Cultural tourism as a vehicle of cultural diplomacy in the Mediterranean

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Abstract

In terms of cultural tourism, few places in the world are more salient than the Mediterranean basin. Moreover, the bordering states of the Mediterranean account for approximately one-third of all international travel destinations. Given these conditions, and the fact that cultural tourism is a vital emerging economic tool, this article will argue that cultural tourism is among the most important instruments of cultural diplomacy. After a further description of culture and its relationship to diplomacy, this article will examine how cultural diplomacy differs from both traditional and public diplomacy, yet still remains a complimentary element of a nation’s foreign policy.

This paper will further argue that cultural diplomacy may enhance a nation’s “soft power,” or rather its ability to get other nations ‘to want what you want’, and further on go to describing the key elements of cultural tourism, and more specifically how it may contribute to peace and improved foreign relations. Finally, this paper will note some of the negative externalities resulting from cultural tourism’s increased growth, including some of the unintended, yet troubling effects on local communities and the environment. Conclusively, a comprehensive analysis will be attempted, of the highest benefits cultivated from cultural tourism and the simple need to preserve it.
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1. Introduction

It has long been considered that diplomacy, as the key driver of foreign relations, shapes security perimeters, codifies political affairs, and fosters economic development, which subsequently enables improved conditions for the cross-cultural exchange of ideas, persons, and customs. Since the end of the Cold War and the advent of the internet age, however, diplomacy increasingly occurs outside the traditional enclaves of embassies and state dinners, in favor of a more informal, citizen-to-citizen track that emphasizes the exchange of art, education and culture as a resource of foreign state relations; a practice now ubiquitously known as cultural diplomacy. This is not to suggest, however, that cultural diplomacy exists only below the state-level. On the contrary, governments are often at the center of cultural diplomacy designation, usually in the form of restoring city centers, promoting art and theater productions, subsidizing student exchange and language learning programs, and organizing festivals that celebrate traditional and local culture.

Cultural diplomacy, dependent on the mutual respect of persons from different countries and regions, is enabled primarily by the ease of which information may be transferred from various locations, the internet and mobile phone being the common tools of the day. In addition, the relaxation of immigration restrictions in places like the European Union, have better acquainted citizens of the entire continent with one another. These two examples of cultural diplomacy, however, are not without their criticisms. On the former, many are critical that these mass exchanges of information often have the effect of mitigating local culture in favor of a more one-dimensional ‘global’ culture. Indeed, “the uniformity of mass cultural offerings around the world has led cultural critics to see globalization as an international orientation toward the worst aspects of mass consumption and American cultural products pitched to the lowest common denominator” (Feigenbaum, 2001). On the latter, the freer movement of people around Europe is often popularly viewed in light of an erosion of the local culture and/or the invasion of an unwanted other. Heightening these fears are the common stereotypes that foreign workers negatively adjust the local labor market towards lower wages and higher unemployment.
Yet one industry, above all, is appropriately suited to carry out the original intentions of cultural diplomacy: cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is defined as “tourism motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic or lifestyle/heritage offerings of the tourism destination, be it a community, region, group or institution” (Stebbins, 1996). Cultural tourism differs from the above mentioned cultural diplomatic endeavors in that it establishes both a public and private-sector incentive to preserve and develop local culture as a means to project positive associations with host countries to foreign travelers, business persons, and visiting politicians, as well as cultivate national, regional, and local economic growth. Above all, the primary positive effect of cultural tourism, according to the Contact Hypothesis Theory, is that “it demonstrates tourism’s potential for fostering understanding between nations and peace” (Reisinger & Turner, 2002). Learning and experiencing differences provides a healthy basis for achievement and preservation of peace.

Moreover, recent studies suggest that cultural tourism’s worldwide share of the tourism industry is increasing annually. According to a project conducted by the Association for Tourism and Leisure Education, the number of tourists taking cultural holidays has nearly doubled over the last decade, from 17% in 1997 to 31% in 2007 (Association for Tourism and Leisure Education, 2007). These growth rates are attributed to a number of key factors, including the better division of labor markets, the increased spending power of the middle class in the developed world and newly industrialized countries, the reduction of travel restrictions, increased competition and subsequent travel price reductions, and overall changes in consumer preferences (Pechlaner, 2008).

