Visitor Welcome Programmes--A Positive Step in Helping to Promote Cross Socio-cultural Relations

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VISITOR WELCOME PROGRAMMES - A POSITIVE STEP IN HELPING TO PROMOTE CROSS SOCIO-CULTURAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

One of the main problems currently facing modern tourism is the alienation of tourists from host nationals. The lack of interaction and communication between tourists and hosts communities can result in misunderstanding, resentment and suspicion. If tourism is to overcome the alienation of tourists and residents from each other, and promote understanding and therefore peace between these two groups, then they must be able to meet, talk and understand each other. Current trends indicate that tomorrow's tourists will be looking for more interaction and communication with their hosts. The paper examines some of the current formal "meet-the-people" programmes and the "informally guided interactions" that are operated in different countries. The paper draws attention to the importance of these programme, for both the tourist and the host.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PAPER

Contemporary tourism has been accused of seldom generating strong inter-cultural relationships.(9) It is argued that many forms of tourism, particularly mass tourism, only offer slight opportunities for host and tourists to discover socio-cultural aspects about each other.(22) The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the opportunities that exist for encouraging positive and meaningful host-tourist interactions within the typical holiday time-frame and tourist experience. Whilst a substantial number of longer term specialised exchange and network programmes do exist, they have been left outside the scope of this particular paper.

TOURISM - A COMMUNICATION PROCESS

"To communicate with you tourist is another thing;
when you all come to our Island, you tend to keep
yourself and try not to communicate with us.
Communicate may be a big word, but it just a few word
need to be said to get friends, and friendship is
what most people are looking for, to have friends you
must communicate with people."

From a school essay by a 14 year old.
Erwin Harris, Antigua.(15)

Inter-personal relations and communication have always been
recognised as potentially important and powerful aspects of travel and
tourism. Meeting and interacting with new people used to be regarded as
one of the most positive aspects of travelling. However as travel has
developed into mass tourism, many now question whether relations between
hosts and guests have created more problems than solutions, and whether
inter-personal relations should even be encouraged. Whilst it has been
more than amply documented that tourism does have negative impacts, (3,
13, 26) the positive impacts must not be forgotten or lost sight of.
Instead they need to be re-evaluated, examined and refined to encourage
positive and meaningful communication and inter-personal relationships,
where practically possible. Negative impacts must not be ignored or
glossed over but lessons must be learnt for the future. Furthermore, the
negative impacts must be viewed in perspective as potentially short-term
problems that can be worked out to find long-term solutions.

Tourism has for many years been proclaimed as the greatest
peacemaking tool available to man. Twenty-seven years ago Hunziker
(1961) stated that, "Tourism has become the noblest instrument of this
century for achieving international understanding. It enables contacts
among people from the most distant parts of the globe, people of various
languages, race, creed, political beliefs and economic standing. Tourism
brings them together, it is instrumental in their dialogue, it leads to
personal contact in which people can understand attitudes and beliefs
which were incomprehensible to them because they were distant. In this
way it helps to bridge gaps and erase differences.....This noble task is
today more important than ever. It therefore overshadows all other means
striving for international friendship."

Since Hunziker put forward his viewpoint, a substantial body of
literature has been developed in support or in opposition to these
beliefs. However, current socio-cultural trends indicate that we are at
an opportune point for the encouragement of interpersonal relations
between visitors and hosts. Better communications that can be carefully
fostered between the visitors and hosts will have positive impacts for
peace as defined in the objectives of the "Tourism - a Vital Force for
Peace" conference.

ACCEPTANCE OF THE GLOBAL ROLE

Over the last decade, the people of the developed countries in the northern hemisphere have become steadily more aware of the global role they are playing. Their awareness has resulted not from an awakening by deep political theorists, but from one of the very problems that for years man has been trying to ignore--pollution.

