

Reflections on Culture, Heritage, and Tourism in Peru

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ABSTRACT: Tourism is an economic and social activity whose essential element is human cultural diversity and both tangible and intangible heritage. As such, its benefits can bring consequences to local populations and the environment. This reflective study focuses on an analysis of how the idea of tourism in Peru has been constructed and operationalized from the perspectives of the state and the private sector. It also explores the naturalization of a hegemonic view that homogenizes culture and national identity and its potential consequences in the formation of social stereotypes and the increase in poverty among the receiving populations. A set of guidelines and recommendations are proposed to pursue sustainable tourism in cultural, social, economic, and environmental terms.

KEYWORD: cultural heritage, tourism, sustainability, national identity.

INTRODUCTION

Today, Cultural Tourism has become one of the most important tools for constructing national identity, even overshadowing education, which is increasingly trapped in the mediocrity of public institutions and the absence of a national project from private institutions [1]. Let's remember the traditional national symbols: the flag, the coat of arms, the badge, and the national anthem, all of which emerged from a 19th-century national republic project that failed due to its lack of inclusion and oppression of those left out. I am obviously referring to what Gonzáles Prada called "the multitude of Indians scattered on the eastern side of the mountain range" [2]. Although the term "Indians" strikes us with its pejorative sense, I believe the core idea of Gonzáles Prada's statement still stands: there is a large sector of individuals outside the Peru project, and furthermore, they see themselves outside such apparent unity. They are only Peruvian in that they were born within a territory north of Bolivia and Chile by fate. In this sense, our unity as a nation lies in the territory - we are Peruvian because we were born in this space called Peru - something that shows our weakness as a community project [3].

But let's return to the national symbols: these have long (or perhaps never) represented what we call "Peru." Just recall the case of children from Puno who couldn't recognize the colors of the Peruvian flag, or the artistic mockeries of the National Shield, where spaces typically occupied by the Vicuña (animal world symbol), the Quina tree (plant world symbol), and the cornucopia spilling gold (symbol of our mineral wealth) appear blank, giving the impression that our riches have vanished. Or, closer to you, the question posed by the national anthem: What does it mean? Does anyone know the exact meaning of the lyrics? It's

likely many in the audience can relate, those who feel they've been unfairly judged, my apologies. So, I think my point is clear: the national symbols, especially through education – and particularly the vital civic education course – have died [4]. It's an empty space and needs to be filled since every nation relies on the presence of symbols of belonging that announce a shared social past, a unity that fosters ties of brotherhood among a particular people [5-6]. "La Marseillaise" for a French person symbolizes "liberty, equality, and fraternity", "The Internationale" is the song of socialism. What does the national anthem of Peru mean to us? A big question, I believe, remains unresolved.

TOURISM AND CULTURE: A CONSTRUCTED REALITY?

This is where the value of Cultural Tourism comes into play: it is an incredibly powerful identity tool, of unexpected strength [7]. Peruvians are proud of that cultural heritage that tourism capitalizes on so well; "Peru is Machu Picchu, the Lord of Sipan, the Nazca Lines, and the ruins of Chan Chan," paraphrasing the lyrics of the tondero "Que viva el Perú señores," by Mario Cavagnaro and performed by Eva Ayllón. This song would be very successful and widely accepted as a symbol of Peruvian-ness if it weren't for being a tondero, a musical genre belonging to the Creole world, a now dead reference in today's world; perhaps the song would be more successful if it was performed in more universally accepted musical genres by all Peruvians, perhaps a cumbia.

The gastronomic boom in Peru is also a way to strengthen the cultural identity of our nation [8]: perhaps the only real bond that unites us as Peruvians is food. The quantity and variety of traditional dishes, as well as the fusion of multiple culinary traditions (Chinese (Chifa) – Italian ("Menestroni") – Spanish – Arab – African and of course, our native cuisine) place Peru among the world's best cuisines. This deep connection is also strongly capitalized upon by tourism, which hasn't missed this opportunity: the so-called "Gastronomic Tourism" is an increasingly profitable sector [9]. For this reason, looking towards Cultural Tourism means directly confronting the issue of national identity. "What are we?", or "What do we seek to be?", are questions that can be answered more inclusively and true to our situation as a pluricultural country if we diligently study our national heritage.

We now turn to more technical matters and must define the concepts we have been discussing up to this point: What is cultural tourism? According to the I Charter of Tourism of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Archaeological Sites): "Cultural Tourism is aimed at discovering sites and monuments. It has a considerably positive effect on these, as, while pursuing its own objectives, it helps to keep them alive and protect them. Indeed, this form of tourism justifies the efforts that maintenance and protection demand from the human community due to the socio-cultural and economic benefits that result for all involved populations" [10]. In this regard, cultural tourism is the kind that satisfies the desire to learn about a place's history and admire its cultural attractions [11], archaeological sites, architectural monuments, historic buildings, museums, among others, acting as a dynamic element of heritage and communities, generating recognition and creating a sense of community pride [12], as well as a factor in spreading historical and cultural richness [13]. Valued for culture, it generates resources for conservation and benefits recipient communities, motivates communities in the management of their heritage, and raises awareness of the value of different local heritages among tourists [14]. This is the added potential of Cultural Tourism: it can not only provide significant dividends to the country but also, through it, generate a more solid image of what is ours, what defines us as Peruvians, and make us feel, for the first time in our history [15].

