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Events Management/ International Tourism Management : Understanding tourism

Theoretical Debates Surrounding Festivals and Events: Tourism Task:

Theoretical Debates Surrounding Festivals and Events: Tourism

An event means an occurrence especially involving something significant or an incident such as sports, recreation, business events and conferences.

Festival is an occurrence characterized by a specific activity; whereas, tourism entails travelling majorly for recreational purposes for a given period of time. Events and recreation provide benefits, not only to the businesses but also to tourism and the community at large. Tourism resulting from these events has resulted to analysis on the advantages and disadvantages of the activity, of which the relationship between tourism and local development being the most debated. The belief is that the benefits will in the long run eventually be to the locals. However, critical scholars of tourism refute this belief especially in its current neoliberal forms. This study bases on evaluation of tourism development basing on traditional festival revival in Hong Kong called the bun festive tourism. This study puts into relief the significance of cultural sustainability, though a factor insufficiently emphasized and theorized in the current tourism studies (Throsby 2007, p. 80). Based on the bun festive season, this study will look at five main areas in which festivals and events tourism will have some impact.

Social Historical Context of Bun Festival's Revival

The bun festival is a cultural event organized by local residents of Chieng Chau Island in Hong Kong and stands for sacrificial ceremony of peace and purity in English. Its popularity stems from its exotic and spectacular events

such as bun scrabble. In 1978, the event, however, was banned by the government as a result of casualties emanating from the collapse of one of the bun towers. This resulted in dwindling of the local tourist revenue in the 1990s. The year 2003 marked the revival of this festival after the SARS epidemic subsided in Hong Kong. This gained success as citizens were able to relax after surviving the epidemic, and as a result, the government accepted to lift the ban on the event after negotiations with local leaders. After incorporating in the advertisements, it currently attracts a large number of tourists.

Cultural Authenticity

The problem of inauthenticity tends to plague cultural and heritage tourism in developing localities. In commercialized marketing of a local place, its artefacts and cultural tradition, the imperative of cultural authenticity is de-emphasized for the purpose of expedience and cost effectiveness; Also, the manufacture of inauthentic cultural products to attract a large number of tourists. This inauthenticity can undermine a country's heritage both directly and indirectly. It misinforms tourists and trivializes cultural differences (Cole 2007).

Commercialization, Commodification, and their Local Economic Impacts

Commercialization aims majorly at the cultural heritage of the locals among other things, which can be made to create profit. Revival of the bun festival has seen the re-shaping of the contents of the festival. For instance, souvenir products such as wallet and t-shirts have been designed to take advantage of the festival. However, commercialization can hurt cultural authenticity, which is undermined by the inundation of the tourists' festival experience with bun-themed souvenir.

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Local Disempowerment or Empowerment

It is not easy to measure local empowerment impact of tourism development since empowerment involves multiple dimensions including social, economic and political aspects. Politically, as can be seen, the government's orchestration and subsequent revival indicates that the locals were disempowered from the activity they controlled. Economically, this has empowered the locals since the benefits are reaped by the local businessmen (Hampton 2005). Socially, as the locals view the festival as their social religious activity, the government views it as a source of income which leads into conflicts between the locals and the government (Ritchie & Inkari 2006).

Cultural Sustainability

This poses a real problem since as it is threatened by current ways of developing the Bun festival. The neoliberal direction of tourism development is undermining cultural development as seen in Bun festival case (Sofield & Sivan 2003, p. 10). Majorly, commodification, sportification and commercialization encroach into the eclipse of the heritage dimensions of a given event. This has led to replacement of some common elements leading to alteration of the whole process.

Conclusion

The advantages and consequent problems that face the Bun festival is a replica of what most cultural events and festive go through. As can be seen, the magnitude of the benefits and effects of the event and festival tourism are almost the same. Therefore, a more convincing critique of neoliberal orientation should be launched in terms of cultural sustainability.

References

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