

Are tourist places “non-places”? Theoretical and empirical investigations

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Geography and the non-place realm have different roots. Melvin Webbers (1964) thesis of ‘The non-place urban realm’ means the impossibility to establish limits to an urban place or specific urban places, because the urban is present everywhere. Relph’s (1976) ‘placelessness’ and Augé’s (1990) ‘non-place’ thesis focus explicitly on tourism and the tourist place. Their arguments insist upon the absence of identity relations – an element considered as central for the definition of place – and the ‘other-directed’ situation in the case of tourist places. In my contribution I will ask to what extent tourist places can be considered as genuinely different from other types of places and, thus, in which extent the non-place concept is adequate. My investigation will focus on one hand upon some conceptual considerations about tourist places, and on the other upon case studies. The mobilisation of empirical investigations suggests indeed the existence of identity relations for some of the tourists. This leads, it is hoped, to a more differentiated thesis on the quality of tourist places.