Since the Chernobyl incident, pollution has become an intensely topical issue in most industrialised countries. Problems such as acid rain, destruction of the ozone layer, and nuclear waste have become issues that have affected nearly all countries, whether of western or eastern political orientation.

Whilst many countries have attempted to restrict their own waste emissions, the problem will remain until others do the same. Legislation will only become effective when others take the appropriate steps. These pollutants ignore all national, state and provincial boundaries. They care not for wildlife parks and beauty spots, man or plant, inhabited or uninhabited environments. Whilst man has always strived to control his environment, the reality is that the pollutants are slowly beginning to control his.

There is now wide-spread awareness about the pollution problems we face. As His Royal Highness The Price of Wales, who was Patron of the European Year of the Environment, pointed out in his address at the U.K.'s 1987 Better Environment Awards ceremony, "More people are being made aware by conservationists and environmentalists of the long term damage which can be done to the environment....there are a growing number of what you might refer to as green consumers nowdays who do mind about what is being done to the environment."

The media has at last focused on these problems and brought them to the public attention. Whether this has been shown in the laughable stories of the New York floating "garbage barge" or in more serious reports of high nuclear contamination in sheep and reindeer as a result of the Chernobyl incident, the awareness is there. In the Federal Republic of Germany, already one-third of the population belongs to the category of highly environment-conscious people.(16) It is therefore not surprising to see in the runup to the 1988 Presidential elections in the United States, that both candidates have made the environment a campaign issue and both are claiming the title of being the most environmentally conscious.

With the realisation that the pollution from the factories we work in or the aerosal cans we use at home, has an effect not only on us but also on someone, somewhere else--comes an understanding of a global role, and a realisation that we are no longer insular nationalistic countries that can determine and solve all the various problems independently. This realisation has occurred not only at the grass roots levels but has also influenced governments. It has been as a result of much of this realisation that both the European Economic Community and the United Nations have recently been so successful in proposing and determining a variety of international co-operation issues.

The realisation of a global role is probably the most important occurrance of the last few years. Ironically it has developed from our attempts to ignore the problems and people's of other countries. The pollution problems that countries have dumped on other countries would not have occurred if we tried to understand the problem and work together, rather than ignored it. Thus, understanding and recognition of other people's and countries through our own experiences is a personally enriching experience. It is an experience which no other industry apart from the tourism industry can hope to offer.

THE NEW FELT DESIRE FOR COMMUNICATION AND PERSONAL INTERACTIONS

As tourism has grown since World War II, so has industrialisation and mass production. We all now survive on mass produced goods--our clothes, shoes and TV sets are all identical to millions of others that have been produced. We have been encouraged and taught to seek standardisation and conformity. Just as we seek this standardisation in what we use in our daily lives, so has it permeated into our pleasure time. As tourism has developed over the last forty years it has also become more standardised. The package tours we book, the planes we fly in, the airports we use, the hotel rooms we sleep in have all become standard. Mass tourism has sought to give us standard experiences. We now know that hula dances are performed hourly in Hawaii, the Disney parade is at 3 p.m. and the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace is always at 11 a.m. sharp. This standardisation has allowed everyone to share the same experience, and take home the same photographs. As Marti (19) concluded, "The timber industry processes timber. The metal industry processes metal. The tourist industry processes tourists."

Yet there are some important social changes that are currently taking place in industrialised countries. These changes will effect the travel markets of tomorrow, and we need to be ready to meet those challenges. Major social changes, recently identified by Martin and Mason (20), will significantly effect the industrialised tourist markets. The population of the majority of industrialised countries is aging, and as a result there will be more people aged thirty and over, including senior citizens, and less teenagers. The lifestyles of these populations will also see a corresponding change, with the newer types of households continuing to grow. There will be more people living on their own and more single parent households. Furthermore, education is being recognised as more important and the level of education is slowly rising. For example in the U.S., the percentage of those attending college grows with each successive generation. Currently 36% of Americans aged 25 years or more have attended college. By the end of this century, this proportion is expected to reach 40%.(8)

These changes in the demographics and lifestyles of the population, will result in the development of different motivations towards tourism. An important conceptualisation of motivation was proposed by A.H. Maslow (21) in his Hierarchy of Needs. This hierarchy can be applied to tourism, as the development of tourist needs can be seen to be similar to the development of general human needs(15) Maslow proposed a five-step

pyramid of needs which every person tries to climb.

