

Article

Transnational Political Economy and the Development of Tourism: A Critical Approach [†]

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Abstract: Following a Marxist and, more specifically, a global capitalism perspective, this paper outlines the peculiar characteristics of tourism to argue that the recent developments of this sector have prominently contributed to the transnational integration and global accumulation of capital. These developments are explored by using a Marxist conceptual framework, including class and value relations, within a broader ecological context. Taking into account the particular pattern of development and rapid growth of tourism in recent decades, we examine the implications for the uneven and combined development of global capitalism. More specifically, we examine whether the growth of tourism may sufficiently counteract the global over-accumulation crisis, as well as the particular ways in which capital can extract and appropriate rent from tourism. It is broadly argued that the development of tourism tends to increase the unevenness, as well as the inequalities and the instability, of global capitalism and while it seems to apparently relax the current over-accumulation crisis, it rather tends to further exacerbate the unfolding socio-ecological crisis.

Keywords: transnational capitalism; tourism development; neo-liberalism; value analysis; crisis; rent extraction; inequalities; uneven development; ecological implications

1. Introduction

Tourism has rapidly developed in recent decades, particularly since the 1970s. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (2018), international tourist arrivals have increased from 25 million in 1950 to 278 million in 1980, 674 million in 2000 and 1323 million in 2017. At the same time, international tourism receipts have surged from US\$ 2 million in 1950 to US\$ 104 million in 1980 and US\$ 1340 in 2017. The total value of tourism exports (including transport services) has reached a level of US\$ 1.6 trillion in 2017 and tourism now represents 7% of world's exports in goods and services. The direct and indirect economic impact of tourism is presently accounting for about 10% of world Gross Domestic Product (GDP). And, as forecasted by the same organization (UNWTO), international tourist arrivals will increase by some 43 million a year during the period 2010 to 2030, compared with an average increase of 28 million a year during the period 1995 to 2010, reaching an absolute level of 1.8 billion by the year 2030.

The economic agents of tourism, transnational corporations (TNCs), tour operators and government officials, along with mass media usually controlled by capitalists involved in tourism, are triumphantly excited with the rapid growth of tourism and imagine that this, seemingly unlimited, growth of tourist arrivals will constitute an engine of growth for the economies with a developed tourism sector and a mechanism capable of pulling the economy out of the severe crisis and recession of recent years. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) can be noted here as a powerful international agent promoting the interests of big tourism corporations and lobbying UN, EU and other governance apparatuses in favour of the tourism growth agenda. After the so-called de-industrialization of most

developed countries during recent decades, tourism is nowadays considered as the “heavy industry” of several countries. While tourist arrivals outpace the size of domestic population by three or more times and the “carrying capacity” of the most popular tourist destinations, the relevant propaganda presents tourism one-sidedly and as a clear blessing as it increases employment and the incomes of all those involved in tourism, helping more generally the economy to overcome crisis. But, is it so? Is it really a clear blessing? Can tourism constitute the engine of a sustainable growth and if so, with what ecological and social implications? The capitalist agents involved are, of course, incapable or unwilling to consider the devastating implications of an unlimited economic growth in general and the potentially disastrous ecological and social implications of an unlimited growth of tourism.

On a theoretical level, the long-lasting domination of neoclassical economics and an uncompromising business-managerial perspective have implied a superficial analysis of tourism, ignoring the growing inequalities and power relations involved in the development of tourism, as well as the potentially negative social and environmental implications from this development (see [Kottke 1988](#); [Eadington and Redman 1991](#)). Compared to the heavily polluting industrial sector, it is erroneously assumed that tourism as a service sector is much less polluting and this is even more the case with some forms of tourism such as ecotourism or agro-tourism. Even in the relatively critical parts of the relevant literature, which recognizes income inequalities and negative environmental externalities, it is considered that a corrective state intervention and internalization of production cost would be sufficient to correct potential market failures. During the last two decades, a “critical turn” in the relevant literature has focused on the discursive, symbolic or cultural aspects of tourism, without again paying attention to, let alone challenging, the power structures and the exploitative relations in the political economy of tourism or the dominant tendency of globalization and neoliberal capitalism (see [Bianchi 2009, 2011](#); [Duffy 2015](#)). Part of this literature has also focused on a rather limited treatment of tourism sustainability (see [Bramwell and Lane 2011](#); cf. [Fletcher 2011](#)).

Given this overwhelming dominance of neoclassical-managerial treatments and the recent (cultural) “critical turn” within the conventional approach to tourism, it is not surprising that political economy or Marxist approaches have played a less important role. Nevertheless, neo-Marxism and dependency theory have played a considerable role in analysing tourism, especially in the 1960s and 70s (see [Lea 1988](#); [Britton 1991](#); [Clancy 1998](#); [Bianchi 2011](#); [Fletcher 2011](#); [Espadero 2015](#)). As pointed out in this context, “tourism is a major avenue of capital accumulation throughout the world, driven by free market forms of enterprise, ranging from small, independent travel firms, to highly capitalized online booking agencies and transnational corporate mega-chains in the hotel, airline and tour operator industries” ([Bianchi 2009](#), p. 494). With the exception of a very recent literature (see [Mosedale 2011](#); [Bianchi 2018](#); [Young and Markham 2019](#)), the relative dearth of classical Marxist theorizing of the development of tourism is rather surprising, given the relative and rising significance of this sector.

