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Slum tourism in the context of the tourism and poverty (relief) debate

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Abstract

The paper examines the role of slum tourism in poverty relief. To do so, it surveys the state-of-the-art literature on tourism and poverty and investigates the ways in which slum tourism research relates to this literature. Slum tourism research has addressed the question of how the poor may benefit from this practice; however, these efforts have not systematically considered the general debate on tourism and poverty relief. The survey of slum tourism research also contributes to the conceptual development of the tourism-poverty nexus. The predominant choice of approaches in this field relies on quantitative indicators of poverty relief, but these do not sufficiently account for the multi-dimensional character of poverty. The study of slum tourism research points to the multi-dimensional valorisation of poverty in tourism which is an aspect often overlooked in the state-of-the-art research on tourism and poverty.

Zusammenfassung

Der Artikel untersucht die Rolle des Slumtourismus bei der Armutsbekämpfung. Dazu wird der Stand in der Literatur zum Thema Tourismus und Armut dargestellt und überprüft, inwieweit sich die Forschung zu Slumtourismus auf diese Literatur bezieht. Die Slumtourismusforschung hat zwar die Frage aufgeworfen, in welcher Weise die Armen von dieser Aktivität profitieren, jedoch wurde dabei die allgemeine Diskussion zu Tourismus und Armut nicht systematisch berücksichtigt. Der Überblick über die Slumtourismusforschung trägt darüber hinaus auch zur Weiterentwicklung des Konzepts ‚Tourismus und Armut' bei. Die vorherrschenden Ansätze auf diesem Gebiet gründen sich auf quantitative Armutsindikatoren, diese werden jedoch dem mehrdimensionalen Charakter von Armut nicht gerecht. Die Untersuchung der Slumtourismusforschung verweist auf die vielschichtige Inwertsetzung von Armut durch Tourismus, ein häufig übersehener Aspekt in der Literatur zu Tourismus und Armut.

1. Introduction

Slum tourism is on the rise across the developing world and it remains a contentious and much-debated leisure practice. While critics maintain that visiting slums is voyeuristic (see *Butler* 2012 for an overview of the arguments), proponents often link slum tourism to poverty relief. Slum tourism promoters, tour providers as well as tourists claim that this form of tourism contributes to development in slums by creating a variety of potential sources of income and other non-material benefits. In line with these assessments and on the basis of similar arguments local governments in more developed slum tourism locations encourage

and support slum tourism as a development strategy. In the ethical debates on slum tourism, its apparent economic benefit is most frequently evoked. In this argument, slum tourism proponents tap into the claim that tourism can be a solution to underdevelopment and poverty, a view that sees tourism as a modernisation strategy for least developed (LDC) and developing countries (DC). In the last 40 years, however, such arguments have been frequently contested and critics have pointed to the limits of tourism as a development and anti-poverty strategy (*Scheyvens* 2007, 2011; *Hall* 2007). In the most comprehensive review of the debate to date, *Scheyvens* (2011) concludes that a careful evaluation of specific initiatives needs to replace earlier generalisations. She warns against a blanket assumption of the use and usefulness of tourism as a development strategy. In academic reflections on slum tourism there have been multiple attempts to evaluate its potential to relieve poverty; however, both a link to existing debates in the broader tourism field as well as a synthesis of the approaches is lacking.

The purpose of this paper is to address this deficit by surveying existing research of slum tourism's role in poverty relief in the context of broader discussions on tourism and poverty. Slum tourism has grown significantly over the last 30 years both in size and range of destinations, however it remains a niche form of tourism in comparison to overall tourism in LDC and DCs. Despite this niche character in proportional terms, I argue that slum tourism offers specific insights into the study of tourism and poverty because slum tourism has a special relationship to poverty. This is predominantly so because in slum tourism poverty is not just a more or less accidental condition of the locale. Rather, poverty itself becomes the main attraction of the destination and is central to the discourses that constitute the slum tourism experience (*Rolfes* 2009; *Meschkank* 2010; *Dyson* 2012). The perspectives on poverty relief in slum tourism differ to those in other forms of tourism in LDC and DC. These differences include the much-observed paradox about slum tourism and poverty alleviation: If slum tourism was a successful strategy for poverty mitigation, would it not undermine its own premise (*Steinbrink* et al. 2012)? More questions arise: As people pay to see poverty, poverty becomes a commodity (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009) and is valorised (*Rolfes* 2009). What implications does this have for the social construction of poverty in slum tourism? Is slum tourism in some way rendering poverty into something valuable? Is poverty normalised and made acceptable in slum tourism? Does slum

tourism perhaps deal with the problem of poverty by making poverty unproblematic? Such negative assessments are set against more positive ones.