Level 1 - Physiological needs; food and water.
Level 2 - Safety needs; security, protection and shelter.
Level 3 Social/love needs; affection and belonging (family and friends).
Level 4 - Esteem needs; self respect, prestige, success and achievement.
Level 5 - Self-actualisation needs; desire for self-fulfillment.

According to Maslow, the lower needs must be met before the higher level needs become relevant to the individual. It is suggested that most individuals in Western societies are entering on the Love or Esteem levels.(27) Tomorrow's tourists will take the basic provisions of food and accommodation for granted. With the changed lifestyles and better education levels that have been referred to, tomorrow's tourists will be looking to satisfy their social/love needs. There will be an increasing demand for a greater amount of inter-personal communication by tourists. Already this increased interest is being seen. A study undertaken of German citizens in 1986 found that the fourth most highly rated main activity that they wished to be involved in during their holiday was "Talking to other people".

TOMORROW'S TOURISTS

The outcome of the above inter-related trends will be that we will have a larger number of tourists with an increased understanding of the global role that they are playing, and a desire to create more inter personal relations. The stage is now set for tourism to aid in developing those relationships between tourists and hosts and contribute to a deeper and better understanding between peoples. Furthermore, as the World Tourism Organisation has pointed out, this understanding between people should be seen as an aim in itself, rather than just a by-product of tourism.(30)

With increased educational levels, and the understanding that what occurs in another part of the world affects our health and our environment, means that as individuals and therefore tourists, we will become much more interested in what goes on in our own and other countries. Non verbal communication has already shown itself as a powerful force for change. For example, a tour through the poisoned German forests is likely to help tourists understand the devastation that acid rain from European factories is causing in these beautiful forests. Once seen, the devastating effects are more likely to be of concern to the tourist. Let us think how much more tourists will understand once they have meaningfully interacted with the local residents. To achieve this understanding there must be communication between the tourist and host. It is this communication process which has so often been missing.

It has been hoped that the interaction between different people would promote greater understanding and lead to the breaking down of national prejudices.(7) Many researchers have noted the disruptive role that tourism has played in socio-cultural relations.(20) Often this has been attributed to the sheer pressure of numbers that mass tourism

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brings.(9)   The large numbers of tourists that mass tourism brings, does
make personal interactions between tourist and host even more difficult.
However, if we do not encourage tourists and hosts to meaningfully
interact and communicate they are deaf and dumb as to what is being seen
or heard.   It is no wonder then, that each group relies on stereotypes
and biases in order to relate.   Only positive and meaningful
inter-personal communication can help lift tourism out of this downward
spiral.

      Cohen's   typography   (4)   sees tourists as falling into four
categories--explorer, drifter, mass individual tourist and mass organized
tourist.   The latter two are the predominant tourist types from the
world's industrialised countries. For example, between 1979 and 1986 the
U.K. saw the number of international inclusive tours (I.T.'s) taken
double from five million to 10 million.(10) I.T. tourists now account
for some 60% of all non business trips made by air by U.K. residents.(28)
However, within the growing I.T. numbers, there has been a division of
holiday types which is showing a bias towards more sophisticated
individualised travel.   The demand from the U.K. for self
catering/apartment holidays has grown dramatically and currently accounts
for 20% of the I.T. market.(10) There has also been tremendous growth
worldwide in the number of special interest tours and packages that are
being offered. All this is a sign of the growth in the sophistication of
the modern, better educated, well-travelled and repeat tourist.
Furthermore, as tourists become more sophisticated and confident in their
travelling we can expect to see a further shift away from the individual
institutionalised mass tourism towards the more individual
non-institutionalised tourist type--the explorer.

