

# **Pro-poor tourism as ideology: A critical pedagogical analysis of poverty, participation, and neoliberal subject formation**

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## ***Abstract***

*Pro-poor tourism (PPT) emerged as an approach aimed at increasing the economic benefits of tourism for poor people and contributing to poverty reduction. The approach particularly emphasizes income, employment, economic participation, and entrepreneurship as ways of enabling poor people to benefit more from tourism. However, how PPT defines poverty, what understanding of development it legitimizes, and how it positions poor people require a more critical examination. This conceptual study reconsiders PPT from a critical pedagogical perspective. Drawing on Freirean critical pedagogy Marxist Critical Policy Analysis, and critiques of neoliberalism, it discusses how PPT constructs meanings of poverty and participation and how it relates to particular forms of subject formation. The analysis draws attention to the tendency of PPT to approach poverty less as a structural and political problem and more as a problem that can be addressed through economic participation. Within this framework, poor people can be positioned as entrepreneurial subjects expected to develop their economic capacities within existing market relations. The study distinguishes economic participation from a form of critical participation that questions and seeks to transform existing social relations, and argues that PPT should be considered not only in terms of*

*its economic outcomes but also in terms of the meanings it produces, the relations it legitimizes, and the forms of subjectivity it promotes. From this perspective, the implications for tourism education point to the need to move beyond employability and adaptation to market needs and to create learning processes through which students can critically question poverty, inequality, power, and ideology.*

**Keywords:** *Pro-poor tourism; neoliberalism; ideology; participation; tourism; critical tourism education*

## **Introduction**

The size of the tourism economy has attracted particular attention in developing countries, and tourism is widely regarded as an important means of reducing poverty and supporting development. In this context, pro-poor tourism (PPT) emerged as an approach that seeks to increase the benefits derived from tourism for poor people and aims to improve conditions in areas such as income, employment, participation, and social empowerment (Ashley, Goodwin, & Roe, 2001; Roe, Goodwin, & Ashley, 2004; Poultney & Spenceley, 2001; Scheyvens, 2009).

Rather than addressing the structural elimination of poverty, the approach focuses on policy and governance mechanisms that seek to increase the share of tourism benefits received by poor people within the existing tourism system (Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 2008). The pro-poor tourism literature indicates that tourism can provide opportunities for employment, increased income, and rural development under certain conditions (Ashley et al., 2000; Goodwin, 2008; Leh & Hamzah, 2012; Poultney & Spenceley, 2001). However, due to the structural power relations within the tourism sector, these benefits are not always distributed fairly (Cattarinich, 2001; Roe et al., 2004,

Goodwin, 2007); the economic value generated is often concentrated in large businesses, international operators, and capital groups rather than in local and poor communities (Roe et al., 2004; Torres & Momsen, 2004; Harrison, 2008; Scheyvens, 2009). This situation can deepen and reproduce existing inequalities, while in some practices poverty itself may become commodified by being transformed into an object of the tourist experience (Schilcher, 2007; Gantait et al., 2021; Gülduran & Gürdoğan, 2022).

The pro-poor tourism literature is therefore concerned not only with the potential of tourism to reduce poverty but also with the conditions under which this potential emerges and its social consequences. This raises questions about how PPT defines poverty, what understanding of development it legitimizes, and how it explains existing inequalities. PPT can thus be examined not only as a development policy but also as a policy discourse that shapes understandings of poverty, development, participation, and economic success. Such an approach requires questioning not only the extent to which PPT provides economic benefits to poor people, but also how the causes of poverty are explained, which forms of solution are legitimized, and how poor people are positioned as social subjects. However, although the PPT literature includes critiques of the structural causes of poverty, understandings of development, and the limits of market-based participation, studies that examine these issues together through the concepts of conscientization, praxis, public pedagogy, ideology, and subject formation within critical pedagogy remain limited. Rather than empirically evaluating particular PPT initiatives, this study examines how poverty, participation, and social agency are understood within PPT literature and policy discourse from a conceptual and critical perspective.