A detailed review of existing literature is beyond the scope of the present article. Our intention is rather to take the first steps towards a long overdue research programme concerning the political economy of tourism, based on a Marxian theoretical framework. Here, an attempt will be made to partly make up for this deficit, contributing to a Marxist exploration of the political economy of tourism. As can be argued, such an approach, based on a sound dialectical materialist methodology (see [Overbeek 2013](#); [Selwyn 2015](#); [Vidal et al. 2015](#); [Liodakis 2016](#)), may contribute more than any other in elucidating the exploitative relations, class tensions and development dynamics of global tourism. Given that the development and accumulation of capital is currently taking place on a transnational context, including the sector of tourism, our approach should be properly placed within a theoretical frame of *transnational* or *global capitalism* (see [Robinson and Harris 2000](#); [Robinson 2001, 2004](#); [Sklair 2001](#)), taking into account the rapid expansion of TNCs, the rising of a transnational capitalist class (TCC) and the emerging transnational state (TNS) or the closely related approach associated with what has been termed *totalitarian capitalism* (see [Liodakis 2005, 2010, 2016](#)).

In the next (second) section, we will more specifically develop this framework of transnational/totalitarian capitalism, stressing its significance for understanding recent developments

in tourism. Based on a value-theoretical approach, we will explain the significance of the capitalist mode of production and its implications for value production and appropriation on a global scale, as well as for economic growth in general and the rapid growth of tourism in particular. We will further stress the particular features of the tourist sector and will also analyse the role of the (national and transnational) state and competitive markets in the ongoing process of primitive accumulation, in the production and exploitation of space (including ecological resources) by capital and in the uneven and combined development of capitalism and tourism on a global level. Then, taking into account a common invocation of the growth of tourism as a way to cope with economic crisis, we will examine in Section 3 the relationship between tourism and economic crisis by focusing on the potential increase of market demand, through the expansion and growth of tourism related economic activity and more pertinently on the implications of tourism as a counteracting factor against the increasing pressure from an over-accumulation crisis. In Section 4, we will draw from Marx's theory of ground rent to briefly explore the ways in which capital, based on private property relations and utilizing a combination of natural, geographical and cultural characteristics of space, can extract and appropriate rent, in the form of super-profits, from a variety of tourism related economic activities. In Section 5, we briefly analyse some of the ecological and social implications of the rapid growth in tourism to conclude that its ecological impact is far more important than is commonly considered, that the growth of tourism, instead of contributing in offsetting the current crisis, is rather fuelling an exacerbation of crisis and that, contrary to what is usually conceived, the currently rapid development of tourism implies even greater inequalities and instability on a global scale. Section 6 ends up with some concluding remarks.

2. Transnational Capitalism, Value Production and Tourism Development

This section is an attempt to outline a theoretical framework helping to understand the development of tourism within a broad ecological context and a rapidly globalizing economy and how this development has contributed to the specific unfolding of a transnational political economy.

As is familiar, the currently prevailing capitalist mode of production (CMP) is based on generalized commodity production for profit. The materiality itself of the commodities produced is not essential. As Marx (1967, vol. I, p. 35) points out, "A commodity is . . . an object outside us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether, for instance, they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference." In the case of tourism, the product produced is a variety of commodified services, which, as services rendered to persons, are produced at the point of consumption. The difference with other sectors of production is that, the products of other sectors may satisfy some kind of biotic consumption need which may be saturated after a point, while the services provided by tourism mostly satisfy some subjective or cultural need and these needs may apparently expand without limit. It seems, therefore, that an unlimited demand for the tourist product can be ensured, provided that there is enough income to support it. As Marx notes, at the same time, the capitalist production itself "requires the production of new consumption . . . Firstly quantitative expansion of existing consumption; secondly creation of new needs by propagating existing ones in a wide circle; thirdly, production of new needs and discovery and creation of new use values" (Marx 1973, p. 408).

The aim of capital at profit maximization can be realized only through the exploitation of labour power and the accumulation of surplus value (profits), which constitutes the most significant engine of economic growth, an inherent imperative of capitalism. Although capital can always be invested at home, economic growth inevitably implies an outward expansion as capital constantly seeks the best possible conditions for its profitability (see Marx 1967, vol. III, p. 256). In this continual search for the best conditions for the export of commodities or for investment, capital surpasses all barriers and does not recognize any national borders (see Marx 1973, p. 524; Harvey 2001a, pp. 243–44). It is in this sense that Marx points out that, "the tendency to create the *world market* is directly given in the concept of capital itself" (Marx 1973, p. 408). Here we have the fullest expression of capital as a social relation reflecting a self-expanding value. In recent decades, the expansion and further

development of the world market, the rapid expansion of TNCs, the increasing over-accumulation of capital in the most developed countries, significant innovations in transportation and communication technologies (TCTs) and the growing significance of transnational accumulation have led to a rising tendency for globalization and created a qualitatively new stage in the development of capitalism that we have called transnational or totalitarian capitalism. The latter term is meant to imply, not only an unprecedented increase in the concentration and centralization of capital, with concomitant consequences regarding a rising social authoritarianism, but also the totalizing tendency of capitalism to colonize all aspects of social life and expand into almost every nook and corner of the global economy (see [Liodakis 2010](#), pp. 25–26). As already noted, from this transnational expansion and accumulation of capital tends to arise a TCC and a transnational superstructure in the form of an emerging TNS, along with a relative decline and significant reconfiguration of national state functions. The TNS and the still active national states feed back into the transnational integration and accumulation process, even if through a highly uneven development and a varying manner and intensity of regulation.

