The Impact of Mass Tourism to Traditional Settlements

DIONYSIA FRAGKOU

Department of Interior Architecture, Decorative Arts & Design, Technological Educational Institution (TEI) of Athens

1. ABSTRACT

The natural and cultural heritage, the peculiar and living cultures are considered a great tourist attraction. Consequently, tourism as the main growth engine of the country, especially the cultural and alternative tourism, is a field that the traditional settlements can provide an opportunity to revive their active integration into the tourism process. In Greece, the protection of remarkable residential sets was announced quite early with the Article 79 of the Building Code 1973 in order to preserve buildings or settlements with special Architectural characteristics. Reference on the protection of the cultural environment, which includes the traditional settlements, appears in Article 24 of the country Constitution of 1975.

By characterizing the settlements as traditional, automatically places them in a privileged position with significant growth opportunities. A basic precondition however, is their sustainability. This depends on how correctly they will be used and if there would take place a strategic planning procedure. In addition, the concerted effort by the State and the local community would be really helpful. The impacts of increasing tourism development are quite often extremely adverse, because of the wrong usage of the natural environment and the cultural wealth. The result is the tourist overconsumption and overexploitation to corrupt and drain the natural and cultural resources.

The aim of this lecture is to highlight that the relevant legislation and the international development of buildings protection did not have the expected results, although they led to the imposition of rules that limited design choices. The morphological integration of new buildings in traditional

architectural ensembles, the barren application of the rule, the distortion of the truth to the perception of the authentic and the really traditional folk-building, rather contributed to the confusion and abuse of the traditional architecture, than benefited. This is the reason that a set of accepted rules and policy should be established in order to protect the natural and built environment and culture from the uncontrolled tourism development. Also they will combine harmonically the terms "development" and "protection" using the architecture as a space identity. The approach of the subject will be through the presentation of examples, comparing the authentic traditional buildings with the new one.

Key Words: Architecture, Tourism, Traditional settlements, Cultural wealth

2. INTRODUCTION

In the Greek land, more and more regions have been orienting or basing their economy and their local labor market on tourism. This phenomenon has been steadily growing in recent decades, not only in Greece but also in the wider Mediterranean region. Tourism activity with elements that refer to the mass tourism model is, in many cases, highlighted as the key activity (Panagiotatou, 1988). Based on the increasing the number of tourists and maximizing the short-term economic benefits, remarkable places with specificities are rapidly becoming impersonal receivers of the accommodation and catering services provision.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) surveys, however, the majority of tourists today wish to visit areas of high environmental quality and strong local culture elements. In keeping with this organization, "the development of sustainable tourism responds to the needs of modern tourists and tourist areas while, at the same time, it protects and enriches the opportunities for tourism in the future. The sustainable tourism development leads to the management of all natural resources in a way that satisfies the economic, aesthetic and social parameters and needs, and preserves cultural diversity, basic ecological processes, biodiversity and life support systems".[2]

Nowadays, consumers around the world are more aware and showing an increasing sensitivity towards environmental issues. Many tourists are now taking into consideration the "ecological footprint"[3] that their journey leaves on their destination. Also the time will soon come when this footprint will determine the choice of destination, means of transport and accommodation. It is no coincidence that an ever increasing number of hotel businesses promote environmentally friendly policies and solutions and emphasize their eco-friendly attitude.

Now the traveller is approaching holidays in the sense of self-fulfilment, experience and "well-being". For these consumers, the acquisition of experience and "exclusive" and personalized

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[2] Tamoutseli, 2009.
[3] http://www.footprintstandards.org (23/07/2011)

services are more important than anything else. "Slow travel" holidays as well as the sharp rise of agro-tourism are two illustrative examples. These holidays facilitate the development of small units that enable travellers to taste everyday life and nature in the places they visit.

How can this happen when the current tourism development model is based on mass and organized tourism? When the uniformity of this tourism development model leaves little room for an individualization of the attitudes, preferences and desires of the potential tourists? When tourism overconsumption and overexploitation alter and deplete the natural and cultural resources of our planet including the traditional settlements? Thus, a great effort is needed to balance the two goods: the good of protection and the good of growth.

