Building a 'Culture of Peace' through Tourism: Reflexive and analytical notes and queries

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Abstract

Combining reflections on my personal experiences regarding tourism with an analytical review of key concepts, this essay addresses the question whether and how tourism contributes to building a global 'culture of peace'. Setting the scene, I first situate myself vis-à-vis tourism and the peace-through-tourism idea. The next section of the paper provides an in-depth analysis of the terms culture, peace, and tourism. After having defined these concepts, I illustrate how my own research project contributes in innovative ways to the current debate. I conclude with a plea for more collaboration and open dialogue between policy makers, industry representatives, and scholars in order to facilitate 'peace through tourism' as well as 'peace within tourism'.
Key words: Turismo, cultura, paz, antropología, auto-etnografía.

Construyendo una «cultura de la paz» a través del turismo: notas y preguntas reflexivas y analíticas

Resumen

Combinando reflexiones sobre mis experiencias personales relacionadas con el turismo con una revisión analítica de conceptos claves, este ensayo trata la pregunta si y como el turismo contribuye a construir una «cultura global de la paz». Primero me enfrento al turismo y la idea de paz a través de turismo. En la segunda parte, este ensayo proporciona un profundo análisis de los términos cultura, paz y turismo. Después de definir estos conceptos, ilustro como mi propio proyecto de investigación aporta de maneras innovadoras al debate actual. Concluyo con un llamado para más colaboración y dialogo abierto entre los generadores de políticas, representantes de la industria y científicos para facilitar la «paz a través del turismo» así como «paz en el turismo».
Palabras clave: Turismo, cultura, paz, antropología, auto-etnográfica

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Introduction: A personal journey

Writing an essay about how tourism contributes to a global 'culture of peace' is not a purely academic matter; for me, this endeavor has personal dimensions as well. It is no exaggeration to state that the course of my life has been greatly impacted by tourism. I spent most of my childhood in Bruges, a popular cultural tourism destination in Western Europe. I vividly remember how the rhythm of the city life dramatically changed with the coming and going of tourist flows. Although my family was not directly involved in the local tourism industry, my parents had their own tourism tales to tell. Before moving to Belgium, my father worked for many years as a receptionist in one of the many hotels in Torremolinos, along the Spanish Costa del Sol. He witnessed how international tourism boomed in his native region, but also how it decayed and created new conflicts. My mother had always dreamt of being a flight attendant. Somehow her dream was never realized, but she compensated for it by traveling widely. As a result, our small family house in Bruges was often filled with foreign tourist-friends whom my parents had met along their journeys.

As a child, it took me some time to grasp what all these strange looking people, behaving in weird ways and speaking in unintelligible tongues, came to do in my hometown (and house). All I saw was that they took lots of pictures – especially the Japanese visitors with their latest technology camera systems fascinated me – and looked in awe at the places I passed by so many times without feeling anything special at all. As I matured, also my desire to understand what tourism was about grew. However, in order to be able to interact with tourists I needed to learn foreign languages. As soon as I managed to decently express myself to foreigners, multiple cultural contacts were about to take place. My friends and I enjoyed giving directions or information to visitors who seemed lost – not uncommon in a medieval town such as Bruges which lacks the clear street pattern design of more modern cities. It gave us an opportunity to practice our language skills and learn something about the cultural background of the people we were interacting with. At an age that our parents allowed us to, we started hanging out in youth hostel bars, meeting with youngsters and young adults from many different countries. As soon as I had the financial means, I started exploring the world myself as an avid explorer. My journeys took me to various corners of the world and helped me enormously to expand my cultural horizon.

All these experiences WIth tourism, not all of them positive, reinforced my interest in other cultures and highly influenced the path of life I chose to take. I cannot objectively judge whether tourism has made me a more peaceful person or not, but I certainly have learned a great deal about interacting with people from other cultures. It comes not as a total surprise, then, that tourism is the main focus of my ongoing graduate education. Although my own research project is not particularly focused on studying the links between peace and tourism, this is a pertinent issue to which I feel I have something to contribute. Building on my rich personal experience, I want to share in this essay some of my reflections and more theoretical analyses of the subject matter. In order to enable an open scholarly discussion, I start off by defining the key concepts that are on the table.

The complex interplay between culture(s), peace(s), and tourism(s)

In what follows, I review and give my own analytical reflections on the multiple meanings of the terms 'culture', 'peace', and 'tourism', and their highly complex interrelationships.

