

Globalization and Tourist Social Structures

The role of 21st Century Internet-based infrastructures in the transformation of the cultural identity of places

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Abstract

Today, processes of globalization have increased mobility both physical and virtual, introducing new ways of entry into vernacular cultures all over the world. One of the primary ways this happens is tourism. The result is a unique tension between, on the one hand, our desire to “preserve the past” in order to avoid forgetting who we are, which runs the risk of nostalgia and golden-age thinking; and on the other, the Modernist impulse to “Make it new!” which advocates for varying degrees of abandoning and discrediting the past for the perceived advances of modern infrastructure and technology. The question of how to resolve this tension remains a key issue within current urban theoretic discourses.

However, an important dimension of this tension is that of global tourism, which heightens this tension by introducing outside cultures into preserved sites and their respective place-based identities. Along with the emergence of global is the rise of Internet-based digital infrastructures, which have led to newly emergent social structures attached to tourism and the places in which it manifests. Given all of this, my aim is to critically engage with the notion of preservation in a way that does not rely on falsely reassuring notions of nostalgia, authenticity, and heritage but instead evaluates how tourism’s new social structures—fueled by Internet-based digital infrastructures—affect local identities.

Modernity and the explosion of Tourism

Antony Giddens defines “modernity” as the various social structures that emerged in Europe in the throes of the 17th century.¹ He suggests that modernity turns places into *phantasmagoric* locales “thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them.”² In other words, what defines the locality of a place is not bound by the forces of that which is present or immediately visible and tactile, but rather by the unseen, interconnected, and disjointed relations that determine its nature. Similarly, in *Transnational Connections*, Ulf Hannerz defines globalization as “a global homogenization in which particular ideas and practices spread throughout the world, mostly from the centers of the west, pushing other alternatives out of existence.”³ And finally, Doreen Massey, in *Space, Place and Gender*, identifies a phenomenon she calls “time-space compression,” describing this as everything from our “movement and communication across space, to the geographical stretching out of social relations and to our experience of all this.”⁴ The value of this notion, she emphasizes, is that it avoids the reductive tendency typical of today’s analyses to forefront global capital as the absolute means for interpreting various material and ideological flows through space and time—analytical reductions which in her view blind us to the actual, lived experiences immanent to a given place. Massey goes on to question the fixation of other scholars with the assumption that this space-time compression inherent in modernity generates insecurity and “unreasonable” desires for preservation. In Massey’s view, by contrast, “globalization does not entail simple homogenization.”⁵ While it may be that places seem closer together because of this space-time compression, the unique geographic and cultural peculiarities in each and all places inevitably means that all places nevertheless embody a unique identity.

But the inherent uniqueness of place isn’t the only aspect she identifies. Places are also neither “static” nor “bounded”; the identity of place is always in process. Therefore, in order to understand the specific identity of a place, we need to understand that places stretch beyond their ascribed geographic boundaries. With this in mind, it seems to me that Massey shows us how places function as nodes of simultaneous diversity and conflict. Ultimately, then, modernity relies on binarisms between the local and the global, as well as the traditional and the progressive. Thus, *how do we think of locality when, on the one hand, cultures tend to preserve the uniqueness of their identity as a form of security, while on the other, at the same time, fulfilling the need to become forward thinking by keeping up with the rules and forces of globalization in today’s age of extensive mobility, far-reaching flows of capital, and the cultural dynamism?*

The answer to this question, I claim, can be investigated through the prism of global tourism, a phenomenon which, due to the dynamic flows of mobility (a direct result of modernity), is now experiencing unprecedented growth. Specific technological advances—especially digital technology and the Internet—have transformed the logic of touristic experience today, and by extension, its impact

¹ Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010: 1

² Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015: 19

³ Hannerz, Ulf. *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012: 25

⁴ Massey, Doreen B., Brett Christophers, Rebecca Lave, Jamie Peck, and Marion Werner. *The Doreen Massey Reader*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Agenda Publishing, 2018: 147

⁵ *Ibid.* 156

on place-based identities. This is partially due to the fact that the politics of mobility have made tourism a powerful economy. According to the UN's World Tourism Organization, Europe welcomed 392 million tourists in 2000, and 2018 will end with approximately 672 million visits and a total spending of 519 billion U.S. dollars.⁶ But what explains this boom?

