Chapter 6

Heritage and Destination Conscience: Empowering Communities and Enhancing Tourism Experiences

Dallen J. Timothy

Arizona State University, USA

Abstract

This chapter examines the role of heritage as a means of empowering destination communities and providing deeper and more meaningful encounters between tourists and their destination, which contributes to the notion of Destination Conscience by highlighting more sustainable and humane ways of 'doing' tourism and opening places up to greater community involvement and access by visitors. This includes heritage concepts such as Indigenous communities, local spirituality and religious traditions, public archaeology and ordinary heritage, and how these translate into deeper engagement between residents and tourists, community empowerment and a more creative and holistic tourist experiences. Conceptually, this chapter highlights notions of empowerment, tourists' experiences and Destination Conscience.

Keywords: Community empowerment; spirituality and place; democratisation of heritage; Indigenous knowledge; residents and tourists engagement; tourism experiences

Introduction

Much tourism until now has focused on extremes – the biggest, the most beautiful, the furthest and the oldest. This is especially apparent in the context of traditional heritage tourism. Heritage assets are a salient part of the supply side of tourism, with the majority of mass tourism focusing on the extraordinary, ancient and most tangible elements of cultural heritage (Timothy, 2018). Heritage is the contemporary use of the past – tangible and intangible, including the living cultural present. It is something humankind values and hopes to pass on to future generations. Heritage is very community-oriented and value-laden (Den, 2014; Kyriakidis, 2019) and is now seen as a salient means of protecting local identities, empowering Indigenous communities and providing opportunities for tourists to learn about, and appreciate, destinations more fully. Heritage tourism – the use of the past (tangible and intangible) for tourism purposes – is one of the most pervasive forms of tourism on the planet, and nearly every trip includes some element of the cultural past, whether culture is a serious pursuit or a more casual, tangential element of a different kind of journey (McKercher, 2002; Timothy, 2021a). Heritage tourism has existed for centuries and has now become one of the most salient elements of mass tourism almost everywhere.

The current concept of 'overtourism' is closely connected to mass tourism. Overtourism is characterised by conditions of too much tourism to the point where destination residents are unhappy about the sector and the social and ecological impacts it effects in their home regions. Popular heritage destinations currently experiencing high levels of overtourism include Barcelona, Rio de Janeiro, Venice, Prague, Vienna, Dubrovnik, Kyoto, Rome, Santorini, Munich, Amsterdam, Budapest and many others (Milano et al., 2019; Pechlaner et al., 2020). In these places, tourism has created contentious relationships between locals and tourists, diminishing the visitor experience and increasing discontent among residents, often thwarting the very notion of Destination Conscience. These conditions have weakened Destination Conscience as communities feel powerless to effect change in their quality of life and the places where they live. Empowerment is key in building community conscience and satisfying tourists who seek deeper experiences. Despite its centrality in mass tourism and part of the cause of overtourism, heritage tourism has the potential to empower communities as they use their past in sustainable ways to develop their present socio-economic well-being and build community solidarity for greater Destination Conscience (Aznar & Hoefnagels, 2019; Boley & Johnson Gaither, 2016; Chong & Balasingam, 2018; Kim et al., 2019; Su et al., 2023; Timothy, 2015, 2021a). This chapter describes the role of four different manifestations of heritage in creating more empowered communities, greater Destination Conscience as manifested in enabling alternative access to communities and a greater valuing of local cultures, and therefore, more meaningful touristic encounters.

Heritage, Tourism and Empowerment

Empowerment is a key construct of successful and sustainable tourism development, and therefore, an important manifestation of Destination Conscience in how communities can choose their own futures and how their cultural inheritances are promoted for tourism or hidden from tourists' gaze. Empowerment occurs when bottom-up development replaces top-down development, when ideas, actions and benefits become grassroots endeavours rather than being imposed from above by governments or powerful elites with personal financial interests (Timothy, 2012). For most of tourism's history, particularly in the Global South, tourism has empowered the wealthiest and most influential stakeholders, while simultaneously disempowering the communities whose natural and cultural heritage is on display. This has accentuated the distances between the haves and the have-nots in society. However, since the 1990s, there has been a greater appreciation among development and planning specialists of the need for a more balanced, harmonious, equitable and sustainable approach to tourism. Part of the answer to these challenges is empowerment, including the empowerment of the most traditionally disempowered sectors of society (e.g., women, ethnic minorities and migrants).