Slum tourism does not occur in all poor areas of the world, but develops under very specific conditions, and the study of these conditions is one of the key questions for slum tourism research (*Frenzel* 2012). One of these conditions seems to be linked to pioneering visits to slums by justice tourists (*Scheyvens* 2002). Events of political tourism of the global justice movement (*Higgins-Desbiolles* 2008, 2009b) triggered slum tourism development in three of its mayor global destinations, in the townships of South Africa, in Rio de Janeiro and in Nairobi in Kenya (*Frenzel* 2012). Does slum tourism arise from visits by political tourists interested in pursuing global justice and equity? Do its political roots remain as justice tourism develops into a broader consumer leisure practice of slum tourism in some destinations? These questions about the political nature of slum tourism point to an important and yet generally overlooked aspect of the 'tourism and poverty nexus' (*Scheyvens* 2011), namely that poverty is a political problem. Definitions of poverty differ greatly between approaches. Poverty is defined as absolute or relative, as material or as multi-dimensional, to mention the most important perspectives. These definitions in the literature relate to how poverty (and therefore poverty relief) is identified and measured and what results such measures produce. Poverty is also socially constructed as a problem, and the specific ways in which the problem is constructed open up a space for fierce political debates. Poverty alleviation today is a universal aim, an enshrined ethical and political target across the world regardless of context and situation. At the same time, poverty appears to result from economic and political arrangements that are broadly defended and supported. Poverty alleviation is therefore also a political question, with a discursive history as the 'social question' (*Arendt* 2006) that is increasingly debated on a global scale (*Frenzel* 2012).

Tourism studies' approaches to poverty and poverty relief have to be understood in the context of this complex debate (*Scheyvens* 2011). In this paper I firstly review the state-of-the-art literature on tourism and poverty relief. This review is structured along the later questions for the review of research on slum tourism and poverty relief, namely what conceptions of poverty are considered and how poverty is quantitatively assessed. Moreover, I ask to what extent poverty is un-

derstood as a political 'social' question and placed in the context of the broader economic and political order. Following on from this reflection I introduce the way poverty relief has been addressed in the context of slum tourism. I survey studies that have attempted to measure slum tourism's effect on poverty relief. In the existing literature, slum tourism's effects on poverty relief are mostly addressed on a case study basis. In reviewing this literature conclusions can be drawn towards a future research agenda on poverty relief. Finally – as the review shows – the slum tourism discourse on poverty relief often evokes qualitative approaches that provide new insights into social and political questions over poverty relief. The slum tourism discourses are linked to the political and social question of poverty. I conclude by attempting to answer how the special character of slum tourism may contribute to the understanding of the tourism-poverty nexus.

2. The tourism and poverty (relief) debate
2.1 Early approaches: liberal and critical

In her comprehensive review of literature on the nexus of tourism and poverty, *Scheyvens* (2011, 2007) differentiates four conceptual approaches that structure the debate as well as give some idea of its historical development; the (neo-)liberal, the critical, the alternative and the poststructuralist/post-development approach. The liberal approach links tourism to development and modernisation and sees the tourism phenomenon primarily as an economic exchange. According to this reading tourism provides a promising tool for poverty relief because it offers foreign exchange earnings and growth potential in LDCs and DCs. Poor countries often have resources desired by tourists, including hardly developed natural environments, e.g. beaches and mountain areas. The income differences between visitors and hosts provide the backdrop for competitive destination pricing. As early as the 1950s and 1960s this affirmative approach to tourism development led to World-Bank-financed tourism programmes (*Hawkins* and *Mann* 2007). Nation states, primarily in the Mediterranean area, also adopted tourism development approaches based on this assumed perfect match. Parallel to the overall approach to poverty alleviation at the time, poverty was primarily understood as a problem that results from underdevelopment and that can be cured by economic growth. Once tourism was established as an industry it would provide the growth needed to foster development and poverty reduction would follow (*Zhao* and *Ritchie* 2007).

From the 1970s onwards this approach has met with increasing scepticism. *Scheyvens* (2011) describes the views emanating from this period as the 'critical approach' to tourism as a tool for poverty reduction. The critics were often motivated by a rejection of mass tourism development as well as a critical view on some of the cultural implications of the expansion of tourism, often describing tourism in LCDs/DCs as a form of neo-colonialism or -imperialism (*Turner* and *Ash* 1975; *Nash* 1989). Critics also highlighted the costs of tourism for developing countries in terms of cultural and social change. Empirical research into the effects of tourism-led development further questioned many of the assumptions about tourism's potential as a 'passport to development' (*De Kadt* 1979) on economical grounds. The research showed that tourism development in DCs and LDCs led to growth, however foreign exchange earnings leaked back to developed countries as tourists' desires for imported products and investors' returns on investment had to be served. Traditional development approaches came under increasing scrutiny in the 1980s as a spiralling debt crisis locked many countries in the developing world firmly into dependency. Foreign exchange earnings seemed not to help the development of the country nor trickle down to ease the burden of poverty among populations. Rather they were often completely consumed to service foreign debt. As critics point out, tourism combined the economic 'underdevelopment' caused by dependency with the post-colonial discursive 'under-development' in which tourism constructed LDCs and DCs as places of deprivation and want, establishing a post-colonial supremacy of the global 'North' (*Hall* and *Tucker* 2004; *Escobar* 1995).