We may argue that the rapid development and globalization of tourism during recent decades has played an active and very significant role in this transnationalization process, in the constitution of a TCC and the emergence of TNS. Because of the particular features of the tourism sector, with a prominent role of geographical space and of the means of transportation and communication and seeking to offer newer and ever-expanding experiences (including geographical, gastronomic and cultural), the economic agents of this sector, perhaps more than any other sector, have greatly contributed in the deregulation of national states and the imposition of privatization policies and trade or service liberalization, creating simultaneously the need for some supranational regulations and a TNS (see [Bianchi 2011](#)). As pointed out, “[t]ourism ... does not just reflect the growth of neo-liberalism but has been central to the construction of the class settlement that brought these changes about” ([Eisenschitz 2016](#), p. 111). As [Derber \(2002, p. 75\)](#) notes, alliances between big tourist firms create “a genuinely global, corporate-dominated governing elite uncoupled from nationality ... [that is] truly unprecedented.” In other words, tourism has pushed towards the emergence and domination of neo-liberalism and has also benefited from neoliberal policies for its rapid growth and transnational expansion. Capitalist interests invested in tourism have, among else, persistently pushed for a deregulation of labour markets and a loosening of rules concerning environmental protection. The global expansion and growth of tourism encompasses parts of several other sectors (construction, agricultural and food production, loan and credit mechanisms, commercial handling, etc.), a variety of commodity and value chains concerning all these sectors and both productive and circulation activities within this sector (see [Clancy 1998](#); [Selwyn 2016](#)). It should be noted that the transportation and communication activities involved constitute an important part of the productive activities of the sector (see [Marx 1967](#), vol. II, p. 52; [Harvey 2001a](#), p. 243). As is often stressed, important technological innovations in the means of transportation and communication have greatly contributed, not only to the overall globalization of capitalism but also to the transnational expansion and rapid growth of tourism, leading to a collapsing of space by time and vice versa (see [Marx 1973](#), p. 538; [Harvey 2001a](#), p. 244; [Das 2017](#)). This, in turn, creates the potential for a drastic reduction of circulation costs and turnover times of the capital involved, increasing thus capitalist profitability (see [Harvey 2001a](#), p. 244; [Espadero 2015](#)). This reduction of circulation costs can be achieved, among else, by exploiting economies of scale (mass tourism), outsourcing practices and utilization of advanced managerial and financial techniques.

The development of world markets since the early stages of capitalism, as well as the current transnationalization and global development of capital, have been always regulated by a continuous mutation of a law of value which assigns value to wage labour utilized in commodity production, while considering the contribution of nature largely as a “free gift” (see [Burkett 1999](#), chp. 6). A great diversity is created by national barriers, an intensified unevenness of world capitalism, largely determined by the dynamics of commodity exchange itself and the combined character of this system, encompassing different countries at various levels of development and various forms of production organization

(see [Das 2017](#)). Despite this diversity, the law of value constitutes a regulating force, unifying this integrated development, assimilating non-capitalist forms of production within the dominant capitalist mode of production and ensuring the expanding reproduction of global capitalism and of the growing tourism sector within it (see also [Selwyn 2015](#)). As Marx already points out in the *Theories of Surplus Value* (vol. 3),

Abstract wealth, value, money, hence abstract labour, develop in the measure that concrete labour becomes a totality of different modes of labour encompassing the world market. . . . But this is only possible on the basis of foreign trade and the world market. This is at once the pre-condition and the result of capitalist production. (cited in [Harvey 2001a](#), p. 256)

What is meant here is that different forms of concrete labour (with varying characteristics), employed in different branches of production, end up, through commodity production and exchange, to be transformed into a commensurate (homogeneous) abstract labour which counts only quantitatively and constitutes the essence of value. Obviously, this transformation is also applicable in tourism, where different types of concrete labour employed in various branches of tourism production and in different countries are reduced to a single category (abstract labour) constituting the substance of value. This comes true to an even greater extent with the contemporary highly increased and inter-penetrating commodity and capital flows on a global scale. “The tendency of capitalism, therefore, is to establish a universal set of values, founded on ‘abstract social labour’ as defined on a global scale” ([Harvey 2001a](#), p. 256). This tendency and the competitive free flow of capital imply, in turn, a worldwide tendency for profit rate equalization, although the rates of labour exploitation may greatly diverge between different countries or regions. Differences in the rates of labour exploitation, combined with value transfers associated with the operation of the law of value, tend to imply a strengthening of the advantage of capital originating in the more advanced countries or regions and this may reinforce the tendency towards uneven development within the tourism sector and in the economy at large.

