

# From Blue to Grey Tourism: Cultural Brand or Culture of Trademarks

**Eva, Reina Gutierrez**

High Technical School of Architecture of Seville, University of Seville, Spain  
e-mail: evareina@coamalaga.es

## Abstract

*This communication aims at analyzing the fact that tourist destinations are changing in recent times; as Ashworth called it 'a change from blue to grey tourism'. It moves away from the traditional commonplace model of "Sun and Beach", towards another range of products designed to exploit the existing or made up heritage.*

*The rising number of tourists with 'specific interests' attracted to places with their own identity does not match the original product of 'Sun and Beach' and its consequent acculturation. The new tourist consumption includes new products: culture and heritage.*

*The final result is a series of 'blue and grey' products: natural or historic heritage, arranged in a catalog, and manufactured, packaged and distributed with the intention to be consumed. As a consequence, what should above all be a "cultural landmark" given its transcendental value for all human beings, is suffering extreme commercialization that is leading us to labeling it as a "culture of trademarks".*

Keywords: Tourism, Heritage, City Marketing.

## Introduction

A few decades ago, visiting a city was motivated thanks to the attraction which a series of publicly assumed values (historical, symbolic, spatial, etc) provoked. Today, no small or big city wants to give up that possibility. As a result, every community and a wide variety of disciplines make use of our resources to try to be visited.

The constant transformation of the urban landscape in order to be adjusted to the needs of tourism accommodated for tourists has become the permanent objective of the economic policy of the city, regardless of what has just been recently done or its economic and, sometimes, social cost.

The construction of tourist areas, divide urban segments into places that were production sites and have turned into consumption sites. The transformed urban cityscape consists of parts of development, each of which offers a scenic view or evokes a romantic version of the urban life of the past. The result is the reduction of the city into a map of touristic attractions.

The globalization of mass tourism has led to the creation of standardized and globalized spaces, where the original conditions have become a show that produces unique experiences. The result is the construction of other places where the exceptional part of time passes, spaces built to meet the holiday dream. Thus, the traveler has been turned into "tourist" because of the appearance of a specific industry, which transformed tourism into business.

The main criticism placed on architecture and the tourist town is the result of the lack of balance between the finding of the right context to place it and the importance given to tourism as if considered as any other space. It is not thought as an expression of a specific and differentiated activity that requires a prior conceptual framework to understand it. It does not accept that its phenomenology is different from the city and the fact that its architectural references do not respond to that context.

### **Reinvention of the touristic destination**

Gregory J. Ashworth speaks of the repositioning of a tourist destination, through what he called the change of coast tourism "blue" type, to "grey" heritage tourism, and clarifies that occasionally has green hues. There are two main types of dynamics that are perceived as a threat to the success of the product of sun and beach. Firstly the boom of tourists with "specific interests" attracted to places with their own identity, increasingly dissatisfied with the original product and the acculturation associated with this type of tourism. The new tourist consumption includes new goods: culture and heritage, which does not focus on a particular product. Its motivations are, according to Ashworth, with the "sense of place", "thresholds of experience" and "permanent spiritual enrichment".

Secondly, there is the market tendency which is almost saturated, with little chance of future growth. Added to this, it is the perception of tourists that the loading capacity of natural systems of oceans has already been exceeded. But not only concerned about "green", but also the "grey", heritage, which may sometimes be damaged.

The different behavior in grey and blue destination is also important. The length of the stay in heritage destinations is usually shorter. It implies less loyalty to specific destination, especially when it has more popularity and uniqueness. The tourist has a number of historical sites which he will collect in his visits, once he has done them, they are not worth repeating. In addition, the consumption of heritage is very dependent on fads and fashions, as it happens to culture in general.

In any case, experts put the accent in a tendency in the increase in tourism typologies, a 'tourism a la carte', by which this polarization, that in the beginning seems to derive from this step of the blue tourism to the grey one, is not so clear. The current user is not as predictable in their preferences, not linking to a geographical area or a specific spatial or architectural formula.

