

## Exploring the Sociocultural Influence of Cultural Tourism

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### Abstract

Cultural tourism is portrayed as a means to comprehend diverse cultures and expand one's worldview, with the "contact hypothesis" suggesting its potential to enhance tolerance and global peace through cross-cultural interactions. However, the study acknowledges the mixed results and debates surrounding this hypothesis in the tourism realm. This research explores whether cultural tourism's sociocultural aspect can foster global peace and reduce hostilities by nurturing intercultural understanding and harmony worldwide. Utilizing a secondary data analysis method, the study will extract insights from existing peer-reviewed articles and scholarly works on cultural tourism, sociocultural dimensions of cultural heritage sites, multicultural interactions in tourism, and the impact of tourism on global peace and intercultural understanding. Online academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, and Scopus will be utilized for research, with collected literature undergoing thematic analysis to identify central themes, patterns, and connections regarding cultural tourism, sociocultural dimensions, multicultural interactions, and peace promotion through tourism. The study concludes that contact plays a vital role in fostering cultural understanding and peace-building, considering factors like tourists' intentions, resources invested, mindfulness during experiences, post-trip integration, quality and duration of interactions, and various aspects related to visitors' cultural backgrounds and personalities. However, cultural tourism can play a significant role in fostering cultural harmony and understanding on an individual level, although it may seem limited in addressing global tensions<sup>1</sup>.

**Key words:** Cultural tourism- Intercultural understanding- Contact hypothesis - Sociocultural impact

### 1. Introduction

Cultural tourism, also known as heritage tourism, is a specialized form of tourism that focuses on a particular destination's cultural heritage. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines cultural tourism as traveling to engage with places, artifacts, and activities that genuinely depict the stories and people of the past. This form of tourism encompasses a wide range of cultural, historical, and natural resources that provide authentic experiences to visitors<sup>[1]</sup>. The term "sociocultural" dimension of cultural heritage sites refers to how these sites influence shifts in people's worldviews and norms of behavior. It is the different outcomes of direct and indirect interactions between the local community and tourists<sup>[2]</sup>. The advantages of multicultural interactions facilitated by tourism extend beyond mere intellectual enrichment; they can change people's thoughts<sup>[3]</sup>. Rather than passively receiving information through mediums like periodicals, television, and the internet, which bring the world to our doorsteps, tourism involves direct human engagement. While

individuals are aware that media consumption offers a mediated experience, many mass tourists perceive their encounters during travel as authentic and immediate, as opposed to virtual or indirect interactions<sup>[4]</sup>. Tourism is an interactive sector, inherently leading to unavoidable interactions between hosts and guests<sup>[2]</sup>. Within tourism, communication is influenced by a blend of expressions, attitudes, and customs defining places and peoples, molding them into marketable and enticing destinations<sup>[5]</sup>. Viewing tourism as a sociocultural creation, it stands as a powerful mechanism, among many, to fulfill the needs of individuals in today's industrialized societies<sup>[4]</sup>. It is a platform where diverse stakeholders shape culture for various objectives<sup>[5]</sup>. The cultural component of tourism is something that lends significance to our journeys. We travel to learn about different cultures, people, ourselves, and our place in the world. While traveling, people often compare the lives of others with their own, seeking more confirmation of their superiority. The cultural side of tourism does not refer to "cultural tourism" but rather to "tourism as a culture," that is, as a means to think about and understand the world<sup>[4]</sup>. These

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cultural interactions occur regularly globally for tourists and locals. Thus, not only do visitors get new experiences, but so do residents of the host communities who could never afford to travel and whose perspectives are broadened by meeting tourists. So, tourism helps shape our worldview and gives us a more complete, prosperous, detailed, and unique view of the world and its many different cultures [6]. Scholars use the term "contact hypothesis" to describe the role of tourism in creating interaction between different cultures and communities. The "contact hypothesis" result is supposed to be optimistic regarding promoting tolerance and global peace [7]. However, when investigating the results of the "contact hypothesis" in tourism, the results become somewhat confusing and controversial.

## 2. Research Aim

This study addresses a crucial question: Can the sociocultural dimension of cultural tourism serve as a pathway to enhance global peace and reduce hostilities? By delving into this inquiry, the research aims to shed light on the potential role of cultural tourism in fostering intercultural understanding and harmony on a global scale.

