



Tourism without borders: Towards World Heritage Sites for all

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Introduction

Tourism activities and economic benefits are often the reason why national governments claim heritage and seek to earn international legitimacy through inscribing historic sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List. It has been asserted that nationalist agenda is complete with the existence of World Heritage sites (Pyburn, 2007). In this context, the World Heritage Convention is used by particular groups to legitimize their ownership of historic sites allowing the dictation of policies regarding access to and utilization of the site (Monteiro, 2011). This restricts the meanings and values attached to World Heritage Sites to a specific geographic location or a specific group, simultaneously allowing biased interpretations of heritage. Moreover, it contradicts the universality of the World Heritage Convention stating that 'World Heritage Sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located' (UNESCO, n.d.). Evidence from the past, whether tangible or intangible, geography and tourism, and the relationships formed between them, forms the focus of this study. The integration of heritage studies, cultural and economic geography allow us to comprehend that space is connected with how the past is remembered and represented in different forms, and allow us to investigate the implications which these have for the present for and the idea of ownership (Graham, Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000). This relationship leads us to think of historic sites as more than objects of attraction, but as responsive bodies to the daily dialogues and conversations between tourists and spaces. Considering the possible impact of biased heritage interpretation on contested sites and tourists, this paper

attempts to answer several questions. How can tourism, as an act of exploration, contribute to redefining contested sites? What is the role of tourism in communicating intangible cultural values at historic sites? This is carried out through reviewing relevant texts and investigating the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba as a case study. When discussing the relationship between tourism and historic sites the main focus should not be on the economic value of historic sites. However, the role of tourism in World Heritage Sites must be further investigated. The connection between World Heritage Sites and tourists can be understood through revealing the relationship between the past and existing intangible values in historic sites such as religious values, language and self-representation.

Tourism and World Heritage Sites

The importance of utilizing culture and tourism was addressed in 2015 by Taled Rifai, the Secretary-General to the UNWTO/UNESCO World Conference on Tourism and Culture in Cambodia. He discussed that beyond creating employment opportunities and growth, the utilization of tourism and culture can lead to the development of local communities by exposing people to different backgrounds, religions and lifestyles (World Tourism Organization, 2016a). The positive impact of heritage on tourism is no less significant than that of tourists on heritage, each revive the other. This relationship is highlighted in the Report on the International Conference on Cultural Tourism in Cambodia, from December 2000, arguing that:

‘Culture and tourism have a symbiotic relationship. Arts and crafts, dances, rituals, and legends which are at risk of being forgotten by the younger generation may be revitalized when tourists show a keen interest in them. Monuments and cultural relics may be preserved by using funds generated by tourism. In fact, those monuments and relics which have been abandoned suffer decay from lack of visits’ (World Tourism Organization, 2001: p.25).

World Heritage Sites encourage people to travel, discover, and reconstruct their identity and imagination. World Heritage plays a significant role in creating the notion of tourism and supporting tourism activities (Arezki, Cherif and Piotrowski, 2009). Tourism plays a significant role in communicating historic values, changing how a site is perceived, and how intangible cultural values are represented in World

Heritage Sites. When investigating heritage, geography, and tourism, and what is considered transferrable of heritage, it is essential to comprehend the relationship between the past and present, and changes to geographic boundaries through time. Tangible heritage is the physical representation of the past. It represents all significant events in the past, and contributes to the development of community identity and the cultural character of the present). Experts such as archaeologists and conservation specialists, who are promoters of the past, should transparently transfer the past to the local community and tourists to limit the struggle between disciplines. Di Giovine describes the process of 'touristic production' as being based on a set of relationships that order a diverse group (e.g. tourism service providers, site managers, local communities, religious institutions, etc.), often with conflicting interests and motives, to define and utilize a particular site or object of significance (Di Giovine, 2013). Heritage organizations and managers must understand the ways in which the interpretation of the past can influence present conservation techniques and the understanding of a historic site by tourists. In the same sense, the transmission and communication of both heritage and history must be considered. Heritage performs within constraints, while history, which is considered the recovery of the past outside of any constraints of audience or time, and its recording, takes a path in which its importance is determined by 'its internal coherence and research quality guaranteed by peer assessment' (Dann and Seaton, 2001). It is evident that both heritage and history are associated with a geographic location; a historic site, object, or a building has a geographic boundary that can be mapped, surveyed, and recorded (Smith, 2009). However, the history and narratives of a site can be considered flexible and can be transferred by tourists across geographic boundaries. As a result, tangible heritage can be described as immovable, but intangible elements of it are transferable. Sites with contested identities, or with multiple associated religious values, are suitable for tackling tourism and identity issues.