Culture

In the vernacular, the word 'culture' has multiple connotations: it is used to describe the means, the process, and the state of people . Many scholars have tried to pin down the culture concept, which is considered to be one of the foundation stones of the social sciences. Anthropologists have shown that all understandings and descriptions of culture are temporally bounded . Definitions and perceptions of culture greatly depend on who you are, your personal background, and the theoretical directions which you are exploring.

A useful distinction to be made is that between *culture* (singular) and *cultures* (plural). First, culture can be defined as those ways of (1) acting (including speaking, ornamenting and dressing the body), (2) cognizing the world (including beliefs); and (3) valuing the world, insofar as they are socially learned and socially transmitted. Although this description was first formulated over a century ago and has been modified and extended since , it is still a valuable definition. Second, a culture is a set of abstract cultural

elements (ways of acting, cognizing, valuing) that is shared within a given population (e.g. a people, social class, region, gender, age group, ethnic group, corporation, occupational group, nation, etc.). This second type of culture takes the social group as definitional of the arena of sharing; it recognizes that culture is patterned, both within and across given populations. Cultures are boundless; individuals can potentially belong to an infinite number of cultures or subcultures which are arbitrarily defined. The distinction between culture and cultures reflects the difference between a search for human universals (stressing similarity) and the recognition of cultural diversity and variability (stressing difference). This is important to keep in mind when addressing the peace-through-tourism issue.

Peace and culture

Peace is an intangible attribute that is difficult to quantify or otherwise measure. Defined passively, it entails the absence of war, acts of terrorism, and random violence . However, this narrow characterization, which does not consider the fundamental causes of conflicts or sustainability of peace globally, is not a sufficient condition for peace. Defined actively, peace requires the presence of justice (cf. the 1978 UN *Declaration on the Preparation of Societies for Life in Peace*, Resolution A/RES/33/73). A broad definition of peace refers to peaceful relationships not only between nations, but also between groups or communities, between individuals, and between people and nature. Although implicitly assumed in the often-used metaphor of 'building' peace, peace does not necessarily have to be something humankind might achieve some day. It already exists and changes constantly; we can create and expand it in small ways in our everyday lives. Just as there are many cultures, there are plural peaces; no singular, correct kind of peace can exist. This view makes peace permeable and imperfect rather than static and utopian.

Since the establishment of UNESCO (UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) after World War II, its major emphasis has been to work towards peace. A 1989 meeting in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, explicitly called for "a peace culture". The *Culture of Peace Program*, UNESCO's comprehensive long-term approach, was established in 1994. In 1997, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the year 2000 as the *International Year for the Culture of Peace* (a runner-up for the UN *Decade of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World*). The definition of 'culture of peace' given by the UN is based on "a

set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behavior and ways of life" that reject violence and endeavor to prevent conflicts by tackling the root causes through dialogue and negotiation between individuals, groups, and States (UN *Declaration and Program of Action on a Culture of Peace*, Resolution A/53/243). Cultural themes prove particularly important within the context of peace. It is often the denial of cultural identities that fuels the countless conflicts afflicting the globe, and that prepares and foments the conflicts of the future . The central element of the culture-of-peace idea is, therefore, an in-depth understanding of the identities of 'others'.

At present, there is no clear consensus as to how a culture of peace should be interpreted. The problem of understanding what is actually meant by the concept is complicated by the various interpretations of the two key elements, culture and peace . Although well-intentioned, the conceptualization of culture and peace in policy documents is often naïve, and scarcely serves the explicit political purpose of underpinning a culture of peace . Besides, if we incorporate part of UNESCO's operational definition that a culture of peace cannot be imported or imposed from the outside, but must develop out of the culture of the people concerned, we should think in a more pluralistic fashion about 'cultures of peace' (plural). As scholars have argued for many years, any universal cultural norms observed throughout the world are so vague as to seem oversimplifications . Therefore, many different cultural traditions need to be included in any culture of peace concept and it needs to address both peace within cultures and peace between cultures.

Tourism, peace, and culture

Acknowledging that it comes in all shapes and colors, I define tourism broadly as travel-for-leisure that is supported by a multi-layered global service industry. Many would agree that tourism can contribute to knowledge of foreign places, empathy with other peoples, and tolerance that stems from seeing the place of one's own society in the world. My own experience, as described above, confirms this. There are many 'good practice' examples of alternative forms of tourism contributing to conflict resolution, greater intercultural understanding, and even global social justice. The question whether and how tourism as a whole contributes to world peace is more complex.