There are many types of community empowerment that exist within the framework of socio-economic development. These include political, social, psychological and economic empowerment, among others (Scheyvens, 2002; Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021). Political empowerment is evident when the people who are most impacted by tourism have a voice in whether or not to accept tourism, reject it or modify it to meet their needs. Community cohesion and solidarity (not necessarily full agreement) and cooperation for mutual benefits are indicative of social empowerment. Psychological empowerment prevails in a community when its collective confidence and esteem are central to planning and promoting tourism, and when communities take pride in what is unique about them and choose either to promote their uniqueness or hide it from the tourist gaze. Economic empowerment indicates conditions where employment opportunities are plentiful, money is earned to fund public services, and all segments of society have opportunities to benefit financially if they choose to do so (Scheyvens, 1999).

There are many themes within heritage tourism studies that clearly manifest the notions of Destination Conscience and empowerment (Timothy, 2020a). These include, but are not limited to, local faith traditions, pilgrimages and sacred spaces; public archaeology; Indigenous communities; and ordinary heritage. These are examined briefly below and their applications to principles of empowerment are highlighted.

Local Spiritual and Religious Traditions

For millennia, humans have worshipped the divine and venerated sacred places (Coleman & Elsner, 1995). Some of the earliest Neolithic sites of ancient worship have been found in Turkey, Malta and South Asia, and have become significant

places of modern-day worship and tourism. Religion is a pure manifestation of heritage because of its rituals, belief systems, practices, recitations and prayers, sacred writ, holy sites and pilgrimages. All of these elements of spirituality or religious worship are manifestations of faith heritage that are extremely meaningful for the faithful and of cultural interest to others.

As part of their religious practices, believers have travelled in search of the sacred, to draw close to gods, seek absolution from sins, beseech deity for favours and blessings, to be healed in body or spirit and to satisfy religious obligations. Some religions require travel to sacred sites to achieve salvation in the afterlife (e.g. Islam and some Christian sects), while others encourage it as a life-enriching experience but not a requirement (Olsen & Trono, 2018; Ron & Timothy, 2019). Long-distance pilgrimages became common in European societies with the Christianisation of Europe during the late Roman Empire and into the Middle Ages (Birch, 1998). In ancient East and South Asia, pilgrimages took shape in a large number of sacred places (Griffin et al., 2018; Stoddard, 1994). Intra-European pilgrimages and religious travel between Europe and the Holy Land began in late antiquity and lasted far into the Middle Ages until the Reformation and bubonic plague slowed it down dramatically (Ron & Timothy, 2019). Today, pilgrimages are among the largest tourist gatherings in the world, with the Kumbh Mela and the Hajj being counted among them, in many ways resembling the large-scale mass tourism seen in other sorts of destinations (Qurashi, 2017; Shinde, 2021).

Despite these extremely popular, long-distance and global pilgrimages, the majority of pilgrimage behaviour takes place in local environs, where vernacular shrines, temples, churches and other sacred spaces are venerated by certain segments of society but might not appeal to the masses (Bremborg, 2013; Frascaroli, 2016). Most sacred places are small scale and unremarkable, and used by a limited number of area faithful (Liutikas, 2014; Stefko et al., 2013). 'Folk shrines' of regional or local importance, sometimes not even officially acknowledged by a faith organisation, as well as sites associated with hometown religious leaders and places where miracles of local acclaim occurred, are the focus of much veneration and pilgrimage-like activity. These everyday localities enrich the cultural milieu and heritage landscapes of places (Burgassi, 2019) which, together with other elements of human heritage, manifest as unique, interesting and value-laden spaces of potential tourist attention.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced many religious adherents to cancel or postpone their pilgrimage journeys abroad. In this process, an increasing number of adherents focused on religious sites of local significance, deepening their sense of place and valuation of regional religious heritage in place of the global (Olsen & Timothy, 2020). This process brought greater visibility to local religious sites. This, in conjunction with various globalisation processes and increased use of the internet and social media, has made what was once a local and common phenomenon (folk shrines and area pilgrimages) into a global phenomenon with widespread currency, particularly among people who seek deeper and more meaningful place-based experiences. Thus, globalisation, the COVID-19 pandemic and a growing interest in deeper, more meaningful experiences have

