

Should Visitor Access to Sites Ever be Limited for Reasons of Conservation? If so, How Can Access and Conservation be Reconciled?

Introduction

Tourism occurs when people travel away from their usual environment to destinations in either the same country or abroad, for a period of not less than twenty-four hours and no more than one consecutive year. The present desire to travel is linked to leisure, business, sports, events, health, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), culture and other activities.

Industrialisation, population growth and technological development caused a boom in the tourism industry after the Second World War. The rapid development of technology changed the nature of cultural exchanges: mass communications, which began with newspapers or radio, has seen the advent and development of television and the Internet. Similarly, travel has become more accessible through cheaper, faster and more efficient means of transportation. Initially, tourism meant, "beach holiday" or "leisure holiday". People vacationed solely to escape from work related pressures, however, in the last few decades; the concept of tourism has become more diverse with the introduction of new ideas and new formats. This is partly due to the longer holiday periods and the increase in the public's desire to travel. The change in the nature of tourism has led tourism professionals to alter their marketing approach and planning schemes to meet this increase in demand.

"New tourism" incorporates issues of conservation, ecology, pollution, human rights and cultural identity. This has led professionals to consider sustainable tourism, alternative tourism, mass tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism (Mowforth 1998: 320).

ICOMOS adopted a definition for cultural tourism at its 12th General Assembly, held in Mexico in October 1999, under the title of International Cultural Tourism Charter whereby cultural tourism is defined as:

"Heritage is a broad concept and includes the natural as well as the cultural environment. It comprises landscapes; historic places sites and built environments as well as biodiversity, collections, past and continuing cultural

practices, knowledge and living experiences. It records and expresses the long processes of historic development, forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities and is an integral part of modern life. It is a dynamic reference point and positive instrument for growth and change. The particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community is irreplaceable and an important foundation, both now and into the future.

At a time of increasing globalisation, the protection, conservation, interpretation and presentation of the heritage and the cultural diversity of any particular place or region is an important challenge for people everywhere. However, management of that heritage, within the framework of international recognised and appropriately applied standards, is usually the responsibility of a particular community or custodian group.

A primary objective for managing heritage is to communicate its significance and the need for its conservation to its host community and to visitors". (ICOMOS, (October 1999), International Cultural Tourism Charter, Adopted by ICOMOS at the 12th General Assembly, Mexico).

In this report, I shall discuss how cultural heritage sites have been transformed into a commodity sold to visitors, and how can archaeological researchers, conservators and tourism promoters reconcile between conservation and visitor accessibility hence fulfilling the public's needs, generating income and preserving the cultural heritage for future generations.

Reasons and Threats of Cultural Tourism

The development of cultural tourism is due to a number of factors; the first of which is the increase of migration to the developed world. This resulted in the formation of multinational societies. People and governments became inclined to promote and protect tourism rooted in cultural identity. Hence cultural tourism was deemed not only economically beneficial but also socially desirable. This led

tourism professionals to develop and market cultural tourist destinations for mass tourism causing threats to them.

Natural disasters, pollution, looting urban development and the cultural tourism boom has led to a deficiency, depletion or destruction of cultural tourist destinations, otherwise known as "exhaustion". This exhaustion can be attributed to the large numbers of tourists visiting sites at the same time, fluctuations in the tourist area life cycles and the increased competition among various tourist destinations. Thus, well-studied planning, development and management policies are essential elements in the new understanding of tourism; sustainability has become an issue of great concern. Sustainability "implies a state of equilibrium in which the activities of the human population coexist in broad harmony with their natural, social and cultural environments" (Middleton and Hawkins 1998: 274; Cleere 2001: 1-11).

In order to develop a cultural heritage site for tourism purposes, recognition of the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats of a site on a short and long-term basis is needed. Then, identification, classification, analysis and monitoring of each of the above follows by providing a management plan that consists of aspects of sustaining the site, according to demand, expectations and international standards of cultural tourism.

Definition of Conservation

Conservation implies all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance. It includes maintenance and may according to circumstances include preservation, restoration, reconstruction and adaptation and will be commonly a combination of more than one of these (Article 1, *The Burra Charter*, 1988).

Moreover, conservation consists of two main principles. The first is that the aim of conservation is to retain the cultural significance of a place and must include provision for its security, its maintenance and its future. (Article 2, *The Burra Charter*, 1988) The second principle is that conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric and should involve the least possible physical intervention. It should not distort the evidence provided by the fabric. (Article 3, *The Burra Charter*, 1988).

