

Cultural Tourism and Environment: The Example of the Maritime Museum of Litochoro in Greece

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Abstract

This paper investigates the extent to which cultural tourism, especially in local level, enhances the social and economic development of a place. For this purpose, in the introduction the terms of culture and tourism are defined, so that the connection between them becomes evident. The article consists of two parts. In the first, which constitutes the theoretical base, cultural tourism and its economic, social and cultural impact on local societies are analyzed, based on bibliographical review. In the second part, by focusing on cultural tourism in Greek reality, the positive contribution of the Maritime Museum of Litochoro (Greece), as a case study, in the multilateral development of the area is demonstrated through original research. Finally, this phenomenon is evaluated and speculations for further research arise.

Keywords: cultural heritage, environment, tourism, museum, sustainable development

Introduction

The word tourism is of English origin, as it derives from the verb “to tour”, which means an extended journey, usually taken for pleasure, visiting places of interest along the route. Today, it signifies the movement of people from an area to another for recreational purpose and also in order to visit historic places and sights. Moreover, the term means the ensemble of technical, economical as well as educational issues that this movement generates (Paraskevaïdis, 1960). Generally, it constitutes a global socio-cultural phenomenon, which is based on the human need for recreation, contact with nature and acquaintance with foreign places and cultures.

Culture can be defined as a vivid combination of the creative activities of people and societies in the past and also in the present and future (Coccosis & Nijkamp, 1995), which define the distinctive characteristics of every person and every place and which, throughout the centuries, created a system of values and traditions of material as well as spoken nature. Culture constitutes the environment, in which the spiritual life of people was shaped, nurtured and evolved, so that a plethora of wishes were created and satisfied, including the quest for something new, different from everyday life. These desires are one of the basic reasons for the generation and the development of tourism, which can be regarded as an effective tool of cultural exchange, a vital link between humankind and its legacy. In essence, culture is a historic phenomenon. Every community has its own culture, which evolves concurrently with the development of social production. Tourism and culture constitute complex interdependent meanings (Pavlogeorgatos & Konstantoglou, 2004).

In the first part of this paper the complex term cultural tourism will be examined and the consequences it induces upon the life of a place will be mentioned. We will focus on the impact of this phenomenon in local societies by analyzing it in an economical as well as a social and cultural context. In the second part the positive contribution of a local museum in the development of a region will be designated through an original case study and more specifically the case of the Litochoro Maritime Museum in Northern Greece.

First Part

Cultural Tourism: Definition of the Term

Cultural tourism constitutes the oldest form of tourism. Its significance is of diachronic significance in European cultural values and its resonance is increasing between social structures and castes (Paschalidis, 2002). It constitutes a special kind of tourism, which comprises a plethora of activities, such as traditional architecture, traditional arts and crafts and their products, traditional lifestyle and activities and even religious tourism (Pavlogeorgatos & Konstantoglou, 2004).

At times, various definitions have been attributed to the term, including one that implies that cultural tourism defines the need to seek the way of life of people in the present and in the past as well (Kennedy, 2002) or that cultural tourism comprises visits in historic and archaeological sites or the attendance of local festivals, dance performances and rituals (Bescoulides et al., 2002). According to MakIntosh and Goeldner (2000) every kind of travelling, during which one can learn about the history, the cultural heritage, the contemporary manifestations of life and thinking can be characterized as cultural tourism. The World Tourism Organization (1985) defines cultural tourism as the movement of people, especially for cultural purposes, such as educational wanderings, artistic and cultural actions, travelling for festivals and other events, visits to archaeological sites and monuments, journeys in order to observe the natural environment, traditional arts and crafts or pilgrimage to holy locations.

In the decades of 1980 and 1990 the development and designation of tourism as the most evolving industry and as the most significant generator of work places evoked socio-economic and cultural trends of a wide scale, along which the following can be highlighted: a) the democratization of tourism and cultural consumption, since they are no longer considered as privileges of a limited elite and b) the gradual expansion of the term cultural heritage, in order to enclose not only the high, but also the lower culture, the material as well as spiritual civilization, the natural along with the human environment. In our days, this encloses pop music, cinema, advertisement, every kind of object or artifact that was in use until the recent past, buildings, public and natural spaces that are connected to the history and identity of a place or a country (Pashalidis, 2002).

