

Parting Words

Facilitating Intercultural Communications Through Tourism: The Example of Greece

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“A hundred miles of travel is better than a hundred miles of scrolls.” —Confucius

Mass tourism is relatively new creation. World War II gave the average person the opportunity to travel, as soldiers deployed to the front lines saw their neighboring countries or people apart from their own. But given the circumstances at that time, they could not fully appreciate what the place or its people had to offer (Tarlow, 2003).

According to Momsen (1999), the World Travel and Tourism Council estimates that tourists are spending 3.6 trillion dollars on goods and services directly or indirectly; this constitutes about 10.6 percent of the 1996 gross global product. One of the largest industries in the world, tourism and tourism-related industries provide one out of ten jobs worldwide.

Tourism can be a sustainable industry if managed appropriately. Currently, terrorism and environmental degradation threaten the marketability of traveling, and the tourism industry must control, if not resolve, these problems in order to remain viable.

Today, for the most part, people's thirst for exploration exceeds their concerns about global conflicts and environmental problems. The sights and sounds of different destinations and diverse cultures still lure tourists from the world over. While most people think of tourism in terms of travelers from one country visiting another, tourism can also be used to break down barriers within countries.

As employees in the Greek tourist industry and graduate students of tourism studies at the Aegean University, we have guided countless visitors to our country, including those who attended the 2004 Summer Olympics. But Greece itself is an increasingly multicultural nation, as a result of the historical development of cultures within our current borders as well as immigration from nearby countries in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Greece's minister of tourism, Dimitris Avramopoulos, recognizes that tourism encompasses not only economics but also ideology (Vamvakris, 2005). Tourism opens doors so that individuals from different nations meet, get to know one another, and understand one another with the objective of working together. The premise of this statement is that people within Greece are already acquainted with the various cultures within the nation. This is not necessarily the case.

According to Dascalopoulos (n.d.), Greece's reputation for homogeneity is not the reality. He presented a list of recognized subcultures within Greek society, including the subculture of the island of Crete, Ionians, Constantinople Roms, Aegean Islanders, Pontic Greeks, and urban Greeks. This list is still incomplete, as

Cypriot Greeks, indigenous bilingual populations such as the Roma, immigrants, and Greek descendants who returned to Greece after the fall of the Soviet Union are not included.

Following Greece's independence from the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, the government used language as a means of unifying the population. However, there is no single Greek language but a variety of dialects spoken in different regions. Katharevousa, the official educational and state language selected in the 1930s, is a derivative of the Attic dialect. But since the language was only partially understood by the population, people eventually rebelled against the government's choice and reverted to using the Athenian vernacular. In the case of the Roma and immigrant groups, other languages were being spoken at home and used as a means of educating children (Dascalopoulos, n.d.).

One solution to bridging these internal divisions and conflicts over language and culture comes from the tourist industry—in Greece usually considered a source of income from other countries. If the population of Greece can accept traveling within the country as a way to explore and understand its diverse cultures, then unifying a multicultural nation becomes possible.

Tourism studies are concerned with examining the experiences of tourists, those who live in the tourism destination, and the relation between the two. One aspect of the program is determining the impact of tourism on the host. This can serve as the launching point for discussing the role of tourism in facilitating intercultural communication in a multicultural Greece. Tourism is uniquely placed to create a sense of cultural awareness among both tourists and the host population. Both groups must be able to differentiate themselves from those surrounding them and recognize that cultural differences are an international phenomenon. The key word is recognition. Cultural differences must not be ignored, since they might allow conflicts to go unnoticed. Studying the experiences of both local and international tourists visiting various parts of Greece can be effective in determining possible cultural conflicts. Early detection of such conflicts can lead to better risk management and analysis. It will also provide standby solutions once the problem arises. Observing each culture firsthand can translate into deeper understanding of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Greek society, on the part of both international tourists and those within the country.

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