

Tourism as a liminal state sociology essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The World Travel Organisation (WTO, 2012) stated that tourism " comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". Recently, many studies are done to link anthropology studies to tourism, accentuating the interaction between tourism, space, representation and social structures, experiences and identities (Nash and Smith, 1991). Anthropology theories can easily be fitted into the tourism industry because the study of anthropologist concerns the way of life, especially those regarding issues of culture and society (Nash and Smith, 1991). In this essay the author would like to identify the origins of the term liminality relating the adaptation of it to tourism, evaluate the characteristic of the liminal state in tourism, the motivational factor of 'play' and relevant tourism examples.

The term 'liminality' was derived from the latin word 'limen' which means threshold. It does not exist in dictionaries and was first introduced by the French anthropologist van Gennep in 1909 in his writing of *les rites de passage* where transitional rites was divided into three stages; the separation where the person is detached from one's natural environment; the transition (liminality) stage describing the ambiguous state of the being; and the stage of reintegration after the person has pass through the threshold and return to society. In the transition stage, it is said that an individual belongs in a phase of being physically and spatially between the ordinary and non-ordinary (Van Gennep, 1960).

Following the path of Van Gennep, Turner (1969) utilised the rites of passage to describe the changes in position an individual face throughout life stages in the pre-industrial era such as puberty and marriage. He described the concept of liminality as the 'betwixt and between' stage experienced by the liminal people as they pass through an indistinctive cultural realm while being detached from the structural society, relating the concept to pilgrimages where a person is separated from its profane environment to a sacred atmosphere of religious sites (Nash and Smith, 1991). As society evolves, mandated rituals and ceremonies are transformed into leisure activities (Turner, 1969). Therefore the adaption of the theory for the post-industrial era was affected by the distinctive difference between work and play during that time and one could choose freely whether to enter the liminal stage. He further relates the similarity of the liminal stage in pilgrims to the tourist experience while on holiday. The term liminoid was then derived from liminality to differentiate the liminal stage in tourist to be purely voluntary based on one's will for leisure and pleasure purposes without ritual association in contrast with pilgrims who goes through more formal and serious rituals in the liminality stage. Tourism scholars supporting Turner's concept described tourist as liminal people occupying a threshold state between places, times and resolutions (Burn, 1999; Hall, 2001).

The liminal experience occurs in liminal time and place of transition when a person withdraws from the normal modes of social action (Turner 1969). Turner (1974, 13) stated that 'In this gap between ordered worlds almost anything may happen'. In this stage of 'between and betwixt', a person goes through mental transitions when norms are suspended and be free from

conceptual blocks (Adam, 2001). Normal routines are replaced by flexibility by being at the state of 'play'. Travelling to liminal spaces therefore frees a person from the pressures and constraints of one's own culture and expectations. Furthermore, since a person in liminality does not form part of the new culture, it releases them from being inhibited by any cultural blocks. Adam (2001) identified that liminal experiences also eliminates emotional blocks as a person in the liminal stage is detached from the judgement of people that they consider important and feel the need to uphold a certain image to these people. Another emotional block would be the fear of failure and embarrassment, but the liminality condition lowers the perceived consequences thus reducing the risk of affecting social status.

Liminality can also be related to physically 'being away' where a person goes through spatial transition (Relph, 1981) and travels to places which are physically and tangibly different from one's home town. Motivation for one to travel away is the differences or lacking of infrastructure, language, ethnicity, values, traditions, and routines of daily life (Kaplan and Talbot, 1983). These differences therefore give the intrinsic feeling of being in a new world giving opportunities to tourist to let out one's inner self or take on an ideal personality. The liminal space of tourism supports temporary forms of transgression for tourist to enjoy unrestrained hedonic experiences (Redmon, 2003). Krippendorf (1987), as cited in Seaton (1997) also suggests that individuals are motivated to seek for elements that cannot be found in society which is shaped by everyday life. For example, people living in the city would be motivated to travel to wilderness area to escape the artificial environment and seek for authenticity in tourism (Mansfeld 1992). Gray's

(1970) travel-motivation theory stated that tourist desires to travel from a known to an unknown place and to provide them with facilities which are absent from own residence area.

