

# BEYOND THE GAZE: HOW PARTICIPATORY TOURISM PRODUCES SOCIAL SPACE

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**ABSTRACT:** This article investigates participatory tourism through two objectives: clarifying how experiential forms of travel contribute to tourists' pursuit of authenticity and subjectivity and examining how these practices shape the social production of space. Responding to gaps in existing tourism theory, the study employs a conceptual research design based on theory adaptation. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and revisiting foundational ideas from MacCannell and Urry, we synthesise contemporary literature with illustrative case observations to construct a theoretical framework suitable for understanding participatory tourism within modern social conditions. The analysis demonstrates that participatory tourism, with its demand for experience, challenges traditional models portraying tourists as passive recipients of staged authenticity. Activities such as long-term stays, volunteer engagements, and experience-based interactions enable tourists to step beyond scripted frontstage environments and engage with spaces commonly reserved for residents. These practices illuminate how travellers renegotiate their social roles and reclaim agency in shaping their travel experiences. Using Lefebvre's concepts, we show how such forms of participation contribute to the production of social space by blending perceived, conceived, and lived dimensions, often extending tourist influence into everyday and residential settings. The study further highlights how digital platforms and online interactions, while not treated as empirical objects of measurement, function as mechanisms through which tourists participate in spatial meaning-making. Overall, the article argues that Lefebvre's framework offers a productive lens for understanding participatory tourism as a socially generative phenomenon and for reconsidering the evolving roles of tourists within contemporary tourism spaces.

**KEYWORDS:** participatory tourism, social production of space, experiential travel, tourist agency, citizen science, digital platforms

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## Introduction

The concept of participatory tourism represents a fundamental shift from traditional top-down decision-making models towards an inclusive structure, recognising local stakeholders as

integral players in the tourism ecosystem (Byrd 2007, Amin 2023). This approach has gained traction as stakeholders have acknowledged the vital importance of community involvement in shaping tourism policies and practices. In this article, participatory tourism is understood as any form

of tourism that involves the active engagement of local communities and visitors in planning, development, or hands-on activities. Under this broad definition, it naturally overlaps with related concepts such as experiential tourism, which emphasises the demand for immersive encounters and voluntourism, where tourists' activity takes the form of volunteer work. These terms are frequently used interchangeably in the literature because they share the common feature of active tourist involvement.

Participatory tourism is crucial in developing countries, where traditional models often marginalise local input (Tosun 2000, Munkhuu et al. 2023). Limited opportunities for involvement, often due to bureaucratic structures, act as barriers to effective tourism development (Tosun 2000, Hung et al. 2010). The core purpose of this inclusive model is to ensure that the benefits derived from tourism contribute effectively to local livelihoods and cultural conservation. By integrating local knowledge and preferences, tourism development becomes more sustainable and equitably aligned with community aspirations (Munkhuu et al. 2023). Comprehensive involvement ensures the equitable distribution of economic benefits and enhances sustainability and cultural preservation (Eyisi et al. 2020, Agapito, Guerreiro 2023, Junaid 2024). Furthermore, it ensures that development aligns with local community cultural values and environmental concerns (Phanumat 2015), fostering a sense of ownership among residents (Tosun 2000, Hung et al. 2010, Munkhuu et al. 2023). A primary framework for this concept is community-based tourism (CBT), which emphasises that local communities should lead initiatives, enabling them to retain greater control over their cultural and natural resources (Tryasnandi et al. 2023, Junaid 2024). Successful implementation of CBT contributes to local economic development, leading to increased employment opportunities and enhanced socio-economic conditions (Bello 2021, Amalia et al. 2024).