In this sense, travel agents or territorial marketing specialists are the ones who play the most important role in building the perceptions on the tourist destinations, not architects. Thus, the tourist product is built on the basis of a series of inputs where architecture plays its role, as also do photography, cinema and souvenirs. All of them contribute to disseminating the mythologized destinations, blurring the boundaries between cultures.

Architecture cannot aim at modeling this space to match its needs, since no longer acts directly on the city. Tourist space is not subject to architecture, it only belongs to architecture because it sets (although not necessarily) its visible shape. On the contrary, the uses of architecture belong to the tourist space in the dimension of the requirements, procedures, rules, habits or lifestyles. Thus, even if they are inseparable, city and architecture still belong to different orders. Such a relationship manifests itself only when a situation or event in the city, have their correspondence in architecture. Although, as Jean Attali says in the book of Koolhaas, "possible things are already given as possible before any architectural creation", finally architecture makes it possible, but not without tourist space updating the virtualities of the strategy.

## **The (accidental) tourist**

As we have seen, what transformed the single traveler into a 'tourist' was the creation of a specific industry, which defined, organized and commodified the 'tourist' experiences. Mass tourism dragged something more than mere movement of a large volume of people towards the coasts of our territories. Then, tourism, as a generalized form of leisure, would abandon its previous exclusive character. In spite of this, something of that exclusivity is still linked to the particular, and sometimes quirky, aspirations of the tourist. Therefore, tourists respond to highly globalized patterns, but maintain their desire for uniqueness: they consume standardization but at the same time it aims at 'specificity'. Thus, 'places' are at the heart of the tourist experience. Its qualities respond to the demand of the tourist, emphasizing the typical qualities of the Post-Fordist Culture: image, entertainment, the power of the market and the attention to the visitor.

Many tourist offers target at thematic diversification, leaning towards specialization, so we can find sports tourism, nature tourism, rural tourism, health tourism, among others. A very complex and necessarily systematized market has to articulate very different interests from travel agencies, transport companies, hotel chains, etc., whose demand works gradually among the mixture of thematic specialization, the cost and the geographical location of each one of the offers.

The 'particular look' from tourist to objects of tourism is worth mentioning, since this is the direct responsible for the way of perception and subsequent apprehension of such objects and tourist sites in general.

The eye of the tourist is a panoramic, passive gaze, static and "cannibal" as Alba Rico says, every vision is an ousted object. It is the previous look to the next image quickly framed in the bus window and then in the lens of the camera, which continues on the TV or computer screen, just to verify that it matches with the image that we saw on a plane or in the magazine. Anyone can travel around the world without ever leaving his hotel, Alba Rico says transcribing a famous advertising campaign "outside is Cairo, inside Sheraton". As Augé says, even if it involves movement of the body, every travel is motionless in the sense that neither the spirit nor the imagination moves. This perspective defines tourists, but it also defines the target of their eyes.

Architectural interventions become pictures to photograph, postcards to add to the tourist's private collection, where the exclusive object in display is himself. This creation of images is so important to them, that his trip elapses between: what he saw before he left and what he will see when he will be back. The result is that time in between as the production of such images. As a consequence, the intermediate space, of the stay or walk, an area seen through the view finder or camera screen. Accordingly, the aim is not enjoying the place but taking a picture, regardless of where it is. The public space is invaded by the image, being dependent on it. The city becomes a set of landscapes without roots, a copy of other territories, which is introduced without taking into account its physical, social or cultural content. This image becomes a gadget or souvenir that produces new "non-territorial landscapes" (Francesc Muñoz), a "non-place of the image" (Marc Augé).

On the whole, the public acceptance of any kind of new projects, including the ones aimed at protecting the historical heritage, is not expressed through the experience once the public has visited the architectural sites, the spaces, the materials, or the game played with lights and shadows. On the contrary, people judge the places through the images they get from them. That is, a two dimensional element, as opposed to the three dimensional one it represents. The elements of the image have the force of law and as Augé says they impose the tyranny of the perpetual present.

