

Via@ Tourism Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors: [Viatourismreview.com](http://viatourismreview.com)

To cite this article:

DELAPLACE, M., GRAVARI-BARBAS, M., 2016, "On The Margins of Tourism: Utopias and Realities Of The Off The Beaten Track Tourism", Via@, 2016-1(9), <http://viatourismreview.com/2016/12/on-the-margins-of-tourism/>

To link to this article:

<http://viatourismreview.com/2016/12/on-the-margins-of-tourism/>

Languages:

EN

Article in English.

FR

PT

DE

ES

IT

This article can be downloaded in French (original language), Portuguese, German, Spanish and Italian.

Via@ Tourism Review makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform.

Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Via@ Tourism Review. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Via@ Tourism Review shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

DELAPLACE, M., GRAVARI-BARBAS, M., 2016, "On The Margins of Tourism: Utopias and Realities Of The Off The Beaten Track Tourism", *Via@*, 2016-1(9), <http://viatourismreview.com/2016/12/on-the-margins-of-tourism/>

On The Margins of Tourism: Utopias and Realities Of The Off The Beaten Track Tourism

Marie Delaplace

Lab'urba, UPEM

Maria Gravari-Barbas

EIREST, EIREST, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Introduction

“Those who travel pursue some phantom which perpetually eludes them; they are always hoping to find some mode of life that is somehow fundamentally different from any mode with which they are familiar. (...) In the obvious places and on the Beaten Track, they never find what they are looking for. On the Beaten Track, through whatever part of the world it may lead, men and women live always in very much the same way, and there is no Open Sesame to their intimacy. But perhaps off the Beaten Track, in the little out of the way places, where the hotels are bad (...), perhaps where there are no hotels, but only rest houses (...), perhaps in the places where you must bring your own tent and porters, with provisions and ammunition (...) perhaps where there is nothing but the jungle and leeches, serpents and precipices and vampires and an occasional pygmy with a blow-pipe and poisoned arrows... Perhaps. But even amongst the crocodiles and the cannibals the secret still eludes you. Life is still fundamentally the same.”

A. Huxley, 1926

As much as the frontier cannot be thought of independently from the countries or territories it separates, tourism *off* the beaten track can only be analysed in comparison with tourism *on* the beaten track. But is there really an on the beaten

track tourism? Spontaneously, images of the packed beaches of the South of France, herds of tourists climbing the Mont Saint-Michel or tackling the temple of Angkor come to mind. The beaten track would therefore be the world of multitude, and the off the beaten track, the world of the individual or the small group. But is multitude enough to define the beaten track, and isolation, what it is not?

Associated with the multitude, the places of the beaten track tourism would be already explored, defaced, describing locations and places no longer offering any possibility of discovery. Conversely, the places of the off the track tourism would be places that we imagine as remote, inaccessible, still pristine and which have yet to reveal their secrets. But our world being finite, with paths to discover and new ways to be opened becoming scarcer, will tourism off the beaten track not gradually disappear?

It should be noted that « off the beaten track » tourism, just like « beaten track » tourism, vary in time and space since they are, ontologically, *located*. Therefore, the current off the beaten track tourism is gradually set to disappear in the near future. As several authors of this special edition observe, there is indeed sometimes some form of institutionalisation of tourism, considered as a time off the beaten track – and it might even be that the institutionalisation, if not the massification are the written future of places off the beaten track, which prove to be successful tourism development stories. Indeed, tourism off the beaten track only lasts for a short period of time, until the time of its discovery. To paraphrase Mallarmé¹, the simple fact of discovering an off the beaten track tourism could very well be cutting the largest part of the enjoyment of this type of tourism – which is to guess it gradually. Thus, the site of Chernobyl (Yankovska, Hannam, 2014), long regarded as a form of off the beaten track tourism, is officially open to tourism since 2011, with now legal excursions; « Tourism has a new frontier: the site of the world's biggest civilian nuclear disaster »². Already, destinations off the beaten track do not have limits, as practices invented by tourists, sometimes proposed by tourism stakeholders, to domesticate the extraordinary and re-enchant the ordinary, do not seem to have limits.