Considering that the development of capitalism takes place, not outside but within nature, we should take into account the fact that, though nature by itself does not produce value, the natural and ecological conditions may significantly increase labour productivity and hence indirectly contribute in the codetermination of value. The growth and external expansion of capital imply a continuous search for increased resources of raw materials, food, energy and labour. The continued accumulation of capital, thus, depends both on (wage labour) exploitation and plundering of the ecosystem (see [Moore 2015](#)). This is particularly the case with tourism, a sector which, perhaps more than any other, is based on a combined utilization of labour and geographical space, including natural or climatic characteristics, ecological sites, social infrastructures and places of a historical or cultural interest attracting tourism. As [Harvey \(2001a, pp. 248–49\)](#) has argued, the growth and external expansion of capital implies a production of space in a specific manner and then its utilization for the improvement of its conditions of valorisation. In the case of tourism, this takes place in the form of developments in the means of transportation and communication (T&C), the construction of airports and other T&C infrastructures, hotels, tourist resorts or other tourist facilities and changes in land use. The state is often pressed to provide a good part of these infrastructures for capital. And, as becomes clear, the accumulation of capital in the tourism sector is largely determined by a sheer exploitation of wage labour (and often of informal, immigrant or slave labour) in the sweatshops of tourism and the extensive free appropriation of non-commodified labour, social or cultural resources and non-human nature (ecological resources). The accumulation of capital, therefore, takes place on the ground of new, continually expanding frontiers of commodification, resource appropriation and ever-new tourist destinations (see [Moore 2017, 2018](#)).

The uneven development of capitalism and tourism alike, implies that the (transnational) operation of the law of value involves extensive unequal exchanges and value transfers, which may arise from differences in the level of development and the organic composition of capital (and hence in labour productivity) within the capitalist mode of production or from the appropriation of labour in the form

of use values from non-capitalist forms of production (see [Marx 1967](#), III, p. 328; [Harvey 2001a](#), p. 256; [Andreucci et al. 2017](#)). Such unequal exchanges or value transfers may arise from wage differences, between developed and less developed countries, greater than corresponding productivity differences or from unpaid labour (e.g., household labour) and a monopsonistic depression of prices of commodities or services provided by non-capitalist forms of production to the tourism sector. These unequal exchanges and value transfers may take place between countries but they ultimately benefit the capitalist class involved, while leading to a further intensification of the unevenness of capitalist development.

Neoliberal states but also the emerging TNS, strive to provide the most favourable conditions for the investment and accumulation of capital in the tourism sector. As the competitive conditions of the sector do not allow collective action, it is only the state that can partly protect the environment, regulate tourist behaviour and coordinate development so as to prevent over-passing regional carrying capacities ([Eisenschitz 2016](#)). National states, moreover, promote and implement neoliberal policies of deregulation, privatization and economic liberalization, provide or encourage the extension of ample loans and credits to capitalists operating in tourism and create all those infrastructures (whether material or social) which are mostly captured and utilized, as positive externalities, by the capital invested in tourism. Some relevant examples may concern the infrastructures required for winter sports, the organization of athletic meetings (e.g., the Olympics) or various local festivities (carnivals, etc.). The TNS, through its various mechanisms, also promotes multilateral agreements and policies for the liberalization of trade and services or for the safety of investments and provides big loans for relevant infrastructures. Along with particular national states, they also encourage or facilitate land deals and water grabs for big investments (see [Sassen 2013](#); [Eisenschitz 2016](#)). The extensive land grabbing recently, aiming at the utilization of land for food and energy production or for the realization of big investments in tourism, is an evidence of a deep-going transnational integration of capitalism. One could mention here, for example, cases of land grabs for tourism, such as Loliondo in Tanzania ([Gardner 2012](#)), Bali ([TNI 2018](#)) and Cavo Sidero in Crete, where a British company signed a long-term contract for land and tourism development on an extensive area including an ecologically fragile and protected eco-system (see also [Apostolopoulou and Adams 2015](#)). These policies by the state (and the TNS), together with market competition, contribute to important processes of primitive accumulation or processes of *accumulation by dispossession* according to [Harvey \(2005\)](#) and thus to the expansion and domination of the CMP in almost all spheres of economic activity. Despite this totalizing tendency, however, there are good reasons for a still considerable part of productive and reproductive activities to remain external to the CMP insofar as the latter can freely appropriate use values relevant to tourism from such non-capitalist activities. The increasing competition, apart from its implications for environmental externalities, also leads to an increasing concentration and centralization of capital in tourism, including important transnational mergers and acquisitions. But again, there are good (systemic) reasons for dispersion or decentralization of tourism providers and a huge number of small accommodation units, insofar as the big (capital intensive) firms of mass tourism may pump part of the surplus value produced by small and labour intensive units. Despite this dispersion, concerning both circulating and productive activities as well as all value chains within this sector, the recent innovations in the TCTs allow a horizontal and vertical coordination of all these activities and economic units, as well as a centralized control by big tour operator companies, such as the German TUI and the British Thomas Cook.

Despite the extensive transnationalization of capitalism, there are currently some trends tending to reinforce the role of nation-states and national development. In what concerns tourism, great efforts are usually made in many countries to increase the competitiveness of national tourism and, despite the already rapid growth of tourism, there is an extensive, costly and often indecent (and rather begging) campaign to advertise and promote local or national tourism in order to increase tourist arrivals even further and without limit. An effort is also made to extend the tourist season and diversify tourism according to natural and cultural/historical characteristics of each country (summer tourism for pleasure, winter sports tourism, ecotourism, etc), so as to better utilize relevant investments and

increase revenues from tourism. Based, either on neoliberal policies or on a presumably “progressive nationalism,” these development perspectives often hinge around a so-called “developmental state.” They assign a central coordinating role to the state, attempting to promote economic nationalism and an autonomous development of the national economy and its main sectors, including the tourism sector. There are even some Marxist variants of this “developmental state” perspective. Such “developmental” approaches tend to idealize state capitalism and misconceive the presumable autonomy of the state *vis-a-vis* both the domestic economy and the global capitalist system. At the same time, “[t]hey tend to neglect the contradictory and conflict-ridden capitalist characteristics of the developmental state and state-led development’ (Song 2013, p. 1258). Yet, ‘the nationalistic and statist mode of development is one of the forms in which the capitalist mode of production—that is, capitalist exploitation—expresses itself in a seemingly ‘class-neutral,’ fetishistic form” (Song 2013, p. 1271). This trend is often manifested with large scale modernization projects or long-term contracts of land grabbing for tourism development.