In a universal level, tourism shows increasing tendencies both in quantitative as well as qualitative level, through the appearance of its new forms, and, as a result, it transforms into a differentiated, varied and complex phenomenon. Even if mass tourism remains the main form of tourism in an international level, new forms of tourism regarding culture, environment, education, health or sports have started to evolve. In general, a tendency of the European consumers of tourism can be detected towards recreation through activities, even of cultural content, in contradiction to the classical touristic model of the sun and the beach (Pavlogeorgatos & Konstantoglou, 2004). Currently, a major part of the touristic flow combines holidays and entertainment with cultural actions, like visits to archaeological sites or museums. The research of Enright and Newton (2004) investigates, among others, the sorts of entertainment that an area with cultural interest can offer, in order to be appealing to the tourists. Cultural tourism is hence acknowledged as a new market in the tourism industry, which reflects an alteration in the needs of the contemporary tourist, even if it had always existed through all its other forms (Richards, 2001).

Impact of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism, besides its socio-cultural dimension, has acquired also an economic aspect (Cengiz, Eryilmaz & Eryilmaz 2006). It can become significantly beneficial for the society of the host tourist attraction as well as for the tourist, as it generates income for this place that can support and maintain cultural resources, which would have been destructed under other circumstances. However, it is a fact that cultural tourists assume that they have a high educative level, are worldly and a form of upgraded tourist in general. Besides, it can be said that each tourist moves about a certain culture, which closely relates to privileges, broadened pathways, tourist agents etc.(Pavlogeorgatos & Konstantoglou, 2004).

Cultural tourism can become an instrument for the exploitation of the cultural tradition and production of a place, as it has happened in many cities (Venice, Florence and Amsterdam) and that can be achieved by the collaboration of the economic, entrepreneurial and commercial workforce, with the cultural and artistic manpower of an area through common goals and visions. Every place is eligible to create a characteristic touristic product by exploiting its cultural tradition and also its current artistic production, the human resources of every age and gender, operatives and scientists, which will engage the local economy in its management and exploitation with immediate as well as long-range benefits that will return and refuel the local economy (Zounis, 2012). More specifically, the creation of a cultural product that can be exploited for touristic aims can comprise the arts and everything that is part of the specific historic memory and the experience of a place, such as its history (archaeological, social, economic), artistic traditions and actions that promote the local cultural dynamic, archaeological sites and architectural buildings of cultural heritage, the natural environment, topography, urban development and public spaces. Moreover, the cultural traditions of all residents of a society (native and immigrants), traditional and modern customary and social events and celebrations, as well as museums, libraries, fashion and sport.

The cultural production and activity that a place can show and advertise can indicatively consist of the creation of multidimensional cultural centers, constructed in a way to display and to provide education in various forms of art, from traditional (woodcarving, ceramic art, tapestry) and institutionalized (music, dance, painting, theatre) to contemporary audiovisual and graphic arts (photography, video, multimedia, industrial design etc.). Also the opening of shopping centers for the display and the sale of traditional products and the establishment of local celebrations and festivities that designate the history and the cultural activity of the local society, which are capable to attract also foreign visitors-tourists. Another parameter is the designation of the local cultural legacy by the exploitation and regeneration of buildings related to the history and the cultural experiences of its inhabitants and their conversion into cultural spaces (old factories, warehouses etc.) and even creation of local museums. The upgrade of the urban environment with the creation of cultural infrastructure (parks, squares, lighting, outdoor sculptures etc.) with parallel information of the citizens about the local environmental issues (traffic, contamination, pollution etc.), which aims at their encouragement in order to participate in their confrontation constitutes another aspect, along with the exercise of cultural policy in terms of organizing cultural events for the attraction of a great number of visitors, which will address to a wider public and also to the non-public, such as children, elderly people, people with disabilities, immigrants etc. (Scaltsa, 2007).

The economic impact of the above actions for a local society is manifold, as these practices can contribute to the creation of small and medium scale enterprises, the enhancement of youth entrepreneurship and the consequent increase of employment. Moreover, the local environment can be upgraded, the local society can be developed and the local production can be further reinforced and also become prominent in the context of globalization. Furthermore, since tourists will be attracted throughout the year, the seasonality of the cultural product will be ceased and, finally, this development will, eventually, increase land and property prices in the area (Cengiz, Eryilmaz&Eryilmaz, 2006).

Apart from the economic impact, there are also socio-cultural benefits for the local communities. Some of the most important for the place are the enhancement of the area's and the local community's prestige and reinforcement of the psychology and education of the social groups, the cultivation of the feeling of pride for the place, encouragement of the creation of relationship between society and cultural environment and acquirement of new experiences and acquaintance with different cultures. We should also mention the promotion of cultural consciousness, the improvement of the self-image, self-esteem, quality of life and social cohesion of the local community, integration of wider public into the cultural actions, promotion of cultural exchanges with other places and, lastly, the creation of new identity for the place (Scaltsa, 2007;Cengiz, Eryilmaz & Eryilmaz, 2006)

The cooperation between the appropriate authorities and the local community can render the aforementioned feasible. Thus, it can help avoiding possible unfavorable consequences from the mass inflow of tourists, such as commercial exploitation, temporary employment, and disturbance of social life, alteration of the authenticity of local traditions and behaviors as well as unfortunate ramifications for the environment. This probability can, however, be avoided by bearing in mind the successful examples of implementation of such programs in cities like Toronto, Boston, Glasgow, Manchester, Bilbao etc. Consequently, every place can adjust its cultural policy in order to achieve positive results for local tourism.