One major cause is that of the emergence and proliferation of digital infrastructures. Such technologies have made it easier than ever for tourists to both learn about and plan trips according to their own interests. A consequence of this is an increased need to address the tension between the need to preserve versions of tradition and the past as part of a cultural heritage, while at the same time becoming progressive by welcoming visitors from outside. This tension often manifests as two opposed impulses on the part of the actors who hold dominion over the identity of a place which encounters such touristic flows. On the one hand, there is the a desire to *destroy* a place's natural or built heritage in order to make way for the advances of modern forms of infrastructure and other convenient forms of technology. But on the other, there is also the desire to *freeze* the impending transformation of one's culture, often in the form of *nostalgia*.

Given all this, my claim here is that the unparalleled mobility that tourism is experiencing because of Internet-based digital infrastructures, along with the instantiation of a kind of tourism which is more concerned with destination and less about the process of traveling, is further transforming the identity of places and their respective cultures. In other words, one cannot study the cultural identity of a place in terms of its relation to notions of nostalgia, heritage, and authenticity without observing how tourism is promoting the mobilization of such notions. By looking at the structures that mobilize global tourism today, we can better apprehend the impacts of modernity and globalization within the current deployment of the tension between *preservation* and *progress*.

In what follows, I examine the social structures attached to tourism in the case of a specific territory known as the "Cycladic isles" in the Aegean Archipelago of Mediterranean Greece. My aim here is to understand: (1) what tourists seek in places, (2) how tourists learn about and plan their trips, (3) how tourists get to places, and finally (4) how heritage and preservation practices are transforming the identity of places for touristic consumption.

What do tourists seek in places?

Currently, the development of low-cost and international air transport systems, in junction with the emergence of an efficient and highly integrated travel services industry, has allowed tourists to travel to more distant and exotic island destinations in ever-growing numbers. Thus, unsurprisingly, the Mediterranean islands have become some of the most popular holiday destinations for Europeans – and similarly, the Caribbean islands for North Americans. Islands have become places where tourists

⁶ UNWTO Tourism Highlights: 2017 Edition | World Tourism Organization. Accessed December 08, 2018. <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284419876>

can fulfill their fantasies to experience the “other”, unconstrained by the structures of everyday life.⁷ In the case of the Cycladic Islands, then, tourists are interested in the following: (1) local tradition, (2) a unique landscape, climate, and the “3S’s” (sun, sea, and sand), (3) aesthetic and architectural style, (4) local culinary culture, and finally, (5) history, given the fact that the Cycladic civilization has left relics on many of the islands, which have now become archeological sites. In view of this, the question of what do tourists seek to experience on the islands has to do with more general and universal traits that define tourist subjectivity at large.

First, one of the main principles of tourism (briefly mentioned above) involves the commodification of the “other” (or “otherness”). Jennifer Craik explains, “Tourists seek transcendence from the everyday life through engagement with Otherness [...]: tourism offers a trance-like suspension from the everyday.”⁸ Tourists visit the Cyclades because they offer drastic contrast from their hometowns. Mary Douglas, in *The Shopping Experience*, addresses the underlying meaning of commodities in choice. She claims that “choosing commodities immediately suggests choosing between cultures, and as a result choosing one and rejecting all others.”⁹ Tourism is very much about the selection of one from an array of many. In a way, the choices tourists make in consuming places provides us with a cultural understating of the lifestyle of those subjects as well as their relation to the economic structures of the places they visit.¹⁰ Choosing Santorini island over Schinoussa island says a lot about the tourist’s lifestyle as well as the structures of the islands in terms of quality of services, infrastructure, leisure options, etc. In view of this, Douglas emphasizes the importance of choice in the identity of culture: “any choice between goods is the result of, and contributes to, culture.”¹¹ Finally, consumption like tourism is not about necessity but choice and this is why it is the “arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape.”¹² In other words, the economic choices that tourists make become part of the visible and tangible aspects of culture more generally as commodities are more about the fulfilment of objectives and less about the objects purchased themselves.¹³