We should also stress the ideological premises and implications of the rapid growth of tourism during recent decades. Apart from increasing incomes and a rising standard of living, there are also important social and ideological conditions which contribute to this rapid growth of tourism. The massive urbanization and the extensive alienation of working people tend to lead to a pressing need for an escape from the dull or repressing conditions of everyday life and a search for leisure and new exotic and rejuvenating experiences. Tourism, in a variety of different forms, promises to fulfil this dream of an escape. It is on the basis of this increasing need that capital develops its activity, by offering commodified services and tourist packages, in order to make and accumulate profits. It can also be argued that, the recreation of labour forces through tourism, the temporary detachment from reality, the induced individualism and, more significantly, the vanity and illusion of freedom associated with the choice of a tourist trip may lead to a co-optation of many working people (as consumers) and to an easy acceptance of the dominant neo-liberalism and ultimately of the status quo itself. However, the growth and global expansion of tourism has implied a transformation and commodification of landscapes and hospitality, while the massive development of tourism and standardization of tourist packages, to take advantage of economies of scale and reduce costs, have led to a construction of huge hotels and cruise ships, leading to impersonal relations and alienating conditions. All these conditions, together with an increasing exploitation of labour within tourism itself, tend again to increase rather than reduce alienation, while the uniformity and environmental degradation resulting from massive, commodified and standardized tourist services tend to undermine the distinctiveness and attractiveness of particular tourist destinations and hence the profitability and potential accumulation of capital operating in this sector. In this sense, it might be said that the tourism developed under capitalist conditions is rather self-defeating and the sector itself tends increasingly to become self-destructing.

3. Over-Accumulation Crisis and the Development of Tourism

The development of tourism has often been presented as an outlet for capitalist investment and as a mechanism of increasing aggregate demand capable of pulling out of the deep crisis and capitalist recession currently faced on a global level. It is further argued that, under these conditions, tourism may offer ample opportunities for employment and income and that the production and exchange linkages with other sectors (such as agriculture, construction, transportation, etc.) may induce great potentials for development of these sectors. These arguments, however, are at least overstressed insofar as the employment of labour (let alone the conditions of exploitation) is seriously reduced by large scale and capital intensive investments in tourism (big hotels and huge, technologically automated cruise ships) and insofar as there is a contradictory relation with other sectors, as is the case with agriculture, in terms of land and water use. There is also ample evidence, in less developed countries, showing that “tourism often gradually supplants agriculture as the main revenue-generator and employer” (Bianchi 2011). But even as a demand-generator sector, tourism has a rather limited potential. The competitive “race to the bottom,” in terms of labour exploitation and ecological externalities, leaves only a limited potential

mainly for a varying redistribution of aggregate demand to different tourist destinations, while the growth of this aggregate demand, which is often induced by a credit overexpansion, is limited by conjunctural factors (economic activity or income fluctuations) and the potential valorisation of an over-expanded “fictitious capital” in tourism and the relevant credit sectors. Such an over-expansion of fictitious capital may be related to real estate (increasing land prices) or financial and productive activities associated with tourism development and an expectation of future profits, which however may never be realized. It seems, therefore, that a “Keynes solution” may not be effective either on a national or a global scale (Smith 2013).

If we take into account the historical coincidence of the lasting over-accumulation crisis since the early '70s and the rapid growth of tourism since then, it is perhaps more interesting to consider whether the growth of tourism has functioned as a potential counteracting tendency or strategy, against the over-accumulation of capital. Marx analysed the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the third volume of *Capital*, where he also considered a number of potential counteracting tendencies including foreign trade (Marx 1967, III, p. 237). As Harvey (2001a, p. 249) points out, Marx expects that “foreign trade may counteract the tendency to a falling rate of profit because it cheapens the elements of constant capital as well as necessities and so permits a rising surplus value to be appropriated. But since this raises the rate of accumulation, it merely hastens the fall in the rate of profit in the long run.” In this sense, foreign trade merely “transfers the contradictions to a wider sphere and gives them greater latitude” (Marx 1967, II, p. 408). One might think that, more or less, the same applies in the case of tourism, in as much as tourism concerns the export of relevant services. A number of researchers have already started examining this possibility (see Espadero 2015; Eisenschitz 2016; Das 2017) but there is a need here to consider this case further.