The eternal pursuit of 'authenticity' (MacCannell 1976, Urry 1990, Podemski 2005) further strengthens this trend. Visitors increasingly seek genuine interactions with local culture and events, which has led to the rise of hands-on, so-called authentic experiences, allowing visitors to integrate into the local community, even if only for a few days. In this context, it is valuable to

quote De Bruin and Jelinčić (2016) on the concept of 'participatory experience tourism': "tourism involving a process of adding value to an experience through active participation by the tourist and that it embraces (...) experiences involving active tourist participation". As De Bruin and Jelinčić noted, contemporary tourists demand a holistic experience with active participation and experiential learning that caters to their creativity and/or social consciousness. These issues are linked to globalisation, the information society, the sharing economy, and social group identification, and they influence various tourist behaviours. For instance, travellers may work remotely abroad, leading to increased demand for work or volunteer opportunities in attractive locations (Lyons, Wearing 2008, Keese 2011, Everingham 2017). The goal is to blend the enjoyable with the useful.

Tourists today often exhibit an engaged attitude; they don't want to be mere 'visitors' or 'passers-by' but rather aim to 'do something for the world'. Many seek to immerse themselves in unfamiliar environments, choosing peer-to-peer accommodation such as Airbnb (Paulauskaite et al. 2017), voluntourism, or working in exchange for food and lodging through platforms such as Workaway<sup>1</sup> or even house swapping. All these activities express the effort to fall on the right side of the 'traveller' versus 'tourist' divide (Urry 1990).

In the world of tourism, defining one's identity is often expressed through terms like 'traveller' or 'wanderer', but rarely as 'tourist' (Podemski 2005). This approach is also reflected in pop culture<sup>2</sup>. Many tourists currently strive for experiences that allow them to actively participate in and contribute to the local community, rather than just observing from the sidelines (Lis et al. 2022).

<sup>1</sup> Workaway.info facilitates arrangements for cultural exchanges. Participants receive food and lodging from a host in exchange for work. See: <https://www.workaway.info/>.

<sup>2</sup> Episode 11 of the 16th season of the TV series *South Park* presents the urge of tourists to become locals: it is time for Butters to begin a journey where he will follow in the path of his Hawaiian ancestors. Available online: <https://www.southparkstudios.com/episodes/hrno4n/south-park-going-native-season-16-ep-11>.

Research on modern and participation-driven forms of tourism has progressed significantly in three main, although intersecting, directions. The first direction aims to define new travel concepts or re-classify them within specific tourism trends or activities (Wearing, McGehee 2013). The second seeks to identify the motivations of individuals choosing unconventional ways of travelling (Brown 2005, Lo, Lee 2012). Finally, many researchers have maintained the attitude of evaluating these phenomena as positive or negative, mostly from the perspective of ecology, social equality, and concepts of sustainable development (Gray, Campbell 2007, Lyons, Wearing 2008, Brown 2016, Lee, Zhang 2020, Grimm et al. 2021), including the use of specific language regimes to obtain a desired effect (Brauer, Dymitrow 2020).

While popular theories from MacCannell and Urry provide a foundational background for this research, a critical review of the literature reveals research gaps. Guiney (2018) and Inversini et al. (2020) highlight the illusory and postcolonial rhetoric used in promotional materials by profit-driven volunteer and work tourism agencies. Today, Internet forums and exchange platforms are key sources of inspiration for participatory tourism, alongside travel agencies. Some tourists are now more discerning, blending cultural travel with online work and reshaping existing social structures rather than creating new holiday resorts. Despite these observations, a comprehensive understanding of tourists' impact on their visited spaces remains elusive because of the lack of a suitable theoretical framework. This underscores the need for updated research on how evolving travel practices, extending from traditional recreational tourism into more participatory, experience-based forms, shape the creation of social space. Although research on urban gentrification (Sequera 2018, Hayes, Zaban 2020) and labour markets in volunteer tourism (Tomazos, Butler 2009, Tomazos, Cooper 2012) offers valuable insights into tourism-driven social change, these studies do not explicitly examine how participatory forms of travel contribute to the production of social space. Their focus lies mainly on motivations and socio-economic effects rather than on the processes emphasised in this article.