Commodification for touristic consumption, however, has as its ultimate goal the quest for authenticity. In *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*, Joseph Pine and James Gilmore suggest that authenticity is constructed based on consumer choices. Deploying Pine and Gilmore’s ideas, authenticity is defined as the “process of purchasing on the basis of conforming [to] self-image.”¹⁴ Hence, authenticity is “rendered” in the sense that “humans have reshaped nature to serve their needs, [as such] every ‘authentic’ experience is somewhat a stage-set where each business can manage the type of authenticity it wishes to evoke.”¹⁵ The authors go on to describe the landscape of

⁷ Sheller, Mimi, and John Urry. *Tourism Mobilities: Places to Play, Places in Play*. London: Routledge, 2004: 22

⁸ Rojek, Chris. *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*. London: Routledge, 2005: 114

⁹ Falk, Pasi, and Colin Campbell. *The Shopping Experience*. London: Sage Publications, 1997: 18

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 29

¹¹ *Ibid.* 76

¹² Douglas, Mary. *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. London: Routledge, 2010: 56

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Gilmore, James H., and B. Joseph. Pine. *Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2007: 75; bracketed comment added.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 86; bracketed comment added.

authenticity as consisting of five genres, each corresponding to respective economic offerings: commodities and natural authenticity, goods and original authenticity, services and exceptional authenticity, experiences and referential authenticity, and transformations and influential authenticity. Given all of this, it seems to be the case that places become sets for the commodification of their unique identity, or what is effectively for the construction of an “authentic” touristic experience. In view of this, I ask: *what does the commodification of culture for authentic experience mean for a place’s identity? And how does this affect the tensions between preservation and progress?*

In line with the above, Dean McCannell in “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings” confirms that “touristic consciousness is motivated by the desire for authentic experiences.”¹⁶ But he also notes an important distinction in places between “frontstage” and “backstage” regions, the frontstage involving the “staged” spaces, filled with services for the tourist’s consumption, whereas backstage regions involve the “real” aspect of the local and local culture. In other words, what McCannell is getting at here is that while tourists search for the authentic, what they end up getting are mere simulacra—fake copies or false images of authentic experiences. This process is in line with what preservation strategies tend to do to places – the freezing of time and everyday life by transforming a place into a spectacles pleasing tourists. Paradoxically, then, tourists end up with inauthentic experiences, since backstage regions are usually inaccessible to them. Gradually, through a series of six stages (as McCannell defines them), tourists can overcome those thresholds and enter the back regions. This, however, largely depends on the ways tourists plan their trips, since frequently tourists tend to be passive experience seekers and expect things to happen to them effortlessly.¹⁷ It would be a quite different experience to plan a trip to Mykonos island through a travel agency, at an all-inclusive resort (for example), where everything is planned for and rather predictable, and (by contrast) to travel to Mykonos with a map of the island in your hands and only a room booked in the town. Finally, as McCannell explains: “touristic attitude and the structures that produce it, contributes to the destruction of interpersonal solidarity that is such a notable feature of the life of the educated masses in advanced industrial society.”¹⁸ In other words, the study of the infrastructures that mobilize various touristic experiences and different groups of people are essential in understanding the role of tourism in influencing the identity of the places that tourist subjects visit.

How do tourists learn about and plan their trips to places?