## 3. Methods

This study will adopt a secondary data analysis approach, leveraging insights from existing peer-reviewed papers and scholarly publications concerning cultural tourism, the sociocultural dimensions of cultural heritage sites, multicultural interactions in tourism, and the impact of tourism on global peace and intercultural understanding. Online academic databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, and Scopus will be utilized for the database search to identify relevant articles, studies, and research papers. The collected literature will undergo thematic analysis to pinpoint critical themes, patterns, and relationships related to cultural tourism, sociocultural dimensions, multicultural interactions, and promoting peace through tourism.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Contact Hypothesis

The concept of the contact hypothesis, which posits that positive outcomes are likely to result from intimate contact in a socially supportive atmosphere among individuals of equal status working towards common goals, was formalized by Allport in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century [8]. Originating in the United States within the field of sociopolitical science, this hypothesis has been extensively tested and validated across a range of global contexts. Research has illustrated its efficacy in settings as varied as youth camps and interactions between diverse religious and ethnic groups [6]. While the hypothesis traditionally focuses on how hosts react to visitors, studies also highlight the significance of visitors' responses to

their hosts. Findings support the contact hypothesis when examining long-term interactions, such as students studying abroad. However, complexities arise in shorter interactions like educational tours or mass tourism, with some studies indicating that attitudes may deteriorate after brief visits, especially in regions with a history of conflict [8].

### 4.2. Cultural Tourism and Inter-Cultural Understanding

The tourism sector serves as a vital conduit between individuals unfamiliar with the culture and its cultural essence, potentially offering significant contributions to the visitor's daily life [9]. By acting as a mechanism that brings together diverse individuals from various regions, tourism simplistically provides them with "intercultural experiences" [4]. This direct engagement allows for acquiring knowledge and cultural exchanges without intermediaries, enabling tourists and hosts to discover the unique richness within each other. The resulting cultural dialogue is one of tourism's most valuable attributes to global peace [10]. For example, Shinde's research (2015) highlights how cultural dialogue through religious tourism fosters interfaith understanding and peace. In India, sites like the Hindu locations of Vrindavan and Tuljapur and the Islamic shrine of Ajmer Sharif exemplify the power of cultural exchange in promoting harmony among diverse religious communities. These places facilitate interactions where individuals from various backgrounds engage in rituals and shared experiences that transcend religious divides. These sites educate visitors about cultural heritage by showcasing historical instances of interfaith cooperation and emphasizing shared values while promoting unity and acceptance. The peaceful coexistence in these regions, demonstrated by the absence of violent conflicts between Muslims and Hindus during the tumultuous 1960s, underscores the positive impact of such cultural exchanges [11]. Nevertheless, the question arises: are these interactions sufficient to promote global peace and foster positive intercultural understanding? Doubts regarding this issue persist in academic discourse.

### 4.3. Criticisms of the Impact of Tourism on Inter-Cultural Understanding

Criticisms challenging the assumed positive correlation between tourism and world peace point to various valid concerns, such as the superficial interactions between tourists and the host culture [12] [13]. Factors like the brief duration of tourist stays and the limited portrayal of the host country in promotional materials contribute to this skepticism. Moreover, the primary motivations of tourists, typically centered around leisure, further complicate the potential for meaningful contact [14]. Various impediments, including language barriers, cultural disparities, and the inherent status differentials between visitors and hosts, hinder establishing profound