Critical pedagogy places the questioning of social relations and inequalities at the centre of analysis, while conscientization and praxis relate this questioning to the development of critical agency and social transformation. Public pedagogy draws attention to policy and tourism discourses as sites where

particular values and meanings are produced, while ideology helps explain how these values and meanings can become naturalized and taken for granted. In this study, neoliberalism is understood as an ideological project that promotes market relations, entrepreneurship, and individual responsibility as central principles of social life (Hill & Kumar, 2009). Subject formation refers to how this ideological framework shapes individuals within particular economic and social positions.

This study reconsiders pro-poor tourism from a critical pedagogical perspective, focusing on how PPT constructs poverty and development and how this shapes understandings of participation, subject formation, and social inequality.

## **1. Critical Pedagogy, Neoliberalism and Public Pedagogy**

### **1.1.Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is an approach that questions how social problems are understood and reproduced through particular ways of thinking (Freire, 1998; Giroux, 1992). Rather than treating social reality as fixed and neutral, it emphasizes that reality is produced through historical, political, and ideological processes (Freire, 1998). In this respect, critical pedagogy differs from approaches that reduce education to the transmission of technical knowledge and skills; it seeks to enable individuals to question the conditions in which they live and to recognize that these conditions can be transformed. In Freire's (1970/2025) banking model of education, students are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge, whereas critical pedagogy understands individuals and communities as subjects who can question social reality and develop actions aimed at transforming it.

Critical pedagogy is not limited to the field of education but also offers an approach for analyzing social inequalities, power relations, and ideological processes (Giroux, 1992; Kincheloe, 2018). From this perspective, inequality is

understood not only in terms of the unequal distribution of economic resources but also in relation to exclusion from decision-making processes, the inability to have a voice, and limitations on the capacity for social transformation (Freire, 1970/2025). Drawing attention to the non-neutral nature of knowledge production, critical pedagogy emphasizes that particular power relations can be legitimized and that discourses that make inequalities invisible can be reproduced (Giroux, 1992). Therefore, critical pedagogy does not merely describe the existing social order; it also seeks to make visible the ideological mechanisms that produce this order and to develop the critical capacity needed to question them (Giroux, 1992). Freire's (1998) concept of conscientization is central to this understanding.

## **1.2. Conscientization, Praxis and Critical Agency**

Conscientization is the process through which individuals critically question the social reality in which they live and understand that this reality is produced through historical, economic, and political relations (Freire, 1970/2025; Freire, 1998). This process involves recognizing that inequalities are neither natural nor inevitable and developing the capacity to question the relations that shape individuals' living conditions. Conscientization is therefore related to moving beyond being passive objects of existing conditions and developing critical agency directed towards transforming these conditions (Kincheloe, 2018). Conscientization gains significance in terms of social transformation when critical understanding is combined with action. According to Freire (1970/2025), praxis refers to the dialectical unity of thought and action; it involves not only critically understanding social reality but also taking action to transform it. Fischman and McLaren (2005) similarly emphasize that critical pedagogy carries a pedagogical responsibility not only to understand social reality but also to transform it. In a similar vein, Hill (2022) argues that the relationship between critical analysis and transformative action needs to be

maintained. From this perspective, praxis means not only understanding existing social conditions but also questioning the relations that produce these conditions and taking collective action to transform them.

Critical agency is related to individuals moving from a passive position in relation to social reality to becoming subjects who question this reality and can act to transform it. McLaren (1998) notes that neoliberal capitalism may weaken social agency by leading individuals to perceive their options within the market as forms of freedom and choice. According to Giroux (2009), education has a central role in the formation of critical political subjects who strengthen the democratic public sphere. In this context, critical agency refers not to the capacity to adapt to existing conditions or to achieve a better position within them, but to the ability to question the historical, political, and economic relations that shape social conditions and to participate in processes of collective transformation.

### **1.3. Public Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy does not view education as a process limited to schools and classrooms; it also recognizes that individuals' understandings of social reality are shaped through the media, culture, politics, and other public spaces.