Historically speaking, the first mass tourist excursions we carried out in 1841 by pioneer Thomas Cook, who operationalized trips within England and abroad, for the working and middle class of England.¹⁹ During that time, the pioneer tourists were able to stay in hotels and get meals through special tokens and vouchers. Tourism was thus conducted in groups and coordinated by

¹⁶ MacCannell, Dean. “Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings.” *American Journal of Sociology* 79, no. 3 (1973): 589-603. doi:10.1086/225585: 597

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 600

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 602

¹⁹ “Thomas Cook History.” Thomas Cook. Accessed December 07, 2018. <https://www.thomascook.com/thomas-cook-history/>

“organizational operators”, as John Urry calls them, and took advantage of the latest technology of the time (i.e. rail transportation). But today, and in fact for some time now, travel agencies are fading. The number of agencies in the United States, for instance, was 132,000 in 1990, whereas in 2014, there were 74,000 travel agencies left, and estimations predict that an additional decline of 12% will occur by 2024.²⁰

Digital technology and Internet-based applications are direct consequences of modernity and partly responsible for the shift in the touristic practice and experience planning. Over the last 20 years, Internet travel blogs (Lonely Planet, Condé Nast Traveller), websites (Bookings.com, Expedia.com or Skyscanner.com), digital magazines, and, more recently, smart phone technologies and applications (such as the geotagging features in Instagram and Facebook) have all managed to democratize the identity of places, free of the curation of travel agents, thereby giving individuals the power to make more informed and conscious consumer choices.²¹

Furthermore, instantaneity and immediacy have become essential elements in the process of learning about and planning tourist experiences. “Most technology so far has concentrated on helping customers search for things they know they want to find,” says Professor Dimitrios Buhalis, Director of the eTourism Lab at the School of Tourism at Bournemouth University.²² In other words, digital technology in the neoliberal and fast-paced capital world, has made travel research time-efficient for the customer. However, travel agencies do become useful in specific instances, such as: exclusive luxury, group, and corporate travel situations. Certain types of travel require the expertise of travel agents for doing tasks that otherwise would be too complex or too costly. Do-it-yourself (DIY) travel planning and research makes travelling more individualistic, which can lead to what McCannell referred to above as the “destruction of interpersonal solidarity.” And yet, at the same time, DIY travel might also provide a tourist with the opportunity to enter a “backstage” region with greater ease.

So when travelling to the Cycladic Islands, what types of travelers visit the islands? Certainly families, couples, individuals, and even large groups (though often appearing primarily by cruises). In the latter case, tourists spend most of their leisure time on the cruise-ships and, at certain moments, they head toward the mainland. In this case, travelling is a planned operation and usually remains at the frontstage of the stages of authenticity McCannell describes. The Cyclades have several archeological sites as well as exclusive archeological islands, and organized tours tend to concentrate on those sites. Alternatively, at the scenic center of the Cycladic towns, there is food and shopping. Families, couples, and individuals are harder to spot here, since they appear in most social situations, making the boundaries between local and tourist near impossible to identify.

²⁰ Braga, Matthew. “Why Are Travel Agents Still a Thing?” Motherboard. March 18, 2016. Accessed December 08, 2018. https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/8q8q4p/why-are-travel-agents-still-a-thing-internet-airlines-agenci

²¹ Larsen, Jonas, and John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze*. Sage Publications UK, 2011: 131

²² “Tech Is “not the Death of the Travel Agent”: Amadeus Report.” Travel Weekly. Accessed December 08, 2018. <http://www.travelweekly.com.au/article/tech-is-not-the-death-of-the-travel-agent-amadeus-report/>

Internet-based infrastructures can tell us about the spending patterns of tourists. In Mykonos, for example, during the last weekend of July for 2019 (peak season), Airbnb lists 306 available homes with prices ranging between 160-680 € per night. In Schinoussa, an island less “popular” than Mykonos, Airbnb listings for the same weekend reach a maximum of 134 listings with a price range between 45-115€ per night. Similarly, Bookings.com lists 405 hotels in Mykonos with prices ranging from 115-900 € per night for a couple. In Schinoussa, by contrast, there exists just 2 listings with a price range of 40-250 € per night. In other words, it becomes evident that couples, families, and individuals will each be affected by the choices that are presented to them. The benefit of the transparency of choice provides individuals with the opportunity to research options according to their budget, which becomes a catalytic factor in the planning process of a trip and in turn affects the groups of people that spend leisure time in those places. Some places offer more expensive accommodation, while other places support the camping culture historically embedded in their character. An additional factor is that the Cyclades are seasonal destinations. This means that because the travel season is only between May and October, tourists must have the time and means to be able to travel during those months. Finally, the unique geography of the Cycladic islands lies in the fact that they belong to a network of many possible choices. There are so many islands (31 habitable) that any taste or type of experience can be accommodated.

