

Tourismification of cultural landscapes - Synergies between tangible and intangible heritage resources

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Cultural Landscapes: a Legacy for the Future

The challenges now are to identify tangible and intangible resources of the past, to map and assess the vectors of transformation in various cultural, historical landscapes and to create synergies between material and immaterial heritage assets. Preservation of tangible structures of the past is a mayor challenge in the 21st century way of life. Partnership with a tourism and leisure vocation of sites creates new dynamics. In many places it's possible to develop attractive tourismscapes, supported by a revalorization of selected expressions of intangible heritage. A wide spectrum of opportunities indeed, mayor management challenges... and many good and less good examples worldwide!

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“It's all about learning from the past, living in the present, and building for the future.”¹

The focus is on the vectors of change in cultural landscapes (*man-made landscapes - evolving over generations*), and on the role of tourism in particular. The challenge is to discover and/or redefine values of the past into tourist experiences today, to develop dynamic preservation strategies for 21st century landscapes and societies, to maintain or even to reinforce a sense of cultural belonging and identity, on the one hand and cultural diversity on the other.

¹ Susan V. Bosak , Legacy Project Co-Founder, social researcher & changemaker

The history of human cultural development is witnessed by the identity and the uniqueness of man-made landscapes worldwide. But can historical landscapes and traditional habitats survive?

For this purpose understanding the impact of conservation policies and of selective processes in the valorization of heritage resources is crucial (Jansen-Verbeke, M. 2013.).

The definition of heritage is subject of a continued debate, highly relevant and above all crucial in our search to understand and explain the current hype of valorizing a (lost) past.

How to map tangible heritage resources in various cultural, historical landscapes and how to create synergies between material and immaterial heritage assets? In this “creative” process the **global-local nexus** is crucial, connecting people and places, historical facts and narratives, experiences and emotions, residents and visitors.

An explorative research agenda

The identification of cultural landscapes in terms of their potential as a tourism destination with a “Heritage label” implies an interdisciplinary research approach.

In addition there is an emerging gap between academic concepts about heritage resources (Tunbridge, J., 2012) and the actual implementation and planning (Jansen-Verbeke, M., 2008) for heritage experiences.

In our understanding of current trends and research priorities, the target is to learn how geographical destinations (places, routes, regions) and tourism dynamics can ‘co-create’ heritage values, embedded in a sustainable spectrum of tourist facilities, and hence offering valuable experiences.

Tourism is no longer ‘a product’ on offer for visitors. Tourismscapes today are all about global and local networks, creating favorable conditions for ‘new, nice, exiting, interesting’ experiences. The interplay between visitors and locals, between enterprises and customers can be staged in time and space, organized and promoted. This implies an understanding of the DNA of “experience-scapes” and moving from a traditional emphasis on visiting material and physical heritage sites, to discovering the imbedding in various forms of intangible and immaterial heritage, in fact traditional ways of life.

The geography of heritage and the genesis of cultural landscapes is the outcome of economic and political power, of changing cultural values and social interest. This is a new perspective in recent tourism research.

There is no blue print to develop the tourism potential of specific cultural resources (tangible and intangible; material and immaterial), of creating an attractive Tourist Opportunity Spectrum (TOS). Landscapes with a unique history (rich on stories) as a setting for 'emotional tourist experiences', are gradually more appreciated as core business in the new cultural economy.

Intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from one generation to another, and constantly adapted to new ways of life, values, environmental and economic conditions. Immaterial heritage of social groups can change in terms of its geo –location, in terms of symbols and surely as a result of global communication and networking. It's very well possible to develop attractive and competitive tourism-scapes, by revalorization of selected expressions of intangible heritage, even more when anchored in material heritage in situ. (Jansen-Verbeke, M., 2013)

Cultural diversity becomes a key issue, offering a wide spectrum of opportunities indeed, but also mayor management challenges... with many good and less good examples worldwide!

The artificial and outdated distinction made between cultural and natural heritage, between tangible and intangible heritage of selected past heritage landscapes, is by all means dissonant with the present interpretation, communication and development of heritage experience-scapes. (Hyangyu Park, 2014)

Connecting values and images of the past in view of 'recreating' identities of people and their habitat and revalorizing their territorial capital implies a long and sophisticated process. Preserving and managing these values, with their material, physical evidence and their non-material associations, is a complex challenge seen the strong interdependency between vernacular expressions and their symbolic significance, the way life of successive generations and the fact that cultural values develop over time.

