

Structural Analysis of Cultural Systems

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Human rights of indigenous peoples in relation to tourism

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank you, Mme. Chairperson,

Tourism is the world's largest industry of the private sector. For many tour operators, indigenous cultures are a commodity within the business of selling exoticism to the tourists. Such enterprises are specialised in bringing non-indigenous tourists to indigenous peoples. Usually, these tourists are not sensitised as how to behave in a culturally sustainable way in indigenous contexts. Sensitisation programmes would be disadvantageous to the maximisation of profits, as they would involve some additional costs. Presenting indigenous peoples as an attraction degrades them to objects equivalent to zoo animals, or even to circus animals, if they have to dance for the tourists. In such situations, the roles of the dominant and the dominated are clearly defined. Due to the tourists' socio-cultural invasiveness, psychological mechanisms are triggered that lead to the destabilisation of the indigenous identities. Especially the young indigenous persons want to escape their role of being subordinate. Eventually, the whole indigenous culture affected disintegrates. Unfortunately, this is a very typical course of events. Moreover, indigenous peoples become all too often involved themselves in such practices, which finally result in the destruction of their culture. As social scientists, we have to point out that in the light of cultural dominance mechanisms, culturally non-sustainable tourism compromises the Indigenous Peoples' Rights that have been acknowledged in the UN Declaration. For example, according to Article 8, 2 (a), any action that has "the aim or effect" of depriving indigenous peoples of their integrity or identity are an infringement of the Declaration. Even if indigenous peoples have already been heavily influenced, they have the right to revitalise their cultures, according to Article 11. But that right is undermined and practically made impossible, if they are always pushed in one direction towards globalisation by the external influences. Tourism in indigenous contexts can only be acceptable, if it takes place in a minimally-invasive, integrative and immersive way, which enhances the indigenous self-confidence instead of humiliating it. Our Tourinfo project, which has been listed by the German UNESCO Commission as a measure to maintain cultural diversity, aims at such cultural sustainability. It offers an alternative for indigenous peoples to the business of reckless and inconsiderate tourism enterprises.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mme. Chairperson.