## **Sun and Beach Tourism**

Sun and beach tourism is the one that has dominated in the second half of the 20th century, leading the tourism industry to the top of world economy, with a level of growth over the world GDP.

International Studies show that the proportion of leisure and tourism holiday, with the sun and beach want being absolutely the main tendency, will decline in favor of other modalities where 'multi-motivational demand' is satisfied. However, the demand that will be achieved in the coming years will continue to be of enormous significance. Thus, sun and beach tourism development paradigms are directed to modify traditional overcrowding through the diversification of tourism products, the evaluation of the quality parameters, including all related to the respect for the environment, nature and culture, singularity and the local origin of their products.

Theories about the dynamics of the tourist destinations based on the offer of sun and beach predict the arrival at a saturation point, as a result of excessive deterioration of its natural resources, which would lead to a phase of stagnation, loss of local values, standardization of product and decline. All of the previously mentioned, contradict the annual visitor values, that follow accounting on the places of these features, which have been able to constantly refocus their indexes of quality and innovation, as well as producing a seasonal adjustment that balance differences in entropy between the different times of the year.

However, this is not true in all tourist destinations, where the locals have a negative perception towards the phenomenon of tourism, which is considered to be blamed for the emergence of new problems like the oversaturation of community services, traffic congestion and high prices. In this regard, there are very few who perceive a positive balance between the benefits and costs caused by tourism.

However, it is not easy to think about this phenomenon and its impact on the territorial space, we must be cautious to establish immediate causal relationships, that tourist dynamics are not always responsible for the scattering and the restructuring of territorial occupation of our mapping patterns.

## **Cultural Tourism**

As we have already considered, one of the firmest strategies would be the review of the tourist destinations mainly that of cultural tourism especially based on the valuation or enhancement<sup>1</sup> of the

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<sup>1</sup> Enhancement (Mise en Valeur). This term refers to the heritage values which need to be recognized, but has also the notion of a surplus value, which has obvious economic connotations associated in addition to its interest or beauty. Thus, it justifies the dominant trend supported by the heritage or cultural industry and the interests of the urban economy, which often make uncertain the fate of a monument or an ancient city.

The usual procedures of enhancement are historical or fanciful reconstitutions, arbitrary destruction or disguised restorations. More specifically Choay (2007) includes a series of procedures to highlight: Staging; Animation; Modernization: It is, introducing a "regenerative implant" in the body of the old building, hoping that the interest generated by the performance of the present impact on old work causes a twofold reaction; Conversion in species: Association of monuments to the sale of objects of tourist consumption; Delivery: "the monument should be delivered on site"; and the final Integration into contemporary life.

It is not about being a demagogue when performing works in the heritage sites, forgetting about the importance of them when preserving and including them in the life cycle of the city. However, it is worth mentioning that the interests of the urban economy sometimes make uncertain the final use of historical sites.

heritage existing or made on purpose. This is due to the status awarded to the heritage today as 'cultural product' manufactured, packaged and disseminated with a view to its use. The 'cultural engineering' has provoked the metamorphosis of its value in use directly into economic value. Its task is to exploit the monuments by all means in order to multiply indefinitely the number of visitors.

The tourist industry is determinant in modifying the profiles of many cities doomed to charge themselves of cultural, artistic or historical references, introduced in the flow of sacredness of the trivial pumped by tourist dynamism. The patrimonialization of urban scenery, in contrast to their socialization, must be understood as the simplification of this framework offered to tourists for recreation and leisure and reverie, expelling anything of improvisation and citizen complexity.

Cities are forced to get full of "prefabricated products" that are identified exclusively by an image, a symbol or name, that is to say, they are unmistakably turned into marks. Monuments, ancient neighborhoods or historical districts, nothing escapes to be included in the catalogue of aspiration and growing tendency to infinity.

Nevertheless, heritage gives meaning to any place, it gives it identity which is very useful when launching new products. We have spoken above of the fragility of the relationship between tourists and local communities, which must prevail in decision takings. It is assumed that "gray" tourism generates more profit and less social decline than the "blue" one, but we have already seen the fragility of the surrounding contexts and the need to anticipate the physical and social externalities. In any case, changing from blue to gray is not a mere substitution of products.