Giroux's (2004) approach to public pedagogy draws attention to the fact that education also takes place in cultural and social spaces outside the school and emphasizes that these spaces can produce particular values, norms, and worldviews. From this perspective, public pedagogy can be understood not only as a process through which particular forms of knowledge are transmitted to individuals but also as an ideological educational practice through which meanings about how social reality should be understood are produced.

From the perspective of public pedagogy, tourism can also be considered not only as an economic activity but as a public pedagogical space in which particular ways of understanding social reality are produced and circulated.

Tourism activities, destinations, tourist experiences, promotional materials, and tourism discourses can shape particular ways of thinking about poverty, development, local people, and economic success. Therefore, pro-poor tourism can be considered not only as a development strategy aimed at reducing poverty but also as a public pedagogical space through which particular meanings about poverty and development are produced and learned. From this perspective, how PPT defines poverty, which forms of solution it legitimizes, and how it positions different social actors should be questioned not only in terms of its economic outcomes but also in terms of the pedagogical and ideological meanings it produces. In this sense, public pedagogy helps explain how particular meanings about social reality are produced and circulated, while the hidden curriculum helps us understand how these meanings can be implicitly normalized and reproduced.

#### **1.4. Hidden Curriculum and Ideological Reproduction**

Within a critical pedagogical approach, processes of education and knowledge production are considered ideological spaces that not only explain social reality but also legitimize particular ways of thinking and particular values (Freire, 1970/2025; Giroux, 1992). In this context, the hidden curriculum refers to implicit learning processes through which particular values, norms, and social relations are conveyed to individuals without being explicitly stated in educational processes. Through the hidden curriculum, the existing social order, inequalities, and power relations can be presented as natural, inevitable, or unchangeable, thereby contributing to the reproduction of the existing order (Giroux, 1992).

The ideological function of the hidden curriculum is related to the normalization of ways of thinking through which particular social relations come to be accepted without question. In the neoliberal context, this process can take the form of presenting market logic, individual responsibility, competition, and

entrepreneurship as natural and desirable principles of social life. Hill and Kumar (2009) argue that neoliberalism does not only transform economic relations but also produces an ideological transformation that limits critical thought and extends market-oriented values into different areas of social life. Therefore, the hidden curriculum can contribute to the reproduction of particular social values not only within educational institutions but also in cultural and public spaces.

From this perspective, education cannot be considered independently of social inequalities. Drawing attention to the relationship between education and capitalist relations of production, Hill, Greaves, and Maisuria (2009) argue that education not only reflects inequalities between social classes but can also contribute to their reproduction. This approach requires inequality to be considered not only in terms of differences in income but also in relation to power relations, decision-making mechanisms, and access to social resources. Therefore, a critical pedagogical analysis should question not only the explicit aims of a discourse but also which values it normalizes, which relations it renders invisible, and which social positions it reproduces (Hill et al., 2009). In this context, emphasizing particular values related to participation, entrepreneurship, and economic success within PPT discourse may have an implicit pedagogical function by pushing the structural causes of poverty and existing power relations into the background.

## **2. Critical Pedagogical Analysis of Pro-Poor Tourism**

Pro-poor tourism (PPT) is a development approach that aims to increase the economic and social benefits derived from tourism activities, particularly for poor people (Ashley et al., 2001; Roe et al., 2004; Scheyvens, 2009). The approach considers poverty not only as a lack of income but also as a multidimensional phenomenon involving political powerlessness and exclusion from social and decision-making processes; it therefore aims to increase tourism

revenues, employment, and participation in decision-making processes in ways that benefit poor people (Ashley et al., 2000; Scheyvens, 2009). The basic assumption of PPT is that the benefits derived from tourism can be distributed more widely to local and poor communities rather than being concentrated among major investors and international companies (Ashley et al., 2001; Goodwin, 2008; Roe et al., 2004). Rather than evaluating specific PPT interventions empirically, the analysis examines how poverty, participation, and subject formation are constructed within the PPT literature and policy discourse. The PPT literature discusses not only the approach's potential to reduce poverty but also its limitations and structural contradictions in practice (Ashley, 2002; Harrison, 2008; Çetin, 2012). The capital-intensive structure of tourism, the possibility that benefits may be concentrated among large businesses and international actors, and the limited participation of local communities in decision-making processes can constrain PPT's capacity to produce outcomes in favor of poor people (Roe et al., 2004; Scheyvens, 2009).

