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CULTURAL TOURISM IN EUROPE

AnaMaria Pahos
Athanasios Stamos
Sasa Kicosev

Hospitality and Tourism School of Advanced Studies, Rhodes, Greece
University of Novi Sad, Serbia¹

Abstract:

The importance of culture as an engine of urban development can be fully gauged by considering its role in regenerating cities. In the last few years, interest in the cultural industries as an economic force of its own has grown. The European Commission has identified culture and the various sectors of the cultural industry as a major economic and social force in Europe. The growth of cultural employment has been strong in the past ten years, exceeding average employment-growth figures. (Commission Européenne du Tourisme, 2004).

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Culture is eminently a city industry, and more generally an urban phenomenon. Through ages, and in particular since the end of the middleages, the most important works of art, the most influential circles of creative thinking, the best schools and universities, and the flourishing of cultural trends and languages, have been closely associated with cities, their power, and their economic strength. It is thus not surprising that as of today, the cultural heritage of most nations – especially in Europe – is concentrated in cities, and that most starting artists or organisations would look for an urban location, preferably in one of those “cultural hubs” like London, New York or Berlin, where land values have now reached levels common to any other global industry throughout the world. (Rioux Soucy, 2006).

Montréal's leaders and opinion-makers have continually emphasized that the future of their metropolis is tied to culture. (Brault, 2006) But it isn't the only city to have recognized the value of culture. Toronto has decided to invest heavily in its cultural infrastructure, while New York City has opted to directly support creative

¹ **AnaMaria Pahos**, Athanasios Stamos, Ph.D., Hospitality and Tourism School of Advanced Studies, Rhodes, Greece, **Sasa Kicosev**, Ph.D., Full Professor, University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences, Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management Novi Sad, Serbia.

endeavours in order to consolidate its reputation as a city of cultural excellence. More than ever before, culture is the beating heart of a city.

In a world where cities rather than countries are the real players in a competitive global economy, culture is now widely recognized as a vehicle of economic and urban development. By virtue of its ability to generate a creative environment that attracts the investors and talents of the new knowledge- and innovation-based economy, culture is destined to become increasingly ingrained in the urban fabric.

So it's no coincidence that urban tourism is associated naturally with cultural tourism. A recent study by the European Travel Commission suggested that a mere 20% of tourists who visit a European city mention culture, in the broad sense of the term, as the main reason for their visit. Yet even if a large number of urban tourists do not view themselves as cultural tourists, the majority of urban vacations include at least one cultural activity.

While urban cultural tourism continues to be dominated by the great capitals of culture such as Paris and London, the current trend of improving the cultural offering means even cities previously lacking cultural interest can emerge as new tourist destinations. Faced with the daunting challenges of urban renewal, many cities choose to develop major cultural infrastructures as a way of tangibly communicating the transition towards a new economic era. Among the oft-cited examples is Bilbao in Spain, which signalled its march to the future by commissioning world-renowned architect Frank Gehry to design the breathtaking Guggenheim Museum. In addition to transforming Bilbao's image, the museum drew more than 1.3 million visitors in its inaugural year, 1997. Significantly, 79% of the visitors said they chose Bilbao as a destination with the express purpose of seeing the museum. Bilbao's success has inspired numerous European and American cities to revamp their images and breathe new life into tourism by constructing major architectural works. (Plaza, 2000).

In Scotland, the city of Glasgow, proud possessor of a substantial industrial heritage, is investing in the creation of a spectacular new Museum of Transport, scheduled to open in 2009. Toronto, too, has launched several major projects, including the overhaul of the Royal Ontario Museum (\$200 million), construction of the Opera House (\$181 million), Gehry's redesign of the Art Gallery of Ontario (\$180 million) and the renovation of the Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art (\$15 million). (Cloutier, 2006).