2.2 Alternative tourism

In the 1980s, alternative forms of tourism developed to address the limits of the previous development of tourism. Alternative tourism encompasses many approaches to tourism. With regard to the tourism-poverty nexus, alternative approaches attempt to create forms of tourism that can more directly contribute to the development of the poorest and to prevent some of the negative impacts (*Scheyvens* 2011). This includes the development of 'community-based tourism' (CBT). CBT attempts to direct tourist flows to the poorest by establishing tourism in communities on the basis of their direct participation. In the 1980s and 1990s CBT developed into a strong fad among development institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and it did not remain without criticism. Critics pointed to the limited economic viability of tourism

approaches that were not driven by profit orientation but by development aims. Moreover, these forms of tourism were also accused of opening up ever more places to tourism development, catering for special interest tourists that liked to explore unique places. *Butcher's* (2003) critique of the 'moralisation of tourism' furthermore questioned alternative tourism because of its tendency to promote individual consumer choice as a solution to global inequality. *Butcher* called this approach 'degraded politics' (2003: 110). More recent criticisms of CBT have included the view that it was mainly serving the interests of the 'NGO industry' as a development tool with little positive impact on the communities (*Ruiz-Ballesteros* and *Hernuandez-Ramuriez* 2010; *Baptista* 2012).

The strong criticism of traditional development approaches in the 1980s led to a slow reorientation of the global economic discourse away from pursuing 'development' and towards the aim of poverty alleviation, a shift that was mirrored in the views on tourism (*Zhao* and *Ritchie* 2007). In this context the 'pro-poor tourism' (PPT) paradigm developed. According to *Scheyvens* (2011) a reinvention of the liberal approach of tourism and development took place, where many of the traditional claims on tourism's potential benefit for the poor were repeated with a slightly modified focus (see also *Harrison* 2008). Scholars today tend to subsume the 'pro-poor tourism' (PPT) approach with neo-liberal tendencies of the prevailing global development organisations (*Scheyvens* 2011). Academic proponents of PPT argue for a stronger integration of ideas derived from alternative approaches, like participation and empowerment, into the tourism development (*Ashley* and *Haysom* 2006). In a frequent definition of PPT, the aim is to render all forms of tourism more beneficial to the poorest. While benefits are described both in terms of material gains as well as in qualitative advantages like access to education and participation, the focus is on 'net-benefits' for the poor (*Ashley* et al. 2001). When those 'net-benefits' are to be evaluated, however, a quantitative measure of poverty alleviation seems the most apparent tool.

2.3 The quantification of poverty

In alignment with such an approach, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) considers tourism development to be pro-poor when it secures an overall reduction of the number of poor people, measured in terms of absolute poverty, following the World Bank definition of the absolute poverty line at 1,25 US$ per day (*Schilcher* 2007; *Scheyvens* 2010). Some claim that economic growth automatically reduces the number of people living in absolute poverty (*Dollar* and *Kraay* 2001). Following this claim, World Bank and UNWTO always regard growth as 'pro-poor'. UNWTO established its own research and development programme to mirror this approach in the Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) framework. An example of a study that attempts to apply this view of tourism and poverty alleviation is *Blake* et al.'s (2008) comprehensive study of tourism's role in poverty alleviation in Brazil. The researchers use a computable general equilibrium model (CGE) to calculate the total revenue tourism brings to the Brazilian economy. A CGE measures the influence of selected factors (like the growth or decline of tourism revenue) on a broad set of indicators, like tax and foreign exchange earnings, wage and poverty levels etc. Data are collected for a base year in a social accounting matrix (SAM), using key commodities and industries as well as information on household earnings. Brazil's direct and indirect tourism revenue accounted for about 5.5 % of Brazils GDP (*Arbache* et al. 2004) in the base year 2002. The SAM also showed the effects of tourism on different income groups and on labour earnings relative to capital earnings. Accordingly, only 13 % of tourism income in 2002 benefited capital (capital took 55 % of earnings in the overall Brazilian economy in that year) whereas labour benefited proportionally stronger from tourism income. Also, the overall importance of tourism earnings was higher among low skilled labour. Both effects (tourism is labour-intensive and the labour is low skilled) point to a beneficial role of tourism development for the poor (*Blake* et al. 2008).

Using the CGE *Blake* et al. also investigate the effects of tourism expansion. They run a simulation with a 10 % increase in tourism earnings. As expected, this leads to benefits for wages, tax revenue and capital earnings, however, without any specific benefit for the poorest. Their findings suggest that the crucial variable that guarantees a disproportionate benefit for the poor is the use of the increased tax revenue by the state. Only if this is redistributed to the poorest does tourism growth benefit the poor more then other income groups. Therefore, social and distributive policy appears to be the crucial factor for tourism's impact on poverty alleviation. If growth is the sole strategy for poverty reduction, income differences and hence relative poverty remain stable at best. Only through policy intervention can tourism help to level the gen-

eral distribution of wealth in a society and improve equity. *Schilcher* (2007) concurs with this view in her discussion of the UNWTO and World Bank approach to PPT. She argues that for UNWTO tourism is still pro-poor even if rich people benefit from it proportionally more than the poor, increasing the inequality in a given country. As *Schilcher* (2007) points out, reducing the poverty alleviation target to a reduction of 'absolute poverty' is aligned with neo-liberal politics of market and trade liberalisation. 'Strategies to alleviate poverty are subject to ideological interpretations lying within the (capitalist) extremes of neo-liberalism and protectionism' (*Schilcher* 2007: 167).