This study takes this discussion a step further by examining PPT from a critical pedagogical perspective, focusing not only on its economic outcomes but also on how it defines poverty, which forms of solution it legitimizes, and which social relations it reproduces. This analysis draws on Hill's (2023) Marxist Critical Policy Analysis (MCPA) approach. Through MCPA's question of “who gains and who loses?”, the analysis questions not only PPT's stated aims but also who benefits from it, who is placed at a disadvantage, and which explicit or implicit ideological assumptions it normalizes (Hill, 2023). Therefore, the key question in relation to PPT is not only how much poor people benefit from tourism, but also within which relations these benefits are produced and to what extent existing social relations are transformed. MCPA guides the analysis of the class and ideological relations underlying the policy dimension of PPT, while the critical pedagogical framework guides the discussion of how these relations are given meaning and what forms of subject formation they produce.

## **2.1. Reproduction of Inequalities**

Although the primary aim of pro-poor tourism is to enable poor people to obtain greater economic and social benefits from tourism, the fact that the approach is shaped within existing market relations creates an important limitation in terms of transforming structural inequalities (Ashley, 2002; Harrison, 2008).

Addressing poverty primarily in terms of income levels may lead dimensions such as social exclusion, participation in decision-making processes, and power relations to remain secondary (Scheyvens, 2009; Chen, Huang, & Li, 2021).

Therefore, the success of PPT should be assessed not only in terms of the amount of benefits poor people obtain from tourism, but also in terms of the social and economic relations within which these benefits are produced and distributed.

Studies from different contexts show that this limitation can arise in different ways. The concentration of tourism revenues largely among international operators and major capital groups, while local people remain mostly in the position of low-paid workers or small-scale suppliers, can limit the share that poor people obtain from tourism (Roe et al., 2004; Goodwin, 2007; Harrison, 2008; Torres & Momsen, 2004). Similarly, studies conducted in different destinations show that local enterprises can remain vulnerable to market conditions and the expectations of major tourism actors, while the participation of local communities in decision-making processes can be limited (Duim & Caalders, 2008; Chen et al., 2021; Kafa, 2014; Suardana & Sudiarta, 2016). At the same time, some studies show that tourism can contribute to rural development under conditions of strong governance, public investment, and long-term planning (Bowden, 2005; Wang & Dong, 2022). Therefore, as long as ownership, labor, and decision-making relations within the tourism sector remain unchanged, PPT's aim of generating benefits for poor people may provide only limited redistribution within these relations rather than eliminating existing inequalities. From a critical pedagogical perspective, the issue is not

only whether the benefits reach poor people, but also whether the social relations through which poverty is produced are made visible. If PPT approaches poverty primarily as an economic problem that can be reduced through greater participation in the tourism market, it has the potential to push the broader relations of ownership, labor, and power that produce poverty into the background of the discussion.

## **2.2. The Limits of the Participation Discourse**

Although PPT aims to enable poor people to obtain greater benefits from tourism, the literature shows that local communities often remain in a limited position in decision-making processes (Roe et al., 2004; Goodwin, 2007; Kafa, 2014; Chen et al., 2021). While poverty reduction is mostly approached in terms of greater economic participation of poor people in the tourism sector, the power relations and decision-making mechanisms that shape this participation can remain in the background (Harrison, 2008; Scheyvens, 2009). Therefore, in relation to PPT, it is necessary to question not only whether participation means earning income from tourism or gaining access to employment, but also to what extent local communities have a say in how tourism is planned and managed and how the value generated is distributed. At this point, PPT's understanding of participation can be examined in relation to the concepts of conscientization and praxis in critical pedagogy.