Table 1: Examples of WTO statements mentioning a link between tourism and peace

Year	Place	Document	Citation
1980	Manila, Philippines	*Declaration on World Tourism*	[tourism as a] "vital force for peace and international understanding"
1985	Sofia, Bulgaria	*Tourism Bill of Rights* and *Tourist Code*	[tourism's contribution to] "improving mutual understanding, bringing people closer together and, consequently, strengthening international cooperation"
1999	Santiago, Chile	*Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*	"through the direct, spontaneous and non-mediatized contacts it engenders between men and women of different cultures and lifestyles, tourism presents a vital force for peace and a factor of friendship and understanding among the people of the world"

The peace-through-tourism idea is rapidly gaining ground among policy makers and industry representatives. The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the UN specialized agency dealing with tourism, is one of its staunchest propagators. In addition to UNWTO statements (see Table 1), campaigns (e.g. the *Tourism Enriches* campaign), and documents , there is an institutional structure that advocates for tourism as a force for peace known as the International Institute for Peace Through Tourism (IIPT). This non- profit organization, founded by Louis D'Amore in 1986 (the UN *International Year of Peace*), is a coalition of international travel industry organizations dedicated to "fostering and facilitating tourism initiatives which contribute to international understanding and cooperation, an improved quality of environment, the preservation of heritage, and through these initiatives, helping to bring about a peaceful and sustainable world". It is based on a vision of the world's largest industry becoming the first "global peace industry" and the belief that every traveler is potentially an "Ambassador for Peace". The IIPT has undertaken a variety of initiatives ranging from global and regional conferences; the establishment of Global Peace Parks; the development of curricula, student and tourism executive ambassador programs to assist developing countries

with tourism; collaborations with other organizations like UNESCO; and passing its own declarations such as the 2000 *Amman Declaration*, the 2001 *Thessaloniki Declaration*, and the 2005 *Lusaka Declaration*. The IIPT also published a *Credo of the Peaceful Traveler*.

The premise that tourism fosters peace and tolerance has been hotly debated among scholars. Although there is a lack of research indicating the precise circumstances under which tourism can promote peace, there is a widespread belief that it does contribute to this end. According to Askjellerud, for example, tourists contribute to fostering peace through tourism if and when they own the kind of attitude which considers the 'Other' as an opportunity for emotional growth, and the encounter with the 'Other' is managed in a nonviolent way. Many defend tourism as a positive force able to reduce tension and suspicion by influencing national politics, international relations and world peace. Some have specifically focused on the role tourism can play in developing peaceful relationships between partitioned countries.

Empirical testing has not always supported the peace-through-tourism-thesis and some scholars have argued that tourism seen as a force for peace is a "simplistic interpretation of the complexities of tourism and international relations". While often a co-relationship is found, with tourism as beneficiary and/or consequence of peace, it is hard to prove the causal relation that tourism is a generator of peace. It is also difficult to make the case that tourism can prevent conflict. Prior to both World War I and World War II, for example, there was considerable private travel and tourism between the future combatant nations. However, travel and admiration of each other's cultures did not prevent war because the strength of personal sentiments was outweighed by political considerations. Of course, most tourism is dependent on peace and security. In a context of relative peace, logistical barriers to travel and psychological notions associated with fear for personal safety and antipathy from prospective hosts are removed and tourism is facilitated.

Interestingly, tourism is not always unsuccessful in the absence of peace, which proves the resiliency of the industry. War can be an important stimulus to tourism through population shifts and technical innovation, and, after the conflict, through nostalgia, memorabilia, honorifics, and reunions. On the other hand, certain act of terrorism are specifically targeted at tourism. In conflict zones, tourists can be targeted because they are viewed as ambassadors for their countries, as soft targets, and often because of their "symbolic value as

indirect representatives of hostile or unsympathetic governments". In countries like Burma, tourism brings international recognition and fosters an illusion of peace while providing foreign exchange to pay for arms which strengthen the military junta . In cases such as this, tourism fortifies the undemocratic regime whose members may benefit personally and politically from any increase in arrivals. Although controversial, a tourism boycott is believed to help diminish the access to such rewards and erode the foundations of the government, advancing the necessary political changes to establish peace.

