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TOURISM AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

· TOM SELWYN ·

Anthropologists working in the field of tourism and the environment in the Mediterranean might well observe that one of the least helpful consequences of the mountain of 'tourism studies' produced over the past two decades by varieties of social scientists, 'management' specialists, and others of no fixed disciplinary abode, has been the tendency uncritically to focus on 'tourism' as an undifferentiated category of cultural, social, and economic activity that has identifiable social and environmental 'impacts'. But it is doubtful that the generic term 'tourism' has much, if any, descriptive or analytical value. Mass charter tourists using resorts, hotels, restaurants, airports, coaches, and so on, and independent travellers using bed and breakfast accommodation may both be 'tourists' but not only are they very different kinds of tourist but also the social and environmental implications of their activities are also clearly very different. Pilgrims, mountaineers and art connoisseurs may well all be 'tourists' too but the activities with which they are associated have quite different relationships with the societies and environments in which they are found. More importantly, a fixation on 'tourists' tends to simplify social and economic landscapes in ways that positively distort understanding of the locations in which they are embedded.

The best route to the understanding of the role of tourists and tourism in relation to the environment in the Mediterranean, or anywhere else, is to get away from 'tourism studies' altogether and relocate the field into more familiar if also more complex ethnographic spaces. The most effective descriptions and analyses of Mediterranean tourism and environment have been those that have focussed on wider and more general politico-economic and socio-cultural structures and processes in definable territories—from villages to the region as a whole and all points in between.

As for the 'environment', our focus needs to be on rural and urban fabrics that are at once products of, are shaped by, and shape human actions and processes, for, as Papayannis

and Sorotou (2008: 83) nicely put it, “all landscapes are cultural and always a result of the interaction between humankind and nature”. We need, therefore, to explain how landscapes and townscape are being sculpted and re-sculpted by complex and overlapping economic and political forces in which tourism is only one part.

All of that said, there is one magisterial source that not only approaches the Mediterranean in the broad, inclusive, detailed, and ethnographic way suggested above but which also contains some basic and necessary points about tourism, narrowly defined, and environment (widely defined) in the region. In *The Blue Plan*, Grenon and Batisse (1989) observe that out of the approximately 250 million tourists from outside the region and 150 million from inside, there are several different sorts of tourist: mass/charter tourists (around 40% of the total), cultural tourists, including pilgrims (around 25%), recreational (i.e. sports, walking, and so on) (about 17%), adventurers and explorers (10%), health tourists (7%) and conference attendees (around 1%). The authors go on to observe that one of the principal characteristics of what they describe as the ‘historical Mediterranean’ is its agricultural diversity (found, for example, in the interplay between coast and mountains in the northern part of the region and the coast and desert in the south and all the various environmental micro-sites in between) and the close interrelationship between ‘nature’ and agriculture. They further argue that the rapid technological, economic, demographic, and social changes in the region over the last half-century or so—in which the growth of tourism has played a part—have placed the region’s natural environment under considerable threat.

Our task is to relate the tourism niches named here to the overall transformations of the wider market and to the technological and economic changes of which the authors speak. We may consider four cases—of an island, a state, a coastal city, and a classical pilgrimage centre—that help us do exactly that.

Mallorca and mass tourism

The Balearic island of Mallorca is one of the leading destinations in southern Europe of charter/mass tourism. About two thirds of the 7.5 million tourists annually visiting the Balearics stay in Mallorca, a large majority in the three resorts in Calvia Municipal District, south-west of the island’s capital Ciutat de Mallorca (Palma). The history of mass tourism development on the island is one that starts with an explosion of unplanned and unregulated hotel building and extensive migration from southern Spain in the Franco era and proceeds to a present stage in which it is more or less contained and regulated within a select number of Mallorcan municipalities, Calvia being the principal one. Calvia Municipality has managed (with help) to address many issues associated with the social and environmental consequences both of mass tourism and the growing phenomenon of apartment tourism and second home ownership. The municipality does its best to insure that building regulations are observed, environmental standards promoted and all sorts of facilities provided for tourists, second-home owners, migrant labour and families of long standing residence. There are, however, insistent structural tensions in this achievement of balance between mass tourism and environmental protection, private and public sectors, resident and immigrant, insider and outsider. Mass tour operators increasingly bus tourists on excursions from coast to interior, thereby placing considerable pressure on the interior

countryside. Furthermore, pressure comes from banks and other investors to allow building in the interior. Forest fires, frequently blamed on arsonist lieutenants of property developers, have periodically gutted large parts of the natural parks on which building could take place.

Bosnia-Herzegovina: weak government and lack of planning/strategy

Following the conclusion of the Balkan war and the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995, tourism in the former Yugoslav state of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) was virtually a blank sheet. Unlike Croatia, with its hundreds of miles of Adriatic coastline, BiH, with only a very small opening to the sea, has taken a long time to re-invent itself as a tourism destination. With the important exception of the mass Catholic pilgrimage site of Medjugorje, Bosnian tourism depends on its natural assets of mountains, rivers, and areas of natural beauty, as well as the well-known cities of Sarajevo and Mostar. BiH has thus looked towards a new tourism market stressing adventure and independent tourism, 'wellness' and spa tourism and cultural tourism which have all attracted favourable mentions in planning circles. Some of the above is taking shape—but most is not. The problem lies in the weak and divided political and policy landscape in a state that has two governments and two tourism ministries. The result of this is an almost total lack of planning. Profitable enterprises (a few hotels in Sarajevo, for example) have been 'cherry picked' and investors have arrived with plans for building of villa resorts accompanied by golf courses on prime land.

