Tourism Destinations as Playgrounds for the Post-modern Tourist-child: A Semiotic Analysis of a Mykonos-webpage
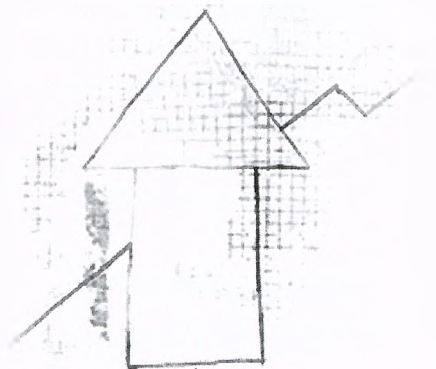
Ilias Sofronas

Tourism Destinations as Playgrounds for the Post-modern Tourist-child: A Semiotic Analysis of a Mykonos-webpage

Οι Τουριστικοί Προορισμοί ως παιδότοποι για τον μεταμοντέρνο Τουρίστα-Παιδί. Σημειωτική Ανάλυση μιας ιστοσελίδας της Μυκόνου

Ilias Sofronas*

*Ph.. D. Candidate, University of Brighton,
School of Services Management*

Περίληψη

Το παρόν άρθρο έχει σαν στόχο να αναδείξει την άποψη πολλών ερευνητών του τουρισμού, σχετικά με την ομοιότητα παιδιού, παιχνιδιού και μεταμοντέρνου τουρίστα, μέσα απο την σημειωτική ανάλυση μιας ιστοσελίδας που προωθεί την Μύκονο ως τουριστικό προορισμό. Η ανάλυση αυτή ταξινομείται σε πέντε θεματικές ενότητες, κάθε μια απο τις οποίες αντιμετωπίζει τον τουρίστα σαν παιδί σε διαφορετικές περιστάσεις, ικανοποιόντας διαφορετικές ανάγκες του. Τέλος παραθέτοντας παραδείγματα απο την βιβλιογραφία για το παιδί και το παιχνίδι, το άρθρο αναδεικνύει τις ομοιότητες μεταξύ παιδότοπων και τουριστικών προορισμών, καθώς και το πως αυτές εκφράζονται μέσα από την τουριστική διαφήμιση.

Abstract

The current paper aims to provide support for the notion of several tourism researchers, regarding the post-modern tourist

*   **Ηλίας Σωφρονάς**. Υποψήφιος Διδάκτωρ του Πανεπιστημίου του Brighton, School of Services Management.

resembling a child, through a semiotic analysis of a webpage promoting the Greek island of Mykonos. The analysis identifies five themes, each one of them treating the tourist as a child in a different situation and satisfying different needs of him/her. Finally using examples form the literature about the child and play, the article pinpoints the similarities between playgrounds and tourism destinations, as well as how these similarities are represented in tourism promotion.

1. Introducing Semiotics

1.1 Defining Semiotics

In order to establish the use of semiotics in "reading" a destination, let us examine briefly the theoretical foundations of the semiotic approach. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) was the first to use the term *"semiology"* As s linguist, Saussure focused primarily on language as the sign system par excellence, thus he characterized a sign as *"the relationship between a signifier (sound image) and the signified (concept)"* illustrated in the following equitation: SIGN=SIGNIFIER⇔SIGNIFIED (Sausssure 1974:67). Saussure (1974:66) argued that meaning is generated and communicated through the association between the signifier and signified in the sign system. In other words, although signifier and signified can be separated on an analytical level, on the experiential level however they are indivisible or as Uzzell (1984:86) formulates it *"the sign is the associative total of signifier and signified"*

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) approached the science of signs from a much broader view, and included in his theory the examination of meanings in the total human experience. By moving beyond the logocentric model of de Saussure, Peirce (1934) used the term *"semiotics"* to refer to not only verbal/textual, but also nonverbal/non-textual systems of signification. Peirce introduced a third factor, an *interpretant*, in the sign structure establishing a triadic relationship. His *"semiotic triangle"* (Fig.1) suggests that meaning is derived through the relationship between the *designatum* (the object/concept signified), the *sign* (the signifier used to represent the object) and the *interpretant* (the one interpreting the sign). Thus, a sign not only stands for something, but it also *"stands for something to somebody in a certain respect"* (Hawkes, 1977: 127).