pushed '…small, regional shrines and sacred sites to the forefront of global tourism. This means that many folk shrines of local renown now have the potential to become destinations of more international acclaim' (Timothy & Olsen, 2023, p. 470). As locally valued religious heritage and practices reach the global stage and as the potential for tourism growth is realised in their ordinary places of religious heritage (Aulet & Vidal, 2018; Shyju et al., 2020), communities may become increasingly united, emboldened and empowered through solidarity of purpose, with the knowledge that their local traditions have importance not only to them but to outsiders as well.

Public Archaeology

Archaeological sites are one of the most pervasive heritage assets and among the most visited localities in the world. Every place of human habitation has an archaeological record, although some places choose to emphasise it in their heritagisation processes, including tourism, more than other places. A different perspective on heritage tourism and Destination Conscience can be understood through public archaeology – an activity that engages the public in archaeology through tours of excavations and sites, interpretive programmes, volunteer opportunities, public education lectures and other outreach activities. This is a process of democratising heritage so that it is both more accessible to the public and reflects better the public's own heritage. This is particularly important in descendant communities, whose own ancestors are the focus of archaeological work. Whereas traditional archaeological research has focused solely on the scientific study of material culture from the past, sometimes to the exclusion of the communities whose history is being studied, archaeologists have come to terms with the idea that communities are important stakeholders and partners in their scientific inquiry, that the public is in fact the client, the audience and equal partners in archaeological pursuits (SAA, 2023). This has led to the suggestion that archaeologists have now come 'out of their fortresses' (Gürsu, 2020, p. 58) and have democratised the past for general consumption. Although public archaeology has existed for many years in one form or another, the term was coined and its systematic practice came about in the 1970s with the realisation that public support is crucial to the work of archaeologists.

Volunteering at archaeological sites, archives, cultural centres and museums, at home or elsewhere, is a clear display of public archaeology (Timothy, 2020b). Archaeology-based volunteer tourism and leisure engages the public, makes findings more accessible to the community and builds public awareness. The democratisation of archaeological heritage forwards the idea that the public has the right of access to its own heritage, and such efforts should be encouraged as a way to enhance educational opportunities, reaffirm local identity and roots and improve a community's quality of life (Corbishley, 2011).

Archaeologists and many heritage resource managers have been reluctant to accept tourism as a legitimate use of the archaeological record. However, given increasingly scarce public and private funds for undertaking research and with a

growing ethos of public outreach and community partnerships in heritage-making, most archaeologists now recognise the need to facilitate and encourage tourism as a means of justifying and funding their studies (Gillot, 2020).

This democratisation of archaeology may also have the effect of empowering communities and creating conscientious stewards of human heritage, including community members, archaeologists and the tourists themselves. In the words of Gillot (2020, p. 36), public archaeology and archaeology-based tourism have 'the potential of not only bringing financial gains but also helping to create a more cohesive identity within local or descendant communities'.

Indigenous Communities

An important manifestation of heritage is Indigenous practices and Indigenous knowledge. Part of the deeper engagement with destination communities is manifest in the area of Indigenous tourism (Melubo, 2023; Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019). The archaeological record and other manifestations of heritage are particularly relevant for descendant communities, and this is especially the case with Indigenous communities that face challenges to protecting their distinctive identities. Many elements of native people's culture are on the verge of disappearing through acculturation processes, environmental changes, overtourism, globalisation or simply modern-day living (Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019; Stonefish & Kwantes, 2017). Heritage tourism and other celebrations of living and tangible heritage can help preserve Indigenous cultures, deepen people's roots, connect them more closely to their ancestral lands and provide a sense of intergenerational continuity (Stronza, 2008; Timothy & Tahan, 2020).