3.   TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENTS

From the 13,000 settlements with less than 2,000 inhabitants, 850 are characterized as traditional and a few dozen are abandoned. All those settlements (according to V. Ganyatsas) are being destroyed due to abandonment, improper transposition of urban standards and arbitrary and forced formations for tourism consumption. But "the most significant destruction is attempted by the imposition of morphological rules". Thus the morphological rules destroy the authenticity of the settlements, falsify their history and their physiognomy. This happens through the interference and ultimate dominance of poor copies of old patterns that "freeze" their developmental dynamics, turning them into a tourist setting.

In the context of cultural tourism, the requirement for authenticity has promoted the reproduction of traditional sites, monuments or events, as tourist or cultural resources. A typical example of the authenticity and identity alteration of settlements and buildings are the tourist resorts. There settlements and hotel units attempt to revive the "old" and "traditional" with great failure as they recreate old techniques and motifs in a modern way, inappropriate materials and different characteristics in order to meet the requirements they want (e.g. settlements with mills in some Greek islands, replicas of stone hotels in mountainous villages, employees masked with traditional costumes etc.)[4].

The cultural heritage of a place is a key component of cultural tourism and a valuable guarantee for the development prospect of the settlements, contributing greatly to attracting tourists who show an interest in culture and respect the environment. Traditional settlements are included in the architectural heritage of our Country, are an irreplaceable element of our cultural heritage and an important factor in its tourist future. Throughout the islands and mainland, we find residential complexes that uniquely reflect our cultural history and are living organisms - as

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[4] Ganyatsas V., 06/02/2016, http://www.tovima.gr

opposed to the very important but individual monuments - housing members of the local community even today[5].

GTO, in an effort to exploit the traditional settlements, realized their importance in good time and undertook their preservation and exploitation. Their preservation, not as inanimate museum exhibits or damaged monuments, but as a dynamic part of modern life, which would play an important role in the tourism development and the development of the country. Thus, in 1975, a program was launched to preserve, restore and preserve buildings and sets of traditional architecture and transform them into hostels or public use buildings such as museums, restaurants, community offices, etc. This would be a pilot project for other settlements. The program consisted of six settlements: Vathia in Mani (Peloponnese), Vizitsa (Pelion), Mesta (Chios), Oia (Santorini), Papigo (Epirus) and Fiskardo (Kefalonia)[6].

The above-mentioned GTO program with its implementation became the reason for re-evaluating the traditional potential of the country, both by the operators and the general public. Although it has contributed to the preservation of some buildings and residential complexes, it has not been able to contribute to the wider use of the political development of these settlements within a strong institutional framework that would protect them from over-exploitation.

Consequently, the lack of definition of land use at an early stage, the incomplete or inadequate control, the legislation for the off-plan construction, the architectural models that have been implemented and are being implemented, had as result an increase in reconstruction, the with-no-preconditions integration into the architectural environment and finally the alteration of the traditional character not only of the settlements but also of the wider region. In order to avoid the risk of converting the settlements into a hotel space, since unregulated construction can destroy their traditional sections, land use should be spatially re-examined and control over the growing structure should be applied (Bozinecki, 2008, Kathimerini).

4. THE GREEK INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

In the Greek institutional framework, the first reference for the protection of the remarkable residential complexes was made quite early with Article 79 of the Greek Building Regulation (GBR) of 1973 which provided for the preservation of buildings or settlements of a particular character. A reference to the cultural environment protection, including traditional settlements, is also found in Article 24 of the Constitution of 1975, while the term "traditional settlement" appeared two years later in Law 622/1977, namely No. 4 which modified the rules of the then-existing GBR context.

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[5] Kiousis Panagiotis, Traditional Settlements and Cultural Tourism: an Integrated Approach, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Research work.

[6] Bozheki-Didoni Paraskevi, Traditional Settlements and Tourist Development: the GTO Program of 1975-1995. The Example of Oia Santorini.

More specifically, the article states that the monuments, the traditional areas and the traditional elements are protected by the State while the necessary restrictive measures of the property, the manner and the form of compensation to the owners, for their protection, would be set out by a relevant law. Since 1973, a series of laws, presidential decrees and amendments have been published not bringing about the desired result.

However, the lack of spatial planning that takes into account the place's carrying capacity and the continuous rebuilding through, on the one hand, the incentives of all Developmental Laws since the 1980s to the present day and, on the other hand, the known arrangements referring to the "off-plan construction" have undoubtedly contributed to the transformation of the place into a continuously expanding receptor of tourist accommodation with no limitation and control in terms of either number or character, type, form etc. (Klabatsea, 2009a).

