

Tourism and Political Change



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Introduction

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1 Introduction

Wantanee Suntikul and Richard Butler

This volume addresses an issue that is of great current relevance, and which will only continue to increase in importance in coming years. Tourism has been proclaimed the largest industry in the world. According to the World Tourism Organization, international tourist arrivals reached 922 million worldwide in 2008 and are forecasted to reach 1.6 billion by 2020. As such, tourism is acknowledged as an important economic sector for many countries. However, the impacts of a complex economy of social contact and exchange like tourism go well beyond the economic realm, and there is a growing acknowledgement that tourism is a human activity with undeniable political dimensions, which enters into relations with other political factors at all scales.

The political dimensions of tourism are many. The increasingly global nature of tourism patterns and tourism-related enterprises is bringing tourism into the realm of global politics. Not only is tourism affected by global economic and political trends and relations between nations – but the role of tourism in influencing international diplomacy is becoming increasingly apparent. Tourism is also intrinsically enmeshed in national, regional and local political milieus, and is an inextricable aspect of the micro-politics of society at every destination.

Tourism has become more closely implicated in political action and activism in recent years, with tourism being seen and used as a tool for political and economic change. Calls for tourist boycotts of countries with undesirable political regimes, the use of tourism to initiate political discussions, increased pressure for fair trade, the potential of tourism for poverty reduction and the role of GATT in tourism all reflect the clearly apparent growing link between these two fields.

The greater politicisation of tourism is happening within an increasingly complex political context. Over the past two decades the number of independent nation states has continued to increase and what were once regarded as fixed institutions, such as the Soviet Union, have disappeared or changed beyond all recognition and expectation. The economic and social consequences of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe and the adaptive re-invention of Communist societies in Asia continue to have repercussions on the global stage and at the level of specific destinations within these regions, as does the rapid and sizeable expansion of the European Union. Complex practices emerge at the interface between global culture and local societies. Former colonies struggle with issues of political identity. New political constellations emerge with the shifting economic fortunes and political affiliations of countries around the world, and xenophobic religious fanaticism ascends to the global political stage. The bombings of tourist nightlife venues in Bali in 2002 and the use of commercial jets to destroy New York's World Trade Center in 2001 are indicative of the tourism industry's attractiveness and vulnerability as a target for politically-motivated terrorist attacks.

Research on the links and relationships between tourism and politics does not have a long or extensive history, but it is a subject area which has grown considerably since Richter pioneered research on the relationship between politics and tourism, notably in her book *The Politics of Tourism in Asia* (Richter, 1989), in which she discusses the influences on, and effects of, tourism policy in ten Asian countries. Her writings, in particular, have encouraged scholars in the social sciences to take more interest and action in understanding and influencing tourism policy. In his *Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place* (Hall, 1994), Hall introduced the discourse of political theory into tourism and reflected on the role of the political dimension in tourism at scales ranging from the personal to the global.

To some extent this theme was continued by Elliott (1997), who presents a primer on the roles of government in regulating and supporting tourism. A practical point of view on the relation of politics and tourism was taken by Poirier (1997) in his investigation of the uses of political science to determine the political risk of foreign direct investment in tourism. Timothy (2001) and Wachowiak (2006) have both produced books on political boundaries and tourism, while the symbolic and political aspects of passports within the system of cross-border tourist movement are elaborated upon by O'Byrne (2001). The literature in this area also contains works examining the politics of tourism as actually practiced and experienced in specific contexts including Myanmar (Philp and Mercer, 1999; Henderson, 2003), Indonesia (Dahles, 2002), North Korea (Kim *et al.*, 2007), Tobago (McLeod and Airey, 2007), the Arab World (Hazbun, 2008) and China's Yunnan Province (Su and Teo, 2009). A current general overview of the recent state of research into the relation between politics and tourism is well represented in Burns and Novelli's (2007) edited compilation *Tourism and Politics: Global Frameworks and Local Realities*.

In their linking of socio-political changes to changes in tourism patterns and policy, a handful of earlier researchers, such as Jaakson (1994) and Leheny (1995) prefigure some of the themes of this book. Political change is also included among the modes of change discussed in books dealing with issues of change in tourism (e.g. Butler and Pearce, 1995; Laws *et al.*, 1998). However, a broad awareness of and attention to the interrelation between political change and tourism is a more recent trend, as represented by Hall (2004), who elaborates on tourism in countries undergoing political transition. In recent years, a number of researchers have been turning their attention to the analysis of the interrelation between political change and tourism, both from the historical perspective – such as Pack's (2007) book chapter on the effects of political change on tourism during the fascist Franco regime in Spain – and in contemporary case studies like George *et al.*'s (2009) study of the political changes that arrived through tourism development in several rural communities in Canada. Altinay and Bowen's (2006) work identified barriers and challenges to planning for a consolidated tourism industry on Cyprus within the scenario of potential closer political integration of the two halves of the politically divided island under a 'federation' arrangement – a subject taken up later in this volume (Chapter 17).

Other recent work on tourism and politics (e.g. Church and Coles 2007, Hall, 2008) has focused on issues of power, implications for involvement and empowerment, political ideologies, governance and, particularly, policy. However, the specific focus on tourism's relation to political change at different levels in different political and geographical locations has not been examined in detail before.

Chapter extract

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