

“A Culture Rush Only Knows Losers”

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Abstract

In this essay you will be looking at the positive and negative impact of place marketing on communities in a area, city or island. Included are authors of literature that correspond with the arguments and perspectives shared in this article.

Keywords

amount anholt around attacks becoming branding braun business cape city com countries debt dependency develop donkey economic economy erik exploited financial found greece https identity impact island keep lesvos local marketing mass nations operators political possible profits retrieved sal shores stakeholders strategy think tour tourism tourists used verde year

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Our first visit to the island felt like striking gold: we found it to be a hidden source of authenticity in comparison to other, heavily exploited, Greek islands. Lesvos, or Lesbos as they like to call it in the Netherlands. It must have been around the year 2004. It was beautiful. And naturally we didn't fly an empty plane onwards to the island. We found some tourists, expeditionists and wanderers on our flights. Some families too, early adopters for some of the tour operators still keeping fairly shy of the mythic and contest island, located close to the Turkish shores.

We lived on a farm, kept donkeys and horses and took the select groups of tourists around the island on donkey treks. A most fulfilling and beautiful journey through the highland and shores of the Greek island. Each summer made the winter, as profits are stored to keep maintenance during the winter months when tourism declines. But it's not just those tourist traps, hotelkeepers and restaurants that rely on the industry.

Tourism is becoming an increasingly important part of economies, not just those of third-world countries but also of the richer western countries. Even in our own little country tourism has grown its foothold in the economy by 27% compared to 2010 (CBS, 2017). The financial potential has a broad spectrum of different businesses and even more stakeholders backing them.

Some countries find their economic troubles worth the sell-out to tourism. Cape Verde is a prime example. I witnessed the conclusion of the elections there in 2016, when the Movement for Democracy had a win and thus paving the way for further tourist expansion on the island. Santa Monica on the isle of Sal even is home to a statue of a pioneer George Vynckier who brought the first bits of tourism to the island.

In 2008, first signs of the financial crisis appear in Greece. Few years later and in the case of Lesbos in 2015, the first refugees hit the shores of Molyvos and Eftalou. Both villages, very close to my old home. And where I used to remember the island as a paradise, I am now afraid to return. And so did other Dutch holidaygangers. A crushing decline of tourism hit the island from that very year and it is still an ongoing refusal of tourists to visit.

Some characteristics of a city or nation can be used to a great advantage, such as the ‘terrorism’ safety guarantee on the island of Sal, Cape Verde - which by the way is never truly a guarantee. Nevertheless boosted the economy through the roof in 2016 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017). Simon Anholt states there is a much greater force waiting to single-handedly strip countries of their illusion that they have found the golden key to a thriving economy. Anholt wrote: “It is the public opinion that really brands these countries.”

And so once that public opinion turns sour, those countries find themselves in quite the predicament. Local stakeholders have put great investments in new development, new business and in labor forces. All of which now don’t have the funds or future for financing itself. Those debts are either put on those stakeholders, slowly succumbed or taken on by the government which in all causes a national debt. In Turkey, the tourism industry deals with a \$17 billion debt (Financial Times, 2017).

There is a second risk lurking in this economic treasure. With tourism we see corporations. Tour operators that try to monopolize or at least solidify a large market share in the country or city. Once local businesses become subject to these organisations, businesses tend to lose their vote when it comes to financial agreements. On the island one of the captain would sometimes sail out making a loss instead of profit, merely because the tour operators would find another captain in a fling. Any of them, all struggling to make ends meet, would be willing to show a few tourists around the Aegean sea at any given time. May it be carrying a financial burden. Some of the Turkish hotels were pressured into becoming an all-inclusive, where costs often level out with profits (Tourism Concern, 2012).

A worrying idea, not just for the locals that are being exploited but for the nations too. Most of profits made in those nations are exported to the origination countries of tour operators. Although they pay sales taxes and so forth depending on local policies, it is nowhere near the amount of profit raised by the marginalized locals (Lea Lange, 2011).

The increase amount of mass tourism puts tour operators to a choice of strategy. In the strategies defined by Mihalis Kavaratzis, we find two that are highly relevant to the countries mentioned. Lesbos and Greece in general are very much involved in the gains and pains of Competition and cooperation between cities. Where-as an isle of Sal in the pover Cape Verde has found an identity in the Local Communities strategy. They use the identity of ‘no stress’ - which seems to be the motto across the island. I’m still in doubt of this motto is heartfelt or implemented by the first

corporate tour operators like TUI. Erik Braun refers to one of his requirements for implementing city marketing: “city branding should be honest and credible”. If this will be maintainable on long-term is debatable.

Alike the heated political elections in Cape Verde in 2016 that I mentioned earlier, Erik Braun claims political alignment is one of the pillars for successful city marketing. Braun says: “City marketing goals should be incorporated into political priorities and long-term visions.” This means any city or country that wishes to develop itself as motor for tourism, requires a stable and willing government. The current division between CV voters is a direct face-off between pro-tourism factions that support economic growth and nationalist that wish to preserve the Cape Verdian identity and independence. They fear being enslaved once more to Western countries and business, the island being a former highly occupied slave-trading route.

Both strategies of strategic marketing have paid off to the countries in one way or another, but they both have unique flaws and downsides. When we think about place marketing, do we think about the possible dependency it may develop, like we should have done when the tobacco business boomed? Is it a growing cancer, eating countries from the inside while being observed by other nations with possible bad intends? A new form of legalized and taxed labor exploiting?

Maybe it sounds paranoid. Yet, modern warfare has already transformed in a method of avoiding direct violence. Instead torturing a city, country or nation by making sure it becomes self-destructive. Political and civil issues are used to corrupt and collapse a country by the foundation, as we see at this time in the Yemen conflict (CNN, 2015). This also counts for independent activists such as the anonymous hacking group. They attacked a large amount of Israeli websites and systems such as the banks, causing a reasonable cost to the country (Reuters, 2014)

It is a heartfelt desire of mine for politicians across the board, may it be national or European - if not internationally through the VN, start thinking carefully and debating about the impact of tourism. A structural solution for exploitation of the financially dependant is needed more than ever. The impact of a downfall in tourism once the dependency is high enough can be limitless and worrying. What is Amsterdam’s mass tourism disappeared tomorrow, what would be the shortage in our local treasury? Tourism travels everywhere, grows quicker than a blink of the eye and always potentially crushing to those that do not keep a close watch on it.

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