Characterically, one can point out some of the consequences of the tourist accommodation uncontrolled growth and the tourism seasonal expansion. Some of them are the insufficiency of water and energy resources, the tendency for land-use change (agricultural land - residential pressures), the landscape alteration due to reconstruction, the widespread off-plan and often arbitrary construction, the lack of promotion and protection of architectural and cultural heritage, the deterioration of the settlements' traditional character, the primary sector contraction and the loss of local varieties in the agricultural and livestock sector, the lack of local population awareness about alternative forms of tourism and primary sector and many others.

The Special Framework for Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development (CFSPSD) for Tourism (2009), invoking the necessity of sustainable tourism development in the country, does not incorporate the notion of the environment's carrying capacity as a policy criterion (Avgerinou-Kolonia, 2011). Thus producing "spaces" for tourism that are governed by the philosophy of intensifying the resources and areas use, with large and complex deployments, alteration of the destinations-places identities and the imposition of a new "image".

At the same time, sustainable tourism development seems to be a recurrent goal, unrelated to the "place's identity". It is therefore viewed, first and foremost, as an economic prospect of the intervention areas and, secondarily, as a mechanism for the "preservation" of their identity. The perception of the country's settlements "image" does not appear to be an input or specification for spatial planning studies, but a parallel process to be added to urban planning, without providing for their inter-replenishment and uniform representation in the ultimate produced space.

Thus, the shift towards post-modernity and the international development of the building protection sector of previous decades has led to the imposition of rules that limit the design freedom and to the morphological integration of new buildings into traditional architectural ensembles. These rules and their sterile application helped to distort the truth about the concept of the authentic, truly traditional-folk building, and contributed to the confusion and abuse of traditional architecture.

The degradation that mass tourism can bring to the environment and the dangers arising from a place's over-dependence on tourism is now becoming noticeable. These negative impacts of imprudent and disproportionate tourist exploitation of destinations with remarkable cultural heritage have made international organizations such as the UN through UNESCO, to design and propose a cultural central model of sustainable development, redefining the notions of growth and culture. According to this, cultural tourism has to develop within strictly defined frameworks and achieve well-defined and clear objectives.

In particular, the Cultural Tourism Charter states that "tourism development and infrastructure projects must take into account the aesthetic, social and cultural dimensions, the features of natural and cultural landscapes, biodiversity as well as the broader visual image of places of cultural heritage (2nd Principle, paragraph 2.5). It is also preferable to use local materials and take into account the local architectural character of the place"[7]. Tourism, as the main driver of the country's development and especially cultural and alternative tourism, is a field that can provide the opportunity for the traditional settlements' revival through their active involvement into the tourist process - an evaluation of this relationship is attempted.

5. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Intensive and inadequate tourism management and its related development may damage their nature, integrity and predominant characteristics. For example, in Koufonisi Island, the annual rate of building permit issuance for new tourist accommodation over the last decade is one of the highest in the country. It is a typical indication of how the island is treated as a "privileged place" of small or larger investments - redeeming its identity as "an alternative tourist destination of isolation and tranquillity with an exceptional natural environment"[8]. Hypothetically speaking, the entire land stock on the island could be converted exclusively into tourist accommodation since there are no tools or mechanisms in place up till now to hinder such a development. In this way, the ecological structure, the cultural features and the lifestyle of the host community can also be degraded, as is the visitor's experience in this place.

The same phenomenon happens in Santorini where the redemption of the sunset in Oia has made this settlement and the whole island an immense hotel, as well as in many other tourist destinations both in the islands and the mainland. The intense concentration in space and time has resulted in significant alterations in the natural and structured environment as well as in the local communities and economy. The pressures on the environment in tourist areas are strongly felt. Disproportionate residential development, illegal construction, alteration of the place's physiognomy and falsification of architectural-morphological characteristics of buildings,

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[7] Dimitsanou-Kremezi Ek., The Revised Charter of Cultural Tourism and the Articles that Ensure the Architectural Heritage
[8] Klabatsea, 2006, Speech at 1st Congress "Place Branding" in Volos

violation of free spaces and habitats, pollution and lack of water resources, all undermine the viability of the tourist product itself.