In terms of cultural tourism, few places in the world are more salient than the Mediterranean basin. Home to Ancient Greek temples, Roman villas, Moorish palaces, and the Pyramids, “the sheer quantity of ancient sites and buildings bind past and present more closely in the Mediterranean than anywhere else” (European Commission, 2002). Moreover, the Mediterranean and the twenty-two states that share in its coastline, account for approximately one-third of all international travel destinations (UNEP, 2005).
Given these conditions, and the fact that cultural tourism is a vital emerging economic tool, this article will argue that cultural tourism is among the most important instruments of cultural diplomacy. After a further description of culture and its relationship to diplomacy, this article will examine how cultural diplomacy differs from both traditional and public diplomacy, yet still remains a complimentary element of a nation’s foreign policy. The tendency is to view cultural diplomacy as merely a tool to foster good will and mutual understanding between nations. While this is certainly a key aspect, we will argue further that cultural diplomacy may enhance a nation’s “soft power,” or rather its ability to get other nations ‘to want what you want.’ Next we will describe the key elements of cultural tourism, and more specifically how it may contribute to peace and improved foreign relations. Finally, this paper will note some of the negative externalities resulting from cultural tourism’s increased growth, including some of the unintended, yet troubling effects on local communities and the environment. Each of these sections will support its arguments with examples from the Mediterranean, for not only is the region considered to be the world’s bastion of cultural tourism, we hope to further the discourse on tourism and diplomacy in the Mediterranean.

2. Culture and Diplomacy

Over the last half century, culture has evolved into a formidable realm of foreign policy, as paradiplomacy focusing on cultural exchange gains in strength. Many countries, especially those residing in the “West”, recognize that promoting their cultural heritage not only attracts visitors and foreign direct investment (FDI), but also helps achieve political aims, usually via the continued reinforcement of positive imagery. Much like the term culture, however, these values are often difficult to quantify objectively. Moreover, the overlapping nature of diplomacy, whether traditional, public, or cultural, often blurs the individual characteristics and merits of each. Thus, preceding our argument for cultural tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, we must first articulate more fully the processes and subsequent benefits of cultural diplomacy.
In any discourse on cultural diplomacy, it is imperative to begin with a reflection on the nature of culture itself, especially as this article will examine the links between cultural diplomacy and cultural tourism. Surely as any student of social sciences is keenly aware, definitions of the word “culture” abound (168 in total according to Kroeber & Kluckholm, 1952), and subsequently include subtle changes in the definition’s emphasis depending on one’s field of study, including psychological, normative, genetic, structural, and historical factors (Kroeber & Kluckholm, 1952). It, however, must be clear that these definitions overlap considerably. Where it regards this examination of cultural diplomacy, there are several definitions that are considered optimal largely because they emphasize the historic and communicated facets of culture. A definition of culture emphasizing history is perhaps most relevant to this field given that governments and societies are often prone to understanding the present via the prism of the past. Thus, for the purposes of understanding cultural diplomacy and, as will be discussed later in this article, its link to cultural tourism, the most comprehensive definition of culture is stated as follows:

“the system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of a society use to cope with their world and with one another, and which is transmitted from generation to generation through learning. It is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. Cultural influences can be seen at various levels of society, including at the national level, regional level, gender level, generation level, social level, and corporate level” (Bates & Plog, 1990).

This definition is particularly poignant in that it indicates the multi-faceted nature of how culture is shared and transmitted. Cultural diplomacy, in our understanding, works much in the same way in that it is shaped, adopted, and practiced by a number of different sources, including governments, NGOs, the private sector, and the individual. Further definitions may also be useful, especially where we will later discuss the importance of heritage sites in promoting cultural tourism. They include Czarnowski’s more poetic interpretation: “the shared heritage, the fruit of the creative and processed
effort of countless generations. It is the body of the objective elements of the communal assets, thus capable of being disseminated” (Czarnowski, 2005). Further, we shall not omit those definitions which emphasize the more behavioral and psychological components of culture. In particular, Linton aptly describes culture “as a set of behaviors people have learned, elements of which are common for members of a certain society and communicated within it.” The sum of these definitions, despite their relative similarities, are needed in order to fully articulate the relevance and practice of cultural diplomacy in as wide as sense as possible.