2.4 Beyond quantification

The paradox is that pro-poor policies that aim at increasing equity and income equality in countries usually depend on policy strategies of state interventionism and protectionism. These are, however, diametrically opposed to neo-liberal strategies of trade liberalisation and state spending that focus on enhancing private sector activities. The problem becomes tangible when, as is the case in Fiji, state spending favours the development of tourism infrastructure against the construction of infrastructure serving the poorest. In terms of UNWTO definitions such an approach would be considered pro-poor, because tourism is likely to grow (*Schilcher* 2007). In her examination of PPT, *Scheyvens* (2007, 2011) confirms *Harrison's* (2008) critical assessment that the new or neo-liberal approach differs little from earlier attempts to promote tourism as a tool to development. It is also important to note that despite the differences between neo-liberal, critical and alternative approaches to tourism and poverty relief, they all assume certain ideas about poverty and indeed tourism. In light of these assumptions, ontological and epistemological questions about poverty and tourism have been raised in what *Scheyvens* (2007, 2011) describes as a fourth approach, 'post-structuralist' or 'post-developmental' to poverty alleviation and tourism. *Scheyvens* (2011) suggests that notions of poverty differ greatly and that such differences have not been sufficiently reflected in the tourism literature. If poverty is understood as a multi-dimensional phenomenon (*Tomlinson* et al. 2008) its measurement can't be reduced to quantitative indicators such as the absolute and relative poverty lines.

PPT academics propose to consider non-monetary, qualitative aspects of tourism's role in poverty relief,

however, in actual practice the evaluation seems to tend to move back to positivist, quantitative indicators. Indeed PPT focuses squarely on 'net-benefits' translated into the headcount of people that move beyond the poverty line. There is an understandable lure of measurable positive and negative impacts that enable the calculation of quantifiable 'net-benefits', but such assessments overlook the complexities of the issue and lead to questionable results. Indeed, as discussed earlier, they seem to feed into an almost mechanical understanding of tourism growth and poverty relief. In this context it is important to consider interventions into our understanding of tourism and tourists. While positivist approaches to tourism tend to see it as an industry, *Higgins-Desbiolles* (2009a) proposes to understand tourism as a social force. Just as the phenomenon of migration has economic as well as many other aspects to it, tourism can be read as a complex social phenomenon beyond its industry characteristics. Rather than focusing squarely on economic cost-benefit analyses, research needs to study tourism as a dynamic system with a range of different effects. For *Higgins-Desbiolles*, this includes the role tourism can play in promoting peace, cultural and social change or influencing political decision-making. In a post-structuralist view tourism in its totality can no longer be reduced to either beneficial or adverse effects on complex issues like poverty alleviation. Taking into account the dynamism of the tourism system one can also better consider the influences of a variety of stakeholders in shaping tourism. This includes the ability of social movements and other agents, including the poor to shape tourism in the ways they see it fit and to transform the tourism system (*Scheyvens* 2011). In the case of slum tourism, may tourists influence the way in which poverty alleviation policy is shaped in a particular country? Can tourism influence the aspirations and expectations of poor people?

2.5 Summary: tourism and poverty (relief)

Post-structural approaches tend to highlight the complexity of the issue and focus on case studies. This has its limits. The question is how to best ensure that research efforts and results on the basis of case studies are transferable between cases. *Zhao* and *Ritchie* (2007) propose a comprehensive research framework that addresses some of the limits of previous studies. In particular they acknowledge the ontological and epistemological questions that persist over poverty and

the poor. In evaluating 'Anti-Poverty Tourism' (APT), they propose to rely on a set of qualitative indicators, including the concepts of 'opportunity', 'empowerment' and 'security'. These function to evaluate tourism in specific cases. Their matrix includes additional indicators highlighting the participation of locals in tourism, not simply as participation in the workforce, but equally as entrepreneurs and as local residents. They also propose to analyse stakeholders and in particular the tourists' role in shaping tourism in relation to poverty. Therefore research may ask to what extent tourists engage with the poor and find ways to do so beyond leaving money. This includes offers in place for tourists to engage in volunteering and philanthropy while on their trip. Overall, *Zhao* and *Ritchie* (2007) create a very useful listing of themes for the research of anti-poverty tourism in specific localities. What is particularly intriguing is the idea that tourism might not be the best strategy to alleviate poverty in a given context, and its development, in cases of conflict with better strategies, should not be pursued.