Turner and Turner (1978) described the liminal situation of a person being detached from society and institutionalised statuses as "anti-structure". The temporary elimination of social boundaries enables the liminal people to interact with one another as social equals with common humanities and homogenised status. Turner (1969) designated the term *communitas* to describe the bonding and experiences shared by those who are in the liminal state. Touristic *communitas* therefore can be related to the travel and tourism ambiance outside everyday life and enables the connection into other tourists' life. While on tour, tourists are given the opportunity to meet and exchange thoughts with those who are outside of their social circle in the liminal time. Wang (1999) stated that touristic *communitas* creates the liminal and harmonious platform for tourist to engage in authentic and unpretentious connections with others in liminoid.

Liminal landscapes are interrelated to the ludic, consumptions, carnivalesque, de-territorialisation, and the reversal or suspension of normative social and moral structure of norms (Andrew, 2012). Bakhtin (1984, 158) described the carnivalesque as " a topsy-turvy world during a temporal suspension of order where traditional hierarchies are set aside, social divisions are laughingly transgressed." Several authors have linked the concept of liminality with beaches (Selänniemi, 2003; Preston-Whyte, 2001) due to its nature of being in between land and sea and it allows users to momentarily suspend traditional ties (Moore, 1996). Beach spaces are

<https://assignbuster.com/tourism-as-a-liminal-state-sociology-essay/>

strongly associated with leisure activities and are perceived as a desirable place to social and relax (Shields, 1990). The carnivalesque characteristic of it symbolises freedom and non-regulation (Moore, 1996) which is the ideal liminal zone for tourist especially the nudist. Nudism are generally not accepted in public and deviates from the normative structure of the society. Evans, (2000) observed the sense of community in nudist and stated that when the liminal people are in nudity, they share a trans-personal sense of belonging in the timeless atmosphere, supporting Turner'(1978) description of *communitas*.

According to Wang (2000), the modern society is based on Logos, the social orders of people functioning through reasoning and rationality; restrained by bureaucracies and complex communities (MacCannell, 1979). Eros, on the other hand involves the non-rational aspects such as feelings, emotions, imaginations, and drives of play and pleasure. The routinely scheduled life causes boredom and stress, causing the need to find balance in Logos and Eros, which ignites the urge to escape from social responsibilities to a liminal time and space. To be in a state of 'play' therefore is the push factor for tourist entering the liminoid stage through tourism. 'Play' is defined similarly by researches of different field and is agreed as the activity of behavioural disposition as mentioned by Barnett (2000) and the aim of play in adulthood is to find innocence and simplicity by ignoring reality (Ackermann 1999). The author has identified the most suitable definition of play relating to those experienced by tourist in liminoid is described by Huizinga (1950) as the activity that takes place within certain limit of time and space according to rules which are freely accepted and outside of the scope of necessities with

enthusiasm and is sacred depending on the occasion. His definition of play shows the relation of sacredness which is absent in the definition provided by Kerr and Apter (1991) in the post-industrial era, the period when disposable income and leisure time is available, who proposed that play is a temporary state of mind in a world we created, described as a 'protective frame'; nothing outside of this bubble matters and the person feels in control and unthreatened by reality. In this liminal state, time becomes unstructured and to be disposed at will, where a tourist can transform from being a slave to the master of time (Wagner, 1977).

Play is recognised to be physically arousal giving feelings of exaltation. Exaltation, as explained by Kristeva (1980), is the extraordinary experience absent from everyday life giving stimulation to all human senses. There are positive and negative arousals depending on the present of pleasure or anxiety. This led Kerr and Apter (1991) to categorise the state of play into telic and paratelic. An individual is in paratelic mode when optimum arousal is achieved with pleasant hedonic tones achieving effortless enjoyment. If the protective frame of play is broken, exposing the individual to danger or life threatening situation, the telic mode takes over through feelings of anxiety and stress through negative hedonic tones. Therefore the motivation of tourist in search for liminality is to escape reality and enter a temporary state of mind to be in control and experience the extreme hedonism of pleasure and anxiety which is absent from their typical daily life.

Ryan and Kinder (1996) claim that sex tourism is a form of deviance, a liminal activity which is usually judged as misshapen behaviour to the norms. It is an activity where tourists go through a voluntary spatiotemporal from