Now, in order to understand the social structures of the islands, the physical infrastructures developed on them, and the way that Internet-based apps facilitate information about these places, one has to consider the media’s role in making places popular tourist destinations. In *Nobrow*, John Seabrook unpacks the change of cultural meanings that occurs through marketing strategies. While “cultured” in older times meant exclusive and elitist (highbrow), today “good” is associated with mass-production that is popular to the culture of mass society. Seabrook uses the term “buzz” to describe the ruling force of popular culture which coincides with a new understanding of aesthetic as a measure of commercial appeal. In other words, aesthetic choices and cultural formation are very much driven and influenced by the deluge of choices amongst consumer goods today. Since cultural identity is constructed by means of the economic marketplace, and is directed by popular opinion, it means that culture is an indispensable part of any marketing strategy, very similar to the way authenticity is tied to its “business producer”.²³

The Cyclades, being a network of interconnected islands, have similar aesthetic qualities but what makes some more noticeable than others has to do with how tourists “broadcast” their experiences to the general public. Internet-based infrastructures are fundamental tools for allowing places to become visible, and thus popular. A recent article in the *New York Times* entitled “Is Geotagging on Instagram Ruining Natural Wonders? Some Say Yes” directly examines these consequences. Most

²³ Seabrook, John. *NoBrow: The Culture of Marketing: The Marketing of Culture*. New York: Vintage Books, 2001: 30-168.

drastic, the article discusses the case of Delta Lake in Wyoming, which saw only 1-2 hikers per day a few years ago, but today as many as 145 people per day hike the landscape.²⁴

One way to think through this proliferation of tourist documentation is through the sociologist John Urry's distinction between "romantic" and "collective" tourist gazes. With the former, the emphasis is on solitude, privacy, and a personal relationship to the object of gaze.²⁵ On the contrary, the collective gaze, involves feelings of conviviality and shared experience. "Here, other people are necessary for the atmosphere of the experience of a place, resulting in a shared process of visual consumption."²⁶ In both cases, though, visual consumption is key, as is easily illustrated by the very ways we speak about touristic experience; common phrases such as "seeing the sights," "capturing the view," "eye-catching scenery," "picturesque villages," and "pretty as a postcard" all illustrate the significance of visual experience for both the traveler and the travel promoter.²⁷ On this point, photo-tourism has dramatically increased recently, which is why social media has become so effective in promoting tourism. Tourists line up at the Louvre in Paris for a chance to stand in front of Da Vinci's painting the "Mona Lisa" and take a selfie with a famous painting, rather than observing the work of art itself. Social media advertising personas known as "digital influencers" have become essential to the structures of tourism for a very simple reason: "word of mouth has long been the most effective form of marketing. Why? Because people buy from brands they *trust*."²⁸ Tourism today is thus about proving you were "there" and social media serves that exact purpose: "pics or it didn't happen," we say today – the sense of sight being essential in the social media buzz.