Assessing nature and preserve it for future generations is a widespread concern. However, when these values are also one of the basic elements which underpin the dominant economic model, the concern is two-fold. This is accentuated in a very special way in the islands, usually territories of small size where a high number of different habitats meet, which usually means fragility, uniqueness and sense of limit. Probably this fragility is one of its greatest attractions which generate more controversy among native populations.

## **City Marketing**

In the last decades of the last century a widespread concern about the future of cities in a global context of increasing competition came about. In this process of invention new categories are continuously created, with reports and statistics on urban classifications, which make cities to compete in the global network to be able to wear any of the multitude of medals offered. "The 13 most creative cities in the world", "Most liveable cities in the World", "2009 City Brands Index", "Global cities index", "Innovation Cities Index 2009", or the Olympic Games, world expos, Forums, Cultural Capitals, and so on.

This dynamic is part of what has been known for nearly two decades, as territorial marketing or "city marketing" based on the existing competition in the "global market of cities", where all aspire to be. This tendency is present in any strategic plan and has a large component of redesign, requires the promotion of a renewed city image. Too often this image is added to the outlines of the globalizers almost by inertia or duty, but without a real study of the strategic plan, its origins and its consequences. It is to know what the city wants to become and how to get to that, with the support of its citizens (marketing involved). In this marketing, as in any commercial product, anything fits, brands, logos, merchandising, advertising campaigns, etc. In the end, we find that it is more important to get involved in the entanglement produced by globalization in the network-system than in the specific characteristics of each city.

As Plato said in the Laws: "every city is in a natural state of war against all the others". The original perversion of power which accompanied the great technical and cultural progress of civilization has

undermined and often cancelled the great achievements of the city until our own days. In the act of transforming lax groups of villages in powerful urban communities able to maintain a larger trade and to build larger structures, every part of life became a struggle, an agony, a gathering of gladiators who fought against a physical or symbolic death. Each era has had its sacred dome and its myths that have been adapted according to the evolution of the times. Now, at the time of the mass media, the fiercest fight takes place first in the virtual world to then attack on all fronts of reality, but always with the aim of being at the top.

There are cities that place in the uniqueness of its architecture, the instrument to consolidate its renewed identity and projected them into the future. They are even convinced of the catalytic power of these elements into the urban transformations of the surrounding tissue. On the contrary, this is not what happened in the New York of the 20s or 30s, when Rockefellers erected their golden condo, in the urban heart of the big city, its natural place for communication and propaganda. At present, however, everything is simulacra.

It is about creating a new architectural monumentality, a representative added value that turns it into a new landmark to identify it with the new public spaces generated, giving them a value similar to the ancient monumental architecture. Does this mean that humankind knows about their inner need to live in community, or on the other hand, it is a strategy promoted by the global system to achieve a good score in the ranking? Sigfried Giedion (1944) stated that "in an era in which the symbols have lost their value and are meaningless, convincing monuments will not be built [...]." "If we have lost the ability to create monuments and solemnize the holidays together, if we forget the true meaning of communal centers, all of this is closely related to the fact that comes to be seen the sentimental experience as something not essential, as a purely private circumstances."

The problem stems from the global nature of these actions, because it tends to replace the Mediterranean culture of walking in the streets, living together with the public open space, instead of an immersion in a mediated space that generates pro-independence and automata guidelines, away from the value of social cohesion and a sense of belonging to the community that cities should transmit in the first place.