<https://assignbuster.com/tourism-as-a-liminal-state-sociology-essay/>

their mundane environment which encourages bohemian behaviours and a chance to portray another personality and lifestyle (Bauer and Mckercher, 2003). Famous liminoid playgrounds for sex tourism are developing countries such as Thailand, China, and Philippine where civilised male tourist feel that they can take advantage of the third world women (O' Connell, 2001) which oppose no intellectual dominance on them. While being in the liminoid playground, tourist can act indecorously by conducting improper conversations and behaviours as they need not uphold their social identity in the liminal space. Concealment is also important to the sex tourists because it eliminates the need of responsibilities (Ryan and Kinder, 1996) and the sexual relationship they are involved in is just for the limited time of pleasure and sense of belonging which is absent from home or they want to escape from their everyday life and gain diverse excitement with different partners once in a while. Another pulling factor of sex tourism is the power of control tourists gets over the prostitutes to fulfil their wildest sexual fantasies and lecheries. Braverman (1974) indicated the transaction between the tourist and prostitute is " not an agreed amount of labour, but the power to labour over an agreed period of time". However, unlike male tourist who seek only for sex, female tourist who travels in seek for sexual relationships often draw on emotionality and romance, forming long term relationships and provide financial support to the local men who they call lovers (Weichselbaumer, 2011), therefore surpassing the liminal state of tourism as they continue their relationship and incorporate it into their normal life.

Gay people normally travel to temporarily avoid censure, disapproval, abuse, discrimination and criticism within social boundaries (Hughes, 2002) and

reach out to those who are like-minded and find their identity. Hughes (1997) suggested that tourism and the gay sexual identity are indistinguishably linked and the acceptance of gay identity is fundamental to many gay men (Hughes, 1997; Cox, 2001). Most gay men live surrounded by heterosexist people and according to Mckercher and Bauer (2003), the liminal role of tourism serves as an alternative for gay men to confirm and consolidate their identity as a homosexual being by providing them the emotional distance from home. Holiday provides the opportunity for gay men to express their sexuality openly with the companion of other gay men as holidays generally enables all to behave out of character and be away from those who may disapprove. They travel to liminal spaces known as gay spaces which are gay-friendly and houses gay communities (Hindle, 1994). These include isolated spaces of bars and clubs, or any public space that allows gay identity to be validated through the social connection with others. This was supported also by Hughes (1997) who suggested that since the society has discourage the public act of homosexuality, holiday provides the perfect chance for the gay men to be himself; at least in boundaries of the liminal time and space. The liminoid state also provides gay men the opportunity to be engaged in sexual relationship with new partners as Monterrubio (2009) suggested that sex is a relevant motivation in gay tourism. However Hughes (2006) believes that sex is not the most prominent motivator depending on the destination choice. Findings of a recent research suggest that places such as South Europe emphasises on gay social life and sex, whereas Africa and Australia attract gay tourist for culture and sight-seeing activities (Gonzales et al, 2010).

Adventure tourism brings people to journey distant, foreign, novel and exotic places (Hill, 1995; Jensen, 1985) which includes the liminal spaces of mountaintops, tropical rainforest, deserts, the Arctic as well as into the air and under the sea. Cockrell (1991) suggested that the traveller would feel the sense of risk, excitement or danger while involved in activities such as rock climbing, whitewater rafting, scuba diving, sky diving, parachuting and backpacking (Ewert and Hollenhort, 1989). The sense of risk and danger intensifies the adrenaline rush provoking alertness, giving the feeling of being 'quintessentially alive' as opposed to the highly predictable daily routines. (Gyimothy and Mykletun, 2004) which supports Wright's (1995) statement suggesting that people breaks the boredom of life and increase novelty of life through participations in adventure tourism. The extreme conditions in the Arctic is the perfect 'play-zone' for those in seek for liminoid as the wilderness settings creates the feel of being 'out of this world' (Viken, 1995; Jacobsen, 1997) which is deceptive, strange, and game-like (Kristeva 1984) giving high arousal of pleasure and anxiety.

In conclusion, tourist goes through the liminal state while on holiday to escape from their social boundaries and routinized lives. The liminal role of tourism is especially significant in forms of tourism which are deviant from the norm of societies such as nudist, sex and gay tourism or for those who are in search of the total inverse of daily life and extreme sensory stimulation. However, Cohen (1974) and Nash (1981) pointed out that only some tourist undergo liminal experiences while some retain their own 'residual culture' due to deep rooted habits and principles. The tendency of retaining the culture could depend on the presence of certain family

members or peers which exerts certain social norms and values on the tourist, restricting the total withdrawal of the tourist's from one's social environment. Barber (2007) has criticised the role of tourism in 'infantilisation' of global society as pleasure tourism brings out the impatient child in us who wants the instant gratification to be kings and queens without evaluating the morality value of our action while faced with weights of adulthood. The author suggest that benefits such as self-actualisation and insights could be achieved by those in liminality and those in 'anti-structure' must return to their roles in society to ensure the structural balance of society.