When the participation of poor communities in tourism processes is limited to their inclusion in the system as workers, entrepreneurs, or beneficiaries, participation is reduced to gaining an economic position within existing relations. From a critical pedagogical perspective, however, meaningful participation requires communities to question the economic, social, and political relations produced through tourism and to develop collective action aimed at transforming these relations (Freire, 1970/2025; Kelsh & Hill, 2006). This distinction reveals the difference between the economic participation

offered by PPT and the transformative participation envisaged by critical pedagogy. From a critical pedagogical perspective, participation therefore means not only inclusion within the existing system but also the capacity of individuals and communities to question that system and the power relations that shape it.

### **2.3. The Commodification of Poverty**

The potential of PPT to reproduce inequalities is not limited to the distribution of economic benefits. Making poverty visible through tourism and turning it into part of the tourist experience also carries the risk of transforming poverty into a consumable experience. Gülduran and Gürdoğan (2022) draw attention to the risk of poverty becoming an object of tourist experience and commodification through examples of slum tourism. Similarly, Gantait et al. (2021) show that, in some contexts, tourism can create cultural and environmental problems alongside the exoticization of poverty. These studies illustrate how poverty can be redefined not only as an economic problem that needs to be reduced but also as something that can be consumed within the tourism market and transformed into economic value.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, this process should be understood not only as the transformation of poverty into an economic resource but also as the reproduction of social meanings attached to poverty. According to Hill (2004), the penetration of capitalist relations into different areas of everyday life takes place alongside the commodification of social relations. In this process, ideological spaces such as the media and education can contribute to the perception of capitalist relations as natural and inevitable. Similarly, when tourism turns poverty into an object of experience and consumption, poverty can be detached from its social and political meaning and given new meanings within a particular form of consumption. In this way, poverty may be presented not as a consequence of unequal relations of power and resources to be

questioned, but as something that tourists can experience, observe, or consume. In this context, the exoticization and spectacularization of poverty can be considered a form of representation that obscures the historical and structural causes of poverty. Presenting the living conditions of poor communities as a form of “difference” or an “authentic experience” for tourists can push into the background the questioning of the class, economic, and political relations that produce poverty. From the perspective of critical pedagogy's concepts of public pedagogy and hidden curriculum, what is produced here is not only a tourist experience but also a particular way of thinking about poverty that is conveyed to tourists and society. Therefore, when PPT's aim of reducing poverty is considered together with the commodification of poverty and its transformation into a consumable experience, it also raises the question of the social meanings within which poverty is reproduced.

#### **2.4. The Depoliticization of Poverty**

Within the pro-poor tourism approach, the causes of poverty are mostly explained in terms of local and economic problems rather than global economic inequalities, capital relations, or historical forms of exploitation (Mowforth & Munt, 2015; Schilcher, 2007). Accordingly, proposed solutions are shaped around greater participation of poor people in the tourism market, support for entrepreneurial activities, and increased market integration (Ashley et al., 2000; Ashley et al., 2001; Ashley, 2002; Karim et al., 2020; Rogerson, 2006; Scheyvens, 2009). Scheyvens (2009) notes that PPT can produce a discourse that presents tourism as a natural solution to development problems and that this can render the power relations between tourism and poverty invisible. Therefore, the central issue in PPT is not only which economic benefits are produced, but also how the causes of poverty are defined and which causes are excluded from discussions of solutions. This perspective is closely related to the neoliberal understanding of development.

Hill and Kumar (2009) argue that neoliberalism creates the conditions for social problems to be detached from their historical and political contexts and addressed through market mechanisms by extending market logic into different areas of social life. In the context of PPT, poverty can likewise be redefined not as a consequence of relations of production and ownership or global inequalities, but as a problem arising from the insufficient integration of poor people into the tourism market. Thus, the solution is sought not in transforming relations of production and ownership but in further integrating poor people into existing market relations. This approach has the potential to push the historical and structural causes of poverty out of the discussion and turn poverty into a manageable problem of economic participation. The depoliticizing effect of PPT is therefore related not only to which problems are made visible, but also to which forms of solution are presented as reasonable and feasible.