Sign
(Signifier used to represent
the object)

Designatum
Object/concept
signified

Interpretant
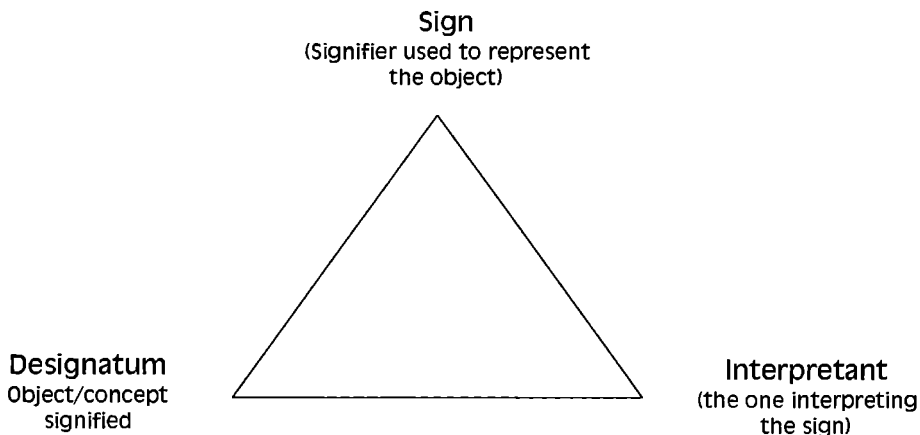(the one interpreting
the sign)

Fig.1

Roland Barthes, another important scholar of semiotics, claimed that there are different orders of signification. He posits that the first order of signification is that of *denotation*. Denotation tends to be described as the "definitional, literal, obvious or commonsense meaning of a sign" *Connotation* is a second order of signification which *"uses the denotative sign (signifier and signified) as its signifier and attaches to it an additional signified"* Connotation is thus used to refer to the socio-cultural and personal associations (ideological, emotional) of the sign. (Fig. 2) (Barthes, 1993:115)

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1. Denotative Signifier	2. Denotative Signified	
3. Connotative Sign I. Connotative Signifier		II. Connotative Signified
III. Connotative Signified (MYTH)		

Fig. 2

It is this second order of signification that Barthes labels *"myth"* For Barthes *myths* are the *"dominant ideologies of our time and serve the ideological function of naturalization"* (Barthes 1977:45). *"Their function is to naturalize the cultural-in other words, to make dominant cultural and historic values, attitudes*

and beliefs seem entirely natural, normal, self-evident, obvious and thus objective and true reflections of the way things are" (Barthes 1974: 206).

1.2 The ontology and epistemology of semiotics

Ontologically speaking, one cannot disentangle semiotics from its structuralistic origins, where reality is viewed as a social construction, consisting of systems of signs, in which structure (langue) plays the primary role. Thus according to this notion the structure (langue) precedes and determines usage (parole). Many modern scholars however abandoned the strict structuralism of Saussure, arguing that *"although language (language refers here to every kind of discourse) remains rule governed it is not a closed system that can be reduced to its formal elements, since its constantly changing and is by definition open-ended"* (Hall, 1997:35)

From an epistemological point of view, the traditional semiotician, is interested in the underlying structures and rules of semiotic system as a whole rather than specific performances or practices which are merely instances of its use. A post-structuralist semiotician on the other hand would also emphasize the importance of the significance that readers attach to the signs within a text. As Chandler (1995 Chapt. 14:3) argues, *..we must consider not only how signs signify (structurally) but also why (socially). The relationships between signifiers and their signifieds maybe ontologically arbitrary but they are not socially arbitrary"*

2. Using semiotics to "read" tourism destinations

2.1 Semiotics in Tourism

Dean MacCanell (1999:109ff.) was among the first to introduce semiotics in tourism, arguing that an attraction in a similar way to the sign, signifies, or a as he calls it is a *"marker"* for, something else (a sight/site), to someone (the tourist). MacCannell concludes that modern tourism is a consumption of cultural signs. Culler (1981:131) supports this notion arguing that *"all over the world the unsung armies of semiotics, the tourists...are engaged in semiotic projects, reading cities, landscapes, and cultures as sign systems"* Moreover, according to Urry's "Tourist Gaze" (1990) it is actually the visual consumption which makes tourism destinations to commercial goods and it is based on the production and reproduction of pictures. Therefore the visual consumption is not the use of the consumed goods itself, but the production and reproduction of signs which stand for these goods. *"The Gaze is constructed through signs,*

and tourism involves the collection of signs" he argues. (Urry 1995:33)