The approach needs to be developed further in light of some of the considerations *Zhao* and *Ritchie* propose. For example while some acknowledgement is given to questions of ownership of the means of production and, in particular, land, these are crucial factors to determine potential negative impacts of tourism development. This is pertinent when previously commonly used resources, like beaches, are enclosed and privatised in the context of tourism development (*Rice* 2005). And while *Zhao* and *Ritchie* (2007) acknowledge the multi-dimensional character of poverty and the calculation thereof, they fall short of debating poverty as a social and political question. This, however, could open the research agenda to the study of tourist and host interactions that move beyond philanthropy and into solidarity, political alliances and the formulation of shared demands. This is in alignment with *Schilcher's* plea for future research which proposes that we should tackle the issue of empowerment beyond the local level. "Research should focus on practical solutions to the question of the empowerment of the poor – both at national and local level" (*Schilcher* 2007: 185). Overall, the state of the art research on the nexus of poverty and tourism shows a tend-ency to reject blanket assumptions about the use and utility of tourism in poverty relief. By moving to case study approaches, more theoretical approaches that see tourism as a panacea to poverty relief or to condemn tourism outright are increasingly rejected. In surveying the slum tourism literature with regard to poverty relief in the light of

this debate in the next section, I highlight the limits and omissions in slum tourism research and search for contributions from slum tourism reflections for the broader tourism and poverty debate.

3. Slum tourism and poverty
3.1 Methodological problems

Perhaps unsurprisingly, claims that slum tourism helps the poor abound in the marketing literature of slum tourism producers. Companies like *Exotic Tours*, one of the major providers of favela tourism in Rio de Janeiro, claim on their website that "Your visit will help our sustainable project as well as create work opportunities within the community" (Exotictours 2013). Across the major global slum tourism destinations similar claims can be found in most promotional material. Slum tourists often repeat these claims, partly to justify their trips and partly because tour operators make them believe that their visits, donations and restaurant meals do make a difference (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009). However, scrutinising these claims slum tourism research rarely relies on quantitative measures. Quantitative evaluations of slum tourism's role in poverty relief do not exist (*Frenzel* and *Koens* 2012). This gap is caused by a range of problems that slum tourism researchers have pointed out. The first problem seems to be that places most frequently visited by slum tourists are not places that qualify as struck by absolute poverty in terms of World Bank definitions. This is true for the countries visited by slum tourists which tend to belong to the category of DCs rather than LDCs. Indeed slum tourism is most frequently pursued in countries that have made strong economic advances in the last two decades, i.e. Brazil, South Africa and India.

This problem also applies on a city level. In Rio de Janeiro the overwhelming majority of slum tourists are channeled into only one favela, namely Rocinha (*Freire-Medeiros* 2011; *Frisch* 2012). Rocinha's population shows a broad range of levels of wealth, and while some residents live in absolute poverty, the economic status of others corresponds to middle-income groups in Brazil (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009). In comparison to other favelas in Rio, particularly those on the industrial northern side of the city, Rochinha is relatively rich. Census data show that 90 % have TVs, most people are in work and major elements of Brazilian consumer culture, including banks with ATMs and fastfood chains like Bobs Burger, are located in this favela. Within Rocinha

tourists are usually not led beyond the centre of the favela, major thru-fares and hubs of activities to where the poorest favela residents live (*Freire-Medeiros* 2012). Rocinha's population is certainly poor in relative terms, compared to the rest of the city. Moreover, it is poor if poverty is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. Open sewage channels cause aggravated health problems, housing in the poorer parts of Rocinha is highly precarious and the security situation remains tight, even after Rio's city government invaded the favela in autumn 2011. A variety of other factors contribute to the multidimensional poverty in Rocinha and more generally to Brazilian favelas, for example the stigmatisation that favela residents are met with by their better-off compatriots (*Frisch* 2012; *Freire-Medeiros* 2012). This complex context shows that a measure of PPT that focuses on the number of people that have been lifted out of absolute poverty can only produce very limited results in the context of tourism in Rocinha.

A similar picture appears in the other main slum tourism destinations. Township tours do not visit the poorest townships, and the complexities of poverty exceed any measure of purely quantifiable terms (*Koens* 2012). In India the slum of Dharavi, while featuring poor housing conditions and limited to non-existent public services, is a place of a significant industry. Most residents are in work and live of their work in conditions that can be considered poor, however not in absolute terms (*Meschkank* 2010; *Dyson* 2012). Secondly, in purely quantitative terms, slum tourism is simply too small to have a major effect on poverty alleviation. Even in the most developed slum tourism destinations, like Rocinha in Rio de Janairo, current estimates consider 30 000 tourists per month to tour the neighbourhood. The tours are normally traded at 30 US$, leading to a gross value of the industry in the range of 900 000 US$ per month. To Rocinha's 150 000 residents, even if they profited more or less equally and directly, this would not produce tangible results in income improvements (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009, 2012). As stated earlier the application of a more qualitative research framework to slum tourism is the predominant choice of slum tourism researchers (*Frenzel* and *Koens* 2012). Without explicitly drawing from *Zhao* and *Richie's* (2007) framework, much research looks at the indicators they list. This includes (business) opportunity, participation, empowerment and security. Furthermore, a lot of research attempts to establish the way tourists understand poverty in the context of their experience of slum tourism.

