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## Sociological and Anthropological Concepts in Tourism

**At the end of this chapter, the reader will be able to:**

- Understand tourism as a quest for contrived reality
- Evaluate how tourism is a quest for authenticity
- Define the environmental bubble and critique how it forms the basis of commercial tourism
- Evaluate Cohen's five roles of tourists
- Analyse Cohen's quest for the other
- Assess and be able to critique the concept of liminality
- Identify aspects of risk and how they affect travel behaviour.

### Introduction

Tourism is both a business and a social phenomenon. To understand how it works, then, one must understand both the business and human sides of the phenomenon. Ever since large scale tourism began, people have been examining it and trying to place it in a sociological perspective. These efforts have involved an examination of why people travel, the social reasons for travel and the type of tourist experience they are either getting or seeking. This chapter examines how the founding sociologists and anthropologists looked at tourism and how their work still shapes our thinking.

## Social perspectives on tourism

Three dominant themes in the sociology of tourism have emerged over the last 60 years. They are:

- Boorstin's essentially negative 1960s view that tourism represents contrived reality;
- MacCannell's 1970s more positive view that tourism represents a quest for authenticity, and;
- Cohen's more neutral views that tourism represents a quest for one's centre.

In reviewing these themes, it is important to understand a few points. One is that most take a very American-centric view of the world. The second is to remember that these works were written over a nearly 30-year period and that they are heavily influenced by the dominant social paradigm at the time of their writing.

### ■ Boorstin's Contrived Reality

In the early 1960s, sociologists were becoming increasingly concerned about the contrived and illusory nature of the human experience in American society. They were concerned that people were no longer experiencing reality in their lives, instead they were being presented a series of pseudo-events. As Boorstin (1964) described them, they were immersed in a thicket of unreality.

Tourism, and especially mass tourism, was seen as being just another example of how American life had become overpowered by pseudo-events and contrived experiences. Boorstin felt that (in 1964, remember) the modern tourist was simply a passive onlooker who was isolated from the host environment and the local residents. As a result, tourists chose to disregard the real world around them, instead choosing the isolation of tourist ghettos. Both the tourist experience and the type of tourism development had to become more contrived, in which the tourist moved in a closed self-perpetuating environment that was isolated from the rest of the world. This was both caused by and reflective of the nature of modern (1964) American society, of which tourism was only a part.

There is much to what Boorstin discusses that is still relevant today. Mass tourists can only withstand a certain amount of strangeness. They like to witness strangeness of the host environment from the security of their own surroundings. Too much strangeness becomes threatening. In addition, he introduced the idea of the 'tourist ghetto' that is isolated from the real world. Destination areas like the Gold Coast in Australia, Disneyworld, Waikiki in Hawaii and many places in the Mediterranean are prime examples of tourist ghettos. On a smaller scale, many destination resorts are physically removed from the outside world. They