mutual understanding during these interactions [15]. Anastasopoulos (1992) conducted a study of Greeks traveling to Turkey. Participants' surveys showed that Greeks came home with generally negative views of their hosts [16]. Smith (1994) found that this study's results had a flaw in its methodology since contact was assumed rather than measured. In addition, travel's temporary and non-repetitive characteristics limit contact intimacy [17]. Tomljenović and Faulkner (2000) disagreed with other scholars that tourism can help people learn more about each other and get along better. They both agreed that the success of the relationship between the host and the guest depends on the quality of services provided at the destination, such as language, guidance efficiency, and low cultural barriers [18]. According to Maoz (2010), the study of the contact between tourists and host destinations has yielded different results. He investigated whether the contact hypothesis between Israelis and Egyptians in the sea villages of South Sinai successfully decreases negative preconceptions and biases. He finds that only 11.6% of Israelis claim to have built "relationships" with Egyptians, but around 70% of Egyptians claim to have made relationships with Israeli visitors. Israelis who didn't interact with Egyptians tended to keep and even grow their negative feelings about them. In contrast, Israelis who did interact with Egyptians tended to change their feelings for the better. Egyptians who claimed to have established connections with Israelis have announced a considerably more profound shift in their previous opinions. In contrast, 25% of Israelis stated they had positively transformed their original unfavorable sentiments. Another significant result was a shift in unfavorable attitudes. About 40% of Egyptians and 30.7% of Israelis who were polled said their negative feelings had grown [19]. However, limitations may influence the study's findings in its interview methodology. It involved gathering information through informal interviews with only 50 individuals, which may not be sufficient to draw definitive conclusions, including tour guides and government advisors, alongside participant observation during guided tours to enhance the insights obtained from interviews. Furthermore, the study did not assess the depth of relationships formed during these interactions, questioning whether they endure beyond the visit or remain superficial. Especially in places like South Sinai, where hotels often host Israeli guests, young hospitality workers are typically required to greet guests. Despite this, their views on the Israeli-Arab conflict might not shift. In addition, individuals from conflicting backgrounds may interact out of curiosity to understand each other better, but this interaction might not change their opinions on the conflict. Tomljenović (2010) believes that it would be naive to expect that these intercultural encounters immediately result in reduced preconceptions, a new, more tolerant worldview emerging, and an improved understanding of one another.

She mentions that although around two-thirds of tourists seek cultural enrichment, the "contact hypothesis" is exaggerated, especially the idea that it leads to cultural understanding and changes people's attitudes by hurting stereotypes or preexisting judgments of tourists. She adds that the kinds of contacts in tourism are shallow and insufficient to bring about the desired changes [8]. Although Wintersteiner and Wohlmuth (2013) emphasize that tourism may broaden the mind, improve someone's awareness of other cultures, cultural views, and so on, and therefore affect the traveler's perspective of the 'other.' However, linking tourism automatically with cultural understanding should be associated less with positive and assured conceptualization and more with factual and research-based conceptualizations. They add that, according to research and experience, acquiring a greater cultural understanding is exceedingly more straightforward if specific circumstances and predispositions are satisfied; the contrary might occur, and stereotypes can be reaffirmed and increased. They mention different responses that could happen when people from other nations, cultures, or socioeconomic classes meet, such as aggression, defense, assimilation, or ignorance of the other. These variable reactions depend on the context, the personalities of the individuals or groups, and other issues [4].

#### **4.4 Advocates of the "Contact Hypothesis" and Peace-building through Tourism**

Supporters of the "contact hypothesis" theory emphasize the significance of tourism in altering individuals' attitudes and fostering global peace. They posit that intergroup interactions can diminish biases [20]. They also identify factors such as close interpersonal contact, collaborative efforts toward common goals, and fostering intergroup relationships as pivotal. The supportive social and political backdrop bolsters the tourism sector is also crucial [20]. Etter (2007) concurs with these assertions by suggesting that the impact is significantly magnified when such interactions are underpinned by institutional frameworks (e.g., regulations, customs, or the local milieu) and when they engender a shared sense of purpose and humanity between the involved groups [21]. Kelly (2006) believes that the mission of tourism is to support positive attitudes and allow people to learn about different cultures. However, he pays attention to the importance of "peace-sensitive travel models" that enhance the quality of host-guest contact. Moreover, he believes that tourist preparation is quite important. The traveler's predisposition has different means, such as tour guides, travel books, and other media [22]. Moufakkir and Kelly (2010) believe that peace-related goals may only be attained via the strategic management of tourism to foster intercultural connections. All levels, from the individual to the national government, are responsible for achieving these goals. Nowadays, in our world, some optimistic examples illustrate how planned tourism may make the