Second Part

Cultural Tourism in Greece

Greece is regarded worldwide as the global birthplace of culture and therefore constitutes one of the most important destinations in the Mediterranean. Travels to Greece for touristic reason date from the 2nd century A.D., continued through all historic periods, in the Hellenistic, Roman and Ottoman eras until the present times (Paschalidis, 2002). Despite its long history, tourism in Greece has become a mass phenomenon just after World War II, during the decade of the 1950s (Coccosis &Tsartas, 2001) with the increase of paying balance as a consequence. Among the plethora of scientific articles and academic papers concerning Greek tourism, cultural heritage is highlighted as the comparative advantage of the Greek touristic industry. Since this legacy, along with the natural environment are mostly inherited, a significant space remains for qualitative improvement and for the creation of infrastructure (Dogani, 2009). Museums as visitors' attraction poles constitute part of that cultural industry, the importance of which follows an upward direction. Within this context, new phenomena of the consumption of cultural heritage have evolved, encompassing cultural tourism, in relation not only to museum, archaeological sites or monument visits, but also to the following of the elements that are part of the vivid cultural production (traditional dances, festivals etc.) (Pavlogeorgatos&Konstantoglou,2004).

Local museums as cultural institutions can contribute in the evolution of a place, since local development as a whole presupposes the amelioration of the social and cultural conditions in a society, along with its economic improvement, factors that are closely related to the exploitation of the indigenous manpower, whether that concerns human or natural resources or even the tradition of one place. As one can deduce from their etymology, local museums mostly appeal to people, who reside within the limit of a certain area regarding its life and culture. As Angoulatou-Retsila states (1984: 198) “*its establishment preserves testimonials that comprise the special character of the geographical region and the human society that lived there, along with the activity it developed*”. Meanwhile, their value and support derives from the community. Every museum, as a place of designation and projection of the local culture and tradition and, also, as an agent with immediate participation in the cultural happenings, constitutes a significant part of the local cultural product (Dermitzaki, Doxanaki&Linardakis, 2009).

The Maritime Museum of Litochoro: Case Study

1. Historical Evidence, Establishment And Aims of the Museum

Excavation findings from the archaeological site of Dion in the region of Pieria (Greece) and from the river Vafyras testify the existence of harbor docks in the area of Litochoro since the Macedonian State. Moreover, there is no other historical reference to a place with organized commercial sailing in the gulf of Thermaikos, except Litochoro. The formation of a center armed resistance in the area during the early 17th century, after the recession of the naval activity during the Ottoman Empire, signaled the continuation of sailing as well as piracy from the nearby port of AgioiTheodoroi. Sailing held an important role at the revolution of Olympos in 1878, since there were ships from Litochoro the ones who transported women and children to the city of Thessaloniki. Therefore, local sailing had a significant role in maintaining the Greek identity in Thessaloniki and, along with the rest of the Greek sailing, established the Aegean as a Greek sea in public consciousness (Vlachopoulos, 2007).

The cultural development, preservation, designation and diffusion of this considerable naval cultural heritage activated a large group of local people to offer their knowledge, labor, artifacts and vision in the service of cultural development. Thus, in 2003 a union of legal validity consisting of friends of the maritime tradition of Litochoro and of the Greek nation was founded under the name of “Maritime Museum of Litochoro” (Letter towards the President of the Municipal Council of Litochoro 2003). Following that, a charter (no. 12/04 in 20/4/2004) was composed, which was validated from the Court of Katerini (the prefecture’s capital) and the Museum commenced its official operation as a non-physical institution of private law and nonprofit character (Certification of activity commencement, 2004).

According to the charter, the museum’s aims can be defined as the following:

- Collection, care, conservation and exhibition of every object that is characterized as an artifact and is related directly or implicitly to the maritime history and tradition of Litochoro and of the Greek nation in general.
- Cultivation of love for the sea amongst younger generations as a source of national grandeur.
- Information about the professional reassurance that the sector of sailing provides, whether this means working aboard or in dry land.
- Further development of Litochoro as a touristic attraction (Charter, 2003).

