
De-commodifying labour in tourism through the platform cooperative model

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Abstract

Research objective

In the last 10 years, the advent of digital platforms, allowing find low-cost flights and accommodation, has amplified the phenomenon of mass tourism, with strong effects on communities as well. With the increase in tourists, communities lose their identity (e.g. all the same shops) and gentrification phenomena increase. The wealth produced is subject to the dynamics of the extractive economy typical of the platform model and is concentrated in a few hands outside the places where it is produced, even with negative impacts on workers in the sector.

In this context, the research examines the contributions of platform cooperatives to the mitigation of negative externalities in the tourism and travel industry that mainly concern the impact on communities, income distribution and labour exploitation. The aim is to describe how some cooperatives operating in the tourism sector respond to mass tourism.

Methodology

Using text analysis and semi-structured interviews, three cases of platform cooperatives (of workers) in the tourism and travel sector are explored for their contribution to the de-commodification of work, sustainability and socialisation of tourism and travel.

Main findings

The understanding of sustainability in tourism has changed in the literature over time, as the focus has shifted from social tourism that provides access to travel and leisure to otherwise marginalised populations, to responsible tourism focused on tourist behaviour, to community-centred models. Cooperatives are part of this debate as they support the socialisation of tourism and the decommodification of work.

The reaction of cooperatives to platform tourism adds to the already long history of cooperatives in tourism. Therefore, the elements that characterise the cooperatives studied that work in tourism through platforms activate dynamics already typical of the cooperative model. For example, cooperatives involve local communities in decision-making processes, are attentive to the creation of an economically sustainable business and valuable jobs, aim to minimise the ecological footprint, and want to promote cultural exchange in favour of

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diversity. In this context, platforms are an important component, but they are not the heart of the business. However, it remains difficult for cooperative platforms to deal with the problems created by large platforms. The research also analyzes platform financing difficulties and the impact of the cooperative model on platform management systems.

Keywords: platform coop, mass tourism, sustainable tourism, decommodifying labour