

UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE CIUDAD JUÁREZ

Turismo en la frontera del conocimiento: entre la modernidad y la posmodernidad



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Alejandro Palafox Muñoz
Coordinadores

Academia Mexicana de Investigación Turística, A.C.



**Turismo en la frontera del conocimiento:
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An approach to the analysis of sustainable tourism development on the island of Cozumel, Mexico

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(Universidad Autónoma de Quintana Roo)*

Introduction

The manner in which globalization is proposed by neoliberal economic policy, “seems that our societies are left to choose between two alternative paths. Either they get integrated in a subordinate and dependent manner to the global market or they would have no other choice than the illusion of autonomy with a backward state” (Guimarães, 1998). Based on the earlier approach, the phenomenon of the economic globalization is characterized by an increase in the flow of goods, capital and technology, which occurs in contexts and imperialist relations throughout recent decades by the signing of agreements of the exploitation of human resources and materials of the capitalist periphery.

To accomplish that, the State establishes the strategies to allow the consolidation of neoliberal economic policy, in this manner the post-capitalism dominated by the tertiary sector, tourism has economically strengthened. Simultaneously funding has decreased to the primary activities, and as a consequence the market organizes economic life. In order for these actions to consolidate the mode of production, in Mexico, the State allows purchase and sale of farm land (ejido) through the reform of the article 27 of the Constitution, causing the deterioration of rural areas and forcing the residents to seek better options for living, mainly by migrating abroad, and to urban centres; while others are implementing the strategy of local development.

In this sense, tourism has become an important economic activity for its ability to attract foreign exchange and employment, which has had great development in the world after the opening of trade and the creation of global commodity chains as a tactic to the reproduction and expansion of the production mode, es-

establishing tourism as an axis of capitalist accumulation. An example of the previous model is the International Tourism Groups (ITG): the Marriott International, Hilton Hotels Corporation and Choice Hotel International, have had a growth of 69.3%, 59.1% and 48.8% respectively since its establishment and development in developing countries from 1995 (Palafox, Zizumbo y Arriaga, 2010). The same happened in the Catalan region between 1998 and 2005, where one in five hotels were administered by a company of the ITG (Buades, 2011).

In Mexico, tourism activity is a priority sector for investment attraction as well as foreign exchange earnings. Thus, during 2010, the country attracted \$ 23.5 MDD, which are divided as follows: \$11.8 MDD by spending of visitors, \$ 9.8 MDD through the sale of tourists with overnight stay, and \$ 1.9 MDD through the consumption made by the trippers (SECTUR, 2011).

Tourist activity in Mexico is important because it is considered to be an export element, and that the average share of tourism in the last eight years in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was 8%. This highlights the economic importance of the tourism sector for the country, hence the motivation from the State in promoting actions that allow the permanence and stability of the mode of production. As a result, the private investments identified in the last nine years has amounted to \$ 25,857.75 MDD, which have been focused mainly on beach destinations like Cancun, Huatulco, Los Cabos, Loreto, Ixtapa, Nayarit and Sinaloa, as well as the Tourism Projects (TP) of Riviera Maya and Costa Maya (destinations that were created by the National Fund for Tourism Development (FONATUR), and have hoarded the 58.4% of economic resources of investment). In the same tenor, investment in hotels and real estate from 2006 has been in the order of \$ 13,313.66 MDD, of which 59.5% was for the construction of new hotel infrastructure.

Also, the state of Quintana Roo is one of the pillars of the Mexican economy through tourism development, mainly because of the three FONATUR's projects in the area (Cancun, Riviera Maya and Costa Maya) along with the traditional tourist destinations (Cozumel and Isla Mujeres), in which the island of Cozumel excels for being the largest port in Mexico with cruise reception. The previous, makes it necessary to analyze the most important economic activity for the locality; the political

economy perspective provides the analytical categories that will help to reveal the contradictions that are raised by this mode of capitalist production that looks for sustainable development of tourism through the use of strategies that are far from what they appear to be.

Political economy

According to Marx (2007), Lange (1966) and Nikitin (1978), political economy is the science of social laws governing the production and distribution of material resources that satisfy human needs. In this sense, Marx (2007) states that the political economy analysis of a country starts with its people and its division of social classes, and the different branches of production, i.e. from its mode of production, since production of material goods is the basis of life in society. Thus, “the mode of production of material life conditions the progress of social, political and spiritual” (Marx, 1973a), this is because people produce in society, in the framework of free competition (Marx, 1990).