Creating heritage-scapes

In order to meet the needs of a 21st century way of life, the assumed advantages of matching global and local values, of merging material and immaterial cultural resources, the heritage business is now booming and has definitely become the umbilical cord in the booming market of cultural tourism (Alvarez, Yüksel, Go, 2016)

The mission is to assess in a realistic and knowledgeable way 'local' business opportunities induced by tourism and the capacity of decision makers and planners to valorize the 'local' cultural capital in a global market.

In our ‘flat’ world cultural differences have become extremely precious and probably a highly important motive for travelling. (Jansen-Verbeke, 2010) We need landmarks, icons and local stories to identify the places we live in and visit. We want to retain collective memories of the past because they tell the story of a place and the habitat of many previous generations and construct our identities versus those of ‘others’.

In the last decennia, more pioneers in academic research on heritage and tourism crossed the borders of their discipline, such as geography, sociology, anthropology, history and economy, and became fascinated about the complex impact of the past on our global society and world today. This new credo of many researchers, particularly in less explored areas such as heritage studies and tourism, leads to innovative views on heritage values, on the territorial embedding of intangible heritage in cultural tourism (Jansen-Verbeke, 2009) and to a discussion on critical issues of sustainability.

It also generates ideas and guidelines for heritage management policies looking forward beyond the target of cultural tourism product development, crossing the borders of disciplines, and with the serendipity to track values of the past, capable of inspiring initiatives for the future, shaping places and peoples’ identities.

Description, explanation, critique, discussion, and debate, this is needed to connect with empirical studies. What are the critical successes factors in our ambition to build knowledge on the complex process of heritagization; the opportunities to assess communicate and discuss the results and insights of relevant empirical research in this field?

Questions about multidisciplinary responsibility on the agenda²,

What is the role of planning/planners?

- in identifying and valorising territorial resources for tourism (natural, historical, cultural)
- in linking pro-actively intangible assets such as stories, cultural expressions, images, to tangible resources (habitat, sites, iconic artefacts)
- in managing the spatial impact of tourismification (overcrowding - misuse-downgrading, loss of authenticity, competitiveness)³

² Jansen-Verbeke, M. 2014, Tourismification of Heritage Landscapes, Emerging Research Issues. Discussion Note in Tourism Tribune (4) pp3-11

³ Jansen-Verbeke, M. McKercher, B., 2013, Reflections on the Myth of Tourism . Preserving “Traditional” Agricultural Landscapes. Journal of Resources and Ecology Vol 4, n°3 pp.242-249

- in developing cross-disciplinary concepts and models for research and development

What is the role of experts in tourism behaviour studies and place marketing in terms

- of managing time space budgets of visitors
- of safeguarding quality of experiences
- of launching collective actions – multi stakeholders' projects
- of connecting local, regional tourism agents and initiatives with international networks.

And last but not least there is the need to trace changes in views on values such as beauty, goodness, religion, tradition, rituals, happiness and grief. Recreating memoriescapes of past events, local or transnational has become a crucial incentive and resource for contemporary tourism projects. However, this needs to be supported by tangible landmarks, but even more by geo-linked historical events.

The survival (or revitalisation) of a wide range of intangible heritage values very much depends on the traditional roots and above all the expressions of living culture today in religion, music and dance, arts and crafts, food and drinks...

The risks of eroding authenticity and affecting grass rooted experiences are real!

Plans for discussion:

1. Invite a panel – 3 or 4 persons

- different background:
 - local,
 - national,
 - visitor
- different working expertise:
 - manager,
 - marketeer,
 - guide,
 - tourism,
 - researcher
- different sector:
 - cuisine,
 - souvenirs,
 - music,
 - arts

2. Request to reflect briefly on their views about methods to preserve the “authenticity” of intangible heritage (choosing one specific example)

- Does the tourist gaze affect the nature of the IT quality? quantity?
- The risk of staged authenticity?
- Commercial need to adapt to the demand side?

3. Just to hear different viewpoints on some key-issues in the debate.

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