When native-led tourism initiatives dominate and native people are empowered to show what they want to show to outsiders or hide what they do not want outsiders to see (Rigby et al., 2011), they will be more empowered and conscientious of their role in tourism. 'When communities take ownership of the problems and benefits associated with tourism, they become psychologically empowered. When tourism brings employment and other economic advantages to the people who want to benefit from it…destination communities become economically empowered. When native people take pride in their cultural heritage and desire to share it with others through tourism, on their own terms of course, intra-community solidarity grows, and they become socially empowered. When decision-making derives from the grassroots level and as autochthonous societies have the power to welcome tourism or to resist it, they are becoming politically empowered' (Timothy & Tahan, 2020, p. 215).

Ordinary and Vernacular Heritage

As noted at the outset, mass tourism has long centred on the extraordinary, momentous and opulent heritage of extraordinary people, including rulers, nobility, celebrities, great artists, politicians and famous military heroes. Yet,

these people represent an infinitesimally small proportion of Earth's inhabitants. Their heritage has been well preserved, interpreted, marketed and sold as a tourism commodity, but what about the heritage of everyone else? Despite tourism's traditional focus on extraordinary and grandiose heritage, the cultural heritage of ordinary people, such as intangible traditions, small villages, farm buildings, industrial archaeology, cemeteries, fisheries, vernacular architecture, agricultural landscapes and other vestiges of ordinary life, is also an important part of the world's heritage milieu that deserves to be commemorated, celebrated and protected for its scientific and social value as well as for its tourism potential (Podder et al., 2018; Timothy, 2014, 2020a, 2022). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage List was a culprit in celebrating only the most glorious, universal heritage until recently, when the organisation later began to memorialise the commonplace heritage of ordinary people through its lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage and Cultural Landscapes (Labadi, 2013; Rössler, 2006). As people's ordinary heritage is valued by outsiders, pride in their local cultures increases (Butler et al., 2022; Nicholls et al., 2004), and there is a stronger desire to protect what might otherwise be lost in favour of something more 'impressive', extraordinary and of greater 'universal value' (Araoz, 2011).

Enhanced Experiences: Deeper Engagement in Heritage Tourism

As these examples demonstrate, various manifestations of heritage have the potential to empower communities and strengthen community conscience as local cultures become more accessible, more highly valued by tourists, the tourism system and residents whose culture is on display. This makes for a stronger foundation for niche and special interest tourisms.

There is evidence that tourists are becoming more sophisticated and choosier about the destinations they visit and the activities they undertake (Moutinho et al., 2011). Although tourists generally want to see the world's momentous heritage, part of the growing sophistication and desired experiential touristic encounters, travel consumers are increasingly interested in seeing how ordinary people live. Expressions of ordinariness and vernacular lifestyles have been an important part of the heritage tourism product for many years, such as folk museums in the United Kingdom (Peate, 1949) and visits to Maasai tribal areas in Tanzania and Kenya (Buzinde et al., 2014; Melubo & Carr, 2019), but seeking ordinariness or gazing upon the 'real lives' of others is now a greater part of sought after touristic experiences (Timothy, 2021b).

Many tourists are unsatisfied with the mass-produced package tours that have been so popular in the past, and they are far less content with the superficial engagement with places and peoples that typically defines mass tourism (Richards, 2015; Timothy, 2018; Yang, 2012). In addition, many travellers are choosing to avoid the most touristified destinations where overtourism dominates consumer landscapes. This has led to the identification of many types of special interest tourism that sometimes function as alternatives to mass tourism and

include, for example, heritage tourism, sport tourism, culinary tourism, roots tourism, ecotourism, solidarity tourism, and many other actions that satisfy personal interests and create unique niche markets. These niche markets are evidence of people seeking deeper, more meaningful and immersive experiences that lead to greater knowledge, increased self-discovery, greater confidence in their place in the world, satisfying personal interests and gaining a deeper understanding of the plight of their earthly cohabitants (Chen & Rahman, 2018; Isaac, 2008; Scarles, 2009). Such changes in the demand for more existential tourist experiences will likely result in greater levels of empowerment in the destination as communities gain financially, politically, psychologically and socially through tourism, but this assertion is in desperate need of additional research.