Indeed, the off the beaten track of some is sometimes only the re-enchanted day-to-day life of the others. In “Before and after tourism(s). The trajectories of tourist destinations and the role of actors involved in "off-the-beaten-track" tourism: a literature review” Aurélie Condevaux, Géraldine Diamant and Maria Gravari-Barbas review the literature exploring practices, stakeholders and the places operating on that niche. They offer a look at the alignment of the ordinary with tourism often mentioned in the literature. Thus, they highlight the fact that tourism development of ordinary places presumes an enchantment and a process of change in perspective, which is a form of distancing from this from the ordinary. They also demonstrate that the involvement of inhabitants and what we commonly refer to as local community in tourism development is nothing new. Nowadays, these inhabitants are however central stakeholders in these dynamics. The current tourism development of ordinary places therefore is based on these equally ordinary stakeholders from these places, namely the inhabitants.

¹ Cité par Jules Huret, 1891.

² <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/13/chernobyl-now-open-to-tourists>

As discussed in a context map in TEOROS (Gravari-Barbas, Delaplace 2015), tourism off the beaten track cannot be dealt with as an analytical category (Cravatte, 2009). Conversely, it should be granted the status of a research topic to understand how the values and the criteria associated with this concept construct, circulate, and where they are located (*ibidem*). It is in – and through – this context that their characterisation of « off the beaten track » tourism places or products that the latter provide us with precious material to analyse: not one of the said places or practices, but of the representations in the entire chain of stakeholders, and especially tourists and public and private decision-makers.

It is around these two categories of stakeholders – which in reality include many others in – that the introduction of this special edition is organised.

Tourism, in search of the margins

Shouldn't we move away from a characterisation of places to focus on the topic, the stakeholder, the tourist? Isn't tourism off the beaten track more a perspective, a state of mind, an imaginary, a quest?

Tourists off the beaten track would then be advance parties, ground-breakers!

Tourists, like consumers, demand to live experiences. Experiential consumption is therefore live as a quest for sensations and emotions, at the same time as practices in line with a personal history (Pine II and Gilmore, 1998). But experience isn't either always an experience off the beaten track! Furthermore, it doesn't seem to be the place in itself, the path defined as being off the beaten track, nor the lived experience which characterises what is off the beaten track and what isn't. Rather, it seems to be defined by the ways in which we take this path... As outlined by Jean Scol (in this edition), when travelling the path by motorbike is way more important than the final destination. In the same vein, Pascal Argod (in this edition) highlights how tourists going off the beaten track claim to free themselves from the marked routes in order to discover places. It is indeed specific modes that qualify the off the beaten track, and others qualifying its opposite. So that an *off* the beaten track tourist can become an *on* the beaten track tourist as soon as his outlook and practices evolve. Dean MacCannell, retracing his own footsteps, in an introspection entitled "Way off the Beaten Path-Or How I Became a Tourism Researcher", which is at the same time an extraordinary retrospective of the paths travelled by tourism during the last decades of the 20th century (in this edition), thus reflectively wonders about his own status as a tourist or a traveller. He invites us to contemplate the off the beaten track path that made him who he is, a tourism researcher. He demonstrates how qualifying and other adjectives associated with the term tourism cannot summarise the variety of behaviours of the tourists, first and foremost human beings, living the experience of their own life. He parallels Aldous Huxley's conclusion that "Life is still fundamentally the same" (1926).

Brenda Le Bigot and Jean Scol (in this edition) discuss liminal practices, claiming to be « beaten path » by analysing, for the former, the backpacking around the world trip in 365 days, and the geography of motorbike tourism for the latter. Their work highlights how these liminal practices can eventually be gradually institutionalised from the moment those who were young backpackers or young motorbike riders get older, change their perspective and therefore, are called to give up their claims for more marginal practices or to taint their past requirements and values... These

changes are not only generational. They are also located in time and space. Thus, the renewal of these off the beaten track practices by the current young generations is not guaranteed since the values characterising these past practices are not necessarily the same as today's values.

Off the beaten track incursions, analysed by the authors contributing to this edition, are not necessarily without consequences, be it for the visitors or the visited. In "*Breaking and entering, or a feeling of heterotopia in tourism situations. A study of two borderline tourism cases*", recounting the visit to the city of Paldiski in Estonia and a stay in a house of the Chora on the Island of Skyros, Hécate Vergopoulos (in this edition) highlights the fact that the presence in a place of someone else's daily life can also become problematic for the tourist. Should it not be agreed to by the host, the tourist could experience it as a tourism offence" in other cultures and lives. Indeed, in the first case, the reality of the people's economic challenges is exposed to tourists, driving them to question their very status of tourists. In the second case, since no encounter nor operation directly took place between the tourists and the owner of the house, the place does not allow the tourist to fully become one.