Other cities have opted instead for urban renewal projects aimed at enhancing and improving access to the culture. Some of these projects are meant to re-energize a heritage district and others to change the vocation of an old quarter, as in the case of the revitalization of Québec City's Petit Champlain and Saint-Roch districts. The latter, site of workshops and stores since the founding of New France, is today a thriving mix of historic homes, restaurants, businesses and theatres. Saint-Roch, meanwhile, owes its new lease on life to one of the largest urban construction projects in the provincial capital. The city invested \$5.2 million in the landscaping of Jardin Saint-Roch, a veritable oasis of greenery amidst the greyness of the then-neglected neighbourhood. Today the neighbourhood is a hot new destination in the heart of the city, boasting trendy

restaurants, fashionable watering holes, lovely avant-garde boutiques and more than 100 artists' studios.

Redevelopment can also help structure the urban cultural offering. In Montréal, municipal leaders have been working in partnership with local tourism and cultural sectors since 2003 on development of an arts and entertainment district to be called the "Quartier des spectacles." (Joyal, 2005). A similar initiative was recently launched by Vancouver, which this past April (in collaboration with British Columbia's Ministry of Tourism, Sports and Arts) announced a \$10-million investment to support creation of a cultural precinct in the heart of downtown. (City of Vancouver, 2006). Vienna, meanwhile, saw fit to think big, combining the concept of a cultural district with new cultural buildings to create a kind of "complex of culture" – the Vienna Museum Quarter. At 60,000 square metres, the vast cultural-tourism-recreational site features more than 40 cultural institutions showcasing art in all its forms. In its first year, the complex welcomed more than two million visitors.

Other cities are tackling the issue of cultural development with an approach that's less about architecture and urbanism, and more about trying to promote and support the creativity of artists and artisans as well as the characteristics of the local populace. In this vein, the mayor of New York recently declared that development of the city's cultural vitality depends on the energy of its cultural endeavours, and that a special office would therefore be created to directly support creative artists and actively defend New York's title as North America's arts and culture capital.

In Washington, DC, in an effort to ensure that cultural development benefits all, the organization Cultural Tourism DC has developed self-guided walking tours through historic neighbourhoods located outside the traditional city centre. The objectives were to promote Washington's different neighbourhoods, get local communities involved, develop cultural products and foster success by ensuring products were truly ready to receive visitors. This approach recognizes culture as an engine for tourism development, and that participation of the local population is necessary for sustained cultural development.

Meanwhile, the popularity of many festivals among locals and tourists alike is another interesting illustration of how culture can act as a promoter of local development. French sociologist Gilles Arnaud says the success of festivals arises out of a number of trends, such as:

- the quest for pleasure, shared feelings, and spontaneity, rather than over-intellectualized pursuits,
- an attraction to the transitory, as opposed to the traditional idea of culture as something durable, permanent and intangible down through the ages.

It appears each city must adopt an approach to cultural development tailored to its specific circumstances, history and means. Urban and cultural tourism, for its part, is simply what flows from the existing and constantly evolving dynamics between the inhabitants of urban spaces and those who visit them. City planning, sociology, tourism and ultimately the economy itself appear to be but variables in the same equation: that of living well together.

CULTURAL TOURISM IN EUROPE

The cultural heritage of Europe is "one of the oldest and most important generators of tourism" (Thorburn, 1986), and it retains its central role in the European tourism industry to this day. According to the European Union, "tourism, and especially cultural tourism in a broader sense, deserve priority attention" as policy areas (Bernadini, 1992). Cultural tourism has become recognized as an important agent of economic and social change in Europe. Politicians now refer to cultural heritage as "Italy's General Motors" (Fanelli, 1993) or as "the oil industry of France" (Mosser, 1994).

The dramatic metaphors attached to the rapid growth of tourism and cultural consumption are appropriate. The cultural and tourist industries appear to be advancing in all European nations and regions, occupying the spaces vacated by manufacturing industry, and claiming strategic city centre locations (Corijn and Mommaas, 1995). Cultural consumption has grown, and tourism is an increasingly important form of cultural consumption, encouraged and funded by local, national and supranational bodies.

