

'Spirit mediums' could help unlock tourism secrets, according to study

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Tourism researchers could learn from spirit mediums to develop a better way of researching by embracing "nothingness" and opening themselves up to the mysterious and unseen "atmospheres" that surround us, a new

study reveals.

Using a three-step process to learn new skills, unlearn their existing understanding and then emerge with "double eyes," [tourism](#) researchers can teach themselves to operate as "mediums" and challenge traditional Western approaches to creating knowledge.

By opening themselves up to new cultures and perspectives, researchers can foster a more inclusive approach to knowledge production that challenges power imbalances and seeks to create a more just and pluralistic global knowledge ecosystem.

Publishing their findings in *Annals of Tourism Research*, a University of Birmingham researcher and her colleagues say that new forms of knowledge can emerge by letting go of the self through a long-term process of unlearning.

Co-author Pilar Rojas Gaviria, Associate Professor in Marketing at the University of Birmingham, commented, "As a living tradition embedded in culture, spirit possession illustrates how 'unlearning' unfolds—giving us the means with which to consider tourism research from the perspective of a selfless self.

"Rather than a spirit completely taking over the medium, spirit possession fosters a more malleable 'selfless' self, where the medium acquires new ways of knowing and seeing.

"We have neglected 'nothingness' in Western thought, but Eastern thinkers are unafraid to explore this as an important part of the world around us—taking the background as the real subject, which can create exciting new dimensions of understanding and knowledge."

The researchers say that openness to different approaches and means of

generating "data" could help to break the dominance of Western ways of working, which have suppressed Indigenous knowledge systems.

Further training of the body and mind should be linked to different forms of expression—such as poetry, music, games, theater, and [visual arts](#)—which provide powerful tools that can help to broaden understanding and improve knowledge in the field of tourism.

"Much like spirit mediums, in detaching from our egos and tapping into phantasmagorical contexts and their atmospheres, we researchers may learn how to use 'nothingness' to build on our work," added Dr. Rojas-Gaviria.

During the colonial era, Western knowledge systems were imposed upon colonized societies—erasing or devaluing local ways of understanding the world. This historical injustice can be rectified by recognizing the validity of diverse knowledge traditions and perspectives.

The researchers believe that their proposed approach to tourism research will help to challenge the biases within mainstream academic disciplines, while promoting the inclusion and integration of marginalized knowledge systems.

More information: Chloe Preece et al, Tourism research with 'double-eyes': A selfless epistemology, *Annals of Tourism Research* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.annals.2023.103619](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2023.103619)

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