What's more, conservation has become an essential factor in the educational value of presenting the site to the public. When monuments and sites are in a poor condition, they become meaningless to visitors. Conservation of these monuments contributes to interpretation and adds value to the site through transformation, because it makes a story out of the site. When visitors visit sites, they are not primarily looking for scientific and historical facts, instead they want to enjoy their time, feel safe and informally be educated through perception. But there comes the problem of authenticity. There should always be a balance between authenticity and visitors accepting different

interpretive methods, such as living history, traditional interpretive methods, because once the public understands the value and significance of the site or resource through interpretation, then understanding leads to appreciation, thus leading to protection (Tilden 1977).

Significance and Value of Conservation

Associated with the concept of conservation, preservation and development of a cultural heritage site comes the value and significance concept. These values can be subdivided into the following:

Management Value: This value lies in implementing and monitoring management concepts in order to preserve and protect the site and educate the public through well-developed interpretive techniques.

Identity Value: Due to the advent of multinational societies people's attitude towards nostalgia and sense of belonging increased. Hence, cultural heritage sites are reinforced by having a cultural identity value (Cooper *et al.* 1995: 48).

Scientific and Historical Value: Although many cultural heritage sites of the world have started undertaking archaeological and other scientific research, still many have great potential in further archaeological research and other fields of study. This in return, contributes to further understanding of the heritage, culture and history of the site, therefore, leading to appreciation followed by protection.

Rarity Value: In general, archaeological sites that have a vast amount of unique material culture and architectural remains are rare. Due to this, the UNESCO appointed the rarity value.

Aesthetic Value: This value lies in the harmony of the set-up of the site with the natural environment. This value is important because in order to experience it, overcrowding of visitors must be avoided.

Socio-economic Value: Development of archaeological sites for visitation usually occurs within an existing socio-economic structure. To promote a site for visitation, local support is vital. To do so, the engagement of locals in the product through socio-economic benefits is the tool. Such benefits are through employment of the locals as tour guides, upkeep staff and handicrafts people, and in food and beverage selling. If the locals don't benefit from the product they will rebel against it and cause problems.

Enhancement of Cultural Heritage Sites by Using Them as a Product

International trends towards cultural heritage changed in recent years. This is due to the public's need for the sense

of belonging or nostalgia (Cooper *et al.* 1995), because the post-modern world generated multinational societies. Moreover, no product is marketed unless there is an economical profit out of it. This is the basic idea of how cultural tourism emerged. It includes marketing the heritage attraction for the public to satisfy both cultural tourism promoters and the public, and improvement of the quality of life of the locals through benefiting socio – economically on a local scale and then on a national scale.

Once a site is considered as a product or business, it is important to identify the demand and supply of the attraction. The reason for this is that management and consumption of a site is publicly financed (Herbert 1995: 170). This is because the cultural heritage resource goes under some form of transformation to add value to it, through management policies of all kinds and is transformed to a product through all kinds of interpretation.

But there comes the conflict between specialists, conservators and the tourism sector. The first group wants to protect the site and the second wants to sell it and make a profit out of it, so how does equilibrium between the two happen? It happens through several ways. It is not enough to only put forward a management plan, but it essential to implement each aspect of it accurately, and monitor it through out the months let alone the years. It is important to change the attitude of both the local visitors and tourists towards the cultural heritage resource and that takes a long time. The second point is that once the public benefits economically out of cultural heritage product; they will protect and promote it. Finally, the third aspect is putting forward a short and long-term marketing policy according to seasons and to the condition of the site that is properly carried out, in order to sustain the natural and socio-cultural resource, generate income to the site, and attract different kinds of visitors, such as funding bodies or foreign expeditions (Middleton and Hawkins 1998; Turnbridge and Ashworth 1996).

Another main important factor in implementing a management plan, is the management of visitors to a certain site due of mass tourism occurring from the amount of marketing and word of mouth. It is not only important to attract people to a site, but it is more important to maximize return visitation and sustainability and minimize complaints, although it is impossible to please everybody.

Further, there are other long and short-term strategies that need to be carried out by site managers. These strategies can be divided into two categories. The first includes direct strategies and the second indirect strategies. Direct strategies consist of the control of visitors by the limit of use of the areas through reservation, ticket pricing, opening hours to the visitors duration of the visit, targeted advertising, providing more information about the site in low tourism seasons and the control of guards and guides and the system of fines for transgressions.

On the other hand, indirect strategies consist of zoning of the area, which consists of planning land use, conservation and maintenance, separation of visitors use through pathways and routes, the increase and restriction of access routes, accommodation and camping areas and finally car parking places. Moreover, it is essential to signpost alternative attractions to reduce the impact and spread the facilities in the area. All of the above is essential to do in order to reduce negative impacts and frustration of visitors to sites, thus reducing complaints, increasing enjoyment and insuring good word of mouth, and return visitation (Stanley-Price 2000). Further, providing littering boxes and upkeep staff on site, will reduce the amount of damage that might occur if they weren't available.