A significant amount of research suggests that in the post-modern era of today, destination choice takes place based on the symbolic meanings the tourist attaches to it, rather than on the functional benefits the destination has to offer (accommodation, entertainment, etc.). Williams et al. (1992) for example suggest that *"place is probably best understood by focusing on its symbolic meaning rather than on the sum of its physical attributes"* while Proshansky et al (1983) refer to the symbolic meanings of a destination as *"place identity'* which is *"the importance a person attaches to the place because of what the setting symbolizes"*

Several studies came to the conclusion that in order to understand the symbolic consumption of tourism, one should focus on the self-related attributes of the destination. Jackle (1985) notes that by relating interpretation to self-reflection, tourism can be seen as a significant means by which modern people assess their world, defining their own sense of identity in the process. This notion is strengthened by the findings of Crompton (1979:413) for example, indicating that *"for some respondents the destination itself was relatively unimportant. Respondents did not go to particular destinations to seek cultural insights or artefacts, but rather for socio-psychological reasons unrelated to any specific destination. The destination served just as a medium through which these motives could be satisfied"*

Kelly (1994:83) approaches the reflection of identity in tourism from a symbolic interactionism view and argues that social actors develop lines of action with consistency based on how they have come to define themselves-personal identities-as well as how others come to define them-social identities. Leisure, she posits, consists of a dialectical process between individual action and social context that is neither free of limits nor fully determined.

There are several studies that examined how tourism destinations are promoted. Although it is not possible to mention all of them in this article, I am going to present some representative studies, each of them approaching the symbolic representation of destinations through a different point of view.

In an analysis of British holiday brochures Marshment (1997:32) comes to the conclusion that gender, in its "socially ideal" form (tanned, slim, blonde young women and tanned, muscular, blonde young men), is a dominant factor in the construction of meanings of holidays. However, she argues, the images presented-both for male and female-are so narrowly defined,

and so much repeated that its final effect is particularly claustrophobic. In a brief comparison with brochures from Japan, Marshment discovered that their emphasis is on visuals of the destination itself (photographs of landscapes, cityscapes, etc.) rather than on visuals of the holidaymakers as western brochures do.

In a more feministic oriented approach, Sirakaya and Sonmez (2000) examine photographs presented in state tourism promotional materials, focusing on latent (i.e. facial expressions, gestures) and manifested (i.e. roles, activities) characteristics delineating the relationships between men and women and the roles and meaning associated with these depictions. They conclude that women are objectified and depicted in "traditional stereotypical" poses (i.e. subordinate, submissive, dependent), in order to sell a destination.

Mellinger (1994) examined postcards of African Americans from the South during the period 1893-1917, from a socio-racial point of view, and located two thematic sets within these postcards. The first consists of images of African Americans as agricultural workers which, so Mellinger, are comparable with picture postcards from the French colonies after the II World War, in which the key image was that of *natural abundance harnessed through European discipline and control*" (Nederveen Pieterse 1992: 92). The second set consists of stereotypical southern characters performing stereotypical activities. Within this set African Americans are pictured as "*submissive, singing and dancing, and resigned to their proper place on the plantation of the good old days*" (Mellinger 1994:766). Mellinger concludes that those images "*served the voyeuristic needs of white tourists to collect and recollect images of other's misery and economic oppression and condemns those imperialist structures and colonialist fantasies that constitute much of the tourism culture and underlining the need to situate tourism representations politically and expose whose interests they serve*" (Mellinger 1994:776).

Furthermore, Uzzell (1984) used three of the connotation procedures, suggested by Barthes (1977:21), trick effects, pose and objects to examine the photographs included in a sample of brochures produced by six sun-holiday companies. He concludes that tourists are myth makers and that tourist brochures are focusing on those attributes of places which may contribute to any identity one wishes to undertake, and not only on tangible qualities. Thus he posits that holiday brochures provide one "*with a set of cultural, social, political and economic assumptions, to create a bricolage of*

his own fantasies and meanings, and by doing so, to create him/herself"

In a socio-linguistic approach, Dann (1996) argues that tourism promotion has its own language. Comparing the tourism language with other languages, Dann indicates divergences and convergences and concludes that the tourism language is a language of social control that *"tries to keep a balance between controlling the tourists on the one hand and giving them the impression of granting them unrestricted freedom on the other"* (Dann 1996:101). Tourism promotion succeeds in keeping this balance, so Dann, by treating the tourist as a regressive and romantic child, searching for happiness and hedonism.

