

TOURISM AND VALUES EXCHANGE

Paper by H.L. Bishop Mario Grech

'Island Fragility & Cultural Resources' - Heritage Malta's third annual national conference held at the Grand Hotel, Ghajnsielem Gozo, 3rd November 2006

The argument assigned to me this morning, “*Tourism and values exchange*” presents a very interesting and audacious challenge, for it offers us the possibility to explore the basics of this increasingly complex phenomenon with its various dimensions: political, economic, social, cultural, religious, ecological and aesthetic. Tourism is above all an affair of human beings and it has its proper deontology that cannot be neglected!

As Article 1 of the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* adopted by the 13th General Assembly of the World Tourism Organisation in 1999 states: “*The understanding and promotion of the **ethical values** common to humanity, with an attitude of tolerance and respect for the diversity of religious, philosophical and moral beliefs, are both the foundation and the consequence of responsible tourism.*”

Furthermore, in his message for the 27th World day of Tourism celebrated on the 27th September 2006, the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI underlined that “tourism can promote an authentic human and social development thanks to the growing opportunity it offers for a sharing of good, for rich cultural exchanges, for approaching natural and artistic beauty, for a comparison between different mentalities, traditions and religions. Travelling enriches the human spirit when one sets out to discover something new, when one is drawn to know the answers that others have given to the great questions of human existence. Especially in our time, tourism appeals to the human person who wants to grow in knowledge and to experience how men and women are the bearers of civilisations and of good.... In order for this to be possible, [the Popes continues], it is important to develop a persuasive program of education for the values of tourism in relation to and in defence of the persons, the communities and the natural and cultural goods of the hosts. Only thus will the *new marketplaces* of tourism and leisure become resources for true human enrichment for all”.

In my humble opinion, there are two ways how one could approach this issue: [a] by investigating the influence tourism is exerting on the value system of our people; and [b] what values all stakeholders in tourism development [national, regional and local administrations, enterprises, business associations, workers in the sector, non-governmental organizations and bodies of all kinds belonging to the tourism industry, host communities, the media and tourists themselves], should uphold so that this tourism industry, whether for leisure, business, culture, religion or health purposes, would continue to contribute to the development of the culture, environment, economy and society of both the generating and receiving countries.

Tourism and social change

That tourism has become a permanent feature of Maltese social change is indisputable. Anthony M. Abela, in his book *Transmitting values in European Malta* [1991] states that “a factor analysis of how Maltese perceive the impact of tourism on values extracted two factors. The first factor is concerned with the change in interpersonal relations and the second with socio-economic change. Accordingly the first factor has high loadings for change in the behaviour between the sexes, manners and courtesy, the way they dress and spend their leisure. The second factor has high loadings for the change in politics, food quality, higher prices and beliefs. Change in belief, leisure and behaviour have both a personal and a social component.” [p143] Abela adds that “the initial sudden and massive flow of tourism disrupted traditional life and is experienced as a cause of an alarming change of values by the middle aged Maltese. Since then, however, Malta has absorbed the initial shock and is presently striking a balance between its traditional and the in-coming foreign values. In this view, the young generation is learning to live with the new tourist culture. What might appear as an irreversible erosion of values and lasting social change is just a period effect of the early impact of tourism. Whatever the case might be, there seems to be no one-to-one relation between tourists volume, exposure to tourism and change in values” [p.144]. On a positive note, Abela concludes that “through their exchanges with tourists, they [the Maltese] reproduced their European tradition...Through a process of amalgamation, it developed its proper European tradition and identity” [p.151].

Sustainable tourism

In order to ensure that tourism is conducted in harmony with the attributes and traditions of the host countries and in respect of their laws, practices, behaviour and customs, documents and literature related with tourism, advocate “**sustainable tourism**” – “sustainable tourism is by no means incompatible with the growing liberalization of the conditions governing trade in services and under whose aegis the enterprises of this sector operate and that it is possible to reconcile in this sector economy and ecology, environment and development, openness to international trade and protection of social and cultural identities” [*Preamble to the GCET*]; and Article 3(1) of the same Charter reads: “All the stakeholders in tourism industry should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations”. Various values are entrenched in this Article! [*safeguarding the natural environment, economic growth, equity, present and future generations*].

Donavan Rypkem, in his article “*Cultural Change and sustainable Economic and Social Development*” [2005], says that the framework for “sustainable economic growth” or “sustainable development” includes environmental responsibility, economic responsibility and social and cultural responsibility. He identifies this important nexus: “for a community to be viable there needs to be a link between environmental responsibility and economic responsibility; for a community to be livable, there needs to be a link between environmental responsibility and social responsibility; for a community to be equitable there needs to be a link between economic responsibility and social responsibility”. This same author provides findings

from around the world to demonstrate how preserving cultural heritage provides environmental sustainability, social and cultural sustainability and economic sustainability. *Heritage tourism* is one of the five measurable of economic impacts of heritage conservation listed by this author and he goes on to point out that “when heritage tourism is done right, the biggest beneficiaries are not the visitors, but the local residents who experience a renewed appreciation for the pride in their local city and history.”