One would think that tourism as a service sector may be characterized by a lower organic composition of capital and the global expansion of tourism to less developed countries, where the material and technological development is lower, would imply a still lower organic composition of capital for the global tourism sector. However, a closer consideration indicates that this is not most likely the case, if we consider the heavy investments in constant (fixed) capital concerning airports and other transportation and communication infrastructures, transportation means (aircrafts, big cruisers and car rentals), hotels and other tourist facilities and all the raw materials required for these constructions. The intensified competition necessitates a continuous process of technological innovation in all chains of the tourist industry and this raises the organic composition of capital, increases labour productivity while rendering wage labour partly superfluous and also tends to downward press the average rate of profit. As noted by Harvey (2001a, p. 247), “[c]apitalist development has to negotiate a knife-edge path between preserving the values of past capital investments in the built environment and destroying these investments in order to open up fresh room for accumulation.” One further reason for a high and rising organic composition of capital (OCC) in this sector has to do with the particular pattern of tourism as it develops under present capitalist conditions and more specifically its concentration and conglomeration mainly in the already developed countries and especially in Europe (see Peeters and Landré 2012; UNWTO 2018). Eisenschitz notes some additional factors reinforcing this argument of a rising organic composition and a falling profitability of capital in the tourism sector. They concern the fact that this sector usually attracts risk-averse and mainly asset-backed investments, as well as the rising land prices, especially in established locations or as a result of credit-fuelled speculation on land and property prices. It is accordingly concluded that “[t]he prevalence . . . of property in tourism investment suggests that the [counteracting tendencies] will be frustrated and the rate of profit will remain depressed” (Eisenschitz 2016, p. 119).

A presentation of empirical evidence regarding the increasing OCC in the tourism sector may be necessary but is beyond the scope of this research effort. At any rate, an explication of the causal links and of the dialectical determination of the relevant phenomena is probably more useful than an empiricist treatment based, as is often the case, on inappropriate and grossly unreliable statistical data.

The problem may be due, partly, to the fact that extensive infrastructures (fixed capital) utilized by capital in tourism are registered in the statistical categories of other sectors.

It should further be noted that, insofar as a massive development of tourism tends to exhaust and degrade un-capitalized nature and the ecosystem on which capital draws freely to increase labour productivity and the profitability of capital, tourist firms are obliged to substitute different and more capitalized methods to make tourism attractive. This, however, increases production costs and reduces the profitability of capital in tourism.

It seems, therefore, that the growth of tourism cannot function effectively as a counteracting tendency to cope with the intensifying over-accumulation crisis of capitalism. It may offer some occasional or temporary space for the accumulation of capital and a partial recovery of its profitability but it fails more specifically to work as a space or time fixing of the deepening crisis of accumulation. On the contrary and apart from other social or ecological implications, it tends to an exacerbation and amplification of this crisis on a global scale (see also [Espadero 2015](#)).

4. Tourism and Rent Extraction and Appropriation

Rent extraction and appropriation from tourism has been rarely examined in the relevant literature and this is paradoxical, given its particular significance for a rising sector of economic activity such as tourism. Only a few contemporary Marxists have touched upon or partly analysed this issue (see [Harvey 2001b](#); [Eisenschitz 2016](#); [Andreucci et al. 2017](#)). Marx himself analysed extensively his theory of ground-rent in the third volume of *Capital* but mainly in relation to agriculture and mining and not in relation to tourism which was not substantially developed in his time. Nevertheless, we may here argue that we can draw important resources and valuable insights from Marx's analysis, to apply them in the case of tourism.

The general category of "monopoly rent" is associated with the monopolistic control of a certain resource (or asset) and the implied possibility of imposing a monopolistic price. As Marx clarifies, "[t]he monopoly price of certain commodities would merely transfer a portion of the profit of the other commodity-producers to the commodities having the monopoly price" ([Marx 1967](#), III, p. 861). Concerning the more specific category of ground-rent, Marx stressed that,

The singularity of ground-rent is rather that together with the conditions in which agricultural products develop as values (commodities) and together with the conditions in which their values are realized, there also grows the power of landed property to appropriate an increasing portion of these values, which were created without its assistance; and so an increasing portion of surplus value is transformed into ground-rent. ([Marx 1967](#), vol. III, p. 639)

Referring to the role of *landed property* in particular, in the case of a waterfall, Marx also states that, 'It is not the cause of the creation of such surplus-profit but is the cause of its transformation into the form of ground-rent and therefore of the appropriation of this portion of the profit or commodity-price, by the owner of the land or waterfall' ([Marx 1967](#), vol. III, p. 647). It is clear that much the same applies in the case of tourism.

Although Harvey has elsewhere more specifically analysed the different forms of rent ([Harvey 1982](#)), when he comes to examine the case of local (traditional) production of a brand name product (wine) and the case of tourism he considers only the general case of monopoly rent extraction. Based on the determinant role of private property and, "by invoking the concept of monopoly rent within the logic of capital accumulation," [Harvey \(2001b, p. 409\)](#) shows that "capital has ways to appropriate and extract surpluses from local differences, local cultural variations and aesthetic meanings of no matter what origin." He focuses on "historically constituted cultural artefacts and practices and special environmental characteristics," emphasizing especially the social, symbolic and discursive elements that lead to the development and accumulation of what is often called "social capital," which make a place or a piece of land unique, particular and attractive for tourism, enabling its owner to appropriate a monopoly rent. As pointed out, the extreme commodification and the

concomitant homogenization resulting from a massive tourist development tends to destroy this uniqueness and particularity of a certain place and hence undermines the basis for the appropriation of monopoly rents. It is also added that, “Given the general loss of other monopoly powers through easier transport and communications and the reduction of other barriers to trade, the struggle for collective symbolic capital becomes even more important as a basis for monopoly rents” (Harvey 2001b, p. 405).