## **2.5. The Construction of the Neoliberal Subject**

The way PPT constructs the solution to poverty around entrepreneurship, employment, market integration, and access to economic benefits entails not only a particular understanding of development but also a particular understanding of the subject. Within neoliberal rationality, individuals are positioned not as subjects who question the collective and structural causes of social problems, but as actors expected to develop their own economic capacities, adapt to market conditions, and transform the resources they possess into economic value (Hill & Kumar, 2009; McCarthy & Prudham, 2004). In this context, poverty can be associated with individuals' or communities' inability to make sufficient use of market opportunities, and the solution can consequently be reduced to the development of economic capacity.

According to the discourse of PPT, poor people can be reconstructed as entrepreneurial subjects expected to increase their own economic value, rather than as collective subjects who are victims of structural inequalities. Values

such as entrepreneurship, self-responsibility, individual success, competitiveness, and market rationality frame the solution to poverty in terms of individual economic performance rather than collective and political struggle. Thus, the inclusion of poor people in the tourism market emerges not only as a form of economic participation but also as a particular form of subject formation. An individual's success begins to be measured not by their capacity to transform existing social and economic relations, but by their capacity to make use of the opportunities available within these relations and to produce economic value. In this respect, there is a fundamental difference between the entrepreneurial subject produced by PPT and the transformative subject envisaged by critical pedagogy. While the former learns to become more effective and competitive within existing market relations, the latter develops the capacity to question and transform these relations themselves (Freire, 1970/2025; Giroux, 2009; Kelsh & Hill, 2006). Therefore, the production of the neoliberal subject through PPT should be understood in relation to the rendering invisible of the structural causes of poverty and the placement of individual economic performance at the center of the solution.

### **3. Implications for Critical Tourism Education**

The way PPT approaches poverty largely through economic participation, entrepreneurship, and market integration raises the question of which forms of knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking tourism education should prioritize. If tourism education focuses only on developing the skills required by the sector and enhancing employability, this may limit critical discussion of the social, political, and economic consequences of tourism (Belhassen & Caton, 2011; Slocum et al., 2019). Therefore, tourism education needs to be reconsidered as a field that, alongside addressing the economic benefits of tourism, also critically discusses issues such as poverty, inequality, labor, power relations, and social justice.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, tourism education should support students not only in adapting to the service sector and developing their employability but also in questioning the social relations and consequences of tourism. In this respect, it is important for students to be able to assess who benefits from tourism, who is excluded, how tourism revenues are distributed, and to what extent local communities have a say in decision-making processes. Such learning should enable students not only to understand existing tourism relations but also to question how these relations are historically and socially produced. In this regard, it is important to create learning processes in which students can discuss how different tourism policies and practices affect different groups, who benefits from or is disadvantaged by these processes, and within which relations of power and resources these outcomes emerge.

From this perspective, PPT offers an important pedagogical area for discussion in tourism education. Rather than simply learning PPT as a tourism model aimed at reducing poverty, students should be encouraged to question what understanding of poverty and development underlies the approach, which actors it empowers, which inequalities it makes visible or invisible, and what kind of subject it produces. For this purpose, case studies of tourism policies and practices can be developed, allowing students to examine these cases from the perspectives of different social actors and discuss what kinds of outcomes a policy produces for different groups. Examining different sources, such as tourism investments, destination plans, or tourism promotional materials, can also enable students to approach tourism not only in terms of economic benefits but also in terms of social inequality, power relations, and social justice. Such a pedagogical approach can enable students to question the model of the “successful tourism professional” defined by the market and to discuss the difference between economic success and social transformation. In this way, tourism education can move beyond being a technical process oriented towards adapting to market needs and become an educational practice that critically