3.2 The role of slum tourism in poverty alleviation

Studies on South Africa (*Rogerson* 2004b; *Ramchander* 2007; *Koens* 2012) focus on the business opportunities for residents that develop as a result of township tourism. The general limitation seems to be that businesses belong to non-local operators who take most of the generated revenue. *Rogerson* (2004b) identifies a lack of education and resources that prevent the poor from a successful participation in the burgeoning business. Overall, his study establishes that there are very limited positive effects of township tourism on the urban poor in Soweto. *Ramchander* (2007) reports similar results. He finds that locals often overestimate positive impacts of township tourism development that is fuelled by promises from development organisations and local government. Rather than bringing new wealth to the community, township tourism seems to leave little to the majority of the local residents as organisers and entrepreneurs keep the profits from the tours. As a general problem of South African tourism, township tourism also seems to display a racial inequality (*Rogerson* 2004a). Township tours are mostly offered by businesses in 'white' ownership, which also retain most of the profits. *Koens's* (2012) study looks at the attempts and difficulties to foster the development of businesses owned by people previously discriminated against in the South African apartheid regime. He points to the casual character of most income provided through tourism. The small businesses relate to each other in a highly competitive market in which increasingly larger white owned companies also operate. The key issue seems to be that despite the South African government's support for the businesses, the effects on business opportunity remain limited.

Freire-Medeiros (2012) reports a similar situation from Rio de Janeiro. Favela tourism is operated by small- and medium-sized private businesses, run by entrepreneurs from outside the favela. Political influence on the decision-making processes of these entrepreneurs by favela residents is minimal. In terms of participation through work, some operators employ local guides. While such initiatives produce positive results, *Freire-Medeiros* also reports on struggles over workplace democracy as conflicts arise between guides and business owners over the terms of employment (*Freire-Medeiros* 2012). Participation is highlighted in attempts by governments to use slum tourism for development, for example in the initiatives by the State of Rio de Janeiro to foster tourism development in the context of the most recent favela pacification

programme. In Santa Marta, neighbourhood initiatives have been funded to develop favela tourism after the pacification of the favela (AP 2010). The results of these recent initiatives remain to be evaluated. It is important to note that earlier attempts by the city and state governments to foster favela tourism crucially lacked participation and subsequently failed (*Menezes* 2012). Security improvements are usually not the result but the condition of slum tourism development. They can be identified, however, in the context of broader questions of empowerment through slum tourism. *Wattanawanyoo* (2012) reports from Bangkok how visits of slum tourists help the Pom Mahakan community in an informal settlement in Krung Rattanakosin to increase their bargaining power against city authorities that intend to evict the settlement.

3.3 The valorisation of poverty in slum tourism

The example of Pom Mahakan aligns with broader observations of the positive effects that slum tourism may have. Evidence from Rio de Janeiro shows that favela residents generally welcome tourists. According to *Freire-Medeiros's* (2012) survey of residents' perception of favela tourism, one of the reasons lies in the valorisation of the favela by the tourists. In the Brazilian context, favela residents are often subject to social stigma and discrimination. They desire recognition which they get, to some extent, in tourists' attention. In his survey of residents' attitudes to tourism in the Greater Cairo slums, *Mekawy* (2012) also finds overtly positive responses. There is a lack of knowledge whether similar effects can be studied in other slum tourism destinations and this gap should be addressed in future research. To date the context of valorisation is normally understood in a different, more negative way. For *Rolfes* (2009) and *Freire-Medeiros* (2009, 2013) valorisation means the commodification of poverty. Here the slum is valorised in purely monetary terms, and the curiosity of tourists is translated into the price of the tour. This valorisation is considered problematic firstly because of the distribution of profits or added value between those that operate the tours and those that are involved in producing and in some way own the resource that is being toured, i.e. the slum dwellers. Secondly, a related question occurs: How do operators organise their tours? Apart from technically facilitating the visit of tourists, they are also engaged in presenting and representing the slums. Here it is useful to think about tour operators as curators (*Butler* 2012).

Problematising the representation of slums and poverty, researchers show that when poverty is commodified in tours, it is essentialised, fetishised and romanticised (*Freire-Medeiros* 2012). The complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon of poverty in a favela like Rocinha is translated into a consumable story which can be told in three hours (*Freire-Medeiros* 2012). This phenomenon is not limited to the walking tour. Rather, as *Freire-Medeiros* (2009) describes, the favela becomes an abstraction of global range in the 'trademark favela' that resurfaces in concepts for night clubs, urban art, video games and of course films in a variety of locations across the globe (*Freire-Medeiros* 2009; *Linke* 2012). Some argue that such a process constitutes a negative effect of slum tourism on poverty, as the complex problem is rendered into a spectacle for consumption (*Linke* 2012). At the same time it is these processes that encourage more tourists to consider doing slum tours (*Mendes* 2010; *Freire-Medeiros* 2011). In this context it is important to consider that tourists who visit slums already have ideas about what they expect to see. The important role of poverty in attracting slum tourists has been confirmed by a variety of studies (*Rolfes* 2009; *Freire-Medeiros* 2009; *Meschkank* 2010; *Dyson* 2012). Indeed the 'attraction' of poverty is directly linked to romanticised perceptions of the poor, a sense of authenticity that tourists hope to find there, and idealisations of a simple life that have long circulated in Western discourses about the (poorer) others (*Steinbrink* 2012; *Scheyvens* 2011; *Hall* and *Tucker* 2004; *Koven* 2004; *Hutnyk* 1996).