Tourism is one of the forceful agents in the process of globalisation. Globalisation, be it economical or cultural, means change – change at a pace that can be disruptive politically, economically, socially and psychologically. Adaptive reuse of the heritage resources can provide a sense of stability and continuity for people and societies that help counteract the disruption that economic globalisation can generate. Heritage conservation permits an island like Gozo to participate in the benefits of globalised economy while resisting the adverse impacts of a globalized culture.

Environmental responsibility also includes the protection of the natural environment. The sensitivity for Eco-tourism is emerging day by day. Countless tourists set out with the explicit goal of the discovery of nature to explore it even in its secluded corners. But as Pope John Paul II has pointed out in his message for the 23rd World Day of Tourism in 2002, “how can we deny that today humanity is experiencing an ecological emergency? A certain kind of savage tourism has contributed to and still contributes to this unwanted destruction by way of tourist installations built without any planning that respects their impact on the environment”. Pope John II spells out in clear terms: “Indeed the destruction of the environment highlights the consequences of decisions made by private interests that do not weigh the real conditions of human dignity. One finds relevant an unbridled desire to accumulate personal wealth that prevents people from hearing the alarming cry of poverty of entire people; in other words, the selfish quest for their own good fortune, induces people to disregard the legitimate expectations of present and future generations”.

Ethical tourism

However, in this last decade in the curriculum of tourism industry, another concept has been proposed: “**ethical tourism**” – a concept very relevant to the theme proposed for our consideration! Ethical tourism provides a more general approach than the sustainable tourism we have just tackled! Taking into consideration that the concept of ethics denotes a philosophical enquiry into values and a practical applications of moral behaviour, ethical tourism is not only about understanding what is good and just in and for tourism, but also about *good conduct* in tourism! In a way, sustainable tourism is a subset of ethical tourism. Ethics provides the broad disciplinary framework within which types of tourism, such as sustainable tourism, can be analysed. For the vital part of ethics is that of *value clarification*. By examining common definitions of sustainable tourism its values emerge. For example, many definitions are based upon “sustainable tourism” as that “which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Here, intergenerational equity is offered as a defining value. Similarly, values of cultural respect, environmental sensitivity and economic sustainability often permeate the concept of sustainable tourism.

Reflection in ethical-tourism-action implies a continuing questioning of tourism actions or options. The questions are not limited to focus on whether these actions or options are good in the sense of effectiveness and efficiency – that is, “*am I doing this well ? Is it effective/efficient in delivering a professional service such as tourism marketing?* –, but one has to ask whether these actions/options are good in the ethical sense – “*is this good?*”. For Aristotle the “good for man” is not what is good and expedient for the individual, but “what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general”. This approach may be in stark contrast with the set of criteria used by modern tourism stakeholders! According to Aristotelian ethics, the “good life” concerned *truth, responsibility for actions and right actions*; for much of commercial tourism management, the good life concerns the good in the very particular senses of good for profits, good for business and good for growth! For the Philosopher, the “good life” has a strong emphasis on man as a collective, rather than the pursuit of individual, business or sectarian ends.

Ethical tourism is of paramount importance if our community wants to be serious when we talk about tourism and values exchange! For as a philosopher of our times, Macintyre, in his book “After Virtue” [1985] illustrates, the language of actions has moved from Aristotelian to managerial meanings! A tourism stakeholder mainly encourages actions as managerial actions where good actions are those which provide service delivery to pre-set benchmarks and profits. These actions have become the dominant actions and so the idea of good tourism actions has become largely understood in these pragmatic terms!

Not to succumb to the temptation of making free time a period of “rest from values”, **ethical tourism** should be promoted. In this context the World Ethical Code for Tourism mentioned earlier merits more attention. It is the fruit of wide-ranging reflections undertaken by various nations and tourism associations and by the World Tourism Organisation. As Pope John Paul rightly observed: “This document is an important step towards ensuring that tourism is not seen just as one among many other economic activities, but as a privileged means for the development of individuals and peoples. Through tourism, the cultural heritage of humanity can be placed more effectively at the service of dialogue between civilizations and the promotion of stable peace” [Message for the 22nd World Day of Tourism, 2001].

It is by practising good tourism that good tourism is produced and the exchange of values is guaranteed!