Throughout the years, several policies and strategies related to cultural tourism have been developed. However, the challenge is not necessarily in their creation, but rather in their implementation and whether they align with our local, regional, and national realities. It's evident that we need clearly defined objectives, viable programs, and a clear understanding of what we want and where we wish to go, especially given the invaluable cultural heritage we possess. The involvement of the community and local residents is vital for the

progress and development of the locality. We need more social participation and greater awareness from professionals in tourism and culture [16]. Initially, it's essential to let the local population take pride in their heritage, ensuring they are the first to conserve and preserve it, creating teams of delegates who can work together with local authorities to maintain the heritage and present it appropriately.

The II International Charter of Cultural Tourism from ICOMOS states that "Host communities and indigenous peoples should be involved in heritage conservation planning and tourism planning" [10]. The consensual participation of the local population is crucial for planning the conservation of Heritage integrated with tourism. No cultural tourism project design can succeed without this participation, which is why we must involve society as a whole. Without the involvement of all stakeholders (individuals, private and state institutions, society representatives, foundations, authorities, etc.), it would be challenging to create heritage and tourism policies that address the essential needs of the locality for tourism.

In Peru, the state sector is the leading proponent and also the main governing entity outlining actions and/or activities related to cultural tourism, seeking genuine synergy, a strategic alliance that caters to the development plans of both sectors, as they are branches of the same tree, undoubtedly feeding into each other [17]. Specifically, those responsible and empowered to create suitable work guidelines are the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism (MINCETUR), the National Institute of Culture (INC), and the National Institute of Natural Resources (INRENA), key entities for the proper management of Peru's tangible and intangible resources.

However, we must be very cautious and not lose sight of our initial focus: seeing cultural tourism also means seeing the issue of national identity. This translates into a proposal that acknowledges our multicultural reality, showing that our nation's wealth is rooted in our diversity, in the many facets that Peru can present, the nation of a thousand masks, or as José María Arguedas would say: "there is no more diverse country." In this sense, the presence of Cultural Tourism as a profitable business should not overshadow the fact that it is a tool for building national identity, with an enormous symbolic potential that culturally benefits the country.

This point is crucial because there is a current trend towards mystifying our historical past [18]. This mystification comes from the sector that concerns all of us: Tourism. This poses a threat to the path we initially forged, aiming for the construction of a national project that views diversity not as an obstacle to development but as a unique potentiality (let's remember the Chilean example where any present-day association with indigenous origins is not tolerated: the Mapuches, pushed to the southernmost tip, are forced to assimilate, to self-eliminate as a cultural group; here, diversity is a problem solved by homogenization).

The mystification that homogenizes prevents us from recognizing diversity. Consider the famous PromPerú logo: "Perú, country of the Inkas." What issue can be seen in it? Relating it to what has been discussed so far will allow us to grasp the crux of the matter and understand the trap of mystification we are referring to. Let's start with a simple descriptive exercise: What do we see in this logo? A hummingbird emerging from the 12-angled stone and a phrase below the word "Perú" which is meant to explain the image. And what does the phrase read? "Country of the Inkas." What's the flaw in the graphic?

First: the hummingbird alluded to in the logo is the image depicted in the geoglyphs of the Nazca plains; the function of the geoglyphs in the ancient Nazca civilization (1st to 6th centuries AD) remains debated, but the prevailing view among contemporary researchers is that they served as symbols of particular tribes' identity [19].

The second element in the image, the 12-angled stone, symbolizes the precision and perfection of Inca architecture [19].

A third element, though not immediately obvious, is gold: both the stone and the word "Perú" are drawn in golden color, perhaps symbolizing our mineral wealth or our exquisite pre-Columbian goldsmithing art,

evident in cultures like Moche, Lambayeque, or Chimú. "Perú, country of the Inkas" then is the phrase that wraps up the entire image's meaning: the hummingbird, the stone, and the gold are all related to the Inca Empire, and this empire with Peru, the country that inherited such tradition. Returning to the question, what's the flaw? It evidently lies in the ruthless combination of historical references, under the pretext that the Inka "sells more."

It's highly ironic that precisely those symbols of identity are now confused in a haphazard mix where anything goes if it alludes to the "mystical." This "mystical" aspect then becomes the perfect excuse for such historical mix-ups. Mind you, we're not against mysticism-themed tourism; in fact, it seems like an extremely appealing offer that can be perfectly leveraged in our favor (in Puerto Maldonado, there's an interesting market for cosmic flights with Ayahuasca intake, priced at 150 dollars). However, what we're wary of is the pretext of showing a "mystical" image of the country at the expense of distorting our very own diversity, the very potentiality I've been advocating for in this presentation. PromPerú presents us with an "Inka" Peru, making us view all our cultural wealth through an "Inka" lens, when we are so much more than that.