One of the aims of this paper is to create a link between tourists and World Heritage Sites, which requires investigating the definition of tourism and touristic activities in relation to World Heritage, intangible and cultural values. The individual is engaged in historic sites and spaces are felt with all senses. Tourists' identity is often influenced in World Heritage Sites. Olsen defines travel as 'an identity-building exercise' (2012: p.359); this can imply acquiring a new identity and vision or modifying and altering existing values. According to Crouch, tourism is performed through a multi-

dimensional, embodied encounter involving tourists, people and space, people as socialized subjects, and desire. The tourist site promotion and the tourist's encounter with a place can cause identity (re)figuration (Crouch, 2005). In the same manner, the identity building or reconstruction exercise allows a new way of conceptualizing intangible cultural heritage, historic rituals and values in World Heritage Sites. For contested sites this can be regarded as an opportunity to consolidate historic and religious values which calls for the endeavors of decision makers. The managerial focus at similar sites should be on maintaining and enhancing the religious identity of tourists through fulfilling their religious, instrumental, or normative needs (Morinis, 1992). Religious intolerance at World Heritage Sites, specifically contested sites and sites with multiple religious identities, poses a threat to intangible cultural values and religious tourism. The Mezquita-Catedral (Mosque-Cathedral) of Córdoba, which is the most visited tourist attraction in Spain, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1984 (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). As one of the largest physical testaments to Islamic heritage, the mosque was constructed during the rule of Abd al-Rahman I. Under the rule of the Visigoths, both Christians and Muslims shared the site of the Basilica of San Vicente and later, after Muslims bought part of the site, a Mosque was built. In the 8th century, Abd al-Rahman I acquired the entire site, demolished the basilica, and built the Mosque (Dodds, 1992). The site witnessed consecutive enlargements over three centuries, and in 1236, the Christian Cathedral was built (UNESCO World Heritage Centre). According to the site's Outstanding Universal Values, the historic mosque of Córdoba has influenced Western Muslim art from the 8th century onwards. UNESCO describes the site as an 'outstanding example of the religious architecture of Islam' (ibid). Although the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba welcomes visitors from any religious background, only Christians are allowed to use the monument for worship (Hedgecoe, 2014). Efforts have been made to register the ownership of the structure under the local archbishopric, which has been suggested is a way to suppress the Islamic identity of the space. In 2010, the archbishop of Córdoba called for the word 'mosque' to be removed from tourist guides and references in order to avoid confusing tourists (ibid). Effective means that hinder the present from affecting the past and heritage should be explored.

In religious historic sites, pilgrimage and tourism can reflect the same meanings. Touristic activities such as voyages to religious sites, prayers, and contemplation symbolize pilgrimage. In this case pilgrimage is understood as 'a subset of tourism' (Di

Giovine, 2013). Performing religious rituals or invoking intangible values in a historic site contributes to consolidating religious identity and group solidarity. Therefore, tourists' activities should be encouraged in order to disseminate the message of universality of World Heritage Sites. In 2010 a group of Muslim tourists were fascinated by the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, and its intangible values. This group positioned themselves toward the mihrab (prayer niche, fig.1) of the mosque and started to perform Islamic prayers. They were immediately obstructed by the security guards, and they were forcibly removed by the police from the site (Monteiro, 2011). The different connections that occur between tourists and historic sites should be respected in order to safeguard the intangible values of a place and to allow the transmission of these values by tourists. Maintaining an atmosphere of worship for tourists who desire to connect with the divine through the intangible aspects of historic structures should be a focus of heritage managers (Shackley, 2001). I argue that in order to build a strong relationship between tourists and historic sites, visitors or pilgrims should be granted the right to choose the values they prefer to extract from historic sites.