      L. Lickorish, the Honourary Vice-Chairman of the European Travel
Commission recently stated that, "A powerful communication interest
stimulated by sophisticated and a greater understanding on the part of
the experienced travellers, provides great opportunities for
institutions, as well as commercial organisations outside the industry,
to link themselves with the travel movement. There are examples of this
happening successfully in the early days but not likely to become more
general with great effort--"meet the people" schemes, specialist links
concerned with culture, sports and other hobbies, exchange schemes and
community links (e.g. town twinning). In short, simple sightseeing will
no longer be adequate even for the first time traveller. Scenery and
environment are becoming more of a background to the human action ."(17)

      The question is what can realistically be done to promote positive
and meaningful interactions?   There are millions of tourists who travel
every year to foreign destinations and never have the opportunity to
speak with these host populations in any meaningful way. How can we hope
that tourism will promote better communication between people when we
provide neither the means nor the opportunity to let it happen?

      Tourism does have the potential to promote peace and understanding
amongst people, but only to the extent that we encourage this potential
to develop. As O'Grady (24) points out "This demands a different type of
tourism which will create possibilities for meeting and the development
of peace and friendship." As Imfeld (12) goes on to ask;

"How can we get from extensive to intensive
travel,
        from devouring miles to lingering,
        from ticking off items in the travel guide to
stopping
            and thinking,
        from rush to leisure,
        from aggressive and destructive to <u>creative</u>
        <u>communication ."</u>

"MEET-THE-PEOPLE" PROGRAMMES

The problem of visitors and hosts being unable to meaningfully
communicate has been obvious for many years. The Danish Tourist Board
clearly outlines this problem when it states in its promotional
literature that "One of the things a foreigner misses most during a
holiday is getting to know the population of the host country." For
several years now many countries have offered "meet-the-people"
programmes. These programmes exist in many various forms but can be
characterised into two groupings--formally arranged programmes and
informally guided interactions.

There are many countries, regions and cities which have created
formal visitor welcome programmes. Such programmes may be arranged by
voluntary organisations as well as by local regional or national
government bodies.(2) These programmes vary considerably in content,
purpose and origin. Tourists may stay in a private home, have dinner
there or visit for the evening after dinner.(2,23) Another possibility
is to meet away from the home perhaps at a restaurant or attraction.
Each country has taken a different approach to offering this type of
programme, reflecting in part its own cultural protocols. The majority
are organised and offered at a local level, and this carries with it
certain advantages and disadvantages. Local autonomy helps to keep the
programme close to the community but this can mean that national tourist
boards are often unaware about what is actually going on at the local
level. This leads to poor promotion of these types of programmes to
potential international tourists.

It is certainly possible that tourists and the locals can meet and
arrange social affairs on their own such as dinner at the local's house.
Andronicou (1) noted that the invitations to homes and tables is common
in Cyprus. However, this type of experience is by no means the norm for
most tourists. Thus, tourists who do wish to inter-react and communicate
with local families and communities, may make a positive decision to
organise holidays that will bring them in contact with the local
residents. Many countries have responded to this demand and now organise
and promote this type tourism.

It is therefore conceivable to talk not only about formal
"meet-the-people" programmes but also to talk about
"informally-guided-interactions", that can also be used to promote
meaningful communication and inter-personnal relationships. The
informally guided interactions are represented by promotion of such forms

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of tourism that encourage the visitor to stay with a host. The booking of accommodation in hosts houses--such as bed and breakfasts is a good example of this. Many countries and regions see this type of "meet-the-people" tourism as having advantages over the more formal programmes. Not only does it put the visitors and hosts in a less formal situation but it also brings some small direct economic gains to the hosts. They have therefore encouraged and promoted this type of tourism more actively than the other programmes. Examples of these types of promoted guided interactions are, bed and breakfast, farm tourism and village tourism.