Tourists' quest to go through the looking glass (finally experience the backstage), including making efforts at introspection and surpassing oneself, is based on turning places and daily practices into poetry.

And if this daily life wasn't the other's but his own? In a world characterised by speed, mobility and movement, could off the beaten track tourism finally lead one to stay at home? In an interpretation of what some researchers call "staycation" (Germann-Moltz, 2009), Romain Bérard invests in his article "*About unexpected tourism? When snow meets the city*" this "home tourism"; daily places becoming tourism places from the moment they adopt attributes usually lacking them. Would the feeling of living an "off the beaten track" experience stem from the (re)discovery, certes reenchanté (by snow, a specific atmosphere, a visit conducted by a local "greeter", etc.) of his or her daily living places? The entire geography of tourism, structured around the foundational differentiation between daily places and places outside the daily life is questioned by these new ways of considering tourism practices (MIT date).

The stakeholders, between *off the beaten track* suggestions and institutionalisation

If tourists are the ground-breakers, the pioneers, the ones making with their footsteps or a renewed and unique perspective, the new tourism practices, off the beaten track suggestions are also the result of institutional or non-institutional stakeholders (national or local decision-makers, associations, private stakeholders, editors, etc.). They are the ones creating desire, opening new perspectives and contributing to decompartmentalise places.

Tourism guides play a major role in this. The Lonely Planet guide immediately claims that the off the beaten track is a matter of attitude. Thus, it affirms that it is possible to be "off the beaten tracks... anywhere!" Advice is provided so that "much like a detective, finding how and where to get off the beaten path, be that far from the

tourist trail or directly on it, requires looking for clues, following your gut, and taking a few calculated risks”³. Thus, it suggests talking to people; to wander; to look at maps not to find your way, but to identify places you’ve never been; to take public transportation; to follow a visiting theme; to travel out of season and out of peak hours, and to avoid over-programming the visit; to be spontaneous; and to take a few risks (Gravari-Barbas, Delaplace, 2015).

This invitation to off the beaten track tourism, promoted by a tourism guide such as Lonely Planet, suggests a possible trivialisation associated with its generalisation, and probably contributes to its ulterior institutionalisation. In its article on “La médiatisation d’un tourisme “hors des sentiers battus” dans une édition touristique creative”, Pascal Argot highlights the fact that the off the beaten track institutionalisation is expressed through the development of a tourism guide. The variety of shapes it suggests are both “serving the customization of the travel and of the discovery of the other”, and is the sign of a generalisation and of a possible standardisation of practices.

Several authors insist on the tension between the “in” and the “off” of tourism suggestions meant to be “off the beaten track”. This tension is maintained between the stakeholders whose role is precisely to “market” products and places exploring the margins. In several cases, it is truly a construction of a tourism place, through the development, the labelling and the storytelling found in these.

In “*Tourism and writers’ houses, between places and letters*”, Aurore Bonniot-Mirloup (in this edition) demonstrates how a place seemingly lacking tourism interest – as it is a house, which can actually be mundane – can become interesting through a process of promotion of the writers living there. This place becomes the medium authorising the meeting between the tourist’s imaginary, and literature works, and then transmutes into the physical localisation of the visitor’s own utopia, thus becoming a heterotopia. Of course, this transmutation comes with mechanisms established by a chain of stakeholders – from the national stakeholders issuing labels, to local stakeholders willing to promote the heritage of their locality.

Chiara Rabbiosi, in her article on participatory tourism in Milan (in this edition) demonstrates, using a “*critical analysis of two initiatives*” (Piacere and MygranTour), the way local stakeholders and associations succeeded in creating new images of places in Milan, and in giving legitimacy to new tourism geographies – off the beaten track. However, this crucial analysis demonstrates that these initiatives, even though these are bottom up ones, cannot completely be differentiated from stereotypes or the reproduction of more traditional tourism suggestions.