This form of planning a trip through visual signs is undertaken by Greek tourist marketing and advertising agencies who make extensive use of digital marketing platforms. With the hashtag "#visitgreece", the "Greek National Tourism Organization" (*Ellinikos Organismos Tourismou*) is hoping to promote and disseminate Greece's cultural heritage worldwide. According to *Kathimerini*, an established Greek newspaper, hashtags don't just facilitate research but are also suggestive of the kinds of experience tourists are likely to have in a given locale. According to Instagram statistics, since February of 2017, 598,527 posts have included the hashtag "#hiddengem", and every year, 1 million people use Instagram to search travel destinations—a fact that further emphasizes the power of Instagram (and social media more generally) in planning a travel-related experience.²⁹ In other words, Internet-based digital infrastructures provide guided access to places and their respective services in a form previously inexistent. As a result, modernity and the rules of globalization have instigated the expansion of the tourist industry, and therefore have impacted the identity of places they occupy. In addition to the instantaneity and transparency of Internet-based infrastructures,

²⁴ Laura. "Is Geotagging on Instagram Ruining Natural Wonders? Some Say Yes." *The New York Times*. November 29, 2018. Accessed December 08, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/29/travel/instagram-geotagging-environment.html>

²⁵ Larsen, Jonas, and John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze*. Sage Publications UK, 2011: 137

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Rojek, Chris. *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*. London: Routledge, 2005: 177

²⁸ Rodriguez, Vanessa. "Social Media and Tourism Marketing: A Match Made In Digital Heaven." *Uhuru Network*. July 14, 2017. Accessed December 08, 2018. <https://uhurunetwork.com/social-media-and-tourism-marketing/>.

²⁹ "Ταξιδεύοντας με το Instagram", KEIMENO: ΝΤΕΙΠΥ ΚΟΥΡΕΛΛΟΥ | *Kathimerini*. ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΕΣ ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ Α.Ε. Εθν.Μαχαρίου & Φαληρέως 2. Accessed December 08, 2018. <http://www.kathimerini.gr/986713/gallery/ta3idia/ta3idiwtika-nea/ta3ideyontas-me-to-instagram>.

travel infrastructure has also contributed to the growth of tourism. This is what I treat in the following section.

How do tourists get to their destinations?

The ways that the actual act of, and infrastructure facilitating, long distance travel has changed over the last 150 years is essential for comprehending the extent of the influence of tourism on place. As both Antony Giddens and Doreen Massey suggest, modernity is characterized by a dynamism due to interconnection, where identity is more “place-bound” than “place-based”.³⁰ Furthermore, the increased power of mobility has contributed to “space-time compression”, with tourism only exacerbating the condition by means of the various transportation infrastructures built for this purpose. Therefore, we need to ask whether the acceleration of our relative mobility and power of communication results in the uneven distribution of spatial freedom, as well as imprisonment, as Massey would question, but with respect to tourism.

More precisely, the modern world would be unimaginable without new forms of long-distance travel such as the passenger train, personal motor vehicles, and passenger planes.³¹ In the case of the Cyclades, 30 international airlines fly directly to Mykonos. In 2018, this island, with approximately 10,000 locals, received 1,388,262 visitors to its airport, 887,105 of which were international.³² Charter and budget airlines were not an option just 10 years ago. Again, the geography of the Cyclades is crucial, as it allows a traveler to fly directly to Mykonos (avoiding Athens) and then to get on a boat to any of the other islands. This is important because it has reshaped the entire economy around the transportation of tourists in the region, providing access to secluded beaches, adjacent islands, or even exclusive day trips.

However, all of this comes at a price, especially when it comes to the development for the necessary services to accommodate the housing and leisure services for tourists. According to the mayor of Santorini, each year more and more of the islands in the region are “conquered” by generic hotels and villas. In Santorini, “[t]here are more than 1,000 beds per square km, more than any other isle after Kos and Rhodes, and in a destination of only 76 sq km, more than 700 restaurants, cafes, bars and bakeries – the vast majority concentrated in Fira, the main town.”³³ In Koufonisia Island, fishermen who traditionally sold fish directly from their boats now display attractive signs offering daily trips to the various archeological sites across the many islands. These phenomena are a direct consequence of modernity’s dynamic power of mobility. In the island of Amorgos, locals advise you to stay away from main roads and the monastery of the town between 12-4pm to avoid the traffic from tourist groups pouring in from the docked cruise-ships. Given all this, I ask: *how do we think of local identity when the tourist industry is so prevalent in the region?*