By contrast, the influence of cultural and leisure tourism has been studied from perspectives such as landscape concretosis, that is, the

progressive replacement of natural landscape with man-made infrastructure (Dielemans 2008), as well as broader critiques involving neo-colonialism and commoditisation (Cywiński 2015). Although these perspectives do not directly form the core of this article, they illustrate debates on how tourist presence transforms local environments. This broader context helps frame why, despite such critical traditions, corresponding analyses remain limited in participatory tourism, leaving its consequences underexplored by contemporary standards (Brauer et al. 2019).

This research gap not only indicates a theoretical void in our current understanding of tourism, but also has practical implications for how destinations can advocate for the development of participatory tourism. This study aims to address these gaps with two objectives:

1. Defining the role of participatory tourism, examining how, paradoxically, the collective urge for authenticity enables tourists to regain their subjectivity in society. We explain that this is possible when visitors give away their comfortable position as passive spectators of tourism shows (MacCannell 1976) and give priority to participatory travel over 'one-size-fits-all' tourism ideas.
2. Exploring the social production of tourism-related space, discussing how participatory tourism creates and transforms social spaces. Using Lefebvre's (1974) conception of the production of social space, participatory tourism is viewed as a significant social phenomenon.

## Research design

### Methods and points of departure

This article presents a theoretical analysis of tourist behaviours and their effects on social space, drawing on the ideas of Henri Lefebvre. Conceptual research differs from empirical studies in that it is based on the synthesis and integration of existing concepts, models, and theories (Hirschheim 2008). To structure this theoretical inquiry, we applied the theory adaptation approach (Jaakkola 2020), which allows the refinement and integration of prior theoretical knowledge to suit a new context. Our study began with a literature review to identify gaps and relevant

theoretical frameworks related to participatory tourism and the social production of space. We then critically examined these theories, problematising their applicability to contemporary tourism practices. By delineating key concepts, models, and theoretical perspectives, we constructed a framework for understanding how participatory tourism shapes social space and how tourists seek subjectivity and authentic experiences. This article thus not only synthesises existing theoretical research but also interprets it through the lens of socio-spatial dynamics, showing how tourism practices influence, and are influenced by, the production of space. To illustrate and contextualise theoretical points, we refer to examples from the tourism market and our own observations, highlighting the relevance of participatory tourism in shaping modern social spaces.

### Literature review

While working on the literature review, we decided to avoid delving into definitions and origins of social space, which have already been extensively discussed in architecture, geography, and sociology (Blaut 1961, Peet 1998, Halfacree 2006). We also do not address issues related to the physical impact of tourism on leisure destination environments (Dielemans 2008). Instead, the starting point was the reference to the concept proposed by MacCannell (1976).

Before participatory tourism and digital nomading or working holidays gained popularity, MacCannell (1976) analysed how tourist spaces are arranged concerning tourists. MacCannell introduced the concept of staged authenticity, referring to culture-related practices staged by hosts to attract tourists seeking experiences. He applied Goffman's front-back dichotomy (1959), dividing touristic settings into the front stage (visible to tourists) and the backstage (hidden from view). His theory focuses on traditional sightseeing and passive participation in staged performances, highlighting the privileged role of locals in creating experiences for tourists. MacCannell explains how different back regions are selectively opened to tourists and modified to give visitors an 'occasional glimpse' of authenticity. This process can be seen as a continuum, culminating in what he describes as the sixth stage of staged authenticity. According to MacCannell, this final

stage represents the kind of social space that motivates touristic consciousness (MacCannell 1976), where tourists believe they are experiencing the true, unaltered culture of a destination, despite the inherent staging by the hosts. This perspective has been supported by other authors, such as Urry (1990), who characterised tourists as passive users of the spaces they visit, identifying three key actors influencing a destination: the local community, governments, and private investors.

Traditional tourism theories portray vacationers as passive observers, absorbing their surroundings without contributing to their development. This view suggests that the cognitive burden (Edensor 2000) is lifted from tourists, who are also excluded from producing social space. While traditional tourism discourse positions tourists as passive observers detached from the production of space, it overlooks the fact that any tourist presence, however passive, contributes to shaping social and spatial dynamics. This article addresses that gap by examining how participatory tourism redefines tourists' roles.