Marseille and the re-sculpting of the city

Although unquestionably one of the great cities of the Mediterranean, Marseille is not a tourist city in the way that others on the Cote d'Azur, such as Nice and Menton, are. It has traditionally been a port city at the centre of trading links between Europe, Africa and Asia, as well as the bridge between France and its former North African colonies. The morphology of central Marseille reflects this. It is an area of cheap accommodation and street markets: in many ways ideal for its cosmopolitan migrant citizens. However, under the aegis of the EU sponsored strategy for strengthening the economy of the region, north and south, with its accompanying rhetoric of competitive Mediterranean cities, which is all linked to the economics of gentrification, Marseille is presently undergoing a programme of inner city refurbishment. This is effectively driving out the existing population and creating a city centre fit for the expansion of wealthier residents and visitors. Marseille is destined shortly to become a place fit for, inter alia, smart conferences. The people and objects of an 'informal' economy that may appear shabby but which, in fact, is the centre of huge interlocking networks of economic and social ties binding the city to Africa and beyond will find no place in such a city: its capacity to provide spaces for residents and citizens of all kinds and socio-economic backgrounds will be terminally compromised, and the pressures of capital development will squeeze out the poor, promote the private over the public, and disrupt any remaining social, religious, and ethnic balance in the city.

Bethlehem and the dominance of large players

Arguably the oldest tourism/pilgrimage site in the Mediterranean, Bethlehem is presently under the occupation of Israeli military rule, surrounded by a high concrete wall with military checkpoints controlling entry and exit. Land around the city is being routinely confiscated undercutting whatever remains of the agricultural economy. The economy in general is understandably weak. The main (religious) tourism/pilgrimage offer consists of the Church of the Nativity in the centre of town, and the main tourist activity consists of the bussing in of hundreds of thousands of day-visitors from Israel (and Israeli hotels) to the city for a brief visit to the Church of Nativity and souvenir shops. There have been consistent attempts over the years to change the profile of visitors to Bethlehem. One potential sector that could (in time) bring substantial benefits not only to the small businesses in the city but also to the villages around Bethlehem is independent travel involving backpackers and others interested in the natural and cultural landscape that Palestine has to offer. However the combined realities of military occupation and the control of existing tourism infrastructure by Israeli companies and a few large Palestinian tour operators has meant that such moves to increase the number of independent/adventure tourists has met with limited success and the tourism economy remains geared towards the large players, bringing little benefit to the majority of small businesses and services.

Conclusion

What these brief case studies suggest is that the anthropology of Mediterranean tourism and the environment starts with the relationship between market and government. The shaping and re-shaping of rural and urban environments that flow from the interplay between market forces and the public frameworks in which these operate—in Mallorca, Marseille, Bosnia, Bethlehem, and elsewhere—all have implications for the types of tourism to be found in them. Complex global, regional, and local structures and processes are at work in these places and anthropologists need to be able to identify and describe these. Amongst these various forces there are also the powerful interests of tour operators, banks, and investors. There are clearly substantial social and environmental implications flowing from these processes as we have described. Coastal urbanisation for mass tourism, for example, has arguably disrupted (forever) the kind of integrated patterns of systematic agricultural diversity described by Grenon and Batisse in favour of a tourism mono-crop. Corresponding socio-cultural transformations in cities deriving in part from processes of gentrification and the smart cultural tourism to which it is linked will, in a rather comparable way, disrupt former models of socio-spatial counterpoint and replace them with an urban morphology structured increasingly by wealth and class.

Our case studies and the assumptions that underlie them thus suggest that the market in general and the tourism market in particular in both city and countryside have a logic driven by private interests framed by various kinds of public response. Indeed (bearing in mind their interdependence in a field like tourism that depends absolutely on environmental well being) one could say that underlying many of the more obvious questions of concern to anthropologists is the relation between private interest and public good.

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GLOBALIZATION AS A DISTINCTIVELY MEDITERRANEAN
CULTURAL PROJECT

• MINNA RUCKENSTEIN •

In his address to the Europe and the Mediterranean Seminar in Helsinki (03.11.08), reproduced in this Forum, Henk Driessen describes the Mediterranean as an area that should be “part of a truly global anthropology”. But how are people in the Mediterranean drawn into processes of cultural change that they see as being part of the making of the global? This question, I think, is highly relevant for attempts to make ethnographic projects conducted in the Mediterranean matter for a truly global anthropology and in the following I try to answer the question with some thoughts on my research on religion in Southern Italy and particularly in Naples.

This discussion is inspired by a paper recently presented by Joel Robbins, titled *Hierarchy and Hybridity: Toward a Dumontian Approach to Globalization*¹. In this thought-provoking work he discussed how Louis Dumont’s theoretical contributions can be used for advancing contemporary debates about globalization; one part of the argument resonates beautifully with what I have understood about religion in Naples. Robbins argues that people everywhere are drawn into the processes of globalization by becoming aware of the globally distributed hierarchy of values that cherishes individualism and, along with it, orientations to life that are understood as ‘modern’. In this global ranking, people in places that are seen as ‘traditional’ or worse, ‘backward’, tend to direct themselves towards cultural change that moves them up in the hierarchy of values. In the Mediterranean area common strategies used for strengthening this movement towards the globally-valued include, for instance, tourism and attempts to incorporate local economies into global networks. But Robbins reminds us that there are also other kinds of processes of change that seek to advance globalization; processes that are more obviously culturally driven and that do not follow the usual political and economic agendas to make places matter in global economic competition.