

Commodification

Refers to the process of converting human, social or cultural value into market value, applied to goods, services, ideas, and other forms and products of human creativity that do not initially possess a market value. The term is often used critically in the vein of Marxist theory, to analyse processes by which items or entities that can be considered unique or inestimable in economic terms, are changed into utilities or sellable goods and services. Slavery is an extreme form of commodification, in which human beings are assigned an economic value and traded like common goods. While the term has been used interchangeably with 'commoditization', the latter is at times used to describe the transformation into commodities of goods and services with initial distinctive attributes.

The commodification of heritage captures the process in which economic value comes to prevail over cultural value in the way cultural expressions, experiences and objects are communicated, described, perceived and marketed. This phenomenon is associated with cultural tourism, which markets cultural experiences and in this process promotes culture as a bundle of cultural goods and services that can be marketed, sold and bought. In a critical perspective, commodification is associated with the negative effects of globalisation, causing the dispersion of local value and authenticity while a local culture is aligned to a global economy. By way of contrast, in a sustainable development optic, heritage commodification can also be seen as a source of capital flow from touristic activities, which can be directed and invested to benefit local communities living around heritage sites.