

CULTURE, TOURISM AND DEVELOPMENT: THE ESSENTIAL TRIO

ADDRESS TO THE FIFTH CTO ANNUAL CARIBBEAN CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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Many years ago, when I was Director of Culture in Dominica, I was invited to sit on the Dominica Board of Tourism (as it was then called). The idea was of course to incorporate culture into the tourism product and to utilize my artistic talents in a promotional campaign for the island. I was the youngest member of the Board at the time with only a superficial understanding of tourism and its full implications. In fact my closest encounters with the industry before that was, as a child, seeing my sister dressing in our national costume the Wob Douillette or Jipe and going to the waterfront to welcome cruise ship visitors in song and dance, and upon her return listening to her fascinating stories about the wonderful elderly couples she met, what they had said to her (complete with perfectly reproduced American accent, of course) and how many US dollars she had made in tips (of which I was naturally most envious).

From that experience I must have learnt the three rudimental principles of the industry -

1. that there were people out there who traveled for the mere pleasure of it
2. that they were fascinated by our island and its culture, and
3. that there was money to be made.

In other words, there was a product, there was a market and there was a potential source of income. Also, and this was important, I recognized that the product had two major pre-occupations:

- the environment, the physical beauty of the country as well as the built structures and
- the history and culture, the intangible cultural heritage of the island.

Moreover they both needed to be properly introduced and attractively presented (my sister was well-spoken and articulate and she cut quite a figure decked out in the national costume, even if I say so myself).

Armed with that understanding and my background in the arts and culture I ventured onto the Board of Tourism at age 25 to make my contribution. I was asked to design a logo for the island which I did successfully in that it is still used today. Then I was asked to design a series of posters aimed at the local population to create an awareness of the potential and benefits of tourism and the role they could play in its

development. Most of my posters worked well: *TOURISM IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS, A SMILE SAYS HELLO IN ANY LANGUAGE, MAKE THE VISITOR FEEL WELCOME*. And then naivety struck: I produced one which said: *YOU ARE A WALKING TOURIST ATTRACTION - BE PROUD OF YOURSELF*. The minute I saw the poster up I knew that I had made a mistake somewhere. The surprising thing is that only one person confronted me on the subject (actually he was outraged) and moreover he was not a Dominican but an African American who was living there at the time. And so strong was his objection that it stayed with me ever since and changed my entire perception of tourism viz a viz people, culture, and economic enterprise. It guided me through the learning process of managing culture and change in a small and vulnerable island, it provided me with a point of departure for my work as a culture specialist and adviser at UNESCO and, in fact, it helped prepare for the thoughts I wish to share with you tonight on Culture and Tourism in general and Heritage Tourism in particular.

In its wisdom, the Caribbean Tourism Organization has selected Heritage Tourism as its theme for this year's conference. This is clearly because it is cognizant of the fact that as attractive as this region is physically it by no means has a monopoly on beautiful beaches, crystal clear waters, pristine forests or spectacular waterfalls and majestic mountains. It has also realized that today's traveler is more discerning in taste and apart from pleasant surroundings is also interested in the history and culture of the host country. Many of them wish to experience the life-style of their hosts and to understand how this was created - the genesis and history of the culture. All countries of course possess these elements but the fascinating reality about it all is that no two cultures are exactly the same. The Caribbean region we know has its distinct character and within the region each and every country has a specificity which cannot be entirely or authentically replicated by the other. It is for this reason that heritage tourism makes sense to everyone involved in the business especially at this time when tourism and cultural industries remain among the fastest growing industries in our globalized world despite recent setbacks.

For those of us who work in the culture Sector of UNESCO this is a timely and absorbing subject as we seek to implement the mandate of our Member States to move Culture to the center of development rather than on the periphery of it where it currently resides for the most part.

Contrary to all glowing terms in which culture is praised by CARICOM Caribbean governments precious few have taken the required bold steps to allow culture to drive the development process of which tourism is a major, if not the principal, player. Industries like the reggae, calypso and steelpan have developed into the highly lucrative enterprises that they are today not because of Caribbean governments but in spite of them. No one can disagree that today Jamaica is known worldwide more for Bob Marley and reggae music than for all the beautiful beaches on its North Coast. The Trinidad carnival and all the other regional carnivals have danced this region into the psyche of millions of persons in almost every country in the world in a way that your best tourism campaigns can only dream of. And now, through sport (which I

might remind you is a part of Culture) St. Kitts and Nevis is known by millions around the world through the triumph in the international sporting area of Kim Collins currently, the fastest man in the world.