Formalised "Meet-the-People" Programmes A diverse range of formalised programmes can be found around the world. Most of these programmes aim to introduce tourists to hosts for a short period of time, such as over dinner, and are free to charge. However, as they have developed some are now offering overnight paying accommodations as well.

An example of one of these formalised programmes can be found in Japan. With the increase in the number of foreign visitors to Japan a movement developed to invite them to Japanese homes. This meet-the-Japanese-at-home movement, called the "Home Visit System" has now been institutionalised by the major local governments. The home visit system is conducted free of charge in the hope that it can provide an opportunity for tourists to visit the homes of typical middle class Japanese families. The primary aim of this system is stated by the Japan National Tourist Office as--"Furthering international understanding and friendship".

The system has grown dramatically since the early 1970's. In 1974 there were just 330 registered families in eight Japanese cities, and approximately 1,577 foreign tourists were received as guests by these families. By 1987, there were 1,175 registered families in seventeen cities involved in this programme. Nine foreign languages can now be accommodated within the system, and over 3,000 foreign tourists were received as guests.(14)

In various European countries formalised schemes have been set up. However, most of these again have been established at the regional or city level and have been the result of dedicated individuals. In Denmark the programme is called "Meet the Danes". It is organised at the city level and is currently available in the cities of Odense, Aarhus and Tonder. The tourists sign up at the local tourist office and list their interests. They are then matched by the tourist office with Danes that share similar interests. In Switzerland, a "Meet the Swiss" scheme is offered through the Zurich Tourist office. It must be noted that not all the programmes offered have been successful. In Holland the "Get in touch with the Dutch" programme has had to be discontinued.

In the U.K. on the other hand, there is no officially organised or institutionalised scheme. However, several individually organised and formal "meet-the-people" or "hosptality schemes" exist. They are operated by private organisations and receive no financial support from the regional or national tourist boards. The largest organisation is the International Friendship League. This is a non profit making organisation which aims to promote international understanding. It has

hosts and hostesses at over 170 locations in the U.K. and offers a range
of services.

    1.   Taking visitors to places of interest.
    2.   Inviting visitors home for tea/coffee or an evening meal.
    3.   Introducing visitors to other families and friends.
    4.   Providing overnight accommodation--as a paying guest.

There are a number of other schemes that are only offered in certain
towns or cities. Examples of these are the "Chester-At-Home" and
"Fareham-At-Home" schemes. Both of these organisations offer an
invitation to any overseas visitors to "Meet the British" in their homes
for tea or dinner. Neither charge for this service. Other schemes and
programmes are also offered by the British Association of Friends of
Museums, the Royal Overseas League, Scots International and the Victoria
League for International Friendship.

The Charity for Action Research for the Crippled Child, offers a
more extensive formal "at home" programme. This scheme is for groups of
20-30 people, usually from the same town/society, and received into
typical British homes for up to six nights. They offer visits to stately
homes, and pubs, and outings to entertainment with them and their
friends. There is a charge for these services but all the profits go to
benefit the charity to raise funds for medical research into all forms of
crippling, especially in children.

    <u>Informally Guided Interactions</u> - It is difficult to draw the line
between the more formal programmes and the informally organised ones,
referred to as informally guided interactions, as both have some type of
organised promotion. The informally guided interactions are
characterised in being for an overnight stay with a family, for which
there is always a commercial aspect.

For the U.K., the British Tourist Authority, puts out two brochures
that promote staying with British families. The "Stay with a British
Family" brochure advertises individual bed and breakfasts as well as
twenty-nine separate agencies that offer holidays based on a range of
British family accommodation settings. An advertisement for one of the
agencies reads "We offer inexpensive holidays with private families--an
ideal way to learn about British life." The "Stay on a Farm" brochure
promotes bed and breakfast accommodations on over 350 farms throughout
the U.K. In its opening remarks the theme is on being able to meet "the
friendly local people....welcoming you to see their traditional way of
life."