examines the social and political dimensions of tourism. Such learning processes can be developed across different tourism courses through case studies, policy documents, tourism plans, industry practices, and other learning materials. For example, in a Tourism Policy course, students can discuss for whose benefit and at whose expense a particular policy produces outcomes; in Tourism Sociology, they can examine the effects of tourism on class, labor, social inequalities, and local communities; and in Introduction to Tourism courses, they can discuss the social and political dimensions of tourism alongside its economic consequences. Similarly, in courses such as tourism economics, sustainable tourism, destination management, and tourism marketing, students can be encouraged to question the power relations underlying economic outcomes and their effects on different social groups. This approach can enable students to view tourism not only in terms of economic benefits and sectoral needs, but also within its broader social and political relations.

However, developing such an educational approach also requires instructors to have a critical background that enables them to address the social, political, and ideological dimensions of tourism. Students' ability to question tourism policies, inequalities, and power relations depends in part on teaching processes that go beyond the transmission of technical knowledge. In this respect, strengthening instructors' understanding of critical pedagogical approaches is an important dimension of developing critical tourism education.

## **Discussion**

This study shows that there is a tension between PPT's normative aim of reducing poverty and the market-oriented understanding through which this aim is pursued (Harrison, 2008; Schilcher, 2007). Although PPT aims to enable poor people to obtain greater benefits from tourism, it largely approaches the solution

to poverty through economic participation, employment, entrepreneurship, and integration into tourism supply chains (Ashley et al., 2000, 2001; Goodwin, 2008; Scheyvens, 2009). While this approach may increase the economic benefits that poor people obtain from tourism, its capacity to transform structural inequalities remains limited to the extent that it does not directly question the relations of ownership, labor, and power that produce poverty (Harrison, 2008; Roe et al., 2004; Schilcher, 2007; Scheyvens, 2009). This suggests that assessing the success of PPT requires attention to both the economic benefits provided to poor people and the social relations within which these benefits are produced and distributed.

The nature of the concept of “participation,” which often carries a positive normative value in the PPT literature, also needs to be considered. In the context of PPT, the inclusion of poor people in the economic system through employment, entrepreneurship, or tourism supply chains may indicate that participation has taken place; however, this does not in itself mean that decision-making power is shared or that existing power relations are transformed (Harrison, 2008; Scheyvens, 2009). From a critical pedagogical perspective, participation should therefore be considered not only in terms of the extent to which individuals and communities are included in the system, but also in terms of their capacity to question and transform it (Freire, 1970/2025; Kelsh & Hill, 2006).

The cultural and ideological consequences of PPT, beyond its economic dimension, also warrant attention. While turning poverty into a tourist experience creates the risk of commodifying and exoticizing poverty (Gülduran & Gürdoğan, 2022; Gantait et al., 2021), framing the solution to poverty in terms of market participation and entrepreneurship can push its structural and political dimensions into the background (Harrison, 2008; Schilcher, 2007). Considered together, these two processes show that PPT does not merely propose an economic solution to poverty but can also produce particular

meanings concerning how poverty is represented and understood. From a critical pedagogical perspective, this requires tourism to be considered not only as a field of economic activity but also as a pedagogical space in which social meanings and ideological assumptions are produced (Giroux, 2004).

PPT's alignment with the neoliberal logic of development can also be examined at the level of subject formation. By framing the solution to poverty around entrepreneurship, individual economic capacity, competitiveness, and market integration, the approach can position poor people not as collective subjects of structural inequalities but as entrepreneurial actors expected to increase their own economic value (Schilcher, 2007; Hill & Kumar, 2009). This finding makes it possible to consider PPT not only as a development approach that produces particular economic outcomes but also as an ideological framework that produces a particular form of subject formation. At this point, the critical pedagogical contribution of the study lies in making visible the distinction between becoming a more effective economic actor within the market and becoming a subject who questions social relations and develops the capacity to transform them (Freire, 1970/2025; Kelsh & Hill, 2006).