world a better place. For example, tourism income is allocated to financing education, the health sector, and solar systems in poor areas of Nepal. Another example is Aboriginal tourism development in North America and Australia to help in the national reconciliation process. Moreover, the network of peace museums is dedicated to confronting war celebrations [23]. For example, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Japan stands as a poignant reminder of the atomic bombing's tragic toll, commemorating its victims and educating visitors on the horrors of nuclear warfare. By promoting peace and advocating for nuclear disarmament, this museum is a powerful symbol of the devastating consequences of conflict [24]. These examples serve as ways tourism can contribute to a better world. Besides the "contact hypothesis," Kelly (2012) highlighted the other four potential arenas that may foster peace-building through tourism. These four things are communication between groups, moral considerations about the environment and human rights; the anti-globalization impacts of tourism, such as reducing poverty and making suppliers and tourists more aware through tourism education; and the Peace Park projects, which aim to promote peace, save the environment, and make the world into one big family [7].

#### **4.5. Factors Influencing Visitor Interactions and Outcomes in Cultural Understanding and Peace Building**

Contact is clearly seen as a vital intermediary in the process of cultural understanding and peace-building, as shown in the debates of both supporters and opponents of such a concept. However, Cohen (2006) emphasizes the importance of the tourist's intentions. Does the visitor anticipate personal transformation? What resources—be it money, time, physical effort, or emotions—does the tourist invest in the journey? Is the experience approached with mindfulness? Does the tourist expect to have agency over their experience, the guidance provided, or prefer a more hands-off approach? Lastly, how does an individual assess their experience and integrate it into their life upon returning home? [6]. Tomljenović (2010) poses a different set of questions in such a situation, such as whether or not there are any possibilities for contact and whether those opportunities are of high enough quality to lead to a positive result [8]. Cohen (2006) mentions that the duration and number of interaction scopes will depend on how long visitors stay in the target country and how many activities they engage in while there, as well as the style of the trip. The extent to which visitors actually learn about the cultures they visit varies widely depending on these factors [6].

Tomljenović (2010) proposes a series of factors related to visitors that may be used to determine the influence of interaction opportunities and their outcomes [8]:

1. The nature of the trip, its length and organization.
2. The features of the selected destination with regard to cultural gaps, language hurdles, and the sense of visitor familiarity toward the selected destination.
3. The visitor's own will to communicate with local people as well as pattern, variety and number of activities.
4. The visitor's personal traits such as cognitive complexity, mental rigidity, openness to new cultures, and so on.
5. Visitors' perceptions of the chosen country and its society.
6. The sociocultural views of visitors that are strongly built in their personality dimensions, such as racism, or bias, nationalism, tolerance, and international orientation.

#### **4.6 Contextualizing the Contact Hypothesis in Cultural Tourism**

The effectiveness of tourism in fostering positive intergroup relations remains a topic of debate. The quality and depth of interactions play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards the host culture. While the potential for developing positive attitudes through meaningful contact exists, the validity of the contact hypothesis is diminishing as encounters become briefer and more surface-level. In cultural tourism, the extent to which individuals from diverse backgrounds understand each other hinges on the specific circumstances of their interactions. Factors such as the duration of engagement, the level of cultural immersion, and the willingness to engage in genuine dialogue are critical determinants of these encounters' impact on individuals. While these interactions can lead to personal growth and increased openness, they may not directly address more significant global issues that transcend individual meetings. Moving forward, cultural tourism must facilitate environments that encourage meaningful conversations while acknowledging that addressing broader challenges requires collective action. Emphasizing education, dialogue, and sustainable approaches within cultural tourism can foster mutual respect, tolerance, and an appreciation for diversity without oversimplifying the intricate nature of global conflicts.

#### **5. Conclusion**

While it is commonly accepted that interactions at cultural heritage sites can deepen personal connections to heritage, the ongoing discourse raises doubts about whether these engagements effectively contribute to enhancing cultural tolerance on a broader societal level. The effectiveness of tourism interactions in fostering cultural tolerance is a multifaceted issue that requires a nuanced exploration of how these individual engagements translate into tangible shifts in cultural perspectives and governmental policies. The limitations of one-on-one interactions in cultural

tourism become apparent when confronting deeply ingrained cultural tensions and conflicts, notably visible in recent episodes of violent disputes. This intricate situation underscores the complexities involved in leveraging tourism to cultivate intercultural understanding and suggests that it may not offer a simple remedy for addressing extensive cultural and political discord.

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