The cultural tourism market in Europe is therefore becoming increasingly competitive. A growing number of cities and regions in the European Union are basing their tourism development strategies on the promotion of cultural heritage, and the number of cultural attractions is growing rapidly. Traditional cultural attractions such as museums and galleries are having to reassess their role as the pressure to generate visitor income intensifies, and the need to compete with a new generation of commercial tourist attractions grows. The opening up of new cultural tourism destinations in Eastern and Central Europe will add to the growing supply of distractions for the European cultural tourist in future. On the global stage, Europe has long enjoyed a dominant position in international tourism and the cultural industries. However, just as manufacturers are facing growing global competition, so Europe can no longer be complacent about its leading position in the cultural tourism market. Europe is losing market share in the global tourism market as a whole (Brent-Ritchie, 1993), and it is also facing growing competition in the sphere of cultural production and consumption.

The culture and tourism industries are now growing fastest in those areas which used to be on the margins of global production. A growing number of tourists are forsaking the Mediterranean beaches for the palm-fringed delights of Asia and the Caribbean. The manufacture of CDs and much other cultural software is now dominated by East Asia.

Countries in these former peripheral regions are also beginning to compete with Europe in traditional 'high culture' markets. Examples include the moves by Singapore to literally 'buy into' the international art auctions market, and the creation by the Taiwanese government of a \$365 million cultural foundation to underpin the island's fast growing art market (Robertson, 1993).

There is no doubt that culture is an important tourism resource in Europe, and that maintaining the competitiveness of the European tourism product is vital. Tourism and culture have always been closely linked in Europe. Europe has always been an important destination for those attracted by its rich cultural and historic legacy. Roman 'cultural tourists', for example, steeped themselves in the culture of civilizations more ancient than their own, such as Greece and Egypt (Feifer, 1985). Subsequent medieval

tourists were mostly pilgrims, and laid the foundations for some of the modern 'cultural itineraries', such as the pilgrim route to Santiago de Compostella in northern Spain.

The origin of the word 'tourism' is usually attributed to the Grand Tour, which originated in Britain in the 17th century (Hibbert, 1969, Feifer, 1985). Towner (1985) defined the Grand Tour as: "A tour of certain cities and places in western Europe undertaken primarily, but not exclusively for education and pleasure".

Most of the early Grand Tourists were aristocrats for whom a trip to continental Europe was often a coda to a classical education. Usually in the company of a tutor, they would spend two or three years travelling through France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, often visiting sites connected with classical culture. The cities of Italy in particular were considered the 'prize' to be won by Grand Tourists struggling over the Alps.

At the same time as a growing number of Grand Tourists were collecting cultural experiences across Europe, cultural artifacts from all corners of the globe were being gathered together and organized for public consumption in the first museums. The advent of museums in Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries was the most physical manifestation of the bourgeois idea of the universality of culture. Museums were organized to demonstrate the progress of human artistic and industrial achievement, the pinnacle of which was represented by the products of Modernity (Horne, 1984).

Museums were not the only markers of progress. Tourists in 19th century Paris were also shown through factories and the sewer system (MacCannell, 1976). This early form of industrial tourism was supposed to underline faith in progress, in sharp contrast to the growth of industrial tourism in the 1980s, which was arguably designed to cash in on nostalgia for past industrial achievement (Shaw, 1991). As the 'Project of the Museum' took hold in Europe, however, the placing of objects in museum displays became important signifiers of their cultural significance, and the museum increasingly became the centre of cultural tourism endeavour.

