

MASS TOURISM AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS

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Although mass tourism might seem to be an instrument for promoting peace and understanding among nations and friendship among peoples, its growth has been viewed in some circles with great concern.

Many people feel that exposure to hordes of visitors is bound to alter popular attitudes and beliefs, that tourism changes mentalities and spreads new concepts relating to work, money and human relationships, and destroys the ties that bind the people to their religion and ethics. In short, tourism is seen as a factor of acculturation in the worst sense of the word, and even of moral decay.

This accusation warrants calm and objective analysis. We hope that this brief study of the situation as it exists in Tunisia will help to put the general question in a better perspective.

For Tunisia, tourism is something that has developed recently, suddenly and by no means accidentally. Until independence the Tunisian hotel industry was insignificant. Nowadays over a million and a half tourists visit the country each year. They spend over fifteen million nights here and statistics show a strong upward trend. The annual increase may be as high as 20 to 25 per cent. The year-round figures are one tourist to every three inhabitants, and three "visitor-bednights" to each inhabitant.

Naturally, certain regions tend to be more heavily "invaded" than others. On the island of Djerba every single person depends on tourism, either directly or indirectly, for his or her livelihood. In Hammamet more than half the local families are engaged in it. Naturally, as there is no "tradition" of tourism, as such, in these regions, the phenomenon tends to look like a more or less well planned invasion. Hotels are mushrooming. The entire coast of the Gulf of Hammamet has been taken by storm while the "hinterland", barely 100 or 200 metres from the coast, remains deserted. Land speculation has spawned a new breed of land-owners. The local people have not always benefitted from this manna from heaven.

Tourism was introduced into Tunisia deliberately. Tunisians realized that vacation facilities, sun and sea, are as much consumer products as anything else and can be marketed. With the incentives given to the

Tourism was once thought of in host countries simply as a money-spinning passport to economic development. Today it is increasingly seen to have complex and sometimes unexpected cultural side-effects when it brings peoples together in an artificial situation in which real communication may be difficult. This theme has roused the attention of the local authorities as well and many recent official statements have expressed concern in this regard.

These two papers from a recent issue of UNESCO's *Courier* discuss the challenges facing modern tourism. Here Tunisia's Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, who is professor of Maghrebian sociology at the University of Tunis and Director of Tunisia's Centre of Economic and Social Research, maintains that it is wrong to see it "either as the way out of our countries' economic difficulties or as a curse that will plunge our societies into disorder. It will not bring us ready-made modernity, although it speeds up the modernization process and may change its course. It need not destroy our values nor upset our beliefs. It simply hastens a trend that started several decades ago.....".

construction industry and through use of the plentiful supply of semi-skilled labour, the hotel industry very soon proved itself able to alleviate the serious problem of chronic under-employment.

As it turns out, job creation in the tourism sector costs as little as one twentieth of the cost in the traditional industrial sector. At the present time the hotel industry employs more than 30,000 people. What is more, tourism has proved one of the key sectors in which profit margins have been sufficiently large to attract both national and foreign capital. The hotel industry has also opened the door to a whole chain of new employment opportunities. Last but not least, tourism has helped a great deal with Tunisia's balance of payments problems.

In short, disproving the pessimism of earlier studies and despite the risks and fluctuations and the very real uncertainty of the sector, tourism has proved, at all levels and for everyone concerned, at least for the time being, a source of economic prosperity.

At the same time it is easy to see that only the economic factors have been taken into account. This of course is understandable, considering the urgency of combatting economic backwardness, and the fact that during the 1960s development was still a very real problem. There were very few of us who could distinguish between development and growth and who understood the importance of the human and cultural aspects. The human problems thus, as it were, forced themselves upon us in a spontaneous and quite haphazard fashion. Little by little we have been obliged to face up to the impact that tourism has had on our attitudes, our values, our beliefs and our outlook on life.

Let us disregard value judgements about the behaviour of the tourist himself. Much more significant is

the relationship between the tourist and the host population. To begin with, the simple fact of the physical presence of groups of foreigners is bound to create new circumstances that affect personal relationships. The tourist does not come on any kind of business, but solely for recreation. He expects a whole range of services from us for which he is ready to pay at a price that is naturally assessed somewhat differently by the two parties but from which both stand to gain, although in varying degrees. This relationship with tourists is something completely new.

According to the traditional concept of relations between people, the bonds of hospitality are sacred. "Drinking water and eating salt" together creates a mystic bond, and hospitality is a communion from which grow lasting ties. Tourists, however, are guests of a different kind. Our tourist visitors are no longer rare passers-by sent by providence. They are sent to us in mass by travel agencies. Quantity dilutes quality. A close relationship between host and guest is no longer possible. Both know from experience that it will not last beyond the week or ten days' stay.

There always was, however, one sector where money was very little involved...the recreation sector. Leisure activities were free in every sense of the word. It was unthinkable, for example, to have to pay to see people dance, (and even more so to pay to dance oneself), to ride on a camel, or to bathe in the ocean. Now all these activities have to be paid for and have become highly lucrative.

Tourism did not create this profiteering mentality from scratch. It simply speeded up its development and accentuated it. But we must be sure that entire sectors of the population do not lose their natural sense of hospitality, and their traditional good manners.

