

Research Note

Intangible heritage tourism and identity

Miguel Vidal González

Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Camino de Vera s/n, 46022 Valencia, Spain

Received 22 May 2007; received in revised form 28 June 2007; accepted 1 July 2007

Abstract

This note seeks to examine the relationship between existential intangible tourism and personal identity. Due to the impacts of globalization, tourism faces a new paradigm of increasing social complexity and the recent impotence of traditional boundaries. In such an environment, the past liaison between identity and local place vanishes. The discussion indicates that intangible heritage tourism can provide a source of identity separate from local places, becoming in effect an “existential tourism”. In this paper, Japanese flamenco tourism is used to shed light on the theme in general.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Identity; Heritage; Destinations; Flamenco; Japan

1. Introduction

Areas of local importance play a predominant role in the construction of identity. Most studies in the field of heritage tourism are related to *places*, even for experientially based scholars. Although there is a key relationship between personal identity and place, globalization has a deep implication for this correlation. On this new framework, Castells (2000) differentiates between a “defense identity” and a “project identity”. “Defense identity” is reactive and searches an identity security in an agoraphobic environment. It assumes a previous holistic identity, related to a *locus*. The “defense identity” tends to reinforce the local traditions and agrees with the landscapes-of-the nostalgia school in tourism when it “argues that in the current era of globalized uncertainty, heritage tourism offers a degree of security and stability” (Halewood & Hannam, 2001, p. 567). In this environment, tourism is an agent capable of providing “the means by which local people can be identified” (Palmer, 1999, p. 318; Pritchard & Morgan, 2001). Accordingly, marketing of historic events can reinforce the *locus* identity (Ashworth & Larkham, 1994), fostering “legacy tourism” (McCain &

Ray, 2003), and sometimes creating a nationalistic heritage tourism (Palmer, 1999).

In a different way there is an emergent “project identity”, an open process that understands that the global world provides opportunities by which one can choose identity roots in different countries. This “distant proximity” (Rosenau, 1996) neglects the customary correlation between identity and local place. Based on research findings in sociology, it can now be said with a degree of confidence that social systems are increasingly interdependent. At the same time, each individual has a multiplicity of identifications (Ibáñez, 1990). As a result, in the global environment a person can have diverse identifications coming together from different countries to build an inclusive identity. In this sense, the liaison between identity and locality vanishes. Furthermore, there is a relationship between (i) the process of individualization, and (ii) personal identities built through personal experiences (Castells, 2000). Similarly, Beck (2004) notes the Second Modernity as a cosmopolitan one, with experiences worldwide becoming a structural component when building this form of personal identity. While tourist experience of place is related to being “away from home” and “being amid another culture(s)” (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004, p. 602), existential intangible heritage does not mean traveling with one’s own culture to visit that of others, but traveling in

E-mail address: miguelvidal@ozu.es

order to incorporate distant cultures within one's own personal cosmopolitan identity.

Some studies indicate a market saturation in heritage tourism (Apostolakis, 2003; Prentice, 2001). In such an environment, existential heritage tourism can offer a new means of understanding destinations. Existential heritage tourism reinforces the importance of new tourist resources, mostly intangible (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003), as illustrated by the recent foundation of Oral Humanity Heritage, by UNESCO. From this perspective, flamenco is a candidate to be considered part of the Oral Humanity Heritage by UNESCO, thereby recognizing the international relevance of this intangible heritage.

2. Purpose and methodology

In heritage studies, “surprisingly, very little research considers the relationship between the tourist and the space visited” (Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006, p. 162). Furthermore, there is a lack of studies concerning the interface between the tourist and intangible heritage. Some studies discuss the importance of educational motivations for heritage tourism (Poria et al., 2006; Richards, 2002) especially when folkloric or traditional practices are key elements in the tourist activity (Chhabra, Healy, & Sills, 2003). Despite the number of studies in heritage tourism, there has been little consideration of relationships between intangible heritage tourism and personal identity.

In his pioneering approach, Silberberg (1995) illustrates a transition in tourism to one of “enrichment”, and Urry (1990) suggests that some tourists come to “feel” rather than to “gaze”. There is also a distinction between passive and active participation (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and not simply a difference between “*heritage tourists* and *tourists at heritage places*” (Poria, Butter, & Airey, 2003, p. 249). Accordingly, “attempting to clarify heritage tourism in terms of leisure and recreation motivations may not highlight the core of this phenomenon” (Poria et al., 2006, p. 172). This note on “research in progress” examines the relationship between intangible heritage tourism and personal identity. Its purpose is to illustrate how intangible heritages can provide an identity source dissociated with local places, thus becoming existential tourism. Departing from a theoretical approach, it offers an outline framework. Japanese flamenco tourism is the medium used to illustrate the general theme.