Culture’s relationship to diplomacy is well-documented, particularly among scholars, who most commonly assert its value in bolstering the West’s “soft power” (described in more detail below) and subsequently bringing about an end to the Cold War. Cultural diplomacy is often articulated as one in the same as public diplomacy, a branch of foreign relations first termed in 1965 by Guillon, a U.S. State Department official, to describe the creation of a country’s foreign policy aimed at external societies rather than their respective governments. As such, public diplomacy’s targeted goal has been to exert influence on a foreign government by influencing its society (Frederic, 1993). In addition, public diplomacy also entails how foreign news is reported in a respective country, and how this news may impact politics (What is Public Diplomacy, 2003). Public diplomacy, it must be stated, generally exists outside the realm of traditional diplomacy, because the latter almost exclusively involves the more formal relationship between political elites (or between representatives of sovereign Nation states – ie. the diplomats).

Scholars in the field of diplomacy often disagree on the relative placement of cultural diplomacy as either a valued feature of public diplomacy (Frederick, Malone, Stignitzer, 1995); a distinct third type of diplomacy (next to traditional and public) emanating from a government’s cultural policy (and we must emphasize, still articulated and promoted at the state-level) (Haigh, 2000); or whether cultural diplomacy is a wholly separate form of diplomacy, articulated and promoted at both the state-level and sub-state level (the private-sector and individual relationships). We argue that cultural diplomacy cannot be viewed solely in the light of a state-level promotion of culture, either at home or abroad, given the enormous dependency on the private-sector, i.e. non-governmental organizations, universities, art and
cultural centers, as well as global institutions to carry out the task of exchanging their independent interpretations of culture (or rather, unofficially sanctioned cultural policies). Moreover, Cynthia P. Schneider emphasizes this relationship between the public and private sectors. She regards the full potential of cultural diplomacy to be waning in countries like the United States because of the “lack of a coherent, public-private, interagency strategy for cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy, symptomatic of a general marginalization of arts, culture, and media by policymakers and the philanthropic community, limits the potential of existing programs” (Schneider, 1999).

Despite cultural diplomacy’s sustained and burgeoning relevance, it is not an alternative to traditional diplomacy, but rather a complimentary tool that may only enhance state-to-state relations. Traditional diplomacy is necessary, according to William Davidson and Joseph Montville in their influential article on the psychological factors of foreign policy, because political leaders must always assure their citizens that they have their interests, security, and well-being in mind. According to the authors: “Even the most sophisticated leaders must adopt forceful postures at crucial moments to meet this most primitive but enduring need of people who fear for their survival” (Davidson & Montville, 1982). These actions, in turn, may lead a nation’s ally or adversary to perceive such actions in best case scenarios as suspicious; in worse case scenarios, they may be considered hostile or even threatening. Cultural diplomacy, on the other hand, allows for an alternative dialogue that typically focuses on art, culture, and education—activities, by and large, considered in the mutual interest of all. Moreover, the underlying hope of cultural diplomacy is that by “negating stereotypes and propaganda, increasing broader communication and levels of understanding, cultural diplomacy can ultimately lead to changes in the way governments interact with one another” (Schneider, 1999). As we will describe in more detail below, cultural tourism is among the most significant vehicles to disseminate both the shared and diverse aspects of culture.

Though cultural diplomacy is often understood merely in terms of the promotion of good will between countries and peoples, another equally significant benefit is its ability to entice. In academic and policy circles alike, this sort of enticement is more commonly termed “soft power.” Whereas
power had long been understood as the ability of a country to obtain both its needs and wants, usually through so-called “carrots” (payments and/or financial incentives) and “sticks” (threatening actions and/or sanctions), soft power describes the ability to influence others to want what you want (Nye, 2008). These processes are almost wholly credited to the execution of public diplomacy, or rather, government sanctioned policies aimed at the society of another country. Thus, the role of cultural diplomacy is either often overlooked in this process, or simply grouped into public diplomacy. Yet we highlight Joseph’s Nye’s explanation that soft power is much more than the ability to persuade; it also requires the ability to attract. More explicitly, he notes that “soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction” (Nye, 2008). Among these assets, we may consider both the material and the philosophical. Regarding the material, for example, how well a country preserves and utilizes its historical sites in the promotion of peace, may induce others to value said country as an objective arbitrator or strategic partner. Regarding the philosophical, a country whose citizens aptly and consistently demonstrate their acceptance of freedom, diversity, and entrepreneurialism, may help sway the political leaders of another country to bolster economic partnerships and realign its security considerations toward the former. Maintaining heritage sites and accepting diversity, however, cannot be solely attributed to government sponsorship or endorsement. Much of these actions or behaviors stem from the will of a community or individual, therefore suggesting that soft power cannot be wholly credited to public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy, as we accept it as the coalescence of government, private-sector, and individual relationships, is as much a factor in shaping the extent to which soft power may serve its intended purpose to attract and persuade.