But the more tourism expands, the more tourists are looking for the local element heading towards a different relationship with the place, where the local is interpreted as a sincere and authentic approach and the question of the relationship with nature and the place with its specific features starts becoming an important element of the design. In this way, the reuse of the existing building stock, in a different way, is promoted. The stereotypes of tourist inhabitation are questioned, such as the importance of the view, the coast and the diptych "sun and sea". The proposals are simpler, the materials more basic and the tourist is required to experience a more direct relation to nature and place. The exhibitionism of the 2000s has ceased to exist and perhaps the need for a lasting connection to technology, networks and information may be revoked.

6. IDENTITY OF THE PLACE

The conversion of a place into a tourist destination involves, among other things, its recognizability as such. This recognizability often equals to acquiring "branding"[9]. The acquisition of a tourist identity can be based on natural or anthropogenic elements, parts of the evolutionary course of the place, or on modern independent interventions, oriented from the very start to cover the tourist interest by creating an additional "tourist image". As such, we can mention the case of Costa Navarino in Messinia. What should not be overlooked is that often the acquisition of a tourist identity uses or even needs the identity of the place (in the sense of a wider spatial unity) for its structuring. The identity of each place is structured through a multitude of elements of the natural and anthropogenic environment, its history and culture, its society and economy. On the contrary, in many cases, the concept of the place's identity seems to be limited or even trapped in its "image", one or more, depending on the recipient (Lynch, 2007).

Each place is a unique "organization"· it is the result of a socio-economic and environmental journey over time, with a record of the past, a reflection of the present and an indication of its future perspective. Thus its identity can only be the result of an extremely complex, multilevel and continuous evolutionary process of all natural and man-made resources of wider spatial units where it belongs and converses. The way of recognizing, reading and evaluating both resources and their evolutionary process at any given socio-economic situation can demonstrate "new" places.

Each component of a region's physical capital, every element of the structured environment, of its cultural heritage (material and immaterial), its social capital, its productive structure and economy, cooperate on the resulting identity (unique/exclusive or predominant/ dominant). Often, criteria such as the rarity, authenticity or fragility of a resource or element and

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[9] Ibid

of a potential comparative advantage contribute decisively to the identity structure of a place. The spatial extent of a historical, socio-political or cultural event often functions as the delimitation of a "place of identity".

In other words, the identity of the place where a tourist destination with an identity is emerged, created and built is claimed to be a kind of passport for the tourist identity. The degree of compatibility of both identities (that of the place and that of the tourist destination) is checked on a case by case basis, referring essentially to the manner, form and type of tourism development by location. The role of spatial planning at both strategic and local levels is gaining increasing importance in the recent period. To the extent that the tourist image is not one of the guiding principles of the tourism strategic planning in Greece, the distance between the two identities will increase to the detriment of both, distorting the place's identity and interfering with the tourist identity of each place-destination. At the same time, the tourist image definition should be based on a systematic and multi-criteria diagnosis of tourist natural and cultural resources (Avgerinou-Kolonia, 2011).

7. CONCLUSION

Tourism generates identities to a greater or lesser extent, forms narratives, transforms them and converts them into stereotypes. When somebody goes to a tourist destination, they expect to meet the fantastic image they have created. So they have predefined what they expect to meet through pictures, texts and descriptions. They have already seen what they anticipate to live and the person who is there to offer it to them is bound by all this information and impressions and must respond accordingly. All this grid of how tourism generates identities and how these identities are mutated or stereotyped is of great interest and, at the same time, extremely complex.

The architecture of tourism in Greece, however, is "pressed" by the over-exploitation and the need to offer more and more benefits and amenities. At the same time, it realizes that in the time of crisis or post-crisis, it is necessary to search for and formulate a new architectural paradigm of an architecture that will look for the "minimal" form, the unintentional materiality, and will aim at the least possible environmental footprint. To the extent that the tourist image is not one of the guiding principles of the tourism strategic planning in Greece, the distance between the two identities will increase at the expense of both, altering and interfering with the tourist identity of each place-destination.

What is needed is a "safety net" in the form of a framework law, which "in addition to protection will allow us to think about what we have to do to protect, what is being authentic and to specify, dissuasively and persuasively, a compatible development plan for each settlement separately, respecting its peculiarity and special character".[10]

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[10]Ganyatsas, ibid.

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