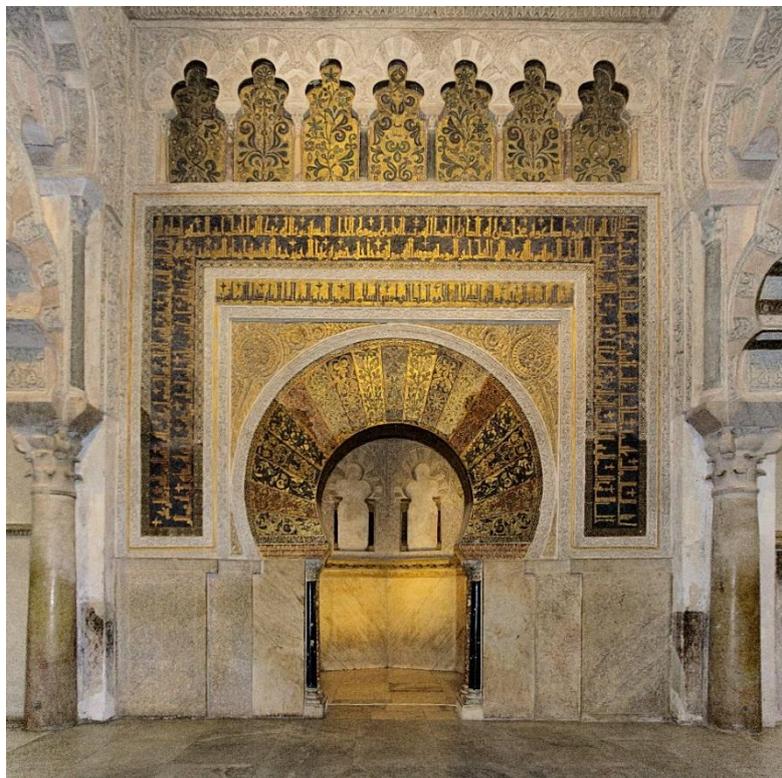


Fig. 1: The Mihrab (prayer niche) of the Grand Mosque of Córdoba (image credit: Ingo Mehling [CC BY-SA 4.0] (Source: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>)), via Wikimedia Commons)

An individual who is performing tourism is not only operating in a specific context made by others, but is also communicating, producing and participating in this context. A tourist reconfigures, existing context and meanings, 'makes space in a process of space-ing', and sometimes transforms historic landscapes materially (Crouch, 2005: p.28). For instance, transformation and reproduction occur when a visitor attempts to read and communicate an engraved script in a historic site to another individual or a group sharing the same background through translating it into a different language. Whether the engraving is directly translated or not, this act has an impact on the intangible heritage values of the space. Tourists' self-representation also affects the historic and religious values of World Heritage Sites. These values and rituals are enhanced, for instance, in religious sites when tourists choose to follow a specific dress tradition that is associated with the devotional value of a place, or when religious rituals are performed by tourists. This active experience and authentic lifestyle is strongly connected with what is known as Creative Tourism (World Tourism Organization, 2005). It involves developing a set of creative skills through direct contact with the local community and its culture. Moreover, creative tourism implies 'an emphasis on 'living' or 'intangible' culture rather than tangible cultural heritage' (ibid: p.22).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that through the performance of tourism, heritage values are rendered tangible, transferable and communicable. Tourists have the ability to communicate intangible cultural values through two methods: directly by getting vividly involved in the historic fabric through performing, producing, interpreting and translating cultural and religious intangible values in World Heritage Sites. This method impacts historic spaces and intangible cultural values directly. Hence, tourists communicate their own existing intangible values, religious rituals and needs in relevant World Heritage Sites. The second method of communication is through the mere existence of tourists in a World Heritage Sites (traditional tourism). Performing tourism traditions such as taking photographs, posting on social networks, communicating with local people, telling stories, and wandering around a historic site communicate intangible cultural values. Understanding tourism as an interactive activity and process is crucial to comprehending its impact on historic sites. This

activity should not be restricted by boundaries, religious beliefs or people. When the definition of tourism is linked to the activities of tourists in historic spaces, an idea of how heritage values, both tangible and intangible, are explored, understood, and transmitted is developed. The connections between tourists and World Heritage Sites contribute to redefining contested sites. Allowing tourists to perform tourism without external interventions, for example in the Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, is significant to the historic fabric and intangible values of the site. Historic site managers and relevant authorities are advised to encourage different tourist related exchange practices such as creative tourism. As tourism is performed without territorial, religious, or cultural restrictions, it can be utilized as a tool for unity and tolerance at contested historic sites, and between countries where World Heritage Sites are situated.

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