Many labels have been assigned to these deep travel experiences in recent years, including slow tourism, immersive tourism, geotourism, purposeful cultural tourism and co-creative tourism. Slow tourism emphasises a greater personal awareness of oneself and the world. It entails reduced speed and mobility by staying in a single location longer, getting to know the place's history and culture more intimately (Oh et al., 2016). Immersive tourism is similar to slow tourism in that it requires visitors to remain longer than usual, appreciating local lifestyles and foodways and learning about local cultures, possibly even participating in religious activities and studying local languages. Geotourism generally has two meanings. The first meaning is geology-based tourism. The second meaning is more culture- and place-oriented; it is tourism that sustains and enhances the distinctive geographical characteristics of a place (National Geographic, 2023). Purposeful cultural tourism denotes travel that is motivated primarily by a desire to learn about other cultures and heritages and to have a deep cultural experience (McKercher, 2002; Timothy, 2021a). Co-creative tourism emphasises deeper engagement between locals and tourists, where the experience is co-developed by destination residents/stakeholders and the tourists themselves for a more profound authentic and embedded encounter (Binkhorst & Den Dekker, 2009; Campos et al., 2018). What all of these tourisms have in common is a more meaningful and profound engagement with a destination, its history, its cultural heritage and its current inhabitants and their lifestyles. That tourists might want to see their vernacular architecture and landscapes and experience their everyday lives is a powerful force for destination communities. These recent movements within tourism enable communities to become more empowered to control their tourism futures and deeply involved in co-creating touristic experiences, while tourists simultaneously become more authentically engaged in local cultures and gain a deeper appreciation for the destination community.

Conclusion

Mass tourism, including heritage tourism, has traditionally focused on the extraordinary, most tangible and oldest heritage of humankind since it began to grow in the late 1800s. Heritage sites of global acclaim have become some of the

most iconic symbols of tourism and nationalism, including the Great Wall of China, Machu Pichu, the temples of Thailand, the Pyramids of Egypt, Angkor Wat and the Roman Forum. Although heritage assets have been the backbone of most mass tourism, as noted above, heritage tourism has also emerged as a niche form of special interest tourism that may help empower communities politically, economically, socially and psychologically and develop a sense of common identity and Destination Conscience, as what was once local and ordinary becomes more valued at a greater scale. As heritage tourism empowers communities, they take greater pride in the remnants of their cultural past and desire to protect and promote it (or not) to outsiders. Thus, the valorisation of ordinary and Indigenous heritage, archaeological remains, faith traditions and other manifestations of heritage builds solidarity among community members and makes places desirable for tourists who seek deeper, more meaningful and existential travel experiences. The very idea that tourists might want to experience something that is rather mundane or ordinary can help build community cohesiveness and increase community conscience.

Tourism has the potential to empower communities, or community cohorts, that have heretofore been either disempowered through tourism or otherwise neglected, including Indigenous people, ethnic minorities and women – all of whom have important heritage that deserves to be protected and shared with visitors from elsewhere, if its owners so desire. Raising the profile of a community's holistic heritage may have the effect of drawing tourists who seek more immersive experiences in the local and in the 'Other', for an empowered community is a desirable community whose members have a real stake in tourism's success which, as the contents of this book make perfectly clear, are important elements of Destination Conscience.

Balance, harmony, equity and other principles of sustainable development may translate into a more conscientious destination that not only benefits more deeply from tourism in social and economic ways but also reflects a greater sense of purpose, value and meaning, which will no doubt translate into enhanced tourist experiences (Michalkó et al., 2015; Rivera et al., 2016; Sheldon, 2022), improved quality of life and a more content populace. This equals more confidence and perhaps an ability to interact more positively with visitors and help co-create more enjoyable and satisfactory tourist experiences in their communities as many contemporary tourists seek deeper, more rooted experiences in communities that are empowered to protect and share (or not) their heritages with the outside world.

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