WASTE AND WANT RICH AND POOR

But there is something even more important. With the advent of tourism, the fundamental patterns of the consumer society are in process of infiltrating our own society. The tourists are Westerners on vacation who come here for a week of leisure and to get away from the year's accumulation of fatigue and worry. The tourist is a worker who has escaped. After slaving away all year he is allowing himself a change of scene and pace, regime and life-style. One might say that tourism introduces the behaviour of a wasteful society into the midst of a society of want. The rift between rich and poor societies here is no longer merely a theoretical scandal based on academic analysis. It is everyday reality.

The tourist's most insignificant possession represents a fortune or a dream for many of the Tunisians called upon to serve him and to come into contact with him, whatever may be involved — a beach ball, a beach towel, a lipstick or a pair of sunglasses. There is something diabolical about this constant temptation and this invitation to taste the extravagant and still forbidden fruits of the consumer society. There is a tremendous temptation to imitate and emulate the tourist.

In an enquiry into the problem of juvenile delinquency we were obliged to recognize that tourism with its perpetual temptations is an important factor in the misconduct of our young offenders. We discovered that juvenile delinquency in no way stemmed from the need to satisfy primary and immediate needs, but rather from secondary needs created by the development of a different mentality, new styles of behaviour, a new outlook on life.

Tourism has undoubtedly played a role in the changing pattern of morality. The tourist comes to have a good time. He wants cabarets, dance halls and night clubs. And to enliven things and create an "ambience", the local public is always welcome. There is no lack of critics to protest against these dens of "vice and debauchery". It would be wrong, however, to blame tourism alone for a trend which in our view is far more generalized.

The impact of tourism on traditional values and attitudes is real enough but should not be blamed for everything. It is simply a factor in accelerating a development that is already under way. Tourism acts as a catalyst, working in the same direction as the historical trends in the society as a whole. The main question is whether tourism, by speeding up developments which we see as inescapable, might not throw the machine out of gear when it is

already being subjected to contradictory forces. The creation of new needs is an integral part of the development process. The ideal would be for new needs to appear only when society is ready with the means to satisfy them.

As an industry, tourism's role is to create these means. But as a social phenomenon its tendency is to reduce the impact of the means thus developed by causing these needs to appear prematurely. The problem is whether tourism, which is a production system geared to satisfy the consumption desires of outsiders, can develop in a climate of economic and moral austerity.

From another angle, tourism could be seen as a missed opportunity. It provides an opportunity for peaceful and friendly dialogue with those who in the past were not always favourable to us. Thus the education of the public and particularly of those sectors that come into direct contact with our visitors must aim at instilling the highest standards not only of welcome, courtesy and helpfulness but also firmness, dignity and strong national pride.

We should therefore like to see tourism become more of an encounter and less of a tour. An encounter is an exchange leading to discovery. The tourist who comes to visit my country does exactly what I do myself: he expresses himself in terms of his own culture. And this is how it should be; for it is the jolt of encountering others that tells him, by contrast, what he is.

Unfortunately, it does not always happen like this. The tourist does not always live up to our expectations, for a simple reason that has to do with his essential motivations. Basically the tourist comes to see the country rather than the people. He is someone who passes by without really seeing anything. And in any case, what does he want except to have his own prejudices confirmed and enjoy the comforts he is used to, including the false ideas he entertained about the country he is visiting?

Cultural mediation is virtually nonexistent. Local or international intermediaries, travel agencies, airline companies, hotel chains, are merely financial intermediaries, with no pretensions to cultural interpretation. One of the sumptuous brochures that various companies use to "sell" our country speaks of: "Tunisia, the sunny terrace of Africa", "An enchanting country with vast stretches of sandy beaches", "A revelation of the oriental lifestyle". Every effort is made to draw the attention of the potential customer to the landscape and never to the people. And when Tunisian culture is mentioned it is always with reference to the past.

Only the brochures and folders produced by the Tunisian Tourist Office in several languages, illustrated with coloured photographs, try to give our visitors a clear and authentic idea of our country.

The main thing is to emphasize the cultural side of tourism. Without running counter to the deep-seated motivations of the tourist who wants to relax and get away from things, we can try to give him what he wants while offering him the opportunity to make real contact with the local people. In this respect, experiments such as the Festival of Tabarqa deserve to be better known, looked at more closely, improved on or perhaps used as pilot experiments.

Lectures before and during his stay, first-class artistic events, round-table discussions, guided tours with better-calibre guides, exhibitions, documentaries—all this is no doubt very expensive, but it would make the tourist's visit a genuine encounter with the country, its culture and its people.

A POWERFUL FACTOR FOR UNDERSTANDING AND FRIENDSHIP

Generally speaking a major mass information and education drive is necessary. Tourism could and should be seen as a powerful factor for understanding between nations and for international friendship. Certain measures would of course have to be taken, first of all among the people of the host country. They should be urged to regard the tourist as just another person, a guest but not necessarily a model to copy. With the great diversity of mankind there is no need for subservience or imitation.

But any kind of action, whether national or international, must be put into effect step by step. Tourism is an all-embracing term which covers many different things. However, we need to define the different types of tourist if our strategy is to have a practical impact. Moreover, tourist types vary from, one cultural group to another. For example, they could be classified according to whether or not they know the language of the country, their financial means, their demands, and their socio-cultural level.

Certainly each different type has its own identifiable motivations. Once these have been determined, we can do a better job of trying to satisfy them. Certain other areas also need rethinking or even reorganizing from scratch: archaeological tourism, sports-oriented tourism, company, professional or trade union tourism associations.