Selwyn (1993) comes to a similar conclusion after examining two sets of brochures promoting destinations in Southeast-Asia. His conclusions are worth quoting in length: *"The language of the New World Order is above all individualistic, and the representations of the brochures examined, elevate the individual-with his or her pleasure, fantasies, senses of power and so forth- to a central position in the pantheon of symbols used by the brochure writers"* *"What brochures sell to contemporary tourists, from a post-structuralistic view, is not so much any real individual freedom in any recognizable world, but more a sort of space in a world of Peter Pans in which eternal children....never grow up"* he concludes. (Selwyn 1993:137)

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3. A semiotic analysis of a Mykonos-webpage

The notion of the tourist as a never grown up child is strongly supported both textually and visually in the analysed webpage, which was selected for its richness in connotations and symbolic representations (http://www.greekislands.com/mykonos). The paper identifies five themes, each one of them treating the tourist as a child in a different situation and satisfying different needs of him/her.

3.1 The tourist as a child under supervision

As Maslow (1970:25) rightly suggests: *"Children do not have to be taught to be curious. But they may be taught, as by institutionalization, not to be curious"* Dann's (1996:101) concept of the tourism language as a *language of social control* trying to keep a balance between controlling the tourists on the one hand and giving them the illusion of an unrestricted freedom on the other, is strongly supported (both visually and verbally) in the web page under examination. It is in this theme that becomes obvious what Boyer and

Viallon (1994:9-10) mean, when they argue that *"it is not so much that a place is inherently touristic...but rather it is the language that makes it so, and language which imposes the duty to see.*

Firstly the author uses "arbitrary" arguments such as *...the island (Mykonos) has been gradually transformed into an **important tourist, cosmopolitan and artistic centre**, ...Mykonos is now **the most cosmopolitan island in the world, more famous than Capri, more fashionable than Hawaii**, ..the remains of its (Delos) **glorious past live on**, ...in Alevkandra...**the image that unfolds before you is like nowhere else in Greece***, to convince the reader to visit the island.

Then the author defines what "has to be seen" and even what "has to be photographed" one could argue, "marking" what is authentic: *Don't miss!!! ...**the nightly Mykonian miracle** is something that cannot be described. Only the one who experiences its full extent will understand,   Usually the night crawl includes a visit to more than one of them (bars),... **the most photographed monument on the island (and one of the most photographed churches in the world)** is Paraportiani...**an inspired architectural complex**, ...the windmills constitute **one of the symbols of the island**,...Alevkandra..is **one of the prettiest corners of the island**, ...it is the neighbourhood beloved of artists (Venice), ...**an inseparable part of life on the harbour** is **the pelican, the island's mascot**,.....there **is no lack of tourists to photograph it** (the pelican).* As one can see, the webpage appeals to a variety of roles that can be played by the tourist-child, ranging from the photographer and the party-animal to the architecture-lover and the artist.

Simultaneously however the webpage grants the tourist-child the freedom to make his/her own choices within this framework: *...the small bars, **suited to every taste**, ...the **choice depends on your mood**,...any description, however hard we try to bring it life, lags far behind the reality. There is only one answer: to **go there**, to **see it for yourself**, **to form your own opinion**.*

3.2 The tourist as a child in wonderland

Within this theme the tourist is confronted with a variety of myths. First we read that the island took its name according to the Greek mythology *from the hero **Mykonos**.* The second myth tells us that   *the large rocks which lie scattered about the island, are the petrified corpses of two Giants that were slewed by **Hercules***. This is to signify that Hercules prevailed over the giants, who could represent the threat of post-modernism and alienation, and made the time to stand still (*petrified it*) in Mykonos.

In the Delos section the reader is encountered with the myth *of the birth of Apollo* that took apparently place in Delos and that... *the five marble lions in a row, that still stand, were the guardians of the sacred lake and that they still gaze out to the east, waiting for the rising of the sun, the **sun of Apollo its god**.* One might argue, these lions are guarding the unspoiled island, this fantasy playground, from the enemy, which is

