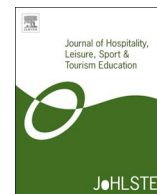


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## Critical Perspectives

# Critical tourism pedagogies: Exploring the potential through food

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## ABSTRACT

Tourism scholars and educators are challenging the long-standing assumption that education should meet the needs of industry and have begun asking what can be done to help students think more broadly and critically about the tourism encounter. Less considered, however, is the role and potential of tourism as (critical) public pedagogy. We move 'beyond' the classroom to assess tourism's broader role in the development of critical inquiry. This paper first illuminates the public, pedagogical role of tourism, arguing that tourism is inherently (and often uncritically) pedagogical. Drawing on the works of key critical pedagogical thinkers, we explore the ways in which tourism could engender critical inquiry. Using food as a platform for this exploration, we offer examples of how critical tourism pedagogies could operate in this context. We conclude by identifying opportunities to situate and evaluate other tourism experiences in regards to how they could encourage critical tourism pedagogies.

## 1. Introduction

Perhaps as a corollary to the growing influence of critical scholarship within tourism studies (cf. [Ateljevic, Morgan, & Pritchard, 2007](#)) attention is now turning to what and how students are learning about tourism. While debates about the purpose of tourism education at the post-secondary level are not new, many in the field have, arguably, accepted the notion that a purely vocational orientation to tourism education is not sufficient. Indeed, [Tribe's \(2002\)](#) argument regarding the need to develop what he called the "philosophic practitioner" through tourism education offered an appealing 'middle ground' between the expectations of industry-oriented service and global stewardship. Recently, a number of scholars have shared their strategies for engendering critical thinking in tourism and hospitality studies (see for example, [Fullagar & Wilson, 2012](#)) and have called not just for critical pedagogies in tourism education ([Bellhassen & Caton, 2011](#)) but for exploring the value of educational approaches that are multi-disciplinary and even post-disciplinary (see, for example, [Caton, 2014](#)). Relatedly, as an area of scholarly investigation, the topic of learning through tourism has gained ground recently. For example, [Falk, Ballantyne, Packer and Benckendorff \(2012\)](#) provide a thorough overview of the relevant literature linking tourism and education to date and describe the area as "neglected".

This paper seeks to build on these developments by exploring the potential for critical tourism pedagogy beyond the classroom walls. While pedagogy is often associated with schools, a great deal of pedagogy occurs outside the classroom, whether recognized or not. Social media, farm tours, slow food dinners, culinary events, and food festivals all provide dynamic sites for a range of pedagogical activities. Outside the classroom, people can teach about cooking from scratch, learn about food miles, demonstrate how to milk a cow, practice making their own preserves, share knowledge of endangered artisanal foods, and experience local food.

Using a broad pedagogical perspective, we position tourism first-and-foremost as public pedagogy and consider the role tourism

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plays in reinforcing certain ideological ‘truths’ about the world for both hosts and guests. Next, we consider the role tourism *could* play as public pedagogy, in particular, as critical public pedagogy, in resisting those ideological truths. Third, we give life to the exploration by offering examples of specific food-related tourism endeavors, arguing that because food provides in-and-of-itself a pedagogical experience, it is ‘ripe’ for engendering ideological critique and awareness-raising. Hence, tourism-related travel that involves critical pedagogical explorations of food presents an opportunity to engender critical inquiry. Last, we extend the discussion to consider the ways food presents an opportunity for critical tourism pedagogies more broadly.