The availability of museums, exhibitions and other cultural manifestations for public consumption helped to boost tourism. The expanding middle class market for travel during the 19th century prompted pioneers such as Thomas Cook to offer the first 'package tours' to European destinations such as Italy and Greece in the 1860s. The focus of most of Cook's early packages was cultural, enabling his predominantly middle class clients to exercise "their absurd pretensions to be in places abroad that they have never dreamed of aspiring at home" (Swinglehurst, 1982), rubbing shoulders with the aristocratic remnants of the Grand Tour.

Cultural motives for travel therefore continued to be relatively important in European tourism up until the first world war. During the inter-war years, however, there was a significant growth in domestic tourism in northern European countries, stimulated by the advent of paid holidays. Much of this tourism was based on seaside resorts or rural destinations, and was designed to provide rest and relaxation in the short respite then allowed from work. Before the Second World War, tourism was still basically a privilege for a minority. In the UK, for example, only 30% of the population took an annual holiday at all in the 1930s.

After the war, a long period of unbroken economic growth in Europe stimulated a consumer boom, which in turn led to greater and more varied tourism consumption. Initially, international tourism flows in Europe were predominantly from north to south, with tourists from the relatively prosperous countries in north west Europe seeking the cheap sun on Mediterranean beaches. The appearance of mass international tourism in Europe during the 1960s was based largely on standardized products offered by tour operators based in northern Europe. There was little consideration of culture in these products, except for the idealized national cultures which many tourists were experiencing for the first time.

The idea of creating packages with culture as a central element was largely confined to the Germanic markets, where a number of specialist 'study tourism' operators appeared during the 1960s (Roth and Langemeyer). In terms of size, however, these cultural tourism operators remained dwarfed by the sun, sea and sand production giants.

As the European tourist market matured in the 1970s and 1980s, however, it began to be increasingly segmented into different niche markets. Tourism products were segmented by time (winter sun holidays) by user group (youth, senior citizens), by destination (tour operators specializing in individual countries or regions) and by travel motivation (e.g. activity holidays). For the mass market operators, culture was something inherent in the product, rather than a niche market in itself. Increasing market segmentation did, however, create new opportunities for specialist cultural tourism operators.

By the late 1970s, tourism had grown into a major global industry, and increasing attention was being paid to both the positive and negative consequences of tourism development (Mathieson and Wall, 1982). Tourism policy began to be taken more seriously, as Governments recognized the income and job creation potential of tourism, and also became concerned about the possible adverse impacts of mass tourism on culture and the environment. Individual tourists, tired of fighting for increasingly scarce space on Mediterranean beaches, began to seek less crowded alternatives, often with cultural attractions in place of sun and sand. The convergence of tourist demand for more cultural short breaks, and the need for cities to replace lost manufacturing jobs created a 'new' market in urban short break holidays in Europe, many of which were based on cultural attractions (Law, 1993).

Over the years tourism consumption patterns have changed dramatically. Tourism has developed from an elite pursuit to a basic leisure need of the masses, and arguably the world's biggest source of employment. At the same time, consumption of all forms of culture has expanded, as the democratization of culture and the growth of the middle class have opened up 'high' culture to a wider audience. As tourism and cultural consumption have grown, so the relationship between tourism and culture has also been transformed.

Until relatively recently, the development of tourism and culture was relatively independent. The number of 'cultural tourists' was small, and tourist consumption of cultural facilities during their travels tended to be incidental to the main function of cultural institutions of serving the needs of the local population. Cultural institutions also tended to be elitist in outlook, and saw visitors as an unwanted diversion from their main job of conserving or producing cultural goods. Today, however, museums and other cultural institutions are throwing open their doors to

visitors and actively competing with other leisure attractions for their custom and expenditure. An examination of the forces shaping cultural provision will help to identify the reasons for this change.

Just as tourism was originally the preserve of the wealthy, so cultural production was historically controlled by and aimed at the elite. The 20th century, however, has witnessed a dramatic growth in the variety and availability of cultural products, which Toffler (1964) dubbed the 'cultural explosion'. The change from private amusement to public spectacle in cultural consumption can best be illustrated through the development of the museum in Europe.