3. Discussion

With more than 300 flamenco schools and over 30 000 students each year, the flamenco population in Japan is the largest in the world (Otsuka, 2001), overtaking even Spain. Accordingly, Japanese flamenco tourism is noteworthy. The 2006 flamenco biennale of Sevilla (Spain) expected 2000 Japanese tourists after receiving 1800 at the previous event (González, 2006). While flamenco dancing in Spain is viewed as mere leisure tourism (thus explaining the lack of

research), our thesis is that for some Japanese, flamenco acts as an art derivative of Zen and provides a deep experience that becomes part of personal identity.

In Japanes culture, Confucianism maintained the pre-eminence of the group, while Zen protected the survival of individual sentiments and spontaneity in a strict and formal ambiance. Confucianism emphasized the importance of rules, traditions, group, hierarchy and loyalty. At the same time, Zen was extended through artistic manifestation, from poetry to painting. Some artistic expressions that originated from Zen started to become popular, such as the tea ceremony or *ikebana*, giving Japanese individuals the opportunity for a personal life and expression in an impersonal environment. As Alan Watts explains, we cannot forget the social context of Zen; we must see it in the context of social life ruled by principles of Confucianism (Watts, 1975). The novelty lies in the fact that this need for “decompression art” has found an outlet in flamenco, and thus existential heritage tourism. This is especially significant because Japan is a closed country with a protected Japanese singularity (*nihorongo*).

The flamenco dancer, Morca (2000), claims that “Zen and flamenco are really one without trying. They are of the same essence”. Japanese arts emphasize simplicity while seeking maximum expression. This artistic environment is present in flamenco, with “palmas” and voices representing the totality of human experiences, from drama to joy. To summarize, flamenco in Japan provides the possibility of spontaneity in a codified tradition. In this sense, “while we Japanese are not generally encouraged to show our emotions and passions in public, we can do so during flamenco” (Waki, 2003).

Not surprisingly, the majority of Japanese tourists traveling to Spain to experience flamenco culture are women, while in Spain the tradition is largely masculine. Thus “Japanese travel agencies offer flamenco tours to Spain and hundreds of women travel every year to watch and/or learn flamenco from teachers in Spain” (Waki, 2003). It is especially significant when considering that Japanese females are less likely to take non-packaged tours than male tourists (Yamamoto & Gill, 1999).

Heritage sites have different significances for different tourists (Cheung, 1999). Following the proposal for “psychographic segmentation” in heritage tourism (Poria et al., 2006, p. 174), intangible, experiential heritage tourism shares this quality. We can therefore identify two segments; for existential tourists, intangible heritage can be “transported” to other countries without losing authenticity, reinforcing the fact that “existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects” (Wang, 1999, p. 352). Accordingly, “the tourist may go on interacting with it (the intangible heritage) long after he/she has departed” (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003, p. 41), allocating fidelity to the experience rather than to the *locus*. As revealed in (Chhabra et al., 2003, p. 702) a “high perception of authenticity can be achieved when the event is staged in a place far away from the original source of the

cultural tradition". In short, for existential tourists, intangible heritage experience is equated as being authentic when it (1) is close to the original "spirit", thus being more than a merely active participation or entertainment, (2) helps tourists to feel their real selves (Handler & Saxton, 1988), and (3) is related to an "existential authenticity" (Wang, 1999, p. 351). Furthermore, intangible heritage can be reproduced for non-local people while maintaining authenticity (a finding contrary to those of MacCannell, 1976; Sharpley, 1994, who believed that heritage authenticity depends on the extent to which traditions are enacted by local people). A suitable example is Yoko Komatsubara, who was invited to open the Cante de las Minas Festival 2002 (Spain). It is noteworthy as being contrary to the notion proposed by Bruner (1994, p. 400), that "no reproduction could be authentic, by definition". These examples reinforce the idea that existential heritage tourists are able to participate in the original spirit of intangible heritage. Accordingly, for Japanese flamenco existential tourists, authenticity is related to a "pure" approach; thus genuine elements make this tradition a profound experience. As Antonio Cabezas wrote: "My wider experience tells me that pure flamenco songs are the favorites for the Japanese" (Cabezas, 1993).