3.4 Slum tourism as communication

Meschkank (2012) points out that slums have place-related semantics of poverty, squalor and desperation. She therefore posits, following *Pott* (2007), that slum tourism is a form of communication. Building on the tourists' pre-existing perceptions about poverty, tour operators may change the existing essentialist views tourists hold on poverty. In Mumbai, the dominant tour operator presents the slum of Dharavi as an industrious place in which nearly 1 billion US$ are made annually in a variety of industries. In *Meschkank's* study tourists often quote this information as a key learning experience in the slum tour, because it contradicts their preconception of poverty and slums as connected to a lack of employment. The place-based semantics have changed. Here a crucial effect of slum tourism on poverty is revealed. Slum tourism may not end poverty, but end certain perceptions about pover-

ty and slums. This comes with the caveat that Dhavari is no longer considered a 'real slum' or 'real poverty' by the tourists, indicating that the place-based semantic of slum and poverty survives the experience of one case which might be qualified as an exception (*Meschkank* 2012). In *Crossley's* (2012) analysis of volunteer tourists' relationship to poverty, in this case in a rural setting, even less of a positive effect on the changes on perception of tourists is reported. *Crossley* (2012) argues that tourist constructions of poverty after their visit tend to naturalise and de-dramatise poverty in order to deal with the dramatic impact of the experience of poverty. The encounter fulfils a redemptive function for the volunteers.

Crossley (2012) identifies three psychosocial mechanisms at play in the case of volunteer tourists' encounter with poverty. Firstly tourists use their volunteering experience to justify continuing their life after the experience unchanged rather than as an imperative to change it, because they have 'done their bit'. Secondly tourists use the trip to confirm views of poverty as somewhat beautiful. Poverty becomes a (rural) landscape that is at once exotic and seductive. Thirdly tourists also construct the poor as happy, living a more authentic life that fulfils them. In all these three coping mechanisms, old, often colonial tropes of the attraction of the poor 'other' come to the forefront. In slum tourism post-colonial patterns have been identified across its long history. *Steinbrink* (2012) points to the predominance of othering in different slum tourism locations. In the current slum tourism phenomenon, tourists often construct their own desired position of globality by identifying the slum dwellers as their local other. Slum tourism thus serves the post-colonial fantasy of the Western tourist. *Dovey* and *King* (2012) present a different reading of the 'taste of the slum' and maintain that it has a transformative potential. The slum to them appears as sublime, a category of such uncertainty that it evokes the need to reconsider previous conceptions. They argue that the opening of the slum to the Western gaze carries the potential to politicise the struggle for global justice, despite Western coping mechanisms. Rather than only a matter of curatorship, the urban fabric of the slum itself imposes a transformative experience onto the visiting tourist.

3.5 Qualitative indicators

To render those considerations into indicators of slum tourism's utility in poverty relief, one would have to add considerably more empirical research that investigates tourists' understandings and considerations before and after the trip among other aspects. *Zhao* and *Ritchie's* (2007) suggested search for indicators of tourists engaging in philanthropy as a result of the trip could be one approach. However, the process of communication in slum tourism can also be analysed further. It could be argued that notions of poverty are negotiated and co-created between tourists, tour operators and locals, and even, following *Dovey* and *King* (2012), the built environment. Within this co-creation process tour operators play a crucial role where the effect on slum tourists' understanding of poverty is concerned. As stated earlier, tour operators can be seen as curators of the slum tourism experience (*Butler* 2012). Therefore it is important to ask how poverty is presented, and whether the presentations tend to enable the romanticisation and fetishisation of poverty or whether they allow the destabilisation of previous conceptions. This idea of curatorship to frame the role and responsibility of providers leads to the question of the motives of providers. Arguably a profit motive seems prone to undermine positive effects. The tours might be constructed along instrumental lines, serving best the interests of tourists and appealing to their expectations, while daring little that could reduce the number of tourists wanting to take part.

However, not-for-profit operators might also be drawn to an instrumental approach to presenting poverty. *Baptista* (2012) shows, following critical development scholars (*Escobar* 1995), how poverty is fetishised in development organisations as they compete for government funding and donations. Indeed *Baptista's* critique of community based tourism (CBT) focused on the way certain ideas can become fads in the development industry. As poverty is ascribed to places where locals often might not consider themselves to be poor, poverty is fetishised because it enables Western NGOs to secure funding. This problem also applies to academic research or political activism. Researchers, who could be considered curators of poverty in a more abstract sense, equally compete over funding and might operate with fetishised concepts of poverty to secure resources. Political activists, interested in advocacy for the poor, also have to rely on abstract notions of poverty, and are in permanent danger of fetishising poverty in pursuit of political arguments (*Frenzel* et al. 2011). The problem of fetishising poverty is pertinent to all these fields, as poverty remains necessarily an abstraction that describes a variety of experiences, situations and phenomena. This abstraction is permanently negoti-

ated and modified as it circulates between people with different experiences and preconceptions. This circulation also takes place in slum tourism and therefore one of the central questions for the qualitative role of (slum) tourism in poverty relief seems to relate to the ways poverty is valorised in the tourism context.