Based on Marx’s idea (2007), men need food, footwear, clothing and other material goods. In order to get them, they have to produce them individually and / or collectively through the acquisition of natural resources, since “nature is the source of materials for use” (Marx, 1973b), and the act of taking resources over for the satisfaction of human needs is called production, so that man through the act of work transforms the environment according to his requirements. Therefore, productive forces and relations of production establish the mode of production.

[...] in the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production, corresponding to a certain stage of development of their material productive forces. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which raises a legal and political superstructure (Marx, 1973a).

Thus, the relations between men and the means of production determine the status and place of men in production and means of distribution of goods:

[...] The slave, the servant, the employee all receives a certain amount of food allowed to exist as a slave, servant or employee. The conqueror who lives from the tribute, the official who lives from the tax, the owner of the land who lives from the rent, and the monk who lives from alms all get a share of social production (Marx, 1990).

Based on the aforementioned citation, the dominant production relations not only impose their laws of operation to the other relations of production which are subordinated, but also determine the general nature of the superstructure of a given society, in this way, “it transforms according to change and development by the productive forces and means of production” (Marx, 1973c).

“The manner in which men produce their livelihood depends, before anything, on nature itself and the means of life found in it and then reproduced. This mode of production should not be regarded as only the reproduction of the physical existence of individuals. It is rather the way in which the activity is conducted by the individuals, a specific manner of manifesting their way of living, a determined way of living of the individuals” (Marx, 2008).

Following the last idea, relations of production are the basis of the mode of production, and are integrated by: a) the types of ownership over the means of production, b) the place taken by the social groups in the production system and their relationships between each other, resulting in a mode of property, c) by the forms of distribution of products, which depend on the forms of property taken.

Thus, in capitalist society, such relationships are antagonistic, since the means of production are private and result in the domination and subordination in the exploitation of one part of society over the other. This is because the owners of the means of production have the total amount of productive forces at their service; at the same time they have influence over institutions and the means of production for the dissemination of ideas through the creation of a world of life. Marx, in the *Grundrisse*, presents this idea as follows:

“... Every capitalist, indeed, requires his workers to save, but only his own workers, because they are set against him as his employees: but he prefers not to demand that of the rest of the workers, since they are set against him as consumers. Of all the “compassionate” phrases he turns to all means necessary to persuade them to consume, to make his merchandise more attractive in order to make them believe they have new needs” (Marx, 2007).

Based on the above, a study of population is conducted, the branches of production and the means of production, resulting in the division of social classes in the mode of production as well as their relations of production between the means of production and productive forces, which generates differences between the distribution of touristic product based on relations of domination and subordination.

Touristic activity in Cozumel

According to data from INEGI (2011), the island of Cozumel has a population of 79,535 inhabitants. The base of the economy is tourism. Thus, the dynamic of income for the state of Quintana Roo in touristic activity has been growing steadily, and has established itself as a column in the foreign exchange earnings and contribution to GDP, in addition to being expanded into diverse territories, establishing Cozumel as a key destination to the state tourism offer.

The highest concentrations of population are located in the townships of Benito Juárez and Solidaridad, in which the infrastructure of access and services of the state is concentrated. Therefore, the ITG have invested \$ 4,295.15 million dollars in the last four years, representing 22.37% of total tourism investment in the country. Of this, the island of Cozumel received only 0.4% of all economic resources taken by the state government, making it clear the tendency to promote the growth of the touristic projects started by the state and to promote only those FONATUR destinations.

Thus, the Riviera Maya and Cancun are notable for the amount of resources that they have received in the creation of tourism offer; as a result, these destinations represent 82.3% of the number of rooms of Quintana Roo. In total, the state has 893 rooms divided in 82,983 establishments. In 2010 11.7 million

visitors arrived in the state, of which 30.8% were cruise passengers –most of them reached the island of Cozumel, and 5% were border trippers. To highlight this, the infrastructure for cruise reception is managed by private capital (Carnival Cruises, Aviomar Group and, Carrix Group).

Therefore, the touristic destinations with a major boost of a trade in the state of Quintana Roo are: Cancun, Cozumel, Costa Maya, Isla Mujeres and the Riviera Maya. However, the promotion of projects, created by FONATUR are driven towards mass tourism (sun and sea), are a fundamental part of tourism policy for the government, which is reflected in the Statistics for the number of visitors, strengthening infrastructure and promotion.