Pic.1

the adult's world, in other words the full of stress and anxiety post-modern society. **(Pic. 1)**
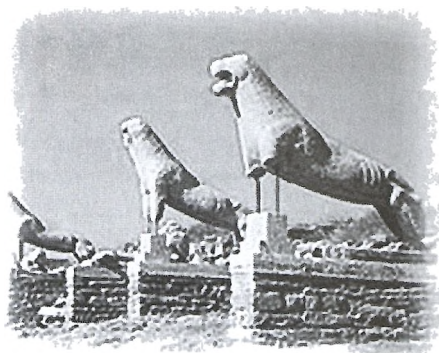
The next myth, (is more a legend for it is based on historical facts) and tells

Pic.2

us about ...**Manto Mavrogenus**, *the heroic woman leader that led the Mykonians to victory against the Turkish invasion in 1822.* Through this myth, the reader, and in particular the female reader, is "invited" to identify his/herself with Manto, as a young girl does with super-girl or cat-woman, as a fighter against repression and exploitation **(Pic. 2)**.

The last myth encountered in this webpage, the myth of **Alevkantra as Venice of the island,** is probably the most interesting one, because it is

based on another myth, that of Venice, which is conjured by all manner of utterances, including literary (Thomas Mann's famous novel Death in Venice), cinema, and even pop music (Madonna's videoclip "Like a Virgin") and which carries all the fantasies and myths that are connoted through Venice, such as mystery and magic **(Pic.3)**.

Pic. 3

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Pic.4   Pic.5   Pic.6

3.3 The tourist as a child playing with his playmates

Within this theme, the tourist as child is invited to "play" with his playmates, the other holidaymakers as well as the hosts. In this webpage the hosts are depicted as friendly and hospitable, as signified in **Pic.4** by the raised hand of the man greeting the tourist, almost inviting him/her to the island, as humble servants as it is signified in **Pic.5** by the two local women accompanying a donkey carrying baskets full of flowers and vegetables, metaphorically offering all these goods to the guests, as dancers **(Pic.6)** who celebrate the joy of life as Zorbas the Greek did, as artists **(Pic.7)** who are painting a colourful picture (the island) for the guest, as "primitive" Millers grinding **(Pic.8)** or as caring fathers that will embrace with their love, warmth and affection the tourist-child and play with him in a similar way to the local man in **Pic.9**, embracing the pelican. Both the embracement of the Pelican in Pic.20, and the child playing with the pelican (the mascot of the

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Pic.7   Pic.8   Pic.9

island) in Pic.4, could be interpreted as an invitation to play (get in contact) with them (hosts).

While in other more exotic destinations, such as Cuba, Thailand or the Pacific Islands, a sexual play with the locals is allowed and even visually encouraged (see for example Schellhorn & Perkins, 2004), in this case, it is outside the boundaries of freedom set by the tourism language.

Pic.10

The presence of other holidaymakers as playfellows is quite restricted in this webpage, but usually it serves the satisfaction of needs at the emotional end of the development continuum. **Pic.10** has a quite feministic connotation showing four young women smoking and drinking, appealing mostly to women that want to be the "hunter" rather than the "venison" These are the same tourist-children (girls) that would "worship" Manto Mavrogenous, as a hero against depression and female objectifi-cation, which is often the case even in western societies (in the adult's world). Finally, in **Pic.11** the tourist child is offered an opportunity to enjoy the lost romanticism and to play Romeo and Juliet, or even *Shirley Valentine* (Wickens, 2002), having a romantic affair and eating under the light of the candles and the moonlight.

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The last myth with regard to the other holidaymakers is that of Hollywood and is verbally signified: *....each year both **famous and ordinary people** turn up on this island **from all over the world** ....It has become **fashionable** the past few years for Greek and foreign **socialites** to organize them (parties) there and the **magazine columns always make mention** of the least one of them.* The tourist can play

Pic. 11

the role of a celebrity by being in the same parties with them (celebrities) and, if lucky enough, by being in the same pictures in a magazine's cover page.

3.4 The tourist as a child close to nature

This theme appeals mostly to the aesthetic needs of the tourist-child.