From a theoretical perspective, the valorisation of slums and poverty in slum tourism relates to the valorisations of poverty that take place across a variety of communicative systems, like charity, academic research and political activism. In all cases valorisation carries the danger that new fetishised, romanticised and otherwise abstract notions of poverty are created. Most importantly, the valorisation may lead to the 'real' abstraction of commodification in which the slum and poverty is being exchanged into monetary value. For the study of slum tourism's role in poverty alleviation, this latter effect seems the least relevant to study because the overall monetary value of exchanges remains small. Qualitative approaches, in contrast, enable the study of a whole range of different processes of valorisation, in which understandings of poverty circulate and are exchanged as a result of slum tourism.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I presented approaches of slum tourism research to the question of poverty relief against the backdrop of the state-of-the-art literature on tourism and poverty relief. I found that slum tourism research predominantly takes place in the context of qualitative approaches to tourism and poverty relief. In particular, the concepts of opportunity, participation, security and empowerment are discussed. Furthermore the literature has found that a valorisation of poverty takes place in slum tourism. A valorisation of poverty takes place not simply in the context of monetary value but also, and more importantly, on the level of semantics. When poverty becomes interesting, and the object of tourist curiosity, the pertinent question seems to be in what ways it is being represented and recreated when tourists experience and encounter it. It might be tempting to reduce the complexities of these exchanges by analysing slum tourism as the capitalist commodification of poverty, where the experience of poverty is monetised. In such a context the question of distributive justice can be addressed, when it is considered who deserves what share of the profits. However such a quantitative reading overlooks the aforementioned complexities of the valorisation processes that take

place in slum tourism. Indeed apart from producing few results in terms of the effect of slum tourism, such a reading ignores the more salient effects, positive and negative, that slum tourism may have on poverty.

Regarding the broader nexus of tourism and poverty this insight is equally significant. Projected onto the debates on slum tourism we can now understand the different approaches that *Scheyvens* (2007, 2011) identified more precisely. (Neo-)liberal approaches tend to focus on quantitative 'net-benefits' to evaluate tourism's role. The economics of tourism are based on the 'real' abstraction in which valorisation is understood in purely monetary terms. Critical approaches, while questioning the distribution of the profits, adhere to a similar paradigm. Alternative approaches move beyond the monetary understanding of valorisation. However, in pursuing a tourism development that avoids quantitative 'impacts', the potential of tourism as a force of valorisation are not sufficiently acknowledged. Post-structuralist and post-development approaches demand a change in the understanding of tourism. No longer should it be predominately seen as an industry, but rather as a social force (*Higgins-Desbiolles* 2009a). Even in attempts to comprehensively quantify tourism's impact on poverty relief (*Blake* et al. 2008) the result is that tourism revenue only benefits the poorest when policies intervene to channel the revenue there (*Schilcher* 2007). Tourism as a social force is more than an income generator. When the multi-dimensional valorisation of poverty is studied, overlaps between slum tourism semantics and those of political activism and advocacy can be examined. In these overlaps the 'social question', the political negotiation of poverty and its alleviation, might emerge. The multi-dimensional tourist valorisation of the slums might contribute, therefore, to a broader debate of the 'social question'.

To see tourist valorisation primarily in economic terms means to hope for an almost technical process by which monetary revenue from tourism exchanges 'magically' reduces poverty. We can now specify how such a role of tourism can be theorised. To quantify poverty relief is itself a way of fetishising poverty within the academic discussions of poverty. Rather than colonising our understanding of poverty and poverty relief in tourism with this one notion of monetary valorisation, future research designs need to develop criteria to evaluate the valorisation process as multi-dimensional. Further research should focus on developing a set of criteria that determine the val-

orisation of poverty in the context of semantics. These criteria could enable the analysis of the communicative processes in which poverty is negotiated and redefined in slum tourism. Building on *Zhao* and *Ritchie's* (2007) set of criteria, notions of opportunity, security, empowerment and participation should be developed to reflect how they are fostered or hindered in this process. This includes questions of how slum tourism providers represent poverty, whose perspectives circulate and, importantly, whether the communication continues beyond the slum tourism encounter. Rather than simply focusing on incidents of philanthropy emerging from slum tourism encounters as suggested by *Zhao* and *Ritchie* (2007), research could ask whether it enables global linkages, leading to the formation of alliances that address the social question as they pursue the communicative and political task of better understanding the root causes of poverty. Furthermore, research could investigate how the communicative processes that take place in slum tourism relate to those that take place in the context of development work, academic reflections and political activism.

In refusing to limit tourism's role to the quantitative abstraction according to which tourism may produce monetary benefits for the poor, future research might most importantly ensure against an understanding of poverty relief as a technicality. The study of slum tourism shows conversely that poverty relief will depend not least on maintaining and enhancing an inclusive processes of communication in which social justice, equity and distribution is being debated. (Slum) tourism might be considered pro-poor when it offers a place where this communication can occur.

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