³⁰ Massey, Doreen. “Places and Their Pasts.” *History Workshop Journal* 39, no. 1 (1995): 182-92. doi:10.1093/hwj/39.1.182: 184

³¹ Larsen, Jonas, and John Urry. *The Tourist Gaze*. Sage Publications UK, 2011: 131; 141

³² Hellenic Civil Aviation Authority - Home. Accessed December 08, 2018. <http://www.ypa.gr/en/>

³³ “Greek Tourism in the 21st Century: The Unseen and Insulting Side of Greek Tourism That Hurts.” *TravelDailyNews International*. Accessed December 08, 2018. <https://www.traveldailynews.com/post/greek-tourism-in-the-21st-century-the-unseen-and-insulting-side-of-greek-tourism-that-hurts>

“Making” Heritage?

“The thing is a lie from beginning to end.”³⁴

- John Ruskin

In “The Seven Lamps of Architecture”, John Ruskin expresses his frustration with modernity’s principles of preservation; i.e., neglecting an object first, only to restore it later.³⁵ Rem Koolhaas, in his essay “Preservation is Overtaking Us” explains that preservation is not the enemy of modernity but rather one of its inventions.³⁶ He goes on to suggest that preservation is no longer a reactive but a proactive activity where soon (he quips sarcastically) we will be preserving the future. Furthermore, Jorge Otero Pailos, in “Experimental Preservation”, criticizes the very meaning of the word preservation when he writes that “it has come to be associated with a sort of deference to the past over the needs of the present that subjugates contemporary action, normalizing and confining it via legal regulations and thwarting alternatives to the status quo.”³⁷ In other words, it seems to be the case that preservation is gaining extensive power over the built environment, in regulating the preservation of a past which automatically chooses between possible futures. Reyner Bahnam thinks of preservation as a form of “paranoia” that leads to the “death of cities.”³⁸ While Doreen Massey characterizes preservation as an unnecessary “fixation” that disrupts the diversity of places. Tradition, she argues, is not static, and thus we should not fear evolution and change. Arthur Dudden, in “Nostalgia and the American”, examines the concept of nostalgia and the meaning of invented traditions. For Dudden, the idea of nostalgia builds upon the idea of fabrication in the sense that nostalgia serves as a way to connect the forward thinking present, which is seen as the “destructive rapidity of change,” to more familiar and safe understandings of the past; in a sense, it eliminates the “fear” that Massey addresses.³⁹ Furthermore, Dudden contends that nostalgia offers a grounding of society; and is “both a psychological mood for [an] important segment of society and also a characteristic feature of conservative resistance to change.”⁴⁰ This idea of “invented traditions” developed by Eric Hobsbawm suggests that heritage is a fabrication. In “Fabricating Heritage”, David Lowenthal clarifies that heritage designation is a process of “upgrading,” “selective forgetting,” and “updating.”⁴¹ This is due to the fact that “anything media-fabricated feels more familiar and appears to be more real.”⁴²

Tourism, then, relies on a shared collection of signs, images, and memories; if heritage is not a universal truth, but a fabrication past selected for the benefit of a few, then each tourist experience is

³⁴ Ruskin, John. The seven lamps of architecture. Vol. 521. John B. Alden., 1885:13.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 14

³⁶ Koolhaas, Rem, Jorge Otero-Pailos, and Jordan Carver. *Preservation Is Overtaking Us*. New York: Columbia Books on Architecture and The City, 2016: 1

³⁷ Otero-Pailos, Jorge, Erik Fenstad Langdalen, and Thordis Arrhenius. *Experimental Preservation*. Zürich: Lars Müller Publ., 2016: 2

³⁸ Banham, Reyner. “Preserve Us From the Paranoid Preservers,” pg. B7. Los Angeles Times; Nov 8, 1973

³⁹ Dudden, Arthur P. “Nostalgia and the American.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 4 (1961): 515. doi:10.2307/2708028: 530

