CULTURAL ATTRACTIONS AND EUROPEAN TOURISM

Edited by G. Richards
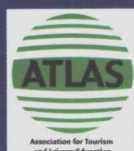
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Edited by

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Preface

This volume represents the latest collection of research findings from the European Cultural Tourism Research Project, which has been running since 1991. The project is managed by the European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education (ATLAS), an international network of higher education institutions which undertakes research and curriculum development in the tourism and leisure subject areas.

The research programme was originally funded by DGXXIII (now the Enterprise Directorate) of the European Commission, to provide some basic information on the scale and nature of cultural tourism in the European Union (EU). The first research phase was completed in 1993, and the results published in 1996 in a volume entitled *Cultural Tourism in Europe*. Since then, not only has the EU expanded, but the work of ATLAS has also grown to encompass Central and Eastern Europe. These developments necessitated an expansion of the research programme as well. This volume presents the findings of the field research undertaken in 1997. The 1997 research built on and expanded the 1992 surveys, particularly in the area of cultural tourism motivations. Responding to comments made about *Cultural Tourism in Europe*, it was also decided to adopt a different approach to the organization and analysis of the research findings. Whereas *Cultural Tourism in Europe* presented a national perspective with reviews of cultural tourism in each of the (then) 12 EU Member States, the current volume looks at the relationship between tourists and specific cultural attractions.

Over the years the project has been supported by a wide range of organizations and individuals, and it would be impossible to acknowledge or thank them all individually. However, there are a number of people who

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The Development of Cultural Tourism in Europe

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In the future, it will be a relief to find a place without culture.
Talking Heads, *Stop Making Sense* sleeve notes.

In the past, only hardened cultural tourists seemed to suffer from 'monument fatigue' or could overdose on museums. This condition now seems to be spreading. 'That's enough culture' screamed a newspaper headline recently (Glancey, 1999), describing the surge of museum development which saw over €600 million being invested in new attractions in the UK in the year 2000. In Spain, the number of museums has doubled during the post-Franco era (Herrijgers, 1998). According to the European Commission, there are now approximately 200,000 protected monuments in the European Union (EU), and 2.5 million buildings of historical interest (European Commission, 1998).

These developments underline the increasing centrality of culture and cultural attractions in modern societies. As MacCannell (1976, p. 154) commented: 'the construction, exchange and movement of attractions is a perfect index of modernisation'. As the development of tourism proceeds, so 'entire cities and regions, decades and cultures have become aware of themselves as attractions' (1976, p. 16).

Cultural attractions have become particularly important in this modern form of pilgrimage called tourism. Not only do cultural attractions such as museums and monuments constitute the largest sector of the European attractions market, but they are also increasingly being placed at the centre of urban and rural development strategies and image enhancement programmes.

This book examines the reasons why culture has become such an important element of the attractiveness of places, and examines the development, management and marketing of cultural attractions.

The Growing Attractiveness of Culture

Culture has always been a major object of travel, as the development of the Grand Tour from the 16th century onwards attests (Towner, 1985). In the 20th century, however, culture has ceased to be the objective of tourism: tourism is culture (Urry, 1990).

The basic markers of the tourist culture are arguably the major cultural attractions. Sites such as the Louvre in Paris, the British Museum in London and the Metropolitan Museum in New York attract millions of visitors to their displays of culture. Some attractions, such as the Eiffel Tower, Big Ben, the Pyramids or the Coliseum, come to represent entire cultures. These attractions are held in awe not just by those who travel from afar to gaze upon them, but they also become important elements of national or even international consciousness and identity. Threatened monuments, such as the Atomium, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the City of Venice must be saved at all cost. In fact these attractions have become so important that they have to be saved from the tourists themselves, as Bennetton's recent campaign to rid Venice of day trippers demonstrates (*Colors*, 1999).

The dilemma of Venice illustrates a major problem for cultural attractions. Culture is considered essential to attracting tourists to many locations, and yet 'cultural' consumption may account for a very small proportion of total activity. In Venice, for example, even those tourists who do stay overnight spend only 2% of their money on culture – the bulk goes on accommodation (45%) and shopping (21%) (*Colors*, 1999). But how many of the staying tourists would come to Venice without its cultural attractions, not to speak of the millions of day visitors?

The problem with trying to stem the tide of attraction-driven tourism is that cultural attractions have become 'must-see sights' (MacCannell, 1976). The lemming-like intensity of this consumption has prompted one psychologist to label it 'musterbation' (Ad Vingerhoets, personal communication, 1999). It is this apparent compulsion that gives attractions a central role in tourism. Although Leiper (1990) has argued that attractions do not literally 'attract' visitors, they certainly do provide a focus for much tourist activity, and are an essential weapon in the arsenal of tourism destinations engaged in a competitive struggle for tourist business (Richards, 2000).