2. Activities of the Museum

A) EXHIBITONS

- 2002: first display of the museum’s collection of maritime artifacts
- 2004: permanent exhibition of the museum’s collection
- 2009: temporary exhibition entitled “Wooden authentic sailing boats models from antiquity until our days”, for which a catalogue was published (Mortaki, 2009)
- 2011: two temporary exhibitions: a) “Battleship Averof 1911-2011. 100 years of history from its launch until today” and b) “The history of cartography, 72 original naval maps from the 15th – 19th century from the collection of admiral Papalexopoulos”
- 2012: temporary exhibition for the celebration of the centennial (1912-2012) of the liberation of Macedonia and its integration in the Greek nation

B) CONFERENCES

- 2004: participation in the 5th National Conference of Maritime Museums in Piraeus
- 2006: participation in the 6th National Conference of Maritime Museums in Galaxidi

- 2008: organization of the 7th National Conference of Maritime Museums in Litochoro
- 2010: participation in the 8th National Conference of Maritime Museums in Argostoli, Cephalonia

C) EVENTS

- 2004-2012: celebration of Saint Nicolas (protector of seamen)
- 2004-2012: celebrations for the Naval Week with participation of other local institutions
- 2010: memorial for the local seamen who lost their lives in duty
- 2011: creation of the museum's website (www.nmlitochorou.gr)
- 2012: unveiling of a bronze statue of the "Seaman from Litochoro"
- 2012: unveiling of the marble busts of two local seamen, N. Vlachopoulos and M. Kofos, who navigated admiral Votsis in order to blow up the Turkish flagship "FetchiBoulent"
- participation in radio and television broadcasts
- publications in Greek as well as foreign press

D) EDUCATION

- 2004-2012: educational tours of students of primary, secondary and tertiary education, unions, associations, army and foreign representatives
- 2008-2010: participation in the environmental program "Helmepa Junior"
- 2011: publication of an informative leaflet

3. The Museum's Contribution in Local Development

As we can deduce from the above presentation of the museum's actions, its presence in the cultural life of the area is intense, while the participation of the local population is remarkable. According to the museum's archives, it receives 40-45 school visits annually. Moreover, a satisfactory number of tourists, who reside in the approximately twenty hotel units of the region, especially during the summer, and the participants in the four Olympus Marathons, which take place annually, where almost four hundred runners take part, visit the museum. We should mention that the museum has not yet received its official recognition from the Ministry of Culture and this fact restricts its projection, since it is not included in the official site of the Ministry. Furthermore, the museum's limited financial resources prevent it from hiring permanent staff and it therefore operates with volunteers, with limited visiting hours as a result. With the condition that these two limitations will be renounced, the results in the museum's visitor's numbers will become more spectacular.

Regarding the museum's geographical position, within a radius of ten kilometers visitors can also benefit from the archaeological site and the museum of Dion, where during the summer the Olympus Festival materializes, the Byzantine Museum of the Monastery of Saint Dionysius in Litochoro, the Alexandion Foundation, the Maritime Museum, the Municipal Art Gallery of Litochoro and many local folk life museums. In Litochoro also, the Museum of Mount Olympus Natural History is currently being constructed. This pluralistic cultural proposal enhances cultural tourism in the region (Garrett-Petts, 2005).

The museum visitor's archives during its eight-year operation and the commercial movement in the nearby stores, especially in the two folk-art shops that have opened opposite the museum, indicate definite increase in the numbers of tourists who visit Litochoro, mostly of Greek origin, between October and May (months that do not belong to the peak touristic season) and also in the weekends. Moreover, all age groups visit the museum and an increase to the educative level of the visitors is observed. This evidence derives from an ongoing research with a questionnaire, which is conducted by the author in the museum. The contribution of the Litochoro Maritime Museum in the exploitation of the region's cultural legacy is crucial and that can lead to further economic and cultural development (Kakourou-Chroni, 2012).

Conclusion

It is considered a fact that cultural tourism holds a significant position in the field of the cultural policy of every place and it can be justified by the numerous researches both in regional as well as international level, which confirm its importance in every place's development. From the exercise of such cultural policies multilateral benefits arise, which can be divided into economic, social and cultural. Museums, as institutes responsible for the preservation and conservation of our cultural heritage, constitute touristic attractions, as they can be characterized as a recreational leisure activity for the public, as well as powerful levers of sustainable development of a place. The relation of culture to sustainable development is a relatively recent field of research interest, which derived by the theories supported by modern museology.

Even the constant effort of the museums to become more accessible to different kinds of public falls into the concepts of development and local support. In this article, the contribution of a local museum, the Maritime Museum of Litchoro, in local development has been attempted through the brief presentation of its establishment, its purposes and the activity it has presented until now. The short historical context in the beginning of the second part operates as a justification for its establishment and, furthermore, reinforces its connection to the local history. Finally, it is important to highlight that the findings of the ongoing visitor research, which is conducted in the museum, not only will bring to light more information, but also will render the museum more competitive and engaging, given the fact that in the wider region other cultural spaces exist. In this way, the economy of the whole region will be toned, beyond the promotion of local history.

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