

Damage to countries' cultural heritage from tourism

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How does tourism damage cultural heritage in countries famous for their traditions How does tourism damage cultural heritage in countries famous for their traditions The development of tourism in countries worldwide serves a series of different interests. At a first level, tourism helps to keep past alive, referring especially to historical monuments or pieces of art in countries with significant cultural heritage. Of course, the use of tourism for different purposes, such as a source of entertainment or leisure is quite common. Current paper focuses on the negative effects, or, else, damages, of tourism in regard to the cultural heritage in countries that are famous for their traditions. Reference is made to certain European countries, which have been known for their valuable cultural heritage: Greece, Italy and Spain. It is proved that tourism can cause severe damages on a region's cultural heritage; however, such outcome can be prevented if appropriate measures are developed in advance. In accordance with McKercher & Du (2002), most commonly 'cultural heritage is vulnerable to tourism' (McKercher & Du 2002, p. 59). It is explained that this problem appears because of the lack of sufficient and appropriate resources for protecting cultural heritage (McKercher & Du 2002). On the other hand, most governments consider tourism just as 'a source that can generate profits' (McKercher & Du 2002, p. 59). The needs of cultural heritage are often ignored, especially since governments are not willing to invest high amounts on the protection of cultural heritage. Indeed, as noted by McKercher & Du (2002) most of the funds generated through tourism are invested on irrelevant areas. Europe is a region with important cultural tradition. Its south part, including Greece, Italy and Spain, is quite known for its cultural heritage. In all three countries,

cultural tourism is highly developed, a fact that can be explained by the important historical monuments cited in the particular regions. In accordance with Dallen (2009) Greece and Italy have been ranked first, along with Egypt, as 'the most famous destinations for people who wish to experience ancient artifacts and archaeological ruins' (Dallen 2009, p. 153). In another research, of 2008, it Italy and Spain were ranked as 'the first and the second most important world heritage sites' (Dallen 2009, p. 96). The above fact is not necessarily considered as positive. More specifically, as the number of cultural tourists in a particular region is increased, so do the risks for potential damages (Richards 1996, p. 52). On the other hand, when visiting an area, cultural tourists are likely 'to develop local cultural manifestations' (Richards 1996, p. 52), a fact that is not always welcomed by the locals, especially if these initiatives are in opposition with the local ethics. At the same time, where no schemes are available so that cultural heritage is protected, then the damages caused by cultural tourism can be quite severe. For example, up to recently the historical items related to Acropolis, Greece, were not available to tourists since there was no area appropriate for developing such activity. When the museum of Acropolis was prepared, all these items were gathered and were set in areas, which are appropriately prepared for ensuring the safety and the condition/ quality of the specific items. Before the development of the museum, certain of these items were available to the public in different settings, which were not prepared or designed for serving such needs. In this context, cultural tourists visiting these areas could become a threat causing, even not intentionally, damages on items of cultural heritage with different characteristics. In the case of

Spain, the damages of tourism on cultural heritage have a different form: tourists visiting Spain are likely to have a specific impression in regard to Spain culture, considering this culture as closely related to the Castilian traditions (Richards 1996, p. 51). However, this identity can be quite different from the identity of a Spanish region with different ethics and traditions; Mallorca where Catalan traditions constitute the area's history is an indicative example (Richards 1996, p. 51). The efforts of Spanish government to promote a specific Spain identity for increasing cultural tourism, can, therefore, lead to severe social conflicts (Richards 1996, p. 51). A similar problem exists in the case of Italy. The particular country has faced the influences of different civilizations. Being the basis of the Roman Empire, the country was set under the control of Byzantine Empire and then it had to face the strong influences of the Renaissance (Richards 1996). Therefore, the cultural heritage of Italy is the combination of the traditions of different civilizations and cultural movements which all played a key role in the culture of Italy, as known today. In this context, Italy has to face similar challenges with Spain, in regard to the management of conflicts related to cultural differences among its regions. An indicative example of cultural differences across Italy is the following one: in Italy, ' every local institution has its own rules for the artistic reproduction in the on-line interactive systems' (Ficarra et al. 2010, 40). Cultural tourists that would visit such places should respect that rules, understanding the unique cultural rules of each region. On the other hand, in certain Italian regions only one or two languages may be used for explaining cultural heritage to cultural tourists (Ficarra et al. 2010, p. 107); again conflicts can be caused due to the

different emphasis on linguistic factor for promoting cultural heritage, a problem that may be related to the inability of facilities for supporting such service in each region, i. e. it may be a problem not developed by intention. The damages of tourism on cultural heritage can be many. In most cases, these damages are not taken into consideration by governments that regard cultural heritage as a potential source of profits. In countries, which have to manage 'group visits to heritage sites across an extended region' (McCool and Moisey 2008, p. 272), such as Greece where historical sites are dispersed in mainland, as also in the islands, this problem can be more severe. Most commonly, it seems that the negative effects of tourism on cultural heritage are long term, as, for example, in the cases of Italy and Spain, where cultural tourism has been related to social and cultural conflicts. Governments in these countries, as also in other regions that have important cultural heritage, should take appropriate measures for protecting this heritage from tourism, both in the short and the long term.

References

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