Cultural attractions play an important role in tourism at all levels, from the global highlights of world culture to attractions that underpin local identities. At a global level cultural attractions are often seen as icons of important streams of global culture. This idea is enshrined in the designation of World Heritage Sites, or in the support from the EU to the restoration of

buildings such as the Parthenon or the designation of the Cultural Capital of Europe each year (see Chapter 3, this volume).

Cultural attractions have also played a leading role in cultural policy and in efforts to promote cultural development. For example, the UNESCO *World Decade for Cultural Development* (1988–1997) emphasized the importance of conserving cultural heritage as a means not only of stimulating economic development but also promoting identity and cultural diversity. The report draws parallels between cultural heritage and nature conservation. Particularly elements of the immaterial heritage, such as languages, are in danger of extinction. Historic monuments are often seen as an endangered species, and yet the recent trend towards designating large numbers of historic structures as monuments indicates that this is one endangered species that is thriving.

At the EU level, culture is viewed as an essential resource that not only provides work but which can also develop cultural harmony within the EU. Cultural tourism was always a difficult area for the European Commission in the past, because neither culture nor tourism was specifically named in the Treaty of Rome as an area of competence for the EU. This has changed since the Treaty of Maastricht in 1991, which incorporated Article 128, emphasizing the importance of culture as an area for policy development. Since then, the EU has adopted what it calls 'a new approach to culture'. In the light of this new approach, the EU has resolved that culture should be considered in all policy areas, much in the same way as sustainable development has been viewed as a generic policy consideration. This underlines the growing importance of culture in European policy. Cultural tourism and cultural attractions have also become central to much of the regional economic development activity financed by the European Commission (Richards, 1999).

The Council of Europe has also been actively developing cultural tourism as a means of supporting culture. In particular the Council of Europe has been active in creating a number of European cultural Itineraries, including the famous Camiño de Santiago (Murray and Graham, 1997). The motive for the Council of Europe in promoting cultural tourism is to ensure the spread of European culture, and to provide resources for the preservation and conservation of the cultural artefacts visited by tourists.

In addition to the economic importance of culture, its role in establishing and reinforcing identity has also played a big part in the growing interest in various aspects of heritage. In particular, as modernity has swept away many traditions and traditional cultural practices, there has been a rush to preserve cultural heritage before it disappears. This process started with the development of open-air museums in Scandinavia in the late 19th century, and extended to many other areas as a result of the mechanization of the countryside, particularly after the Second World War (Forni, 1999). These ethnographic museums were initially focused on the preservation of rural heritage in the face of urbanization, but during the 20th century

the disappearance of extractive and manufacturing industries and their associated working cultures has led to a new round of conservation of 'industrial heritage'. Today France has some 400 ecomuseums, and Italy has about 500 ethnological collections.

More recently the nostalgia industry has contributed a wide range of new attractions to the cultural scene. The increasing pace of life and the feeling of disorientation and loss associated with modernity have ensured that the preservation of the past has become big business (Hewison, 1987). Membership of organizations dedicated to heritage preservation has grown considerably in recent decades. For example, membership of the National Trust in the UK grew from 278,000 in 1971 to 2,189,000 in 1993 (Advertising Association, 1996) and English Heritage membership rose from 270,000 in 1992/93 to 374,000 in 1996/97 (Hanna, 1998). It seems that the combination of nostalgia for the past, the need to reassert national and local identities and the perceived economic benefits of cultural development have had a dramatic effect on the supply of cultural attractions.

Some observers, in common with Hewison, have decried the growth of the 'heritage industry' and the attendant growth of heritage centres and themed 'experiences' (Wright, 1985), although other authors have found Hewison's analysis exaggerated (Samuel, 1996). These differing reactions reflect a strong division of opinion about the preservation of heritage. Not everybody agrees about what kind of culture should be presented or preserved, or how it should be presented, or for whom. Conflicts have often arisen over the development and interpretation of cultural attractions (Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996), such as the plans to develop Stonehenge (Bender and Edmonds, 1992), or the conservation of the Voortrekker Monument in South Africa (Grobler, 1998).

What this book seeks to examine is why the consumption of cultural attractions has become such an important aspect of our daily lives. The thematic chapters and attraction case studies that follow provide a range of different viewpoints on this question, based on an analysis of a range of different cultural attractions, from 'high' to 'popular' culture. The rest of this chapter looks at some of the basic questions surrounding the concept of culture and its use as a basis for visitor attractions – what aspects of culture attract tourists? Is interest in culture growing? Why is the supply of cultural attractions growing?

What is Culture?

