

From Tourism to Research

An essential issue that contemporary tourism studies must address is the gap between the tourist's lived experience and the researcher's analytical interpretation in understanding and deconstructing the culture of the destination. This issue points to a potential disjunction between the experiential and affective perspective of the tourist and the analytical and conceptual lens of the scholar. It further raises critical questions: can the tourist's lived experience be transformed into a valid source of cultural data? Or, conversely, can the researcher grasp the deeper cultural meanings of travel without direct, embodied experience? A tourism researcher is an explorer who walks alongside travelers—not merely to observe, but to understand more deeply and reach the essence of knowledge. From origin to destination, and from destination to purpose, they pause at the waystations of thought. Their mission is to convince the academic community of the vastness of this interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary ocean, and to highlight its significance within the epistemological framework of our time. The journey begins with observation—watching with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the heart, witnessing landscapes, feeling spaces, and experiencing moments. However, when the tourist's gaze intertwines with the researcher's lens, the journey transforms into something far deeper than mere sightseeing. It becomes an exploration into the layers of culture and identity. The researcher becomes a bridge—from the passion of seeing to the contemplation of meaning, from emotional stirrings to intellectual depth, and from the threshold of admiration to the depths of analysis. Travel is not just a spatial movement—it is a gradual entry into semantic and cultural worlds. The tourist, with a curious and captivated gaze, and the researcher, with an analytical mind, both seek to uncover these worlds of meaning—one through experience, the other through examination and interpretation. While the tourist may be enchanted by fleeting beauty and charm, the researcher pays attention to the hidden layers of culture woven into the fabric of place and time. In this context, the adoption of phenomenological approaches—by engaging with the individual's lived experience in relation to the surrounding world—enables a deeper understanding of travel not merely as spatial displacement, but as an encounter with meaning and identity. Within such a framework, the tourist's experience can thus be regarded as a form of cultural and epistemic data, providing valuable insight into the hidden layers of the phenomenon under investigation. These two perspectives, though different, complement each other: one experiences, the other interprets. Travel, as a form of cultural understanding, invites a reconciliation between these two views—where travel narratives are enriched with cultural analysis. It is a call to a deeper perspective on tourism, recognizing that travel is not merely about reaching a destination, but about traversing a path adorned with meaningful landscapes and thoughtful pauses. In all its forms, travel provides a fertile ground for the free tourism of culture.

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