THINKING ABOUT CULTURAL TOURISM FROM A SUSTAINABILITY STANDPOINT

The development of tourism should be primarily based on sustainability criteria, meaning it must be ecologically bearable, economically, socially, and culturally viable, and ethically equitable for local communities [20]. It's noteworthy to emphasize the particular importance of local participation, an essential strategy to give residents the opportunity to decide on tourism planning and development in their area. In this way, there will be realistic expectations of what can be hoped for, greater motivation to protect the cultural and natural environment, and improvements due to this activity will be perceived as benefits [21].

Within this vision of sustainability, it should be considered that the tourist resources a community has are, above all, community resources. That is, while a locality may have cultural and natural heritage attractive enough to attract visitors, this heritage must also be part of the local citizens' enjoyment. This implies a different appropriation of the heritage by the locality, which doesn't prevent its use from also being a significant economic component through tourism, promoting job creation, strengthening the local economy, and conserving heritage [22]. It also poses a collective challenge in terms of new ways of managing cultural and natural spaces, generating resources to make them sustainable. This involves the government, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private investment, but above all, the local community.

Tourism should contribute to sustainable development, integrating itself into the natural, cultural, and human environment. It must respect the delicate balances that characterize many of our tourist destinations and environmentally sensitive areas. Tourism activity should foresee an acceptable evolution regarding its impact on natural resources, biodiversity, and the capacity to assimilate the impacts and waste produced [21-23].

The World Tourism Organization (WTO), based on the Brundtland Report on Sustainable Development, defined sustainable tourism development as "meeting the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisioned as leading to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems" [24].

A favorable aspect of tourism in places of extreme poverty is that it contributes to its reduction due to the vast amount of labor used in this sector, extending employment opportunities. Today, the notion that natural resources, manufacturing, or agriculture were the only sources of income for people's survival has had to be radically changed, as entire towns now live based on their cultural resources, allowing for poverty reduction. This is essential for peace, environmental conservation, sustainable development, and ethically and morally,

an obligation for a better world where differences between rich and poor nations become less and less distanced [25].

The advantage that developing countries have in tourism mainly lies in their unique culture, flora and fauna, climate, crafts, and diverse landscapes, which in many cases remain untouched by human intervention. Tourism is the ideal tool for job creation. Compared to other sectors, tourism employs a lot of labor, which requires relatively little training and can offer jobs to everyone, including women and young people.

The Secretary-General of the WTO stated that "The strong growth highlights the ever-closer relationship between tourism, climate change, and poverty reduction. Responsible and sustainable growth of the tourism sector will boost the exports and employment of the global economy in general and of the poorest countries in particular" [26].

There are many global benchmarks of developing countries that, through tourism, have improved the living conditions of local communities. To this end, the WTO has defined seven ways to combat poverty through tourism, and these can be applied in almost all countries as long as certain aspects are properly addressed:

- Employment of the poor in tourism businesses.
- The supply of goods and services to tourism businesses by the poor, or by businesses employing them.
- Direct sales of goods and services to visitors by the poor (informal economy).
- The creation and management of tourism businesses by the poor: for example, small, medium, and micro-enterprises, or community-based businesses (formal economy).
- The collection of taxes on tourism incomes or profits, the amount of which is intended to benefit the poor.
- Donations and voluntary support from tourism businesses and tourists.
- Investment in infrastructure, stimulated by tourism, that also benefits the local poor, directly or through support to other sectors [27].

For the impact of tourism on poverty reduction to be effectively realized, massive action is needed, in parallel, from a significant number of tourism businesses, each contributing in the way most consistent with their characteristics and objectives for poverty relief. The isolated actions of one or two companies, no matter how valuable, will not make a dent in the overall poverty experienced in so many regions.

CONCLUSIONS

The economic impact generated by the increasing number of visitors coming to Peru brings a series of benefits and revenues to our country. Among them are job creation, the influx of foreign currency helping to balance the payments, increased public revenue, the promotion of business activity, and a significant means for generating GDP, benefiting the rest of the economic sectors through the so-called multiplier effect.

The sociocultural impact allows the quality of the tourist experience to depend not only on the main attractions offered at the destination but also on the infrastructure and available services. In this sense, tourism seeks to encourage and collaborate with the improvements in services and infrastructure made in the regions where it operates.

The environmental impact is one of the most important and necessary aspects to consider, leading to the formulation of conservation measures and improvement of environmental quality. In this regard, tourism can and should contribute to the revaluation of the natural environment in the areas where it operates, as a well-preserved environment helps elevate the quality of the tourist activity and boost the local and national economy.

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The tourism sector seeks to respect and disseminate environmental protection and conservation standards that counteract the possible negative impacts that tourism activity might generate.

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