With regard to the aesthetic needs, Maslow (1970:25) reported already in the early '70s that at least in some individuals there is a truly basic aesthetic need. *"They get sick (in special ways) from ugliness, and are cured by beautiful surroundings; they crave actively, and their cravings can be satisfied only by beauty"* he concludes. Emphasizing the importance of aesthetics and consequently of visual consumption in modern society, Michael (1950) argues that modernity has wiped out the "hunger of the stomach" however it has brought about another hunger, namely "the hunger of the eyes" The modern eye is thus hungry for nature, he suggests. The desire of the post-modern tourist-child for aesthetic nourishment through closeness to nature becomes obvious in the in the following "painting-like" descriptions of Mykonos:

*a **deep, blue sea**, covered with **white waves**, **caiques of every colour** and an **all-white town** rising up the hillside from the sea shore, picturesque windmills with the **breeze in their white sails**,...the alleyways of the town are paved and all the joints between the paving stones **whitewashed**. Every alley is a **painting**, every corner a revelation. ...Everything is in contrast: the **white houses** and the **blue sea**, the **multi-coloured window frames** -a contrast in atmosphere which gleams with the **freshness of the sea**... Houses built over the sea with **polychrome porches, balconies, windows, doors and stairways**.* Closeness to nature is also visually represented by the embracement of the pelican by the local man in Pic. 9, as well as by the donkeys accompanying the two local women in Pic. 5 (see above).

Nature however does not only appeal to people's aesthetic needs but also to their sense of freedom. As we learn from the "Romantic Movement" and especially from Rousseau, in Emile, nature not only can animate a child's imagination but also inspire his love of freedom. The notion of freedom through closeness to nature is nicely depicted in the following picture (**Pic.12**) in which the innocent, unaware of social conventions child, carrying his teddy-bear (to signify his playful attitude), is following the "innocent pelican" which represents a primitive reality, free of social conventions, a temporary illusion of freedom that the destination has to offer.

Pic.12

3.5 The tourist as a child in the school

It has long been stated that in children the desire to learn and grow through play and experience is innate (Grey, 1974). As a consequence, Mayo and Jarvis (1981) suggested, that this is true throughout our lives and that individuals continually seek to know and understand themselves and their world. In the same way that play fulfils the need to learn for a child, travel can fulfil this important need in adulthood as well (Mayo and Jarvis, 1981).

In this theme it becomes obvious that destinations do not only appeal to the social or aesthetic needs of the tourist-children but also to their needs to know and understand though play. The webpage under investigation includes many "lectures" through which the tourist can satisfy their desire to know and understand by playing the role of a historian, an anthropologist, an archaeologist or even a historian of art. The first lecture is a history lecture about Mykonos from the ancient times, over to Venetian and Turkish occupation until contemporary times. Then the reader is given a lecture about Delos's history and its previous role as a religious, cultural and commercial centre, but also about its archaeological interest today. The next lecture is almost a "history of art" lecture where the reader becomes familiar with the architectural importance of the Parapartioni church. Finally, the tourist is invited to an anthropology lecture, in which he/she learns about the tradition of Windmills and their important role for the local community in the past and is invited to visit them and learn more about them either as a guest (some became dwellings) or as a visitor (some became museums).

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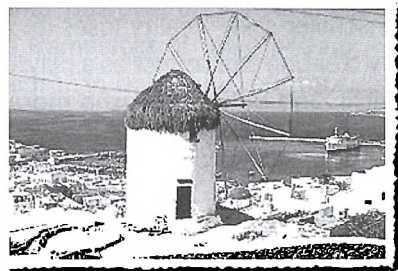
All these representations mentioned earlier in this chapter are contradictory to the reality of the post-modern alienated society of the tourist-child, where playmates are hard to find, where affection and warmth are lost, where people have stopped celebrating the joy of life, living in a colourless, grey and dull urban environment, in which there is no place for romanticism and play, deficiencies that can be compensated in the played reality of tourism.

4. Concluding comments

Several tourism researchers have noted not only the similarities between the tourist and the child but also the link between tourism and play (e.g. Graburn, 1983, 1983; Cohen, 1985; Crick, 1996). Dann and Cohen (1996: 310) even suggest that the investigation of the play literature provides a "worthwhile avenue of theoretical investigation for those intent on distilling the constants in touristic attitudes and behaviour" Indeed the similarities between the tourism language and the development of the child through play can not be overlooked. For the Victorians, as we learn from Charles Dickens's Hard Times (1907), play was a sin. This attitude lasted until the appearance of the "Romantic Movement" In Emile for example, Rousseau (1759) describes the ideal education for a young man, in which he should be allowed to wander freely, to explore woods and fields, arguing that nature would animate his imagination and inspire his love of freedom. For Rousseau, Emile was an ideal, for though man is everywhere born free, everywhere he is in chains, due to the "social contract" The German philosopher Schiller (1845) saw a way of turning those chains into hoops of pleasure. For Schiller, the problem was reality. It tied men down so that "man fashions himself only as a fragment" a position very close to the post-modern approaches about the self (Baudrillard, 1983; Eco, 1986). To become whole, man had to break the physical and moral constraints of reality. This could be done by taking a different attitude to things. Through play, Schiller said, "reality loses its seriousness"

