

**Dimensions of Tourism within Dystopian Themes in the novel Station Eleven by  
Emily St. John Mandel**

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**Abstract**

Tourism is generally understood as a leisure-based activity sustained by infrastructure, economic systems, and global connectivity. However, dystopian fiction complicates this understanding by presenting worlds in which such systems collapse. This paper explores how tourism-related dimensions as mobility, space, memory, culture, and exchange are transformed within the dystopian framework of Station Eleven by Emily St. John Mandel. Although the novel depicts a civilization destroyed by a pandemic, it does not portray the complete disappearance of travel. Instead, movement persists in altered forms, particularly through the Traveling Symphony. By analyzing spatial redefinition, cultural performance, memory preservation, and non-capitalist exchange, this study argues that the novel reimagines tourism not as commercial leisure but as a survival oriented, culture sustaining human practice.

**Keywords**

Dystopia; Tourism Studies; Mobility; Cultural Tourism; Dark Tourism; Fiction; Cultural Memory; Survival Narratives; Gift Economy; Spatial Transformation

**Introduction**

Modern tourism is closely linked to globalization. Air travel, digital booking systems, economic exchange, and hospitality industries make leisure mobility possible on a global scale. Tourism thrives on stability, infrastructure, and consumer culture. When these elements disappear, tourism at least in its conventional form appears unsustainable.

In Station Eleven, a devastating pandemic called the Georgia Flu destroys most of the world's population and collapses global civilization. Electricity fails, air travel stops, and communication networks vanish. Under such circumstances, tourism as an industry ceases to exist. Yet the novel reveals that mobility does not disappear. Instead, it transforms through the Traveling Symphony, a group of actors and musicians who move between settlements performing Shakespeare and classical music.

**Collapse of Infrastructure**

The sudden disappearance of global systems eliminates the foundations of international tourism. Airports, highways, hotels, and digital networks deteriorate into ruins. An airport that once symbolized global mobility becomes a settlement and later houses a Museum of Civilization, preserving objects from the past such as smartphones, credit cards, and newspapers. Transit spaces transform into memory spaces.

**Reimagined Mobility**

Although airplanes and automobiles vanish, mobility continues on foot and through caravans. The Traveling Symphony follows a repeated regional circuit. Travel becomes slower, riskier, and locally oriented. Instead of exploration for pleasure, movement serves cultural preservation and communal survival.

### **Cultural Tourism Reinterpreted**

The Symphony performs Shakespeare across settlements. These performances are not commercial but communal. In exchange for food and shelter, they provide art and storytelling. Culture becomes a necessity rather than entertainment. The movement of art replaces the movement of consumers, redefining cultural tourism as shared meaning rather than economic activity.

### **Dark Landscapes and Ruins**

Abandoned cities and overgrown suburbs create landscapes of decay. Unlike modern dark tourism, where visitors voluntarily explore disaster sites, survivors in the novel inhabit ruins permanently. Movement through these spaces reinforces awareness of loss and historical rupture.

### **Memory as Tourism**

The Museum of Civilization preserves artifacts that symbolize the lost world. Survivors engage with these objects to understand their past. Tourism takes on a temporal dimension, traveling through memory rather than across continents. The Traveling Symphony functions as a living archive, sustaining stories and artistic traditions.

### **Economic Transformation**

Without money or formal markets, exchange operates through reciprocity. The Symphony receives hospitality instead of wages. Tourism shifts from capitalist transaction to gift-based mutual support, strengthening community bonds.

### **Power and Mobility**

Certain settlements restrict freedom under authoritarian leadership. In contrast, the Symphony's movement represents autonomy and resistance. Mobility becomes a symbol of independence and cultural survival.

### **Community and Connection**

Repeated visits by the Symphony connect isolated settlements. Travel fosters solidarity and shared identity. Rather than fragmenting society, mobility rebuilds networks of trust and communication.

### **Conclusion**

Within the dystopian world of Station Eleven, conventional tourism disappears alongside modern infrastructure. However, fundamental dimensions of tourism, mobility, cultural exchange, memory engagement, and spatial encounter persist in transformed forms. The novel suggests that tourism is not merely an industry but a reflection of humanity's enduring need to move, connect, and preserve meaning.

### **References**

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