Despite all of this (and the examples can go on and on) most CARICOM governments are yet to feature culture as a central component in the national development plans. This in light of the fact that excellence in field of culture seems to be the attribute that comes most naturally and easily to the people of the region and that it is the field that has brought the most recognition and economic gain to the region since the death of the sugar industry two centuries ago. Besides, it has done so without the exploitation and dehumanizing of anyone involved.

On the other side of the culture coin there is the tangible side of the phenomenon: the physical natural and built environment which remains the other might pillar of the industry. But now the visitor wants to know the history that shaped the environment, the people who constructed those buildings and their reasons for building them or for maintaining the land in a particular manner. Not just the buildings or the forest becomes important but the history of the building and the forest, what events took place there and how they contributed to the culture and development of the country that we know today.

The main reason why CARICOM governments have not yet embraced cultural industries and heritage tourism is because they have not been able to accurately assess the economic impact of these activities. Does a Music festival really make any money? Where does the income of successful entertainers go? How can intellectual property be protected and made lucrative? How many visitors arrived because of their interest in a historic site or a particular form of wild life, or a certain ceremony, or a group of indigenous people and their craftwork or a particular singer, writer, actor, comedian, poet or painter, a certain fashion model or designer or sports personality or (to refer to a current topic) to see in actuality the location of a certain block-buster movie such as PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN?

Let's face it, as much as we respect them and recognize their importance and essential role in society, the Caribbean is not particularly well known for its doctors, lawyers and engineers. Yet the education system continues to promote these professions rather than seeking to develop the cultural ones that appear to come spontaneously to the population and for which the people of the region appear to have a natural propensity. I am not proposing the replacement of the one with the other but rather the sharing of the emphasis on both sectors, the traditional "professions of note" along with the new, dynamic and extremely lucrative cultural ones.

However I do not wish to preach to the converted but would prefer to engage you with some considerations on the development of heritage tourism in the Caribbean, the place of culture and development in tourism policies, tourism and the preservation of natural and cultural sites, tourism and cultural interaction and how we might be able to do all these things without turning our people into walking tourist attractions.

By identifying the crucial issues involved in this form of tourism and by looking at the future of these issues perhaps we might find a means of formulating tourism policies that respect societies, cultures and nature while contributing to development.

You know even better than I the trends that indicate that Europe's share of world tourism is progressively decreasing in favour of new destinations in developing countries such as the Caribbean. The prominent position of tourism is confirmed by the importance of tourism in international trade. At US\$372 billion, receipts account for over 20% of world trade in services. In recent years, international tourism has been responsible for over half the foreign exchange capital flows to developing countries, thus confirming its essential role in economic policy.

Tourism therefore becomes a powerful factor in the intermixing of peoples and of mutual understanding. UNESCO's mandate for the creation of peace and global security through promotion of understanding among people is therefore well served by the sector, hence our interest and involvement.

Today's tourist is looking for meaning, for an alternative to a way of life that is rapidly becoming universal and which can already be qualified as "post modern". It is believed that more than half of today's tourists are interested in or are likely to be interested in culture. Cultural events such as concerts, art exhibitions, festivals and historical circuits cause considerable stir and draw hundreds of thousands of visitors willing to spend a lot of money on travel and stay for the enjoyment and culturally enriching experience they are looking forward to. Such a visitor therefore comes to appreciate the cultural identity of the country he visits and wants the specificity to be preserved. This consequently strengthens the economic assets of a developing country where cultural attributes have been better preserved.

Of course, the word culture is being used in here in two ways: first, as the social construct of beliefs, values, traditions and lifestyles which guide social practices and human interaction; and secondly, as the tangible and intangible representations of a society's heritage, presented as tourist attractions. Heritage tourism is an asset for the Caribbean and other developing countries because it is based on resources that cannot be relocated or replicated in the home country of the visitor.