Over the last ten years, there has been a period of intensification in the investment to build tourism, based mainly on the creation of hotels and real estate for diversification of the tourist flow through timeshares, and to consolidate the luxury housing developments for the tourism of second residence (Jiménez y Sosa, 2010). Also, there has been a steady growth in tourist arrivals in the area. In Cozumel, cruise tourism has been propped up after the construction of infrastructure and the relentless promotion of the destination, which has led to the stagnation in the lodging sector, under the shadow of the cruise vessels, the latter is the main interest of the municipal, state and federal authorities, even though the island has a hotel infrastructure of more than 4000 rooms.

Despite the arrival to Quintana Roo's soil of more than 100 million tourists, economic growth conditions are too complex for the reaching of the proposed regional development of the touristic activity, while food poverty in Mexico has increased seven times compared with the period of 1989 - 1994 (Scott, 2009 in UNPD, 2011). Along with the aforementioned data, the country has collected only 21% of GDP, "derived from the low levels of tax collection and tax evasion" (OCDE, 2011). Likewise, income and investment are targeted to tourist destinations with high prevalence of transnational corporations. The representation of the ITG in the state is limited, because the Spanish companies hoard the territory (Palafox, Zizumbo y Villarreal, 2010).

It is important to mention that 82% of the international market that visit the tourist destinations of Quintana Roo comes from the United States of America, which has created a clear econom-

ic dependence in this market, the rest of the tourist flow comes from Italy, Spain, Switzerland, Germany, UK, France, Holland, Portugal and Belgium. However, the European visitor prefers the Riviera Maya, which consists of 45% of its market, the rest being North Americans and Canadians. Quintana Roo and its major tourist destinations depend on the U.S. market; therefore its promotion revolves around the market of spring breakers.

Cruise liner tourism is an important sector for the local economy, mainly integrated by the Cozumel, Costa Maya and Riviera Maya harbours, which receive passengers from the United States and Canada, most of them middle class, who make an average purchase of \$ 82.00 dollars, and make use of complementary offers like restaurants, supermarkets, jewellery, crafts, restaurants, rental, etc; leaving in 2010 an economic benefit of 296.51 million dollars, which Cozumel captures 80.4%, Costa Maya 18% and, Riviera Maya 1.6%.

One of the pillars of economic globalization is the modernization of products and services or the creation of new ones, in order to monopolize a market with more consumers. Cozumel's tourism product is strongly associated to the coastal resources, therefore the sun and sea tourism with diversity in: cruises, time-shares and all-inclusive services. This, together with the intensive use of natural resources for diving, fishing, snorkelling and complementary offers such as archaeological sites of Mayan culture, as well as marketing of craftsmanship and jewellery have made of Cozumel a tourist destination mainly organized by Local Touristic Groups (Palafox, 2010).

Final comments

The intensive use of natural and cultural attractions, as well as high consumption of goods and services has had an impact on national and international touristic activities. Thus, whenever the state constructs destinations according to international trends in the framework of neoliberal economic policy, it continues to focus on promoting economic sustainability, so that the mode of production continues replicating itself, causing tourism to constitute an axis of accumulation.

This has certain, important, implications. It creates infrastructure for access and services to develop tourist activity that indirectly favors the progress of the community. Funds are also

received to create workspaces and aid the explosive flow of migration, a consequence of the opportunities surrounding the quality of life. Another important implication is the capital outflows due to the large number of multinationals established in these destinations, through the offering of workspaces on-line or through operators with highly precarious working conditions including those of stability and renowned for high exploitation, where working hours exceed the regulations of the authorities.

Also, the gap of inequality continues to rise, as the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL, 2010) confirms, stating that in Mexico, 82.3% of the working population has some type of poverty [food, education or property], evidence of the situational effect on the national and international tourism sector. The country has 6.7 million workers in the tourism sector, of which only 33% have social security (WTTC, 2008) and (SECTUR, 2009). This diminishes the consumption capacity of the population, which continues to decrease due to the lack of assistance from the State. However, surplus is needed to replicate the mode of production, but “the insatiable quest for profit tends to restrict markets compressing salaries” (Bensaïd, 2009 in Marx, 2009), in other words, the purchasing power of the people diminishes, and therefore the system goes into crisis.

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