While the peace-through-tourism rhetoric often seems to stress the importance of the intercultural person-to-person contact between tourists and 'hosts' as a conduit to peace, recent research suggests that high politics activity may be more important than low politics activity as a vehicle for peace . Given its highly symbolic value, the peace-through-tourism discourse can be co-opted by politicians, the media, or other powerful institutions to advance their own particular interests. In Israel, for example, stories about peace through tourism constituted crucial discursive tools by which popular newspapers represented the Middle East peace process, and its effects, to mass reading publics . Finally, we have to recognize that tourism is far from being the only sector claiming to be in a privileged position to promote peace (cf. the International Olympic Committee *Round tables on sport for a culture of peace and the observance of the Olympic truce*).

Peace through tourism and within tourism: Some preliminary research

Having defined and reviewed the key concepts, it is time to return to my own tourism tale. My long-term experience in Bruges taught me that it is not always easy as a 'local' to establish contacts with tourists that go beyond superficial levels of service and friendliness. I noticed that tour guides were among the few locals with whom tourists interacted for a considerable amount of time. Given the important mediating role of these service providers, I decided to focus my research project on an analysis of their narratives and practices . In what follows, I briefly describe my own study and what it can teach us about the relationship between tourism and peace.

I consider tourism as encompassing a wide range of dynamic phenomena, involving many stakeholders with multiple, often competing, interests. Tourism does not begin with the act of touring, but with the construction of a worldview

that renders the world 'tourable'. As such, it is an arena where local, national, and transnational organizations, communities, and individuals exert various degrees of agency and control over discursive imaginaries. Tourism discourses are sets of expressions, words, and behaviors that describe places and peoples, and turn sites into easily consumable attractions. Like other globally circulating discourses (including the culture of peace idea), they emerge from political economic conditions that frequently entail differences of interest. The way in which these global imaginaries are being represented, respoken, or rewritten locally sheds light on struggles over normativity, attempts at control, and resistance against established regimes of power (both within and outside the tourism industry). Transnational corporations, travel guides and books, government agencies, policy makers, service providers, local communities and individuals, and the tourists themselves, all play a role in constructing peoples and places for touristic consumption.

While it is important to research processes of essentialization, objectification, and consumption, I examine how local tour guides, as key stakeholders, negotiate multiple interests. In their efforts to create attractive and easily consumable narratives for tourists, the guides I am working with – in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and Arusha, Tanzania – extract and emphasize selected features of the landscape and the people who live in it. Particular interests of tourists mold the structure of their guiding role and the peculiar contents of its activities. Tourists often expect the guides to be local ambassadors, mediators, or brokers between the tourists' culture and the imagined local culture. Inspired by tourism marketing narratives and with the aim of having frictionless interactions, guides provide simplified and historically fixed versions of local natural and cultural heritage. I noticed, however, that the guides in Yogyakarta and Arusha have their own agendas as well. Many see foreign tourists as a portal to the (better-off) world. The guides' ability to inventively (re)produce popular global tourism discourses adds to their cultural capital and social status, and, not a minor detail, helps them earn a living. As such, the guide-tourist encounter is the place where two socio-cultural imaginaries meet, and sometimes clash.

Guides not only have to balance their personal interests and desires with those of the tourists, they also have to take into account other agendas. The different local, national, and global reactions to recent events like the tsunami, SARS, and terrorism, for example, seriously influenced tourism and the guides'

narratives in both Indonesia and Tanzania. Global tourism clearly forces re-alignments of interests between the local, national, and transnational scales. This is particularly clear in the context of heritage tourism, which promotes and sells the experience of so-called 'authentic' natural landscapes or 'traditional' cultures. Heritage can be conceived of as a group of people's natural and cultural legacy from the past, what they live with today, and what they pass on to future generations. In heritage tourism, however, what counts as heritage is increasingly defined on a translocal scale (e.g. UNESCO's *World Heritage List*). World heritage sites do not longer belong only to the community where they are located; they now belong to all the peoples of the world (at least, so goes the dominant discourse).

However, as I have experienced myself, local people are not merely passive subjects that are acted upon by global tourism forces. They can, and often do, play a role in determining what happens in their encounters with tourists. People may, for instance, consciously try to match tourists' expectations of what is authentic, even if the results seem contrived or fake. Guides are quite conscious of the fact that they are presenting cultural displays to tourists and not exposing the truly meaningful symbols and rituals of their private and backstage lives. In other words, local people may be active agents in determining what they want to preserve, purposely inventing traditions and/or folk art for tourists, yet entirely cognizant of what is real or staged, authentic or spurious.