A basic question which needs to be addressed before we can go much further is – what is culture? Given the fact that 'culture' was identified by Raymond Williams (1983) as one of the most complicated words in the English language, it is not surprising that cultural tourism is *extremely* difficult to define. This problem has been accentuated in recent years by

the additional meanings and functions attributed to 'culture' as a result of the democratization of culture and the increasing convergence of culture and everyday life. As Rásky (1998, p. 76) points out, 'culture' has taken on a growing range of responsibilities, or to put it another way 'culture has to a certain extent made itself unrecognisable because as an inflationary and inflated concept it has assumed immeasurable dimensions'.

The same trend of inflated meanings can be identified in the usage of the word 'culture' in relation to tourism. Cultural tourism, heritage tourism, arts tourism, ethnic tourism and a host of other terms seem to be almost interchangeable in their usage, but it is rarely clear whether people are talking about the same thing.

According to the conceptual definition of cultural tourism proposed by Richards (see Chapter 2 this volume), the distinction between cultural tourism and other forms of tourism is basically to be found in the learning function. Cultural tourists can learn about the culture of a destination and gain new experiences related to that culture in a number of ways, depending on the forms of culture they consume. Littrell (1997) argues that culture can be viewed as comprising what people think (attitudes, beliefs, ideas and values), what people do (normative behaviour patterns, or way of life) and what people make (artworks, artefacts, cultural products). Culture is therefore composed of processes (the ideas and way of life of people) and the products of those processes (buildings, artefacts, art, customs, 'atmosphere'). Looking at culture in this way, cultural tourism is not just about visiting sites and monuments, which has tended to be the 'traditional' view of cultural tourism, but it also involves consuming the way of life of the areas visited. Both of these activities involve the collection of new knowledge and experiences. Cultural tourism therefore covers not just the consumption of the cultural products of the past, but also of contemporary culture or the 'way of life' of a people or region. Cultural tourism can therefore be seen as covering both 'heritage tourism' (related to artefacts of the past) and 'arts tourism' (related to contemporary cultural production).

In this volume, therefore, both heritage attractions and arts attractions will be analysed as 'cultural attractions'. The case studies presented in Part II of this volume also deal with attractions based on products (such as museums displaying material culture) and attractions based on culture as process (as in the case of cultural events and festivals).

A Growing Interest in Culture?

It is clear that there is a growing range of phenomena that can be classified as 'cultural'. Richards (1996) has argued that this may at least partly explain the apparent growth in cultural tourism. With more tourism attractions being seen as 'cultural', it is almost inevitable that there will be more *cultural* tourists. To what extent is the growth of cultural tourism an artefact of the

growing definition of culture, and to what extent are specific aspects of culture becoming more popular with consumers?

Culture is consistently argued to be a major determinant of the growth of tourism and leisure consumption. The World Tourism Organization, for example, asserted that cultural tourism accounted for 37% of global tourism, and forecast that it would grow at a rate of 15% per year. Such figures are often bandied around (e.g. Janarius, 1992; Bywater, 1993), but are rarely backed up with empirical research.

The basic assumption of many authors seems to be that a growing number of people are 'interested in culture', and that this leads to more demand for cultural tourism (Urry, 1990). But is there actually hard evidence for a growing interest in culture? Most of the studies that report a growth in cultural interest are not based on empirical evidence, but rather broad assertions.

Looking at some of the available data, we can identify a growth in the popularity of specific types of cultural attractions.

According to the European Heritage Group, attendance at museums, historical monuments and archaeological sites has doubled between 1977 and 1997 (European Commission, 1998).

Other estimates indicate that between 1982 and 1995, the attendance at museums and monuments across Europe grew by about 25% (Richards, 1996). Even the higher growth rate in cultural attendance is about the same as the growth in international tourism in Europe, which has expanded at 4.5% a year over the past 20 years. Growth in cultural attendances has also not been particularly steady, tending to dip in periods of recession, and individual countries also showing localized declines periodically. In Greece, for example, museum and archaeological site visits dropped significantly in 1990, largely thanks to a decrease in foreign tourism. Although visits have since started to grow again, they have still not recovered to pre-1990 levels.

Growing attendance at cultural attractions does not in itself constitute evidence that people are becoming more interested in culture. It may be that more people are travelling or taking day trips, which may lead to more people visiting cultural attractions simply because there are more visitors present at a particular location. In The Netherlands there is evidence that cultural tourism is stimulated by the growth of tourism as a whole (de Haan, 1997). In other words, there is little direct evidence that people are becoming more interested in culture, as measured by visits to attractions – cultural attractions are being visited more because there are more tourism and leisure visits in total.

One way of gauging if there is an increasing interest in cultural attractions is to see if there is any evidence of a shift in the balance of attraction visits towards cultural attractions. If culture is becoming more popular, one would expect to see cultural attractions gaining a larger share of the attraction market.