EXTENDED ABSTRACT

TOURIST COMMERCIALIZATION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORIES: ADAPTATIONS, CONFLICTS, AND MANAGEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

Collective memory can be defined as a social construction process that carries a significant load of meaning, providing both individual and collective significance. It involves a continuous and ongoing reinterpretation of the past, shaped by an active and variable context that emerges from diverse social interactions.

The study of memory, particularly collective memory, has generated a broad field of research, which has grown in prominence within the social sciences since the last third of the 20th century. It is a complex concept that encompasses various perspectives and interests. The inclusion of a certain narrative about the past in collective memory influences the legitimization processes of different social groups' claims (often in opposition to others) and shapes individual and collective identities. Thus, various agents attempt to assert their narratives about the past through a wide array of mechanisms (especially in a present dominated by telematic networks and the rise of post-truth strategies) within a landscape shaped by different political perspectives.

In addition to this ideological and identity-related contest, there are other narratives that are not necessarily tied to legitimizing a particular version of the past for political purposes, but rather to increasing attractiveness and promoting inclusion in the tourism market. Sometimes, tourism narratives do not align with the previously established discourses, but incorporate new elements or combine existing ones, seeking to resonate with certain stereotypes and interests of potential customers. These narratives are often embellished with legendary or epic elements, infused with exoticism, and simplified for brief tourist consumption, which tends to be marked by superficial cultural contact.

The symbolic constructions of the past generated by tourism agents interact with other types of discourses, influencing identities and shaping collective memories. This paper

offers reflections and perspectives on these processes, along with an approach to key aspects that could enhance the sociocultural sustainability of tourism, while minimizing the impacts of tourism commercialization on collective memories.

2. OBJECTIVE

This paper provides a reflection on the processes of reconfiguring collective memories for incorporation into the tourism system. From a critical perspective, these processes are analyzed, with special attention paid to their potential impacts on local cultures and collective memories. Based on these reflections, an action model is proposed to guide the processes of tourism commercialization of collective memories, minimizing negative impacts and improving the sustainability of such tourism products.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a theoretical work, offering a framework for reflecting on key issues that could be useful for designing strategies to incorporate collective memories into tourist destinations. It is understood that only the agents within the destination are capable of establishing ad hoc strategies for each case. Thus, the methodology of this work is based on conceptual analysis and a review of case studies available in the literature.

4. RESULTS

The paper reveals that tourism narratives, by incorporating certain elements of collective memory and reconstructions of the past, tend to simplify the discourses handled by local populations. This can generate a series of impacts on local identities, ranging from the distortion of their own history to the creation and assimilation of cultural stereotypes tailored to satisfy tourist demand. However, it is determined that with proper planning and the active participation of local communities in the process of incorporating collective memories into the tourism system, these impacts can be minimized.

The main steps of the proposed model are: (1) establishing strategies that explore the implicit theories of different agents regarding destination sustainability and how it should be achieved, aiming to reach agreements and common objectives, (2) conducting a detailed ethnographic analysis that results in a catalog of different narratives on key aspects of collective memory, (3) adapting these narratives for inclusion in tourism narratives, understanding this process as a form of cultural intermediation, (4) effectively incorporating these narratives into the tourism market, and (5) developing mechanisms for monitoring, controlling, and mitigating the impacts generated by the tourism commercialization of collective memories

5. CONCLUSIONS

Collective memories, as symbolic constructions, are crucial for the performativity of groups, communities, and human populations. For this reason, in response to emerging

tourist demands and the need for destinations to differentiate themselves, they have great potential to be incorporated into the tourism market—whether through the projected image, the setting of destination elements, or through specific products.

It has been argued that the stereotypes that drive tourism consumption are often based on constructions of a destination's past, appealing to a sense of nostalgia for a time perceived as more authentic than the present. In many cases, tourism agents emphasize key aspects of destinations to establish a place in the minds of consumers, focusing on the authenticity and exoticism of the destination to maximize attractiveness and economic benefits. These strategies often involve modifying the narratives of societies and their memories, resulting in various impacts and possible responses from local populations.

While it is understood that the incorporation of the symbolic constructions of the past and the collective memories of groups, communities, and populations necessarily requires some degree of adaptation to adapt to the characteristics of tourism consumption, it is also considered that proper planning and management of these processes can minimize negative impacts. Furthermore, it can provide various benefits (economic, empowerment, and identity pride, among others) to those who hold and maintain these collective memories.

Respecting the collective memories, culture, and history of a destination's community should be a primary objective for the agents responsible for promoting and marketing that destination. This paper emphasizes the importance of governance and the active participation of all agents in the different phases of strategies for incorporating collective memories into the tourism market. The key actors in this process should be the holders of these collective memories. From our perspective, the fact that these groups perform these memories and, in part, structure themselves as a group based on these narratives, gives them greater legitimacy to decide whether their memories should be integrated into the tourism market and how they should adapt for this purpose. Of course, other agents can also contribute significantly to this process, as they have broader knowledge about the tourism system as a whole, as well as specific perceptions about the destination and its actual or potential demand.

The specific implementation of the above strategies will depend on multiple factors, including the characteristics of the destination, the communities involved, and the elements of collective memory to be incorporated into the tourism system. This paper advocates for a tailored approach to each case, utilizing methodologies based on participatory action research techniques, which have already demonstrated their ability to produce positive results in tourism planning in relatively small destinations, often within the paradigm of community-based tourism.

Implementing these methodologies in destinations with different characteristics (such as larger, more established destinations dominated by foreign capital or highly dependent on tour operators, among other possible factors) presents a major challenge. This is especially true when addressing the dynamics of international economic power and its influence on destination planning and management. However, we believe that this approach offers a way to anticipate and address the various socio-cultural impacts of tourism by empowering local institutions, groups, and communities.