When talking about visitor management it is also essential to know what are visitor's needs on a site. No matter how the site looks like, how spectacular is the landscape, if a visitor was frustrated reaching the site or queuing for a long time, it will affect his/her impression about the site. It is vital to give a visitor a good first impression about the site. Moreover, the training and availability of staff is also important for visitors because they contribute in the familiarization and in creating a comfortable and safe atmosphere for the visitors. Hence, the quality of staff will reflect the quality of the cultural heritage resource. Therefore, the availability of staff on site, updated about events and information, their friendliness and willingness to help, will insure enjoyment for the public, thus, leading to reduced frustration and boredom, less vandalism, reduction of conservation and upkeep, increased security, and proper answering of any inquiries, they contribute in the interpretation of the site. In high seasons of visitation, it is important to have backup staff for managing visitors. These can be volunteers or paid on a daily basis to insure the safety of both the visitors on site and the site itself. Furthermore, training of staff for handling special needs visitors and dealing with emergencies is part of both a management plan and the management of visitors.

In addition to the above, the availability of informative material, such as printed materials, audiovisuals, or otherwise, is essential and should always be updated, authentic, and according to visitors' needs. What's more, when visitors come to a site they are attracted to services, events, functions and so on, hence the site manager needs to diversify income resources by providing services that please the visitors according to their expectations, benefit socio-economically and sustaining the resource. For example, providing advanced and developed audiovisuals, a café, and refreshment booths at different positions on site, different kinds of souvenirs, children's gadgets, and special and appealing events is essential. Moreover, pricing entrance tickets should be studied carefully and provide different pricing according to age and seasons. By doing

this, revenue to the site is guaranteed for its maintenance and upkeep and can contribute in financing conservation projects in the future (Feilden Bernard and Jokilehto 1998; Herbert 1995; Prentice 1993; Stanley-Price 2000; Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996).

The Dynamic Interaction Between Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Since tourism has become extensively based on cultural heritage in the last few decades, international organisation recognise a great interaction between the two. One of these organisations is ICOMOS where the following is what they agreed upon at its 12th General Assembly, held in Mexico in October 1999, under the title of International Cultural Tourism Charter, concerned about the dynamic interaction between tourism and cultural heritage:

“The natural and cultural heritage, diversities and living cultures are major tourism attractions. Extensive or poorly managed tourism and tourism related development can threaten their physical nature, integrity and significant characteristics. The ecological setting, culture and lifestyles of host communities may also be degraded, along with visitor’s experience of the place.

Tourism should bring benefits to host communities and provide an important means and motivation for them to care and maintain their heritage and cultural practices. The involvement and co-operation of local and/or indigenous community representatives, conservationists, tourism operators, property owners, policy makers, those preparing national development plans and site managers is necessary to achieve a sustainable tourism industry and enhance the protection of the heritage resources for future generations”. (ICOMOS, (October 1999), International Cultural Tourism Charter, Adopted by ICOMOS at the 12th General Assembly, Mexico).

Conclusion

It can be said that conservation and visitor accessibility supplement each other according to the aims and motivations behind developing cultural heritage sites whether socio-economical, socio-political or for protecting and sustaining the heritage for the coming generations. Unless there is international and national management policies and plans that are carried out in full accuracy and monitored, there will always be a conflict between specialists and the tourism sector, thus losing sites of value not only on a national level but also on an international level.

The most important is to change the attitude of the public — starting with locals, visitors and tourists — and insuring benefits for them out of the cultural heritage resource, whether economical, informal education and improvement of the quality of their lives, then one will have their support, since neither conservation can do without visitors nor can visitors do without conservation. Both

natural and cultural conservation contribute in interpretation of cultural heritage sites, thus one understands the site leading to appreciation of it leading to its protection which in turn leads to protection.

Cultural heritage in general is a new concept world-wide. It will take time to change the approach towards preserving and protecting sites, but comparing to has been done both on an international and national scale, the approach is changing slowly but surely. A very good example is what happened with environmental issues and sciences. Several decades ago, and as technology, development and industrialization increased, people all over the world were not aware of what are the consequences of ignoring the environment. When they realized what might occur they introduced a large campaign of how to protect it, thus the new generations were very aware of the issue, got interested and even specialized in different field related to the topic. Still cultural heritage, awareness and education are at the beginning, because cultural issues were not as important and it was only recently that they started to tackle these issues. In the years to come, more and different specialties of cultural heritage issues will emerge that no one would have thought of in our time.

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