By treating the tourist as a playful child, tourism language is breaking the physical, and quite often the moral, "chains" of reality and is offering the tourist a temporary freedom, the illusion of an achievable self-actualization. A child is unaware of the social conventions and the social constraints and believes that it is capable to achieve everything, in other words to reach self-actualization. Becoming adults, humans realize that self-actualization is

a utopia that can not be reached, at least not on a permanent basis. They become aware of the fact that Pandora's box has been opened or, according to the Christian tradition, that paradise is lost. However individuals cannot live without self-actualization as a target, which is the hope left in Pandora's box. This would take the meaning of their lives away. But one might ask, can this hope be experienced in the contemporary society, in an adult's world or is it possible only in a mythical sphere, in a children's world, as signified through tourism language and realized through tourism as a played reality? As Cohen, D. (1987) argues, although contemporary society abandoned the notion of play as sin with regard to children, it has not yet outgrown this Victorian legacy with regard to adults. Peter Pan is seen today as pathological rather than charming (ibid 9), he comments. Hence one of the functions of the tourism language is the signification of the fact that within tourism being a child and thus playing is allowed.

Another function of the tourism language is to signify the fact that this is a played reality and the play roles that can be played within this game. Bateson (1956) points out, that play is a form of meta-communication. In order to play "cops and robbers" for example, I need to preface it with a signpost like "Let's play cops and robbers" The signpost should not be necessarily so literal. Putting a funny voice or a mask will do. Tourism language is offering a broad variety of such masks (play roles) to the tourist. One can be Vasco de Gama (explorer), Robinson Crusoe (camper), Aristotle Onassis (5* guest), Erich Schlimman (cultural tourist), Mother Teresa (volunteer tourist), Indiana Jones (hill tribe trekker) etc. Thus, tourism could be compared to a huge kindergarten with different playgrounds (destinations), each of them offering the opportunity to play with different toys (roles). In this garden of children (kindergarten) children (tourists) can "blossom" as flowers did (Froebel, 1887). All these playgrounds have a common characteristic, that of freedom. They offer the tourist the illusion of freedom, in a Peter Pan's world, free of social conventions, where the tourist-child can be whatever he/she wants, however under the supervision of the language of tourism that sets the framework of this freedom.

Of course there are not only good children in this world, but tourism has something to offer for "naughty" children-the term naughty is used here to describe socially non –acceptable or at least socially criticized, roles-too: The fatal lover in Ibiza, the party animal in Faliraki, the sex tourist in Cuba, the drug tourist in the Netherlands, etc. Destinations for "naughty" tourist-children could be compared with adventure playgrounds, an innovative

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attempt of social engineering (in Copenhagen 1943), for especially difficult children, who could not be persuaded into conformity just through having swings and see-saws. The International Playground Association stressed the therapeutic value of freedom for it defines an adventure playground "as a place where children are free to do many things that they cannot do elsewhere in our crowded urban society" That freedom, however, Cohen, D. (1987:32) notes, wasn't given to children only to enjoy themselves but to stop them being nuisances. They could be noisy, raucous and violent in the fantasy space of the playground if that stopped them being violent in real life. In this manner one could argue that tourism destinations often act as adventure playgrounds where naughty tourist- children can play out their aggressions.

In tourism as play both hosts and guests are involved, therefore tourism language is there not only to signify the play roles offered for the guest but also the play roles offered by the hosts. The local women can play the role of a sexually available, seductive beauty, or a maid that will provide you with all the goods the destination has to offer, or even a caring mother that will "embrace" you with her warmth and hospitality, while the local men can play roles such as exotic lovers, dancing entertainers, or even wise old men that will reveal you the secret of life.

In this light I would suggest that the post-modern tourist resembles a child in an Odyssey for a personal Ithaca, which takes place in the realm of fantasy and utopia through play, which in contemporary society is still perceived as a sin for adults, and which is only "allowed" within the sphere of leisure and in particular of tourism. Within this framework, tourism destinations could be described as playgrounds for the frustrated, stressed and anxious post-modern tourist-child, whereas the play-roles (toys) offered by each destination (playground) are signified in the language (both verbal and visual) of the tourism promotion.

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