

Chapter 56

Management of World Heritage Sites: An Integrated Sustainable Marketing Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to determine sustainable efforts by the world heritage sites (WHS). By gauging the effectiveness and efforts of the WHS to convey viable social, environmental, and economic use of their resource through the medium of website marketing, effort is made to highlight the extent to which sustainability initiatives are visible in the vision and mission and signature websites. In doing so, it makes a significant contribution in heritage tourism literature and communicates a critical assessment of sustainability initiatives to the WHS management and respective states. Mixed results are presented. Although, the World Heritage Convention supports an exhaustive list of site-centric heritage sustainability initiatives associated with conservation and authenticity, other aspects of sustainability such as host community concerns, social and viable economic impact considerations to date have received less attention.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, the world heritage sites have witnessed a phenomenal growth in visitation numbers (Li, Wu & Cai, 2008). Despite the emerging significance of world heritage, it continues to share a dialectic and complex relationship with

tourism (Boyd & Butler, 1997). A divide exists between scholars of cultural heritage and scholars of tourism on heritage tourism impacts. According to Lyon, the “practitioners involved in the design of heritage as a visitor attraction face professionals whose interest is focused on the resource and its protection rather than on the question of public access” (2007:62). From a tourism perspective, heritage is a commodity purposefully designed

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to satisfy the needs of contemporary audience. In line with this view, Taylor (2001) maintains that heritage tourism is motivated by monetary benefits. It has been suggested that dialectic relationship between tourism and heritage can be nurtured through the use of strategic tools such as certifications and sustainable marketing (Chhabra 2010; Lyon 2007). Although sustainability is at the forefront of the ideology behind the world heritage movement today (Aas, Ladkin & Fletcher 2005), it offers limited value due to its somewhat narrow focus on conservation and authenticity thereby denying a broader and integrated approach.

In the light of the emerging significance of an integrated perspective of sustainability in heritage tourism, this study seeks to use an integrated sustainable marketing paradigm to determine if a predetermined set of important indicators from the model are visibly implemented by the world heritage sites (WHS). More specifically, the aim is to suggest add-ons to the heritage conservation principles so that a holistic and integrated sustainable paradigm of heritage tourism can be devised. In the recent decades, the global/world form of heritage has received unprecedented attention in heritage tourism, more so because it brings with it a celebrity UNESCO status to the heritage site. The accolade has become a reference point and “a measure of quality, trademark, and an authenticity stamp for the heritage tourist” (Rakic and Chambers 2007: 146). The UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) aims to facilitate the identification and conservation of cultural and natural heritage across the globe that is considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. This is embedded in the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (adopted by UNESCO in 1972). In brief, the UNESCO’s World Heritage mission is multifold:

- to encourage countries to sign the World Heritage Convention and to ensure the

protection of their natural and cultural heritage;

- to encourage States Parties to the Convention to nominate sites within their national territory for inclusion on the World Heritage List;
- to encourage States Parties to establish management plans and set up reporting systems on the state of conservation of their WHS;
- to help States Parties safeguard World Heritage properties by providing technical assistance and professional training; provide emergency assistance for WHS in immediate danger;
- to support States Parties’ public awareness-building activities for World Heritage conservation;
- to encourage participation of the local population in the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage; and
- to encourage international cooperation in the conservation of our world’s cultural and natural heritage (UNESCO 2010).

The appreciated UNESCO honor has also surfaced as a major marketing tool in the recent years for the world heritage site managers (Lyon 2007; Rakic & Leask, 2006; Rakic & Chambers, 2007). That said, it has also been posited that the “concept of ‘World Heritage’ has drifted from its original purpose. It has become an accreditation scheme, used either to serve the purposes of the tourism industry or for the purposes of nation building” (Rakic & Chambers, 2007: 146).

The intention of the original idea was to bestow unique and universal value to selected heritage and advocate support for its conservation. However, recent motivations have extended to nation building, identity and an attraction towards the potential economic numerations by promoting tourism at these. Several authors note that the conservation of heritage sites is being compromised today for financial gains (Bregalia

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