## 2. Tourism as public pedagogy: what *does* tourism teach?

Tourism is an educational practice. The travel experience, undertaken by tourists and set up by operators, travel agents, developers, and host communities, operates as a social force (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006) and as such encourages or discourages learning about power imbalances and injustice. Thus, whether or not scholars become concerned with the educational potential of travel, its pedagogical power cannot be ignored. As Werry argues,

Tourism is, arguably, one of the only contemporary sites outside of the education industry where explicitly designated, non-vocational learning about other times, places, and peoples takes place. (2008, p. 17)

Central to thinking about tourism as pedagogy is the notion of public pedagogy – teaching and learning that is not limited to the classroom. Developed by educator Henry Giroux, public pedagogy can both reproduce the status quo and resist it. As an example, Giroux (2004a, p. 45) argues that

the media, as well as the culture they produce, distribute, and sanction, have become the most important educational force in creating citizens and social agents capable of putting existing institutions into question and making democracy work – or doing just the opposite.

Foremost thinkers in the area of food and pedagogy, Flowers and Swan (2015), argue public pedagogy can entail resistance or social reproduction. In the context of food and tourism, they outline the ways in which the tourist’s experience of food, as a medium for learning about culture, can serve to challenge or to reinforce cultural stereotypes (Swan & Flowers, 2012). Robert (2015) confirms this view, while broadening the term to include the political, social and cultural spaces and discourses in which processes of normalization, as well as contestation and resistance, take place. In addition, “public pedagogy also refers to the processes and functions that operate within these spaces and on and within learners to generate experience and impressions from which meaning is made and through which learning happens” (p. 115).

Efforts to view all pedagogy as political and contested beg consideration of the forces working to shape pedagogy for their own benefit. Contemporary assessments of pedagogy, then, particularly pedagogy in the public domain (e.g., media, public policy) must be situated within the broader ideological context of neoliberal globalization. Giroux (2004b, p. 74) defines public pedagogy in the neoliberal era this way:

Public pedagogy in this sense refers to a powerful ensemble of ideological and institutional forces whose aim is to produce competitive, self-interested individuals vying for their own material and ideological gain. Corporate public pedagogy culture largely cancels out or devalues gender, class-specific and racial injustices of the existing social order by absorbing the democratic impulses and practices of civil society within narrow economic relations. Corporate public pedagogy has become an all-encompassing cultural horizon for producing market identities, values and practices.

While not much scholarship within tourism studies paints tourism as part of this powerful ensemble, attention has been drawn to the ways tourism-related policy decisions are normalized within the discourse of neoliberal globalization (see, for instance, Mair, 2006). Simpson’s work (2010) connects directly with the notion of tourism as public pedagogy as he develops a powerful theorization of themed tourism development in post-socialist Macau as “a didactic laboratory for Chinese consumerist pedagogy” (p. 67). He writes, “[i]n the case of Macao, this themed landscape comprises a grammar that budding capitalists must master in order to participate in transnational consumerism” (p. 73). Authors such as Silk and Andrews (2011) build on Gibson (2005) and Kellner (1995) and take up Giroux’s ideas in their work on urban development and branding. They illuminate the ways pedagogy, through public discourse, translates and reinforces certain messages about the (tourism-related) options for development under neoliberal globalization. They write:

...such discourses are extremely public, potent, pedagogic, and political, serving as an economy of affect through which positions of power and privilege are normalized and thereby (re)produced. Further, this also points to the increased role of culture and the cultural industries in disseminating cultural pedagogies that educate citizens = tourists = consumers with respect to “how to behave and what to think, feel, believe, fear and desire— and what not to” (Kellner, 1995, p. 2) within certain spaces.” (Silk & Andrews, 2011, p. 438)

Although not concentrating on the pedagogical role of tourism per se, other critical tourism scholars, particularly those concerned with gender and race, have been building the case for challenging the ways tourism trades on and reinforces unequal power relationships; issues that extend to the very structure of the tourism academy itself (Munar et al., 2015).

Of course, elements of tourism scholarship have begun to make the argument that *some* aspects of tourism activity offer potential for critical inquiry. Within the great bulk of volunteer tourism studies, for instance, one can find examples seemingly brimming with opportunities for transformative learning and engendering resistance to the dominant powers (see for example, Coghlan & Gooch,

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