### Conceptual analysis

When considering the spaces that surround individuals, particularly those whose lives diverge from dominant narratives, it becomes clear that conventional perspectives fall short. These standard frameworks often fail to account for the complexity of experiences that do not align with predefined paths or socially accepted roles. As MacCannell (2018) notes, "the possibility that a stranger might penetrate a back region is one major source of social concern in everyday life" (MacCannell 2018), pointing to the deep-seated anxieties that arise when private or marginalised spaces are exposed to public scrutiny. Traditional sightseeing no longer meets the desires of individuals seeking meaningful experiences abroad. The quest for authenticity has evolved, as seen in the rising popularity of travel concepts like 'be like a local' and 'immersing in a foreign culture'. As a result, we are observing a shift in tourists' roles from passive spectators to active participants, underscoring the need to reevaluate our understanding of tourism and its impact on social space production. The new trend emphasises genuine engagement and meaningful

interactions, offering a deeper, immersive way to experience the world.

In this context, Lefebvre's ideas about space come to the forefront. Space, according to Lefebvre, consists of perceived space (spatial features noted by our senses), conceived space (what is presented through representations of space), and lived space (how humans use space and retrofit it for their use). Only by observing these three dimensions (the spatial triad) together can we achieve a full understanding of any given space. Thus, space is fundamentally social and should not be merely regarded as a mathematical, abstract concept tied to physical matter.

In other words, space emerges as a human, anthropogenic, and cultural creation shaped by individuals and collectives. Lefebvre's spatial triad has been successfully applied to the interpretation of a variety of geographical phenomena, including constructing the notion of rurality (Halfacree 2006), embodied geographies (Stewart 1995), state and territoriality (Brenner, Elden 2009), sociological implications of architecture (Stanek 2011), upholding of questionable geographical concepts (Dymitrow, Brauer 2017), young people's perceptions of space (Hammond 2019), and the creation of spatial peripherality by political means (Persson, Dymitrow 2024). This diversity of approaches also finds application in tourism research, as it allows us to spotlight enthusiasts of participatory and experiential tourism, suggesting that their actions align with Lefebvrian ideas about space.

Lefebvre's analysis of the significance of space for social change does not divorce space from the underlying social relations within the context of modern society. Lefebvre delves into the concept of space and its genesis through a tripartite dialectical process involving everyday activities, viewpoints, representations, and contemporary spatial imagination. He contends that space emerges as a societal product, shaped by value and the social construction of meaning, ultimately influencing social behaviours and perspectives. Lefebvre equips us with conceptual tools to critically evaluate perspectives on space that overlook the evolving ideologies shaping our understanding of space's creation, lived experiences, and utilisation. By recognising space as a social construct intricately woven into our daily routines, including travel, this article advocates for

an updated Lefebvrian analysis of reality influenced by tourists. According to Lefebvre, social space is both produced and consumed (Lefebvre 1974). This concept applies to the increased consumerism in tourism, which aligns with the capitalist system (Hall 2010). Vacationing, a source of pleasure, arises from the separation of relaxation time from work time, a hallmark of modern life (MacCannell 1976). However, today, 'pleasure' encompasses more than leisure and the traditional Sun, Sand, Sea tourism. Destinations are ranked not only by visual appeal but also by their 'experience potential'. A wide range of experiences is now packaged and consumed as tourist attractions, including the opportunity to live and work alongside locals. Urry (1990) insightfully discusses the decline in the popularity of seaside resorts in the United Kingdom, attributing it in part to the emergence of what he calls a 'three-minute culture', driven by rapid media consumption. This shift, he argues, encourages people to constantly seek out new and extraordinary experiences: 'As a result, people keep demanding new out-of-the-ordinary experiences'. In his influential work *The Tourist*, Urry contrasts traditional forms of leisure with darker, more complex sites of interest – such as the former Gestapo headquarters in Berlin – highlighting a growing appetite for experiences that go beyond the simple pleasures once offered by seaside holidays. In doing so, he helped shape the understanding of tourism's evolving commercial potential.