There is a need here, however, to distinguish between rents more clearly deriving from monopoly pricing and “ground-rent” proper. As Marx points out,

It must be distinguished, whether the rent springs from a monopoly price, because a monopoly price of the product or the land exists independently of it or whether the products are sold at a monopoly price, because a rent exists. When we refer to a monopoly price, we mean in general a price determined only by the purchasers’ eagerness to buy and ability to pay, independent of the price determined by the general price of production, as well as by the value of the products. . . . [In the first case] the monopoly price creates the rent. On the other hand, the rent would create a monopoly price if grain were sold not merely above its price of production but also above its value, owing to the limits set by landed property. (Marx 1967, vol. III, p. 775)

We may here more specifically argue that, apart from the general case of monopoly rents appropriated by capitalists in the tourist industry stressed by Harvey, it is much more pertinent to analyse the case of tourism by using the concept of *differential rent* and *differential rent of type II* in particular, as analysed by Marx (1967, III, chps. 38–40). According to this analysis, the differential rent (or differential rent of type I) arises from the degree of fertility of a piece of land, in the case of agriculture or the favourable location of the land, especially in the case of residence and the monopolistic (exclusive) property rights of the owner of the land. These natural characteristics (fertility and location) may increase the productivity of labour and hence the potential of producing surplus value. In the case of tourism, this type of rent may arise from the natural and climatic characteristics of a particular place or landscape, as well as from the location and the historical or cultural significance of the place as a tourism destination. Again, all these features may contribute to increasing labour productivity in tourism, which may be conceptualized in different ways, depending on the particular form of tourism and the specific involvement of labour in the production of relevant services. It can be conceived, for instance, as the number of tourists commuted or accommodated per day, the number of tourist visits carried through per day or the passenger-miles travelled in the transport chain of the tourist industry. The increased productivity of labour, again, creates the possibility of extracting a greater amount of surplus value, which can be partly captured as rent.

The differential rent of type II may arise in close dialectical relation with rent of type I, not merely as a result of favourable location or specific natural and historical-cultural features but largely as a result of capital investments for the construction of relevant infrastructures (transportation, communication, etc.) and all expenses, social efforts and popular participation in organizing festivals and in cultural developments necessary to make a tourist destination attractive. All these investments aim at an even further increase of labour productivity, surplus value production and a potential appropriation of an additional rent, which may be ensured with the monopoly of property rights. These additional rents are essentially appropriated in the form of higher than average rates of profit (super-profits) and as a result of the difference between the prices of the relevant services and the price of production of these services (the regulating prices), encompassing an average rate of profit. It should be clear that this type (II) of rent may co-exist with a differential rent I and also with a general monopoly rent.

The importance of analysing this type of rent appropriation in tourism concerns the illumination of its determinants and its implications for an increased profitability and accumulation of capital, the fact that it sheds light on the sources of the relevant investments (including public investments and popular contributions) and the potential distributional implications flowing from the fact that the capitalist

agents appropriating such rents on a transnational level are often in a polar social and geographical contradiction with those bearing the cost of the investments required (see also [Andreucci et al. 2017](#)).

5. Ecological and Social Implications of Tourism

In tourism, as in other sectors, capital, labour and power are deployed *through* nature, as “specifically harnessed natural forces” ([Marx 1973](#), p. 612), to increase surplus value and profits. “Capital is itself co-produced. In turn, it co-produces specific historical natures, albeit under conditions that are full of resistances and frictions to capital’s desire for a world of fungible, passive and malleable life” ([Moore 2018](#)).

Despite a blinkered presentation by mainstream media and research, the rapid development of global tourism, under the specific historical and conjunctural conditions of recent decades, has had rather disastrous ecological and social implications. As tourism is based on and draws heavily on nature, the rapid growth of tourism and mass tourism in particular implies an increasing appropriation of natural and social resources, often at no cost and thus it tends to exhaust and degrade these resources and the ecological environment as a whole. This implication is further reinforced as, contrary to a widely accepted assumption, the tourist industry is an energy-intensive and heavily polluting industry. Among else, this is due to the crucial involvement of the transportation sector and the increasing share of aviation in tourist transportation. Currently, this share of air transport exceeds 50 percent of the total transportation of transnational tourism and this percentage, as well as the CO₂ and other emissions, tends to increase with increasing long distance tourist flights (see [Peeters and Landré 2012](#)). This increasing share of air transportation is associated with competitive pressures and capital’s need to reduce turnover times. Even the environmental mitigation policies, focusing on technological improvements such as energy efficiency and transportation modes, may be counter-productive in as much as a rebound effect (the Jevons paradox) may exacerbate the problem, with the growth in aviation outpacing efficiency improvements.

As long as the capitalist mode of production is overwhelmingly dominant and competition among alternative tourist destinations intensifies, the increasing exploitation of both labour and nature entails a rapid degradation and a deepening ecological crisis. The rapid growth of mass tourism in particular, does not only lead to an over-loading of relevant networks of transportation and communication or other municipal services, leading thus to a further ecological degradation and a decline in the quality of life but it also erodes the particularity (distinctiveness) of any tourist destination and thus the premises of a further tourist development. There is a recently increasing awareness that “over-tourism” may have detrimental social and ecological implications concerning popular destinations of urban or summer tourism, as is the case with cities like Barcelona, Dubrovnik, Venice, Amsterdam, Berlin, et al. or some of the Greek islands such as Crete, Rhodes, Corfu, Mykonos and so forth (see [UNWTO 2017](#)). It is also remarkable that rapid climatic changes can be considered partly as a result of tourism growth but also they bear in a rather complex way upon some of the crucial premises of tourism. Under these conditions, it is clear that the mode and pattern of tourism development is clearly unsustainable (see [Fletcher 2011](#); [Peeters and Landré 2012](#)) and this holds true from both an ecological as well as a social standpoint.