In the post-Cold War era, much of the discourse on cultural diplomacy and soft power have centered on the debate regarding their current usefulness. Some suggest that because more than half of the world’s countries are democracies, soft power’s relative effectiveness is in decline because political and economic values worldwide have become much more intertwined and interdependent. More explicitly, because open societies and economies are now more the norm, they are no longer a unique resource of attraction and persuasion. On the other hand, many consider the dissolution of a bipolar security paradigm to be among the greatest resources of soft power potential.
These arguments stem from the idea that the world no longer views itself in East-West terms, but rather through a multicultural lens enabled by new technologies that ease communication (Mayor, 1993). We consider the latter view to be more convincing. Moreover, we suggest that the increased fusion of global political and economic values will only enhance the desire of an individual to seek out the uniqueness of another’s culture. Here begins the processes of cultural tourism.

3. Cultural Tourism as an Instrument of Cultural Diplomacy

Travel and tourism is the world’s largest industry (D’Amore, 2010). Since the 1950s, the growth of international tourism has been a boon to national economies starved for industry after the destruction of two world wars. Between 1950 and 2007, international tourist arrivals grew from 25 million to 903 million according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2009) Projections indicate that these figures will grow to 1.3 billion by 2020 (Levy & Hawkins, 2010).

In light of the mentioned role of cultural diplomacy, and the fact that the number of conflict areas has decreased profoundly over the last half century, this begs the question of whether tourism is a tool for peace, or rather a byproduct of it (Litvin, 1998). Prior to answering this question, however, we will first describe more clearly what cultural tourism entails and how it may pertain to economic and sustainable development, particularly in the area around the Mediterranean. Further we will describe some of the criticisms of cultural tourism in the following section, especially those related to unsustainable business practices that can marginalize or destroy the diplomatic potential of a heritage site.

Cultural tourism, as we have noted, is “tourism motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical, artistic or lifestyle/heritage offerings of the tourism destination, be it a community, region, group or institution” (Stebbins, 1996). While often the norm, excursions to museums, churches, and castles are not the sole extent of cultural vacations; rather, they are usually the initial draw. In addition, vacations that include cross-cultural home-stays, volunteer and environmental projects, as well as educational seminars that
include presentations on art, history, and culture, among other such topics, are also considered under the gamut of cultural tourism. Though not a requirement, cultural tours often emphasize public and alternative means of travel, including bicycling and walking tours, as well the full utilization of local bus, coach, and rail transportation systems. Such an emphasis is put in place by countries to not only encourage the traveler to see and experience endemic ways of living, but also to foster economic returns for the local, regional, and national governments. Increasingly, governments and non-government organizations have been organizing training seminars on codes of conduct for local residents and travelers alike in order to encourage deeper communication and mitigate instances of misunderstandings and cultural insensitivity. Local residents are, as well, often educated on the number of incentives, usually economic, derived from maintaining a high level of authenticity.

As mentioned, the Mediterranean alone accounts for approximately one-third of all international tourist arrivals. Though these figures indicate a strong preference for leisure tourism, in particular cruise tourism along the Mediterranean coastline, culture and heritage tourism are beginning to hold an increasing share of the marketplace. Unfortunately, the actual figure for the number of tourists on cultural holidays in the Mediterranean is difficult to quantify precisely, largely because these figures are generally based on surveys where a tourist’s perception may significantly adjust the results of the survey. Moreover, tourism research did not begin to flourish globally until the 1980s, thus negating our ability to compare cultural tourism figures accurately before this decade (Richards & Munsters, 2010). In spite of these problems, the OECD states that worldwide cultural tourism accounted for some 360 million arrivals in 2007 alone (OECD, 2009).