The problematic to be addressed however is how best to promote this form of tourism which could become the dominant activity in small islands and begin conflicting with traditional activities such as agriculture and fishing, and is highly disruptive of social structures and life-styles. Is it possible, therefore, to strengthen identities and preserve traditional cultures and at the same time to promote encounters with other cultures through tourism? Given the death or decline of most of the traditional industries in the Caribbean (bananas, agriculture in general, bauxite), would the only choice open to the population be between the development of a tourism that could lead to social disruption or, just as damaging, face the inevitable migration of its people resulting from the impossibility of finding work in the traditions sectors (a predicament which some Caribbean countries are already facing).

But a community must know and understand itself before presenting it to others. Certain elements must be protected because they have market value and are therefore vulnerable, and also because of their sacredness. They can be looted, vandalized or devalued through over-use. Moreover they can even be sold to foreigners who can afford to obtain such treasures legally.

Tourism cannot be reduced to the level of a commodity. It is also a profoundly human activity that brings together messengers of culture who discover each other while respecting each other's differences. To avoid possible negative results of such encounters great efforts must be made to sensitize, educate and inform both tourist and local populations. Governments therefore should give the greatest attention to the dialogue between culture and tourism. Just as Culture and heritage should not be the sole prerogative of specialists and intellectuals, so should tourism not be the monopoly of experts and commercial entrepreneurs.

Host and guests carry within them awareness of their identity and their meeting always results in something new. In a sense, this may allow one to rediscover one's roots. All cultures of the world have been built up through an eternal process of give and take. There was a time when cricket was a foreign game in this part of the world. Culture is in constant movement; it is a living identity, a dynamic logic which ceases to be a source of inspiration when it is forced to remain static.

The question then becomes, should people and their culture become 'frozen' in time for the benefit of tourists, or on the contrary, should societies which are already besieged by cable television be completely open and unprotected against cultural influences carried by international tourism? These two unacceptable situations raise ethical questions that business concerns, governments and visitors should ask themselves in the search for a path somewhere in between. The tourist can also be a medium for the revitalization of and promotion of a culture he discovers and admires.

So can the past be given to the present and preserved for the future? The sacred nature of heritage demands that it be restored and maintained in a way which guarantees its integrity in face of tourism. Financial resources are required to establish tourism programmes that ensure that human beings are not turned into tourist attractions or, in the extreme, consumer goods, that the privacy of citizens is protected and populations are prepared for such the touristic encounter. The economic need to welcome more visitors and encourage them to stay longer must be balanced against the long-term future of populations, natural sites and the built environment.

Good heritage tourism development must therefore be part of an overall development strategy. Such plans must be integrated with global planning and they must be elaborated and implemented in close cooperation with the populations and individuals concerned. The ideal tourism strategy then should combine three requirements:

1. the satisfaction of local populations,

2. a successful tourism experience and
3. optimum conditions for preservation of the cultural heritage.

To facilitate this possibility UNESCO has established a number of programmes and conventions governing the promotion and protection of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as the cultural diversity of the world. To mention just a few there are the World Heritage Convention (which protects natural and cultural sites) and its adjunct World Heritage List (on which Brimstone Hill is inscribed as a World Heritage Site), the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Heritage (which protects shipwrecks and submerged archaeological sites), the Convention on Illegal Trafficking in Cultural Goods, the Recommendation on the Protection of Folk and Traditional Practices, the Convention on the Protection of Places of Scenic and Aesthetic Beauty, the Proclamation on Oral and Intangible Masterpieces of the World, The Living Treasures Programme, The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, The Slave Route Project, the Project on the Revitalization of Traditional Masquerades for integration into the Tourism Product and the Youth Poverty Alleviation through Tourism and Heritage - YouthPATH. As member states of UNESCO you are all entitled to participation in these programmes as some of you have already done. I invite the others to do likewise.

There is a world of heritage and cultural opportunities waiting to be incorporated into the tourism product in the Caribbean - not least of which is CARIFESTA which, once re-invented can be a major income generating and tourism promotion tool.

UNESCO's aim is to work with all concerned to influence tourism projects and policies through research, training, awareness building, the setting up of networks and the implementation of pilot projects. Our objective is to inform decision makers as to their options, to sensitize the general public and to promote the cultural heritage as a major and essential factor for development.

I wish you a most successful and fruitful conference.

[Back to Economic Development](#)