Contrarily, leisure tourists perceive the constructed authenticity in flamenco as being more authentic, as the distorted authenticity suits better than the expected stereotype (Boorstin, 1991; Bruner, 1991; Silver, 1993). Leisure tourists' searches are primarily hedonistic, with "sevillanas" being the favorite section of the staged authenticities they see while visiting Spain. Therefore, in heritage tourism the more stereotypical images typically attract tourists (Halewood & Hannam, 2001). Accordingly, for leisure tourists, conformity with the stereotypical image is expected, and an authentic "visit to Spain should involve some element of sunshine, bullfights, excitable locals, and so forth" (Waller & Lea 1998, p. 125). As a result, leisure tourists have a lack of interest in the "transported" attraction, as once removed from its original place it appears to lose its charm.

Differences in the perception of flamenco by tourists from China and Japan (both with a Confucianism tradition), reinforce the distinctions between existential intangible heritage tourists and leisure tourists. The Andalusian Tourism Council (Spain) considers Chinese tourists to be similar to Japanese tourists, "loving flamenco" (Maldonado, 2003). Consequently, Chinese tourists should exhibit a similar demand to the Japanese for flamenco, but initial signs indicate differences in the appeal of flamenco to Chinese and Japanese tourists. For example, the first attempts to stage flamenco performances in China have been fruitless, as Chinese spectators demanded an "adapted" flamenco. Thus "Made in Spain", a pioneer flamenco spectacle, will be performed but "with a special design for Chinese taste, with many changes, both in movement and colour" (Morales, 2004), with a clear disregard for any sense of authenticity.

4. Management implications and research in progress

Existential heritage and leisure tourists behave differently at the destination. Leisure tourists seek a hedonistic experience rather than learning. For flamenco leisure tourists, this implies short contact with the intangible heritage element as spectators whilst traveling within the destination; it is in fact considered part of the whole experience. On the other hand, flamenco existential tourists seek a deep integration into the very ambience of flamenco. Japanese existential tourists, therefore, consider flamenco as the central motivating factor when choosing a destination. These factors should be taken into consideration when developing specific tourist products. The product should not be simply a performance program (as for leisure tourists), but include courses, workshops, conferences with artists and, in general, participation and a deeper integration in the whole flamenco culture. Japanese existential flamenco tourists are wealthy, interested in cultural tourism, and able to travel outside of peak seasons thus representing a target segment with interesting potential. Consequently, destination management offices should attend to this segment with ad hoc strategies.

Further research is required in this area, especially an empirical analysis of the intangible heritage/identity interaction. It is expected that the framework proposed in this research note will provide theoretical foundation for further research and practical guidance to develop managerial strategies. This note is exploratory and part of a research in progress that includes a study concerning the trade-off between existential intangible heritage tourism and a modern destination image. It further investigates the appeal of authentic attractions for existential intangible heritage tourists (authentic attractions are determined by traditions still in existence at the destination). Uniformity fostered by globalization reinforces this appeal. Accordingly, a danger of inconsistency arises in the destination with images of modernity being incompatible with traditional heritage. On the other hand, leisure intangible heritage tourists are attracted by a reconstructed experience of the past which is therefore compatible with a modern destination.

5. Conclusions

In tourism, there is a growing need for research into the impacts of globalization. In the global environment, the compulsory liaison between identity and local place vanishes. This note examines the relationship between existential intangible tourism and personal identity. In conclusion, globalization fosters a relationship between distant intangible heritage and personal identity. This note suggests the role of existential intangible heritage tourism when building cosmopolitan identity. It also argues that existential intangible heritage and leisure tourists exhibit different behaviors. From the perspective of leisure tourists there is an intangible heritage authenticity rooted in *locus*,

and a performance program is therefore expected in the destination. On the other hand, existential intangible heritage tourists link authenticity with the original spirit, and thus seek deep integration. Important aspects of the new approach are the destination management implications. From an industry perspective a key issue emerges, being: the ability of an intangible heritage product to reach potential consumers. Consequently, destination management offices should attend to this segment with ad hoc strategies. As a note concerning “research in progress”, there is much scope for future studies.

