

PETER SMEKAL. *The Threatened Paradise: Tourism on a Greek island*. Uppsala University: Dissertations and documents in cultural anthropology, 8. Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology, Uppsala University, 2006. Pp. 392. ISBN 91-506-1900-4.

Peter Smekal's anthropological dissertation focuses on tourism in two villages, Ólymbos and Diafáni, both located on the Greek island of Kárpathos in the Dodecanese island group between Rhodos and Crete. Smekal operates on the basic assumption that the polarity of tourism versus anti-tourism corresponds to the social hierarchy and distinction of modern society. Thus the form selected for a holiday mirrors the individual's background in general: his or her occupation, education, structure of household (whether the person lives together with others, with children or alone), values and impacts from parents and other categories of social networks. Simultaneously the dissertation belongs to the category of community studies in the sense that the author focuses on communication between local people and tourists, and amongst groups of tourists.

In general there still exist few dissertations that take an anthropological perspective on tourism which operates inside a very complex general discourse. As the study of tourism has no methods of its own, researchers are borrowing from other fields. Furthermore, many issues and approaches are competing for publicity in tourism studies: for instance, the cost-benefit analyses emphasized in business schools which are also used by practical entrepreneurs. Nature tourism offers one more direction, and jointly these form the frame for anthropological studies of tourism.

The central theme of this dissertation is an analysis of the conceptions that travelers have of themselves. None of Smekal's informants want to be identified as 'tourists', and they resort to numerous strategies in order to avoid categorizing themselves as such: they describe themselves as 'travelers', 'vagabonds' or other alternatives. Smekal stresses how there are numerous contradictions among the tourists' own use of these words. The accompanying discussion includes a broad range of interesting points that demonstrate Smekal's advanced reflections, based on an extensive reading. Yet in reporting his research, he could have made the social distinctions between these different groups deeper.

Smekal highlights how the culturally constructed picture of the local community communicated to the tourists is characterized by peaceful relations between different groups of locals. Beneath the surface are conflicts that remain invisible to the tourists as the local community strives to portray an authentic 'other'—a cultural construction—for their visitors. This portrait "promotes a mythical idyll of harmony and community, and an image of a romanticized rural past" (p. 279). Yet an example of an underlying conflict is the tension over whether to pave the road between Ólymbos and the capital of the island, Pigádia. The centre of the dilemma is located on whether to preserve authenticity by slowing down traffic or to improve the capacity and safety of this narrow mountain road and simultaneously become more modern.

Smekal exposes and analyzes this conflict and numerous others of its kind very well, but what then? How far should an anthropologist or ethnologist go in his/her conclusions before presenting alternative parameters for a solution? This is an old, yet still current question. In light of the actual political requirement of performance responsibility that exists on the island, I would want to go further than Smekal, and also beyond what

most anthropologists, except those working in action research, would suggest. From this perspective I find Smekal's analysis limited, for example, as he discusses the narratives tourist guides present on Ólymbos. Smekal neither writes about the political process through which their narratives are managed, nor of how their work is organized. These omissions give rise to important, unanswered questions. Are the guides employed by some form of a tourist board? Are they independent small entrepreneurs who are cooperating in some form of an agreement with each other, or is there a different arrangement?

Smekal's text makes it evident that the region he discusses lacks a strategy for protecting what is conceived as cultural heritage, that is, the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes that are inherited from past generations. The power of the concept of heritage strategy is that it compels a selection of what is seen as essential to protect so that these objects may also be prioritized in a political-economic context. Simultaneously the concept itself is subject to cultural constructions that may change. In this sense it is highly political and also poses challenges to the process for achieving consensus.

This is surely a general problem that emerges from the difficulties of achieving consensus, as well as from efforts to define and address the challenges that Greece and other Mediterranean countries face. As different funding institutions—including those of the EU—expect performance responsibilities from recipient domains, the area faces intense competition over the actual political discourse through which actors within the tourist industry aim to become more visible and powerful. Without acting as 'cultural police', anthropologists could become more engaged in these debates and assist in the resolution of these competitions.

Smekal has a sharp analytical eye as he discusses consequences of tourism on the island of Kárpathos. Although his intention is clearly to remain neutral, in his comments he repeatedly alludes to the contradictions and unclear goals that characterize the tourism context. It would have been useful if he had occasionally put aside his veil of neutrality, and prescribed some alternative parameters for a balanced development of tourism where the mentioned heritage strategy would find a place. Such a step would have been particularly important since tourism dominates the local island economy and forms an essential part of local political interests. However, it is an interesting and well-written dissertation on tourism in an environment where economic livelihoods are primarily dependent on it.

OLE RUD NIELSEN
ETHNOLOGY
ÅBO AKADEMI
onielsen@abo.fi