



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Anthropology of Tourism Applied Perspectives

2627-2-F0102R026

Course title

Anthropology of Tourism

Topics and course structure

Anthropology was slow to recognise tourism as a legitimate object of scientific inquiry, long dismissing it as excessively frivolous and superficial, and turning its attention to it considerably later than other social sciences. One possible explanation for this delay lies in the relationship of resemblance and filiation between anthropology and tourism: the global spread of travel practices has multiplied opportunities for encounters with "the other", making the presence of tourists on anthropologists' fieldwork sites increasingly pervasive and giving rise to discourses — grounded in direct experience — that challenge ethnographic authority itself. What distinguishes anthropological knowledge from tourist rhetoric? In what ways does the anthropologist's experience differ from that of the tourist? In attempting to answer these questions, anthropology has developed a critical reflection on the different modes of encounter with alterity, identifying the hosts-guests binary as the privileged site for observing touristic interaction. Understood as a reciprocal exchange, the hosts-guests relationship can be seen as a game involving both visitors and visited in a continuous and mutual crossing of identity boundaries, and as an encounter between imaginaries not free from mutual stereotypes and prejudices. The course begins with an analysis of the host-guest binary in its multiple manifestations, explored through the presentation of case studies drawn from the anthropological literature on tourism. It then moves, through a critical lens, towards its deconstruction and a questioning of the rhetorics of hospitality associated with it. The course also offers a critical overview of key concepts in the anthropological study of tourism: tourism as a social fact, defensive strategies, authenticity, tourist typologies and motivations, the tourist imaginary, and heritage. Particular attention will be paid to a critical analysis of the processes of identity representation, invention and staging of authenticity, and resignification at work in the tourist encounter.

Objectives

1. Knowledge and understanding

The course provides students with solid competencies in the concepts, debates, and interpretive paradigms developed within the anthropology of tourism. By the end of the course, students will be able to know and understand the main analytical models and the most important research traditions in the field, with particular reference to the hosts-guests binary, the categories of authenticity, tourist imaginary and heritage, and the processes of identity representation at work in the tourist encounter.

2. Applying knowledge and understanding

Students will be able to apply the analytical tools of the anthropology of tourism to the critical reading of scholarly texts and to ethnographic research, through the analysis of case studies drawn from the relevant literature. They will also be able to recognise and deconstruct the rhetorics of hospitality and authenticity in contemporary touristic contexts.

3. Making judgements

Students will develop the ability to elaborate an autonomous and critical perspective on the processes of identity representation and the staging of authenticity in the tourist encounter, formulating well-argued and documented personal assessments, including in relation to contexts and issues not directly addressed during the course.

4. Communication skills

Students will acquire the ability to present the contents of the discipline clearly, concisely, and effectively, using the specific vocabulary of the anthropology of tourism. They will also be able to argue their positions and actively participate in scholarly discussions in academic contexts.

5. Learning skills

Students will develop the ability to read scholarly texts critically, to establish connections between the different course materials, and to independently update their knowledge, including through the consultation of bibliographic sources not included in the syllabus.

Methodologies

The course is taught in Italian. Classes are held in person, with the integration of some online sessions, according to the following structure:

Lectures (75% of total — 15 sessions of 3 hours each)

14 in-person sessions, combining frontal and interactive teaching, with PowerPoint presentations and audiovisual materials.

1 online session (streamed), aimed at providing both attending and non-attending students with the analytical and methodological tools for a critical reading of texts, through the practical example of analysing a scholarly essay. The online format allows non-attending students to be reached as well.

Interactive sessions (25% of total — 2 sessions of 3 hours each)

2 in-person sessions dedicated to the presentation and collective discussion of the essays included in the course reader, which forms part of the required bibliography. Presentation quality and active participation in discussion will be subject to assessment.

Online and offline teaching materials

All teaching and learning materials are defined during the course and uploaded to the course website, which must be checked regularly by both participating and non-participating students.

Programme and references

The course will proceed with the analysis and subsequent deconstruction of the host-guest binary and the rhetorics of hospitality it conveys, examining key categories in anthropological reflection on tourism: tourism as a social fact, defensive strategies, authenticity, tourist typologies and motivations, the tourist imaginary, and heritage, illustrated through ethnographic examples. Particular attention will be paid to a critical analysis of the processes of identity representation, the invention and staging of authenticity, and resignification at work in the tourist encounter.

Required readings

Bruner, E. (2005), *Culture on Tour*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Burns, P. (1999), *An Introduction to Tourism and Anthropology*. London: Routledge.

One volume of the student's choice from:

Leite, N., Castañeda, Q. E., & Adams, K. M. (Eds.) (2019), *The Ethnography of Tourism: Edward Bruner and Beyond*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Vietti, F. (2024), *Unexpected Encounters: Migrants and Tourists in the Mediterranean*. New York: Berghahn.

Although this course is taught in Italian, Erasmus students may request course materials in English and, if they wish, sit the examination in English or French.

Assessment methods

Assessment

Learning outcomes are assessed through an individual oral examination, lasting approximately 20–30 minutes, during which the instructor will ask questions on the required readings and the topics covered in class.

Assessment criteria

The assessment takes into account the following elements:

Knowledge and understanding of the required texts and course content.

Ability to present content clearly and concisely, with appropriate use of disciplinary terminology.

Capacity for critical analysis and the ability to establish meaningful connections between texts and themes addressed in the course.

For attending students: quality of participation in interactive sessions and of the in-class essay presentation.

Office hours

By appointment, to be requested by email (silvia.barberani@unimib.it)

Programme validity

The syllabus is valid for two academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

Dott.ssa Patrizia Pertuso

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | REDUCED INEQUALITIES