Regarding the Mediterranean, what can be more accurately quantified is the number of cultural tourism projects and research studies commissioned by the European Union and Member States to further develop this industry. In 1992, heritage tourism, under the category of cultural tourism, was made a major pillar of the European Commission’s tourism strategy (Richards, 1996). Moreover, the EU has sponsored a host of initiatives, including the Euromed Heritage Programme. Both the EC and the EU Member States are also in the process of ratifying the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and
The growing interest in the field of cultural tourism as an instrument of cultural diplomacy raises an important debate: whether the tourist industry, as a whole, is a catalyst for peace, or simply a byproduct of it. It is often accepted as fact that tourism enables understanding and tolerance, as well as fosters cross-cultural relationships. Politicians from Mahatma Ghandi to John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan have cited tourism’s potential to induce a more globally cooperative environment. Moreover, there is no shortage of tourism scholars who ardently support the industry’s ability to enhance world peace. These arguments range from the sanguine, “[tourism spreads] information about the personalities, beliefs, aspirations, perspectives, cultures and politics of the citizens of one country to the citizens of another” (D’Amore, 1988), to the hyperbolic, “tourism could be the equivalent of atomic energy by being a positive force for world peace…effect[ing] social change on a global scale by building bridges of understanding and acceptance through the peace ambassadors [i.e., tourists]” (Holland, 1991).

Critics of this widely accepted causal relationship, however, suggest that there is no evidence to suggest that “an indigenous tourism industry in any way led to conflict reconciliation” (Litvin, 1998). In support of this claim, Litvin makes reference to the more simplistic and negative definition of peace as “the absence of war.” Further, critics often site the limited engagement between tourists and local inhabitants, as well as the more debilitating forces associated with mass tourism, including the exhaustion of local resources, and the usurping of tourism proceeds by outsiders and ‘middlemen’, among other negative externalities (these arguments will be addressed further in the following section).

Both of these contradictory positions make valid arguments; however, we consider the causal relationship of peace and tourism, and additionally tourism’s value as an instrument of diplomacy, to be complimentary. Yet, one is probably the enabling condition for the other: whereas tourism does not automatically bring peace, there are virtually no tourist flows towards war-torn places, however beautiful, such as Afghanistan. In other words, peace, as understood as the absence of conflict, presents favorable conditions for travel,
thus reaffirming that tourism is a beneficiary of peace. Tourism, however, can also foster peace if we accept that not all conflicts are destructive; some may in fact be considered constructive if they help transform societies away from tension and toward mutual understanding. Thus, while the above criticisms of tourism’s potential to bring about peace focus on the destructive elements of conflict (i.e. war) and utilize a negative definition of peace (the absence of war), we accept a wider definition of the term peace as “what we have when creative conflict transformation takes place non-violently” (Galtung, 1996). Implicit in this definition of peace is that conflicts are not “resolved,” but rather “transformed,” (Galtung, 1996), thus suggesting that tourism, especially in forms such as educational cultural tours, may play a role in this transformation when a conflict has progressed beyond a destructive phase. Consequently, “the tourist contributes to fostering peace through tourism if and when he or she owns the kind of attitude which considers the Other as an opportunity for emotional growth, and the encounter with the Other is managed in a nonviolent way” (Askjellerud, 2003). In order for cultural tourism to realize its full potential in the promotion of peace, the industry, as a whole, must be inclined to tackle some of the other debilitating externalities resulting from its rapid growth trajectory.

4. Negative Externalities of Cultural Tourism

Despite the growing awareness of cultural tourism’s potential and our arguments noting it as an instrument of diplomacy, some criticisms exist as to its functionality. One of the main problems is that because more and more money is being allocated for cultural tourism expenditures, poor and unequal business practices are increasingly marring the sustained use and uniqueness of certain regions. These problems exist between tourism agencies, often located far away from cultural sites, and the local community. As well, cleavages exist within the local community itself. Further, problems related to environmental degradation and resource exhaustion are coming to the forefront as the industry continues to experience marveled growth rates.