In this respect, the main contribution of the study is to approach PPT not only as a development approach aimed at reducing poverty but also as a policy discourse that produces particular forms of knowledge, meaning, and subject formation. The critical pedagogical perspective makes it possible to question how PPT defines economic participation and within which social relations it constructs this participation. From this perspective, the study shows that greater economic benefits from tourism do not in themselves constitute social transformation; transformation also involves questioning power relations, meaningful participation in decision-making processes, and the development of collective agency.

These findings also have implications for tourism education. Examining PPT from a critical pedagogical perspective requires students to move beyond

evaluating tourism only in terms of economic growth, employment, and entrepreneurship and to question the effects of tourism policies and practices on different social groups, the distribution of power and resources, and existing inequalities. Critical tourism education therefore involves not only adding particular topics to the curriculum but also developing dialogical learning processes through which students can discuss the social and political dimensions of tourism.

At the same time, this analysis does not mean that all PPT initiatives produce the same outcomes. Initiatives in which local communities have a meaningful voice in decision-making, tourism benefits are distributed more equitably, and local actors are positioned not merely as beneficiaries or workers but as decision-making subjects may produce more meaningful forms of participation and more transformative outcomes. A critical pedagogical perspective therefore does not require the categorical rejection of PPT; rather, it raises the question of under what conditions economic participation can be extended towards social agency and transformation.

Finally, the conceptual and critical nature of the study means that its assessment should not be interpreted as an empirical evaluation of the outcomes of particular PPT initiatives. The study focuses on how poverty, participation, and subject formation are constructed within PPT literature and policy discourse. Future empirical research could therefore examine the quality of local communities' participation in decision-making processes across different PPT initiatives, the conditions under which economic participation can produce transformative outcomes, and the role that tourism education may play in these processes.

## Conclusion

This study has reconsidered pro-poor tourism (PPT) from a critical pedagogical perspective and has shown that the approach largely frames poverty in terms of market participation, economic capacity, and entrepreneurship (Harrison, 2008; Schilcher, 2007; Scheyvens, 2009). The main finding of the analysis is that there is a tension between PPT's normative aim of reducing poverty and the market-oriented understanding of solutions on which this aim is based. Greater economic benefits for poor people from tourism do not, in themselves, mean that structural inequalities or power asymmetries in decision-making processes are transformed.

PPT should therefore be understood not only as a development policy or tourism strategy but also as a pedagogical and ideological space that produces particular meanings, values, and forms of subject formation (Giroux, 2004). From this perspective, while PPT promotes economic participation, it may render the structural and political causes of poverty invisible, contribute to the commodification of poverty, and position poor people as entrepreneurial subjects. The assessment of PPT should therefore not be limited to the extent to which poor people benefit from tourism, but should also consider how poverty is defined, who is included in decision-making processes, and which social relations are reproduced.

In this framework, the contribution of critical pedagogy to PPT lies in making it possible to reconsider poverty not simply as an economic problem to be reduced but as a social reality produced within historical, political, and class relations. The distinction between the economic participation offered by PPT and critical and transformative participation makes visible the difference between including poor people in the tourism market and enabling them to become subjects capable of questioning the power and resource relations that shape tourism. At the same time, this assessment does not mean that all PPT initiatives produce

the same outcomes. Where local communities have a meaningful voice in decision-making processes and tourism benefits are distributed more equitably, PPT may create conditions for more meaningful participation and social transformation.

The conceptual and literature-based nature of this study means that it does not provide an empirical evaluation of the outcomes of particular PPT initiatives. Future research could examine the positions of poor communities in decision-making processes across different PPT initiatives, the power relations among tourism actors, and the conditions under which economic participation can lead to transformative outcomes. Such studies could contribute to the empirical assessment of the critical pedagogical framework developed in this study.

Reconsidering PPT from a critical pedagogical perspective also has implications for tourism education. This approach can contribute to the development of critical learning processes in which students examine tourism not only in terms of economic benefits, employment, and entrepreneurship but also in relation to poverty, inequality, power, and social justice.

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