Conclusion

How can we analyse these complex situations nowadays? Condevaux, Djament Tarn and Gravari-Barbas are introducing the concept of hyper-tourism, observing that emerging tourism practices (alternative tourism, “off the beaten track” tourism, etc.) do not act as a substitute for the visit to the top tourism locations. Tourists interested

³<<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel-tips-and-articles/how-to-get-off-the-beaten-track-anywhere>>, 18 December 2015

in “alternative” forms of tourism (Cousin *et al.* 2015) still seek, at the same time, more traditional forms of tourism. The “hyper-tourism” thesis would therefore testify to this accumulation and diversification of practices, and tourists moving indifferently from a more mainstream tourism which is characterised by commercially promoted products by providers established or concentrated in established tourism locations, to alternative tourism. Off the beaten track tourism does not oppose “mass” tourism, but complements it. As previously mentioned, moving from one to the other is sometimes only the result of a change of perspective... more than the result of a post-tourism situation. It is therefore the result of a hyper-tourism situation, characterised by the intensification, the generalisation and the cross-cutting nature of tourism phenomena, not in our post-modern societies but hyper-modern ones (Gravari-Barbas, Delaplace, 2015).

The critical analysis of the bibliography suggested by Condevaux, Djament-Tran and Gravari-Barbas (in this edition) substantiates the cross-cutting nature of contemporary tourism phenomena. It highlights both tourists’ (historical...) quest to further push the margins of the tourism ecumene, as well as the high reactivity of tourism stakeholders, who are now capable of offering increasingly more sophisticated and customised products. She especially highlights the disintermediation of tourism, made possible by the digital economy and by tourists’ maturity, which is always richer in “tourism capital” (Darbellay *et al.* 2011) and, often, by host-populations’ tourism maturity. Could the multiplication of possible direct encounters between the one (the tourists) and the other (the inhabitants) made possible by the development of Internet and peer-to-peer networks, annihilate their differentiations?

The hyper-tourism context thus introduces a new paradigm in the understanding of the tourism phenomenon as understood since its inception. It allows one to address tourists’ quest for off the beaten track experiences as an improvement from the tourism phenomenon as captured by research. It therefore requires one to reassess this research, and probably the concepts, as well as the methods and tools involved.

The tourism phenomenon allows it’s repositioning in the context of generalised mobilities. It promises to be an exciting prospect!

References

- Cousin S., Djament-Tran G., Gravari-Barbas M., Jacquot, S., 2015, “Contre la métropole *créative* ...tout contre. Les politiques patrimoniales et touristiques de Plaine Commune, Seine-Saint-Denis”. *Métropoles*, 17, *Politiques urbaines alternatives* (2). Available on: <https://metropoles.revues.org/5171>
- Cravatte C., 2009 “L’anthropologie du tourisme et l’authenticité, Catégorie analytique ou catégorie indigène ?” *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 1 (No 193-194).
- Darbellay F., Clivaz Ch., Nahrath S. Stock M., 2011, “Approche interdisciplinaire du développement des stations touristiques. Le capital touristique comme concept opératoire”, *Mondes du Tourisme*, No 4, p. 36-48
- Germann Molz, J., 2009, “Representing pace in tourism mobilities: Staycations, Slow Travel and The Amazing Race”. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 7(4), p. 270-286.
- Huxley A., 1926, *Jesting Pilate. The Diary of a Journey*, Triad/Paladin.

- Huret J., 1891, *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire*, Stéphane Mallarmé, Bibliothèque-Charpentier, p. 55-65.
- Gravari-Barbas M., Delaplace M., 2015, "Introduction. Le tourisme urbain « hors des sentiers battus » Coulisses, Interstices et nouveaux territoires touristiques urbains", *Teoros*, 34, 1-2.
- MIT, 2008, *Tourisme. Lieux communs*, Belin, Mappemonde.
- Pine II B. J., Gilmore, J. H., 1998, "Welcome to the Experience Economy", *Harvard Business Review*, July August. Available on: <https://hbr.org/1998/07/welcome-to-the-experience-economy>
- Yankovska G., Hannam K., 2014, "Dark and toxic tourism in the Chernobyl exclusion zone", *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol 17, Issue 10, Pages 929-939

Translation French > English

Murielle Jackson