According to Mike Robinson two conflicts persist; first, cultures are increasingly being packaged in the same “glossy brochures” that invariably portray local cultures in a superficial way that belies their uniqueness
Second, much of the profits are disbursed and reduced by the middlemen in the long chain that exists between the tourist agency and the local community’s caterer. Local souvenirs, for example, are now often imported from distant locales, often from China and Southeast Asia, a disturbing externality in the race for cheaper products, mass production, and profits that often culminates in the eradication of both unique crafts and local trade skills. As a result, communities centered near heritage sites, often lack the financial capabilities to maintain cultural and historic authenticity. This also leads to significant population shifts as the younger generations are fleeing the more remote villages in search of jobs and economic prosperity in cities. Further, local communities are often divided between those generating revenue from tourism versus those seeking an income from other industries (Robinson, 1999). Tourism, in general, requires land to build hotels, restaurants, and other sources of entertainment; land otherwise coveted by agricultural workers and manufacturers.

Another major concern is that the sheer number of tourists visiting a heritage site may cause more damage than benefit. These arguments, it must be mentioned, are not exclusive to cultural tourism, but for the tourism industry on the whole, for which cultural tourism is increasing its proportion of annually. For example, the staggering year-to-year growth of tourists in some Mediterranean countries, including Croatia (20% per year), Syria (15.7%), Egypt (11.7%), Algeria and Turkey (10.1%) (MCSD, 2008), while encouraging for local economies, does not come without unwanted environmental burdens. Tourists produce high-levels of garbage and often exhaust or deplete natural resources. For example, it is estimated that a northern Mediterranean (e.g. Spain) city dweller uses on average 250 litres a day; the average tourist, however, uses 440 litres. With an allowance for watering gardens and golf courses and filling swimming pools, this can rise to some 880 litres per day for visitors in more luxurious accommodations (WWF, 2005). Such consumption patterns have acute effects, especially in the Mediterranean where water is scarce much of the year. Unfortunately, imposing limits on the number of tourists able to visit a site, or imposing quotas on the resources a tourist may consume, may produce the effect of negating tourism as a whole for a community, country, or region.
All of these problems, whether they include the unequal distribution of tourism profits, the erosion of cultural or natural beauty, the battle for land use, the division of local communities, and natural resource exhaustion pose a threat to the viability of cultural tourism in the future, especially where it may pertain to the continued enhancement of cultural diplomacy. We argue, however, that none of these problems are beyond the realm of improvement if cultural tourism, in collaboration with the mass tourism industry, adopts the key instruments of sustainable tourism, including the integration of tourism into planning, responsible advertising of tourism, sustainable use of resources, waste management, diversification of tourist offerings, support of the local community, and promotion of the role of research in the field of tourism. While an explicit examination of all of these instruments is beyond the realm of this Research Paper, we will highlight what we consider to be the most pertinent instrument of sustainable tourism as it relates to communication and diplomacy: the better involvement of the local community.

As McIntyre states, “community involvement in tourism can reinforce positive impacts while mitigating negative ones, as in this way residents understand tourism, participate in its decision-making and receive benefits from it” (McIntyre, 1993). The involvement of the local community in the decision process, especially within the confines of sustainable development planning, assures not only a higher rate of success (on account of the members of local community having a keener and more practical understanding of the region that outside experts do not), but also increases their positive attitude towards the projects and determination in goal achievement. Educating the local community about the negative impacts of a certain type of tourism may make them see the need to change. Regardless of the immediate financial benefits generated from the more environmentally destructive tourism industries, local communities may welcome a change that provides for a more long-term and eco-friendly tourism industry that serves to protect the natural and cultural heritage of their area. While the Mediterranean countries are primarily missing regulations that would aim to involve the local community in these decision-making processes, more positive experiences exist in the realm of government-supported projects. Cyprus recently implemented a project aimed at the revitalization of village economies, where financial incentives were offered to local people to renovate
traditional houses for tourist purposes. Professional help in terms of marketing and promotional activity was also available to the applicants of this support programs. Such projects are highly desirable, since they not only play a significant role in the revitalization of targeted areas, but also raise awareness of local inhabitants of the cultural heritage worth preserving that they may have previously taken for granted or did not even realize that it could be an asset in their tourist offerings.