Today, a burgeoning market of participatory, interactive travel has emerged, propelled by factors such as widespread Internet access, the global prevalence of English, and the increasing affluence of Eastern communities disenchanted with conventional, 'cookie-cutter' vacations. Modern tourists eschew the confines of tour operators' pre-packaged itineraries and tourist traps listed in guidebooks. Instead, they appear to breach Goffman's metaphorical 'back regions', discovering and embracing destinations before locals can even designate them as tourist hotspots. Motivated by a desire for novel experiences and authentic cultural immersion, travellers willingly engage in activities far from traditional tourism, such as harvesting fruits, childcare, and even manure disposal.

Moreover, novel incentives for travel, such as digital nomad visas, have gained traction<sup>3</sup>, facilitating the idea of living and working remotely from any locale beyond one's domicile. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis has catalysed and accelerated these trends, reinforcing the efficacy of established platforms like Airbnb and Workaway. While these experiences cater to tourist demands, the contemporary quest for authenticity represents not a new phenomenon but an intensified continuation of tendencies already observed in earlier research.

By consolidating and synthesising existing knowledge, it becomes possible to establish a foundation for critically examining the social production of space through tourism. This section outlines the key concepts, theories, and models relevant to such an analysis.

## Discussion: The production of social space

This section aims to explore the mechanisms by which social space is shaped within participatory tourism. We examine the emergence of certain community dynamics that serve as a backdrop for participatory tourism (Lis et al. 2023), as well as newcomers' (tourists') sense of belonging in spaces not intended for them.

As noted, we observe a rise in cultural and active tourism initiatives beyond traditional leisure and resort areas. Activities such as cooking classes, local meetups, language exchanges, and volunteer projects are gaining attraction but are less common in conventional tourist destinations. Interestingly, regions and locales that previously saw less tourism activity now eagerly incorporate participatory initiatives into their marketing campaigns<sup>4</sup>. New, distinctive offers and tourism market products are sold on a large scale. Modern travel platforms, such as GetYourGuide,

EatWith, and Airbnb Experiences, increasingly promote experiences that promise meaningful encounters with local people – examples include cooking classes with local chefs or crafting with artisans (Atsız et al. 2022). It is important to note, however, that many platform-based accommodations, particularly on Airbnb, involve minimal or even no interaction between hosts and guests and are often concentrated in highly touristic, commercially attractive neighbourhoods.

Alongside these contactless and increasingly professionalised offerings, a parallel segment has emerged in which hosts intentionally open domestic or semi-private spaces to visitors through curated, small-scale activities. This shift moves tourism space away from typical commercial zones and into the homes and daily lives of local residents, who often offer these services as side jobs. As a result, the front stage moves even further and blends with the backstage of tourism performances. By opening their own homes for rent and kitchens for entertainment, locals can assume a privileged role in crafting intimate, everyday-based encounters, even if only a portion of platform activity operates in this participatory mode. This marks a departure from the past, where distinct leisure-oriented spaces like the Mediterranean contrasted with industrial zones of Northern Europe. As Lefebvre notes, the Mediterranean has acquired a specific role in the social division of labour and has been subject to a form of neocolonialism (Lefebvre 1974). By contrast, experience tourism often repurposes existing spaces instead of relying on newly built infrastructure, thereby blurring the boundaries between workspaces and vacation spots. The intersection of work and leisure becomes apparent also when individuals engage in citizen science initiatives while travelling.

A fundamental objective of citizen science is to engage society in the transformation and enhancement of social spaces (ENEC 2018, Vohland et al. 2021). Citizens, the primary users of public spaces, play a crucial role in their development. The perspectives visitors bring from their communities enhance citizen science projects, providing fresh insights and alternative viewpoints. This contrasts sharply with Lefebvre's portrayal of residents being marginalised in space creation, dominated by authorities and landowners.