References

- Apostolakis, A. (2003). The convergence process in heritage tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30, 795–812.
- Ashworth, G., & Larkham, P. (Eds.) 1994. *Building a New Europe: Tourism, culture and identity in the New Europe*, London: Routledge.
- Beck, U. (2004). *Poder y Contra-Poder en la era global*. Barcelona: Editorial Paidós.
- Boorstin, D. (1991). *The image: A guide to pseudo-events in America*. New York: Vintage.
- Bruner, E. (1991). Transformation of self in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18, 238–250.
- Bruner, E. (1994). Abraham Lincoln as authentic reproduction: A critique of postmodernism. *American Anthropologist*, 96, 397–415.
- Cabezas, A. (1993). Le flamenco au Japon. *XXI^e Congrès d'Art flamenco*. Paris.
- Castells, M. (2000). *La era de la información. La sociedad red*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.
- Cheung, S. (1999). The meanings of a heritage trail in Hong Kong. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, 570–588.
- Chhabra, D., Healy, R., & Sills, E. (2003). Staged authenticity and heritage tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30, 702–719.
- González, D. (2006). *La bienal de Flamenco espera recibir a más de 2000 japoneses*. <<http://www.actualidad.terra.es/cultura>>.
- Halewood, C., & Hannam, K. (2001). Viking heritage tourism: Authenticity and commoditisation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 28, 565–580.
- Handler, R., & Saxton, W. (1988). Dissimulation: Reflexivity, narrative and the quest for authenticity in “Living History”. *Cultural Anthropology*, 3, 242–260.
- Ibáñez, J. (1990). *Prólogo a M. Maffesoli: El tiempo de las tribus*. Barcelona: Icaria.
- Maldonado, E. (2003). *Andalucía busca turistas en China*. <www.5días.com>.
- MacCannell, D. (1976). *The visitor: A new theory of the leisure class*. New York: Schocken Books.
- McCabe, S., & Stokoe, E. H. (2004). Place and identity in tourists' accounts. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 31, 601–622.
- McCain, G., & Ray, N. M. (2003). Legacy tourism: The search for personal meaning in heritage travel. *Tourist Management*, 24, 713–717.
- Morales, J.C. (2004). *Festejos en Asia*. <<http://www.invertia.com>>.
- Morca, T. (2000). *Flamenco spirit*. Costa Rica: Morca.
- Otsuka, Y. (2001). *Historia del Flamenco*. <<http://www.eunavi.com>>.
- Palmer, C. (1999). Tourism and the symbols of identity. *Tourism Management*, 20, 313–321.
- Pine II, J. B., & Gilmore, J. H. (1998). Welcome to the experience economy. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(4), 97–105.
- Poria, Y., Butler, R., & Airey, D. (2003). The core of heritage tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30, 238–254.
- Poria, Y., Reichel, A., & Biran, A. (2006). Heritage site management. *Motivations and Expectations. Annals of Tourism Research*, 33, 162–178.
- Prentice, R. (2001). Experiential cultural tourism: Museums and the marketing of the new romanticism of evoked authenticity. *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 19(1), 5–26.
- Pritchard, A., & Morgan, N. (2001). Culture, identity and tourism representation: Marketing Cymry or Wales? *Tourism Management*, 22, 167–179.
- Richards, G. (2002). Tourism attraction systems: Exploring cultural behavior. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 33, 162–178.
- Rosenau, J. N. (1996). The Dynamics of Globalization. *Securiti Dialogue*, 27(3).
- Sharpley, R. (1994). *Tourism, tourists & society*. Huntingdon: ELM.
- Silberberg, T. (1995). Cultural tourism and business opportunities for museums and heritage sites. *Tourism Management*, 16, 361–365.
- Silver, I. (1993). Marketing authenticity in third world countries. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 20, 302–318.
- Stamboulis, Y., & Skayannis, P. (2003). Innovation strategies and technology for experience-based tourism. *Tourism Management*, 24, 35–43.
- Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. London: Sage.
- Waki, Y. (2003). <<http://www.flamenco-world.com>>.
- Waller, J., & Lea, S. (1998). Seeking the Real Spain? Authenticity in Motivation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25, 110–129.
- Wang, N. (1999). Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26, 349–370.
- Watts, A. (1975). *El camino del Zen*. Barcelona: Kairós.
- Yamamoto, D., & Gill, A. (1999). Emerging trends in Japanese package tourism. *Journal of Travel Research* 38(2), 134–143.