Invigorating cultural tourism with the instruments of sustainability may have an even larger impact on cultural diplomacy. Whereas we have discussed in detail the mutual exchange of art and culture in the formation of cultural diplomacy, another field is beginning to emerge as one of the most vital areas in need of mutual cooperation: the environment. Our argument follows the same logic we have noted above regarding culture’s role in shaping diplomacy. If, for example, a tourist is affected by the cultural offerings of another nation, such that his perception of this country may be influenced positively, then this tourist would also likely be more engaged if a cultural heritage site was not only well-preserved, but also utilized a number of different environmentally-friendly tools to sustain itself. Next, if we accept that the culmination of relationships formed on the basis of cultural exchange may foster an improved mutual understanding between nations, then the culmination of individual relationships formed on the basis of sustainable cultural tourism may foster improvements in how countries negotiate bilateral or regional environmental policies. In other words, the enhancement of environmental policy may have a bottom up path, starting from the individual tourists coming home and bringing the newly observed environment friendly practices back to their home countries. A keener understanding on the relationship between sustainable cultural tourism and its ability to infiltrate transnational environmental policies, however, requires a more thorough examination of the subject in both academic and policy circles. As for now, we consider that at least a minimum connection can be ascertained to this relationship given the existing links between environmental and cultural tourism at both the state and supranational-level. One of the key examples for the Mediterranean region is the Council of Europe’s proposed Regional Programme for Cultural and Natural Heritage in South East Europe that would intrinsically tie cultural heritage policy with newly established environmental regulations.
The connection between culture and environmental preservation may contribute to diplomacy in other more dramatic ways. In cases where one country lacks domestic knowledge in how to properly maintain its antiquities, they may look to improve relations with another country which has better developed these practices. One new idea offered by Jonathan Aitken in the February 2009 issue of the American Spectator, suggests that Syria, a country rich in Christian, Judaic, Muslim, and Roman antiquities, may reach out to American scholars, museums, historians, and environmentalists to ensure better the quality of preservation initiatives and protection of cultural heritage sites. Though Syria’s relationship with the United States has been strained in the wake of the American-led invasion of Iraq, Aitken notes that an initiative based on “antiquities diplomacy” may be akin to Richard Nixon’s “Ping-Pong Diplomacy,” which helped open a more fruitful diplomatic relationship between the United States and China in the 1970s (Aitken, 2009).

5. Conclusion

Cultural tourism aspires to be one of the most ardent vehicles of cultural diplomacy in the world today. Few other industries or initiatives are as well equipped to remind man of the benefits of mutual understanding and peace as those ascertained from exploring another’s culture, be it a material attraction, or an informal conversation between tourist and local on the cultivation of an indigenous product. Moreover, the technological, political, and economic characteristics of the twenty-first century suggest that the combination of public and private sectors, as well as the individual, may play a more prominent role in the formation of cultural diplomacy. Cultural tourism’s potential as an instrument of peace, however, may be marginalized if governments fail to establish proper mechanisms that not only bind their private-sector messengers of culture within ministerial agencies and initiatives, but also heighten local communities’ ability to partake in the responsible planning, execution, and in the end, profiting of cultural tourism.

The current cultural tourism projects in the Mediterranean offer a healthy start to the process of preserving and celebrating local culture, for these initiatives have the potential to not only inject preservation ideals and regulations championed by the European Union into the policies of the
Maghreb, the Middle East, and other developing countries for the benefit of future generations of explorers, but also they may help eviscerate the topical and often hyperbolic discourse on the growing racial divide. We concede that cultural tourism may not bring about an end to this debate, but increased education of culture, history, and arts, especially where they involve first-hand encounters, may steer this supposed conflict away from the simplistic overtures that highlight cultural differences, toward a mutual fascination and understanding of mankind’s ability to live in peace, regardless of the remarkably different environmental, historical, and cultural settings.

The realization of peace and diplomacy through cultural tourism, however, can only exist if this industry accepts a greater responsibility in preserving cultural norms and heritage sites. Far too often, the motive of short-term profit causes the tourism industry to favor the quantitative, i.e., the number of tourists, over the qualitative, or rather the aesthetic and educational value of an individual tourist’s experience. Moreover, governments of all regions, and especially in the Mediterranean, must work closer together to ensure that the tourism industry implements the key instruments of sustainable development such that no valued artifact of our past may be damaged by our desire to experience it. In this sense, cultural diplomacy must include not only the mere promotion of culture and art, but also the preservation of these creations.
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