Cultural Tourism and Social Resilience: Discourse of Historic Cities in East Germany, the Case of Gotha and Eisenach

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Cultural Tourism and Social Resilience:

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1. Problems addressed and aims of the dissertation

This thesis explores how cultural heritage plays a role in the development of urban identity by engaging both actively and passively with memory, i.e. remembering and forgetting. I argue that architectural heritage is a medium where specific cultural and social decisions form its way of presentation, and it reflects the values and interests of the period. By the process of remembering and forgetting, the meanings between inhabitants and objects in urban environment are practised, as well as created.

Through a close investigation of towns in East Germany, this research attempts to add to the discussions of heritage policies and provide empirical cases in heritage management after the reunification.

In specific, it aims

1) to fill the gap in the discourse of heritage management after the fall of the Berlin Wall in East Germany

2) to analyse the consequences of the actions (policies, promotions, management details) and

3) to reflect the residents’ perception and attitude toward the transitions.

2. Relevant current research in the scientific field

The central elements of the study consist of heritage studies, tourism management and urban resilience, and they are mutually inter-related. The theories of heritage and memory building are introduced to explain ‘what’ gets chosen from the past to be remembered. Cultural tourism, as the vehicle of selective remembering, its characteristics and place-making studies are introduced. Parallel to memory and cultural tourism studies, debates on social resilience are introduced by reviewing different perspectives and examining its relevance to the research topic. Exploring the three main research fields, it connects the memory building in East Germany through practices and explores the potential impacts on current debates.
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- Heritage and Collective Memories

Kirschenblatt, Halbwachs, Ashworth, Graham, Tunbridge and Allison have argued the flexible significance of architectural heritage. Augé (2004) notes about the importance of collective forgetting and the active cultivation of some memories at the expense of others. As in the case of individual memories, societies must be able to forget to form memories properly. If we, as individuals, were able to remember everything, we would not be able to make sense of the information we recall. Our memories would be saturated with information, and it would be impossible for us to adequately sort through the piles of memories to find the ones that were important to us.

- Cultural Marketing and Tourism

As Porter (2008) notes, nation-states hold exclusive powers to transform heritage management, and heritage tourism practices the power. When scrutinising how nation-states establish themselves, what is particularly notable is how they self-fashion the raw materials of history and tradition. While observing how the contemporary society appreciates their heritage, we can identify where the community’s interests lie.

As Ashworth and Voogd (1990) argue, the place-marketing nowadays is more to construct an image for the potential visitors or residents. To make the place more attractive and competitive, the place requires different levels of coordination and planning. Regarding place planning, especially, in positioning and visualising, tourism is an indispensable and useful tool. Richards (2010) claims that today’s cities need to be more eventful and more entertaining so that they can be resistant to economic restructuring and to remain distinctive. According to him, cultural production has become a major element of the urban economy.

- Resilience and Social Resilience

According to Folke (2006), the social resilience approach is a way of understanding the dynamic systems of interaction between people and the environment. As a growing branch of resilience studies, social resilience is especially referring to the capacity of a community to cope with disturbances or changes and to maintain adaptive behaviour (Maguire and Cartwright 2008). Maguire and Cartwright extracted representative characteristics of resilience into three major views upon which the community is able to withstand and respond positively to stress or change:

1. Resilience as stability: Buffer capacity
2. Resilience as recovery: Bouncing back
3. Resilience as transformation: Creativity (Maguire and Cartwright 2008, p. 10)

3. Methods used

Interdisciplinary Research

The case study is applied to macro level (city level: Gotha and Eisenach) and micro level (object level: specific heritage sites). By looking at the specific cases the research analyses the performance of selective remembering and to observes transferring significances of specific heritage. A qualitative field research on the case cities was applied; different levels of interviews, informal talks, photographs, and

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1 Please see the references.
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walks with residents were conducted. Parallel to the empirical research, analysis of different aspects and sources was done such as tourism material data, policies in the concerned spaces, structural changes, and archive data. In addition to that media clipping, tourism statistics, and expert interviews were applied.

4. Main outcomes

The central achievement of the study lies in the examination of the theories which have not been explored at community level. The interplay of remembering, forgetting and place-making were well observed in the heritage management of Gotha and Eisenach. This research documents the examples of heritage tourism of East German cities and explores the potentials of heritage tourism as a component of social resilience.

This research shows that cultural heritage plays a substantial role in the current society of historic towns in East Germany. Especially the former industrial cities like Gotha and Eisenach, after their industrial strength is taken away, the cities try to promote the village charm and traditionally shared history through heritage tourism. It is not only to redeem the glorious past that gives meaning to the history of the town, but also to fight against its existential crisis. The local festivals and celebration provide a way of healing for the citizens. Sharing local intimacy and develop pride of their own city helps to become resilient against negative external factors. Sharing common practices and memories regarding the urban space strengthens their identity in a compressed timeframe. As Hoffmann (1984) writes, by the development of tourism, a city can develop its communal anatomy and social-cultural diversity. These characteristics of new heritage tourism in East Germany show the potentials of forming social resilience. As the cities can raise their original identity and increase positive pride in the community, it satisfies the main characters of social resilience: stability, recovery and transformation.

Despite the positive vibes, there are unsolved issues due to the abrupt and top-down tourism development. Parallel identities, drastic changes, and concerns regarding un-done heritage sites are also documented in the thesis.

5. Areas of potential further research

This study is limited to the state of Thuringia in Germany. Further research can be done in different cities at city level as well as in other states. This can expand the discourse of regional identity and heritage policies in East Germany. In addition, international examples of territories with parallel identities and their individual solutions can add the discussion of identity studies in current society. Given the online travel market, tourism industry is developing day by day in all dimensions and becoming a part of global lifestyle. Prompt and diverse tourism research disciplines in sociology studies will help to understand the dynamic changes and the impact on local identities.

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References