Before the late eighteenth century, collections of art and other cultural products were basically the private property of princes and nobles (Negrin, 1993). As a result of the French Revolution, however, art collections belonging to the royal family and the church were confiscated. The conquests of Napoleon later ensured that works from royal collections throughout Europe joined the French works already assembled in the Louvre, the first national museum in Europe. The Louvre was soon emulated by other national museums such as the Prado in Madrid and the Altes in Berlin. Whereas private collections were based largely on the personal taste of the owner, these new public museums were designed to provide comprehensive collections spanning all epochs and cultures. "Underlying this comprehensive assemblage of cultural artifacts was the notion of world culture. European culture in the nineteenth century saw itself as a universal culture, valid for all times and peoples" (Negrin, 1993).

This modernist concept of the expanded relevance of the past, and the desire to assemble collections which underlined the inevitable progress of history towards the superiority of the present (Horne, 1984) was responsible for the first wave of expansion in cultural production.

In the UK, the 1845 Museums of Art in Corporate Towns Act gave an initial impetus to the establishment of local museums (Shaw, 1991). Much of the early expansion of cultural provision in urban areas was due to philanthropic donations by wealthy industrialists or fundraising by cultural associations (Bever, 1993). However, the long-term support of the new cultural institutions in most cases quickly devolved to the state. The early growth of cultural policy based on public museums, galleries and libraries usually had an educational function, aimed at introducing high culture to the masses.

Changing patterns of leisure time availability also shaped views on how that time should be spent. In the 19th century, 'free time' among the working classes was viewed as a potential threat to social stability. Various attempts were therefore made to ensure that the working class used their time in constructive ways. The promotion of 'rational recreation' was seen as a weapon against idleness "one of the central metaphors of moral degeneration in a bourgeois society" (Rojek, 1993) in the 19th century. Idleness was attacked mainly through voluntary sector initiatives, such as the Lord's Day Observance Society (1831), which Rojek argues helped to organize leisure according to middle class values. One of these values was the importance of 'high' culture, as embodied in the Art to the Poor scheme operated in London's East End in the 1880s.

Such initiatives helped to solidify distinctions between 'high' culture, which was considered an acceptable use of leisure time for the masses, and 'popular' culture, unacceptable manifestations of which were often suppressed (Corijn and Mommaas, 1995). Efforts to democratize high culture and promote access for the working class were founded in the belief that exposure to suitable forms of high culture would help to educate the masses, and help to create a feeling of national identity and solidarity. The educational role of culture was largely responsible for the significant increases in cultural funding which occurred in many European states after the Second World War.

A second wave of expanded cultural production was created from the 1960s onwards through the recycling and recombination of cultural forms which arguably marked the transition from modernity to postmodernity. Postmodernity not only recycled the past, it also expanded the range of time periods which were considered to form part of our historic heritage. As David Lowenthal (1985) has observed, whereas it was "formerly confined in time and space, nostalgia today engulfs the whole past", so that 1930s Art Deco or 1950s juke-boxes can be considered as part of the 'heritage', whereas museums had formerly looked towards the Renaissance or antiquity for their historic justification (Walsh, 1991). In addition to the burgeoning cultural production stimulated by recycling the past and historicizing the recent past, postmodernism has also been marked by the emergence of new interest groups and specialized markets. Museums can therefore abandon the modernist project of universality, in favour of market segmentation and themeing.

The result has been a second 'museums boom' in Europe. Even though the first expansion of museum supply in the second half of the nineteenth century was fairly rapid, the museums boom of the last 25 years produced an unprecedented increase in museum supply from an already high base. This trend was present throughout Europe from the 1970s to the present. Growth in museum supply has been evident in all areas of Europe, but seems to have started slightly earlier in north-western Europe. Museum growth was also encouraged by Communist regimes in Eastern Europe during the 1980s, although arguably with different motives from their western counterparts.

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