cultural values in terms of mechanic and social reproduction which results in commodification.

Interaction of communities which have different social and cultural structures increases commodification of cultures. Cultural values offered as a package to tourists are commoditized in this context (Gotham, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2011). Commodification of cultural values in order to develop tourism has both positive and negative effects on culture (Cole, 2007; Mbaiwa, 2011). While negative effects are reducing or ruining authenticity of cultures, destroying local identity and cultural values, leading conflicts in culture, degeneration of social environment and relationships as well as making the destination less appealing (Bauer and McKercher, 2003; Greenwood, 1978; MacCannell, 2001; Shepherd, 2002); positive effects are the conservation and survival of cultural values, identities, customs, and traditions that have almost been forgotten, reappearance of old business branches and handcrafts, diversification and enrichment of

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cultures, resurgence of cultural ties, possession of cultural self-consciousness, and encouragement of local people to own and be proud of their culture (Cohen, 1988; Cole, 2007; Halewood and Hannam, 2001; Su, 2011).

Beyond these effects of commodification, its reflections are mutually beneficial both for local people and tourists. Even if it is not embraced by the whole community on the grounds that it leads to a loss of culture, many local people earn from what they produce and sell, or they feel satisfied by keeping their culture alive while practicing their traditions. Tourists, on the opposite side, gain abstract benefits such as experiences, joy, satisfaction, and pleasure.

Considering tourist demand, local people and other suppliers create commodities out of their cultural values; while these can be tangible elements such as souvenirs –e.g. magnets, sculptures, ceramics, jewelry, textile products, handcrafts-, intangible experiences are also presented to tourists. Tourist demand for these elements of culture and memories –e.g. photos, gift exchange, practices of encountered culture, narratives of experiences- shared in the extended travel stage, known as “voyage prolongé” (Boyer, 1999) also increase and sustain the commodification process. Although who creates commodification is controversial, evidently both local people and tourists generate the process. The study suggests to both sides that culture is a thing that needs to be approached respectfully and protected from extinction. Local people need to be loyal to their own culture, remain faithful to its essence, and should not shape it only for tourist demand. Tourists, on the other hand, should be aware of the uniqueness of the visited culture, and contribute to the protection of the culture by asking not to damage its authenticity.

Based on the previous conceptual framework in the literature, this study proposes a model which attempts to explain the processes leading to commodification of culture with respect to tourism. Lack of empirical evidence testing the model makes it impossible to derive practical analysis and results. An applied research with practical results would contribute to the literature. Authors also suggest to make deeper destination-based research to examine positive and negative effects of commodification on cultural values. Interviews with local people living in popular tourism destinations will be beneficial for the related area. Further research can also draw attention to the effects of commodification on tourists.

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