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 529

⁴¹ Lowenthal, David. “Fabricating Heritage” in *History and Memory*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Spring 1998): 5-24

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25681018>: 13

⁴² *Ibid.* 12

a reinforcement of these mechanisms of fabrication. The commodification of Santorini's cultural heritage, for example, has led to the preservation of a specific aesthetic style which is attracting tourism, and at the same time, it has generated pressures on the natural landscape and unregulated urban growth for the accommodation of tourists that is threatening the overall marketing of Santorini as a tourist product with a unique cultural and aesthetic heritage. Therefore, it seems to be the case that the tourist industry is complicit in the formation of identity of places. This is evident by the fact that the transformation of the social structures of tourism is a symptom of modernity's evolution. I have shown above how modernity and mobility have led to the growth of the tourist industry by means of Internet-based infrastructures. Preservation, as previously mentioned, is also symptom of modernity. And it seems that tourism reinforces the preservation of heritage, on the one hand, for touristic consumption, but has also instigated the unregulated promotion of development (in the case of the Cyclades) for touristic services, on the other.

It seems to be the case that tourism is thus contributing to the reinforcement of a promotional cycle of invented tradition, fixation on nostalgia, and fabrication of heritage, which leads to the commodification of heritage, and in turn, the further preservation of heritage for the visual consumption of the tourist which therefore strengthens preservation as a mechanism. This process, then, leads to McCannell's division between a "frontstage" (the fabricated cultural identity of place) and "backstage" (regions of authentic experience and identity). The acceleration of social mobility and the growth of the entertainment sector have inevitably led to a fear of the loss of identity which only reinforces the process of the preservation in the built environment. This is a rather paradoxical process because, as in the case of the Cycladic Islands, young people tend to be the ones pressing for rapid touristic development, considering it the best way to modernization and an increase in their quality of life.⁴³ They tend to partake in all processes for social and economic change brought about by tourism in their areas, while, more recently, they have also taken the lead in forming groups seeking to change the mass tourism development model, which they now consider to be problematic for local culture.⁴⁴ Thus, the cultural, social, and environmental impact of tourism throughout the world has led to changes in two key areas: those of a social nature (i.e. attitudes toward one's heritage), and those of an institutional nature (e.g. priorities and choices of tourism policies).

To conclude, then, the many transformations and side-effects I have outlined above are the result of an inherent tension between the forces of preservation and progress—transformations only further exacerbated by the expansion and large scale distribution of Internet-based digital media technologies. But while the expansion of these technologies may seem as though it is the result of the impulse toward progress, Ulf Hannerz points out that it has also resulted in a new form of preservation:

Media technologies do not only allow us to reach out through space. They also bind time by allowing us to record things, and thus preserve even more kinds of ideas and cultural forms,

⁴³ Bramwell, Bill. *Coastal Mass Tourism: Diversification and Sustainable Development in Southern Europe*. Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2004: 69

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

in great detail, from that past which is continuously evolving as today becomes tomorrow's yesterday. The cultural heritage just grows and grows and grows and is now turning into a storage problem. Again of course it is not only a matter of technology but of organization as well. But here the state tends to take on a great deal of responsibility (through schools, archives, museums, and other institutions).⁴⁵

Implicit in Hannerz's characterization of the relationship between media technology and cultural heritage is the logic identified by Koolhaas, namely: that progress, as an attitude, brings with it the impulse to preserve. But Hannerz adds an important element here, that of the state, which plays an undeniable role in protecting (for better or worse) the many actors constitutive of our Internet-based forms of infrastructure. In other words, while it may be the case that identity is simply an (ontological) feature of places (as Massey suggests), there nevertheless remains the threat of the reduction of the diversity of identities in the world when state's prioritize the protection of their global economic interests over that of their local cultural heritage. When global profit making ventures (such as AirBnB and Uber) gain the protection of more and more governments around the world, they are given a tangible, material priority that supersedes the concerns of individual cultures.

⁴⁵ Hannerz, Ulf. *Transnational Connections: Culture, People, Places*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2012: 24

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