Although the disproportionate attention given by scholars to the negative tourism impacts experienced on the part of local people reflects, in part, some ethnocentric bias in research, it is also an implicit recognition of an imbalance of power relations and the multiple conflicts present within the industry. This trend, however, may change as we shift away from assuming that tourism is imposed on passive and powerless people. While national authorities play a crucial role in manufacturing, marketing, and controlling destination images, often in the interest of creating a stronger national identity, tourism also stimulates the resurgence of local (ethnic) identities and competing discourses of natural and cultural heritage. Tourism can become a very empowering vehicle of self-representation, and local people may deliberately choose to culturally reinvent themselves through time, modifying how they are seen and perceived by different groups of tourists.

However, even if people have control over the tourism development in their communities, local control is not necessarily a 'good thing', particularly where that control is in the hands of development-driven politicians. In other words,

the notion of equity also plays a role. Unfortunately, tourism often aggravates inequalities on the local level. As the impacts of tourism development differ between local groups, we need to differentiate between various population groups – notably those who are better off, who get more out of tourism (e.g. local service providers), and the poor, whose lifestyle and culture are less like those of tourists and who stand to gain fewer (economic) benefits from tourism. Besides, the interests of one local community will not necessarily coincide with those of others. Nor is it likely that the interests of the local community will be the same for all within the community. Local people do not speak with one single voice and are ridden with many conflicts of interest, certainly if an economic important issue such as tourism is concerned.

In sum, in order to fully resolve the conflicts within tourism, we need to consider the power relations involved and the dialectic between all stakeholders. An open and sincere dialogue between the various parties will stimulate sustainability and is a first step towards establishing a solid culture of peace within the industry as well as in general. I use the insights outlined above to make the tour guides I am working with more aware of the complex macro- and micro-social contexts they are operating in, providing them with tools for possible change towards more social justice.

Discussion

No doubt, tourism is an extremely complex phenomenon through which identities and worldviews are continuously being represented, consumed, reconfirmed, negotiated and modified. Social scientists should investigate it as an arena in which many players interact and negotiate the construction of culture to different ends. While it is important to acknowledge the positive force tourism can have as the world's largest industry, academy honesty forces us to maintain a realistic and non-glorified vision of its socio-cultural, economic, environmental, and political impacts . Scholars have the difficult task to make all parties involved aware of the distinction between the rhetoric power of currently popular discourses (e.g. eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and peace-through-tourism) and the realities on the ground. It is imperative to analyze and expose who is producing what discourse, and who is deciding who benefits and who loses out.

My own research has taught me that there is a lot of tension within the tourism industry itself. These internal conflicts are played out on local, national, and global levels and, apart from culture, they relate to other divisive factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. It seems contradictory, then, that an industry which is so laden with conflict claims to be in a privileged position to foster world peace. While I am certainly not negating the many possibilities tourism has to achieve such a noble goal, it might be more ethical to simultaneously address the question how we can solve the many problems hindering peace inside the tourism sector. One example suffices. In 2005, the third *Global Summit on Peace through Tourism* took place in Pattaya, Thailand, a popular sex tourism destination . It was highly hypocritical that the summit limited its agenda to grand narratives about world peace, turning a blind eye to the social injustice linked to Pattaya's (sex) tourism .

Right now, peace-through-tourism ideas seem to be sustained more by the sweet dreams and rhetoric from industry representatives and policy makers than by fine-grained empirical research and academic theories. As argued throughout this essay, scholars have good reasons to be skeptical about the way the peace-through-tourism discourse is currently framed. Academic honesty forces us to be critical of hollow and unsubstantiated slogans; it is their job to do so. This does not mean that the peace-through-tourism ideal is not worth pursuing. Every effort at making this world a better place is definitely worth trying. However, in order to turn the peace-through-tourism discourse into practice, more open dialogue is needed between policy makers and industry representatives on the one hand, and scholars on the other. It is only through more collaboration within the tourism sector – public and private; academic and industry – that tourism can ever become a true peace-builder, both within and outside tourism.

We should also be humble and stress that progress towards global peace can not be an isolated tourism process; it is part of a larger social change that begins with recognizing that the fundamental social and political order needs to be transformed. Tourism always functions as part of the wider economic and geopolitical systems from which it cannot be divorced. If we take the idea to build cultures of peace seriously, informed action is needed on multiple fronts. This includes addressing the issues of social injustice and other types of conflict within the industry itself…

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