<sup>3</sup> See Goa pitches for 'Digital Nomad Visa' to strengthen tourism. Available online: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/goa-pitches-for-digital-nomad-visa-to-strengthen-tourism/article-show/101552901.cms>.

<sup>4</sup> See the Visit Faroe Islands: 'Closed for maintenance, open for voluntourism.' Available online: <https://visitfaroeislands.com/en/closed>.

Citizen science democratises space, empowering individuals to actively participate in shaping their environments.

For instance, travellers seeking deeper forms of participatory engagement often choose to stay in residential areas, frequently relying on long-term rentals rather than traditional hotel accommodations. While participatory tourism itself is not the direct source of real-estate pressure, the increasing use of long-term rentals by visitors who aim to integrate into local communities can influence housing availability and, indirectly, contribute to the gentrification of popular areas (Cocola-Gant, Lopez-Gay 2020). Second, it blurs the delineation between spaces reserved for locals and those for tourists. Additionally, the influx of participatory tourism alters employment dynamics within destinations. Conventional, full-time positions may be supplanted by 'willing vacationing workers' (Brennan 2018). This phenomenon is often fuelled by the appeal of volunteer work abroad and its perceived value. Younger demographics tend to see it as an easy way to organise trips, often without considering whether they would undertake the same work domestically<sup>5</sup>.

Building on earlier insights, let us explore the online actions of individual tourists and their impact on physical spaces. Platforms such as Google Maps and [MAPS.ME](#) serve as widely recognised and commonly used GIS tools by both tourists and tourism professionals (Kowalczyk et al. 2023). They rely strongly on user-generated information, and these contributions influence how places are discovered and circulated. Research on digital mapping practices demonstrates that volunteer-added tags, reviews, and pictures can direct visitor flows as they are used for trip planning and increase the visibility of locations that were previously absent from official maps (García-Palomares et al. 2015).

In areas with limited visitor information, these contributions often function as an internal mapping infrastructure, making restaurants, scenic viewpoints, or small cultural sites more accessible. Moreover, visitors often feel compelled to share their insights to help others or leave their mark (Munar, Jacobsen 2014). A similar trend emerges through social media. Empirical work on

geotagging shows how viral images shared can generate a sudden increase in visitor flow, leading to what is referred to as the 'Instagrammisation' of a place (Fatanti, Suyadnya 2015, Oh 2022). It can also be seen as a more sophisticated and digitally catalysed version of 'I was here' syndrome (Chylińska, Kosmala 2023), but it might actually rapidly reshape spatial patterns and affect how local environments are managed. In some cases, the consequence is that material interventions are required, such as new signage, barriers, or crowd-management strategies (Cornell et al. 2025).

Beyond the digital domain, many participatory and experience-based forms of tourism have a perceptible impact on physical spaces. For example, volunteer tourists often engage directly in landscape-shaping activities, such as constructing trails, restoring buildings, or repairing erosion damage in remote communities. Research conducted during a field trip to the Faroe Islands in September 2021 explored short-term volunteers who improved local facilities, such as hiking trails and their signage (Lis et al. 2022). The initiative we observed, *Closed for maintenance, open for voluntourism*, was the second edition of the programme, organised by local authorities. Additionally, studies from Nepal explored voluntourists' engagement in rebuilding infrastructure after earthquakes, thereby literally altering the physical environment (Wearing et al. 2020). Likewise, World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms (WWOOF) participants contribute to the maintenance and transformation of agricultural landscapes through organic farming, which can have cumulative spatial effects over time (McIntosh, Bonnemann 2006).

These phenomena challenge the conventional notions of cultural governance and belonging that are typically associated with locals, raising questions about the meaning of being 'a local' and the influence visitors can assert over space. Decades ago, average participants of the touristic market were mere spectators under the watchful eye of touristic agencies. Pánek (2016) notes that platforms like FixMyStreet demonstrate how ordinary users can drive attention to local challenges or even propose changes to urban environments. This shows a shift in power dynamics, since these activities were originally reserved for local authorities.