Similar schemes are offered in Australia, where a commercial "Home
Stay" and "Farm Stay" schemes are offered. In Yugoslavia on the other
hand "Village Tourism" is being promoted. Whilst the tourist stays with
one family, the idea is to help integrate the tourist into the life of
the village. There are already over 60 locations where these programme
is offered. The purpose of the programme is to "cater for those who
desire active holidays in unspoilt natural surroundings without giving up
their comfort" and want "to feel like one of the family."

There is therefore an enourmous range of opportunities which exist

for encouraging host tourist interactions within the confines of the usual tourism experience. Due to the number and diversity of these formal programmes and informally guided interactions, it is difficult to comment on the effectiveness or advantages of one type over another. Rather each type needs to be examined for suitability to meeting its objectives within the particular socio-cultural context in which it is placed. Success is also not just to be measured on the impacts on the tourist.

IMPACTS OF PROGRAMMES ON THE HOSTS

The implementation of meet the people programmes also has significant social impacts on the hosts. Those who are visited will inevitably attempt to explain various socio-cultural factors to their visitors. This explanation process helps hosts become more aware of their own culture and more interested in their heritage. Through this process tourism will continue to contribute to both conservation and development of the world's heritage. The United Kingdom has become an example of this phenomenon. As tourism to the U.K. has increased, so too has interest by the British in their own culture and heritage. As Lohr (18) aptly put it, "No sane person comes to Britain for the weather or the beaches....They come for the heritage....Yet if outsiders are fascinated by this nations past the British themselves are obsessed by it--and increasingly so in recent years." The membership of the National Trust, Britain's leading preservation organisation, has tripled since 1975. Membership now stands at 1.5 million--more than any political party. A new museum is opened in the U.K. every two weeks, and a recent survey of 1,750 museums found that half of them had been founded since 1971.(18)

Not only has the number of museums increased but more interest and attention has been placed in conserving and enhancing the quality of the built environment. As Dower (6) observed, "Tourism and conservation can be brought together to work for mutual benefit...Tourism and conservation are interdependent and....both stand to gain from close and effective collaboration." Run down inner city areas, such as Rochester-Upon-Medway, in Kent, England, have recently been rejuvenated and have rediscovered their historical past. The centre of Rochester-Upon-Medway, once the home of Charles Dickens, had become by the mid-1970's a run down empty core. By raising the historical connection with Dickens and attracting tourism, the city centre has been restored and annual festivals are now held involving not only tourists but emphasising local involvement. Projects such as these serve not only to meet the needs of the tourists but also re-instate a sense of place and belonging to the residents. As L. J. D'Amore (5) pointed out, "It has become clear that a desirable place to visit is also a desirable place to live and that tourism can contribute not only to jobs, economic development and foreign exchange, both directly and indirectly, but to an improved quality of life and quality of environment as well."

CONCLUSION

The various forms of "meet-the-people-programmes" and "informally guided interactions" that have been discussed, offer a bridge which can be used in helping to cross the communication void that often exists between tourists and hosts. This bridge will play a positive role in helping to promote peace and understanding, as it allows hosts and tourists to meet and communicate in an atmosphere of mutual interest. Tomorrow's more sophisticated, educated tourist will increasingly be looking for this type of interaction and communication. It is a challenge to which we must respond. It is something we can all be involved in, within our own communities and with our family, friends and neighbours. Through the encouragement of this type of tourism, it is possible to make tourism not only a real community industry, but also one that can help us in attaining our goal of making tourism a force for peace.

PROPOSALS FOR ACTION

Establish plans to set up a formal meet-the-people programme or informally guided interactions within your home community. The plans need to be respectful of the community and of the type of tourist that visits.

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