'Zerópolis' is the name that Bégout assigned to Las Vegas, which, according to him, "symbolizes and anticipates the future of our metropolis, and embodies the standard horizon of our daily lives". Considered as a quarry for future urban trends, such as an on-site laboratory study of postindustrial cities which try to arrange around the arteries devoted to mass retail and leisure. It has made of 'disorientation' a pattern of urban spatial organization, whose utopia is to believe that it is a city and that, as such, can offer a comfortable urban existence. It has created an urban landscape of commercial essence living in the way of instant presence. In this case the entertainment industry has been liberalized; it has been reinforced by his victories in the field of leisure and tries to attack human life in all its fronts, especially in the areas of work and consumption, giving the impression that all aspects of daily life may also have a fun side. It not only affects cultural attitudes but all sectors of civilization: technical, social organization, city, and so on. It has built a way of life based on entertainment. Las Vegas is the exaggeration at the top expression, and its model should be recognized as the ghost of entertainment industry stalking its prey.

## **The Result**

In the end, it is an urgent need to provide general spaces with the ability to attract tourist and economic flows. The urban space is adapted to potential consumers, who can generate economic movement, promoting, without adapting, urban development. The strategies followed, can give positive or negative results but do not guarantee anything. In general, this urban policy seems to be more than pure marketing, spreading to many areas, and becoming "a Commodity (product to sell), Enterprise (for its management

mode) and Patria (for the creation of sense of belonging and patriotism of city)". Different companies are being created to market the city as if dealing with a slut, to seduce residents, visitors, or investors, with the ultimate goal of creating a city brand. It is sustained in a multitude of brands of whatever nature collecting during the process: mainly natural, cultural or social heritage.

The result is modern cities-show, in which what is offered for sale is not endless entertainment (as in 'Las Vegas') but the fetishized of the past and culture, reduced to photo albums and souvenirs ready to display infinitely. As Manuel Delgado says "reality is now a picture made of images, a representation of what was already pure representation, a scenery with nothing behind.

In this sense Pérez Humanes, intertwined the concepts "public sphere, image and communication", always in continuous change and transformation, as the cause of the uncritical acceptance of this new renovated image, underlying under the brand, to which tourists end up dedicating their particular look.

As a result we have a non selective perception that ends up gathering in the same group the Burj al Arab in Dubai and the Colosseum of Rome, both are two images collected in our album of trips already done or to be done. Also we can say that, due to democratization and the change of the concept of needs suffered thanks to the tourist industry, we are all tourists in our country of origin or abroad, at home or away; the conclusions drawn are obvious and really frustrating.

The mass media industry of entertainment is proceeding to change our media in a stenographic environment at the service of tours and travel catalogues. Physical or virtually integrated archeological sites in the city, historic centers lethargic or rebuilt according to tourist demand. Rarely visited museums and a multitude of theme parks that, momentarily, move tourist away from their everyday life. All of them generate a "mega-structure" that goes through the city and, which as itself, has a tendency to continue growing like an oil stain. It makes this network as wide as possible in order to generate a node that stands greatly on the global theatrical system.

The **tourist mega-structure** is constructed from a space of control, where space is not as important as information. The space is reduced to a mere receptacle for the numerical quantification, the representation of flows, economic gain (hotel rooms, visitors per day, daily expenditure...). This space is assisted by an infrastructural network, at the same moment that is lived and inhabited. It provides the invisible mechanisms that allow shopping to work properly, allows the packaging of local cultural surroundings by putting them on sale in the global system. It programs looks, smells, sounds and feelings, calculating and calibrating to obtain the maximum persuasive effect. It aspires to a guaranteed stability by mechanisms that allow an immediate response to sudden changes. The negative side of this is a residual space without market interest. The space is treated as a resource to exploit, process and manipulate, not based on the local features. In spatial terms, this part of the city is generated by default rather than by intent, creating a map composed of tourist areas and residual spaces. This space of control is being designed to optimize and maximize benefits by minimizing costs, at the highest possible rate. Hence why, it is constantly searching for the next loophole to exploit, the next chance expectation.

Tourist spaces are part of a territory with larger scale than themselves, weaving a network, the tourist mega-structure, which reaches far beyond its own location. By extending this network over the city, it admits the transfer of social behaviors which are typically urban with the consequent hybridization between mega-structure and city.

So, what should, above all, be a "**cultural brand**" because of its significance for all human beings, especially for its inhabitants, is subjected to an extreme commercialization that leads us to speak more of a "**culture of trademarks**".

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