<sup>5</sup> Notes from the field trip study.

Initiatives like voluntourism and working tourism, driven by a desire for unique experiences, challenge and diversify traditional vacationing practices. If we view certain vacation activities as consumable products, then these initiatives necessitate planning and preparation. In essence, just as the construction of resorts alters the landscape of coastal villages, engaging in new tourism experiences requires its own means of production. The concepts of 'production' and 'exhibition' are rooted in Lefebvre and MacCannell's teachings on space and society.

## Conclusions

This article explores participatory tourism and its relationship with the social production of space using a theoretical framework. We can draw conclusions about the evolving nature of tourism, tourists' increasing sense of responsibility towards their destinations, and the Internet's influence on tourism as a social phenomenon. Today, how we travel and spend leisure time continues to serve as a reflection of our social identity, much like it did in the 20th century (Urry 1990). Over the past two decades, several new factors have intensified the immersive nature of travel.

We conclude that the demand for alternative tourism, where travellers are active participants rather than mere spectators, will grow at an unprecedented rate. Tourists benefit from globalisation and the Internet, which facilitate the exchange of ideas and travel opportunities. Tour guides are no longer the sole playwrights of destinations visited. The rise of the sharing economy has also introduced innovative concepts, making travel, especially long-term, more accessible.

In today's context, mere leisure is often insufficient motivation for travel. This is where the emancipation of tourists becomes most apparent. For many travellers, particularly among younger generations, leisure alone is no longer sufficient. While rest and relaxation remain central motivations for going on holiday, the most fulfilling experiences are increasingly those that involve meaningful interaction with local communities. These may take the form of collaborative culinary experiences, long-term internships, or participation in citizen science projects.

This shift in preferences has also fuelled a growing trend of travellers independently organising their trips, in pursuit of authentic, immersive experiences, often deliberately avoiding packaged tours and isolated resort stays. Additionally, the widespread use of social media has transformed travel dynamics, with travellers sharing their journeys with a global audience, fostering a sense of belonging within a virtual community.

The second purpose of this article was to explore how the increasing involvement of tourists influences the social production of space. The transformation of destinations is directly connected with tourists' cultural emancipation and heightened social awareness, challenging previous notions of tourists as naive consumers of staged attractions (Boorstin 1992, Podemski 2005). Nowadays, it is increasingly common to see tourists who demonstrate a sense of responsibility in their interactions with destinations, moving beyond traditional roles to seek deeper connections with the places they visit.

We need to mention the production of space shaped by the Internet, a dimension unforeseen by Lefebvre and an interpretative path that emerged during this study. Traditionally, physical space is shaped by images and written content, but today, the digital realm plays a crucial role in shaping social space. Forums, social media, blogs, and matchmaking websites empower tourists to craft social spaces remotely. The Internet also serves as a powerful tool to gather people interested in certain initiatives. The planning phase has become vital in shaping the travel experience.

In conclusion, Lefebvre's framework of the social production of space is suitable for understanding contemporary tourist behaviour in participatory tourism. It emphasises the role of tourists in creating spaces and reveals the complexities of power dynamics and cultural meanings. As participatory tourism evolves, Lefebvre's insights offer a critical lens for analysing the shifting landscapes of travel.

In response to the evolving paradigm of participatory travel, authorities should aim to foster deeper connections between tourists, the destination and its inhabitants, promoting engagement in local activities and facilitating meaningful interactions guided by residents. Such

endeavours should cultivate a sense of belonging. Remarkably, upon returning home, tourists often undergo a nostalgic process linked to the destinations explored on their own, the genuine bonds built with locals, and experiences that money cannot buy. This sentiment serves as a catalyst for a lasting sense of attachment to a place, as travellers fondly reminisce about their experiences. This can lead to economic benefits, as tourists are more likely to revisit and recommend destinations. It is essential that local hosts maintain their role as policymakers in the social production of space.

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