From a social standpoint, the rapid growth of tourism, the associated processes of class differentiation and primitive accumulation, the increasing exploitation of labour and the unlimited appropriation of nature involved, imply increasing inequalities and class tensions on both a national and transnational level (see [Andreucci et al. 2017](#)). It can be said that tourism development is involved in a vicious circle insofar as the ruins of capitalism and neo-liberalism, in the form of an increasing alienation and social frustration, constitute the premises of tourism development, while this development itself tends to further reinforce these phenomena. As [Eisenschitz \(2016, p. 117\)](#) points out,

The more unequal the society, the more people’s status is undermined and the more fashion goods, such as tourism, are consumed to regain it. This is an unstable position since there is no limit to it; markets will continually create new mixes of destinations, activities and

accommodation that is marketed to appeal to the aspirational, the dissatisfied and those who feel a loss of status. This sort of tourism validates high levels of inequality and class differentiation, normalising these differences both in their own societies and in the contrast between the tourist and their poor hosts.

It seems, therefore, that tourism, far from offering a true social emancipation for the alienated working people, is in fact further strengthening the exploitative stranglehold and the frustration of these people.

The inequalities and instabilities stemming from the development of tourism are further amplified through a close interlocking of this sector with the credit and banking sector. The structural and conjunctural constraints in the valorisation of fictitious capital and the over-expansion of credit, particularly in a period of over-accumulation crisis, are combined with the geopolitically sensitive character of tourism to create even greater inequalities, class tensions and instabilities. As noted, “[t]he principle of paying low wages but making credit easy to obtain invites instability” (Eisenschitz 2016, p. 119). These same forces, the distributional implications of the capitalist structure involved and the more general dynamics of capitalist development tend to intensify the unevenness of tourism and of capitalist development in general. This unevenness of capitalist development and the class-structured distribution involved are recently led to extremes as there is a rise of complex predatory assemblages, encompassing financial mechanisms and complex types of knowledge and technologies and “[t]his mix of elements and its guiding logics has led to escalated systemic capacities for massive capture at the top, environmental destruction on a scale we have not seen before and a significant rise in the expulsion of people from reasonable life options even in rich countries” (Sassen 2017, p. 7). These assemblages develop and operate on a transnational level, also encompassing tourism and involving financial institutions, air transport companies, tour operators, real estate and land dealings and other transnational businesses. It is not a surprise, therefore, that there is a recent trend towards a reprimarization of the economy of several peripheral countries (see Petras and Veltmeyer 2014; Cooney 2016), also encompassing tourism, as well as a growing divergence between increasing numbers of tourist arrivals in these countries and the relevant receipts from tourism (see UNWTO 2018). Clearly, the working people majority of such countries bear the (social and ecological) cost of massive tourism, while transnational capital captures the new value created in the tourist industry and lucrative profits. It is for these reasons that an insubordinate resistance and a continual struggle against the dominant pattern of tourism is manifested in various chains of the tourist industry and many parts of the world (see, e.g., Craven 2016 and the recent protests against tourism or Airbnb in Barcelona and elsewhere).

The unevenness of capitalist development, also encompassing tourism, often leads to an over-indebtedness of some of these countries, such as Greece and implies an imposition of (conditional) financial programs associated with lasting social austerity policies, an internal devaluation and a clear or disguised expropriation of the country’s natural and social resources. A characteristic case at point concerns the sell-out, for a long period, of fourteen airports of Greece to the German Fraport AG. In this way, German capital, in cooperation with a Greek capitalist group, controls the gate of a massive tourism and is enabled to capture and appropriate, in the form of super-profits and rents, the lion’s share of the value created by unpaid work and social resources accumulated by Greek people over a long period of centuries.

6. Concluding Remarks

We have attempted to develop a Marxian theoretical framework and utilize an array of analytical categories in order to better understand the developmental trends, the class relations and power conflicts, the interchange of society and nature and the socio-ecological implications associated with the rapid development of tourism.

Despite a recent recognition of the problems related to “over-tourism” and extensive references to the conditions for a sustainable tourism (see UNWTO 2017), we have shown that the currently dominant pattern of capitalist development in the case of tourism is clearly unsustainable. As was

more specifically argued, this pattern of development and the drive towards a maximum (unlimited) growth of tourism imply growing social inequalities, an increasingly uneven development and social instability, an extensive deregulation and transnationalization of production and capital and an increasing ecological degradation. Rather than functioning as a means to cope with the exacerbated over-accumulation crisis, tourism in fact and particularly mass tourism, tends to intensify and amplify this crisis further on a global scale. According to our analysis, the extraction and appropriation of rents from the development of tourism contributes significantly to the growing inequalities noted above, while the detrimental socio-ecological implications of “over-tourism” tend to undermine the premises for the development of tourism itself, undermining thus more generally the conditions for social and ecological sustainability.

There is no doubt that a socially and ecologically sustainable tourism can only be ensured beyond capitalism, within a communist perspective and social planning, with a radical reduction of real or fictitious needs for tourism, a de-commodification of tourism, an authentic honouring of hospitality and a sufficient and ecologically-minded support for travelling.

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