



# THE HOTEL BAUEN'S CHALLENGE TO CANNIBALIZING CAPITALISM

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**Abstract:** Contemporary capitalist globalization, neoliberalism and corporatized tourism create a cultural pedagogy asserting that there is no alternative to these systems. Taking a critical stance, this article bridges critical globalization and tourism studies to offer one alternative model to challenge this cultural pedagogy. It does this through a case study of the Hotel Bau- en of Buenos Aires, Argentina which was subject to a workers' takeover in 2003. This case study offers us insights into how an enterprise can transform its internal operating environ- ment and its external relations in profound ways to achieve important benefits for all stake- holders, but particularly the workers. The findings from this analysis challenge the assertion that there are no alternatives to a narrowly corporatized form of tourism. **Keywords:** critical tourism, worker-run recuperated enterprises, alternatives to capitalism, alternative manage- ment practices, tourism as work. © 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Cannibal- *n. & a. 1. n.* Person who eats human flesh; animal that eats its own species. (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 1976, p. 144)

Globalizing capitalism can be described as a “historical project” focused on “managing power relations within states and across the state system” in order to create a system of market rule in the interests of “a powerful global managerial class” (McMichael, 1998, p. 304). Neoliberalism is the ideology that articulates the detailed agenda to se- cure this system; it is a view that asserts the private sector should be freed from excessive government intervention so that market mecha- nisms can run unfettered and is correlated with strong private property rights, free markets and free trade (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). This system cedes extensive power and influence to business interests (Hamilton, 2003), thereby creating a notable democratic deficit and enables the capitalist class to accumulate great wealth (Giroux, 2008). But as numerous analysts have indicated, neoliberalism has much wider

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effects than merely economic impacts; it is in fact reshaping societies and cultures in profound ways.

One of the key controversies today among policy makers, scholars and communities concerns whether these forces should be advanced, reformed or opposed. Those speaking in support of neoliberalism, positioned in institutions like the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, government, business and academia, claim it should be advanced in the interests of economic development and human well-being. Other analysts, particularly certain economists like Jeffrey Sachs and Joseph Stiglitz as well as some policy makers, support these forces but have become concerned with the social and ecological costs of neoliberal policies and advocate a variety of measures to reform its worst aspects and humanize its processes.

The opponents of globalizing capitalism and neoliberalism are numerous and come from a variety of perspectives including right-wing protectionists, left-wing socialists, environmentalists, anarchists and a mix of grassroots activists moved by local concerns. While the opponents from the right mark a distinctive grouping, the other opponents have formed what could be called a loose coalition of “transnational left activism” (Reitan, 2007, p. 7) against capitalist globalization. These activists have organized protests whenever the global managerial elite gather, from Seattle to Davos, at meetings conducted by organizations like the World Trade Organization and the World Economic Forum. They have been effective in positive actions like the Jubilee 2000 debt relief campaign and the World Social Forum. While characterized by great diversity, they generally agree on the importance of nurturing diversity, solidarity, equity and emancipatory processes. Their gatherings have featured the catchcry “another world is possible” at meetings like the annual World Social Forum where they have explored visions of a more just, equitable and sustainable future (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008b).

Since the 90s, Latin America has been at the forefront of resistance to capitalist globalization and neoliberal ideology and exploration of alternatives to these hegemonic forces. In 2003, former workers of the Hotel Bauen in Buenos Aires, Argentina seized this bankrupted and abandoned hotel, re-opened it as a worker-run cooperative and sought legalization of their control under the principle of the right to work enshrined in the Argentine Constitution. This study employs critical globalization theory to explore the dynamics operative in capitalist globalization, neoliberalism and corporatized tourism, and the resistance these arouse. It additionally offers an exploratory case study analysis of the Hotel Bauen, which examines what critical public pedagogy its example offers and what this pedagogy might offer tourism social science.

While the key features of critical theory are numerous and have been detailed extensively in Kincheloe and McLaren (2000, 2005), and while there are many diverse critical approaches, this analysis focuses on the role of cultural pedagogy in contemporary affairs. This term is used here in the sense of Giroux who noted the “regulatory and emancipatory relationship between culture, power, and politics”

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