

TOURISM'S IMMENSE POTENTIAL: LIFE BEYOND TOURISM

In this, European Intercultural Dialogue Year, an awareness of the extraordinary potential enshrined in the phenomenon of tourism has gained a foothold in Florence, and it was originally sparked by a small sign in the Uffizi Gallery asking visitors to:

“Kindly refrain from throwing your used chewing gum on the ground”
(Photo in the Gallery)

A CHANGING CITY IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

Tourism and the consumption of the world's heritage.

Opportunities for ever faster and more frequent travel, and the massive rise in world trade, are two of the reasons that place tourism firmly on the list of phenomena that have made the greatest contribution to recent change in our metropolitan areas; and it is a change that has been both physical and psychological. Yes, psychological; in days of yore, intercultural dialogue was based on interaction between the traveler and the local culture of the places he visited; it was a time when a traveler was known by his name. Later, he began to be known by his room number. Today, he has been further downgraded to the point where he is nothing but a credit card number.

In the leading hotel chains that drive the development of tourism at the international level, a very young receptionist will greet his guest by swiping his credit card to make sure that the full bill gets paid, including of course any drinks from the bar or movies viewed in his room. The hotel's managers, for their part, never even see the guest; they are not interested in him. They are two worlds apart, totally distinct from one another and mutually uninterested in each other.

In other words, we have lost a tremendous heritage, the heritage of human relations. We have wasted it to the point where we have killed it off. Only two things count today: automation, and making money.

LIFE BEYOND TOURISM: FOR PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Yet beyond the "mask" of tourism, beyond the tourism that we have to put up with on a daily basis, the tourism that is wearing our cities out both physically and psychologically, there is a world, a wealth, that is not merely material, a world that is not immediately visible, indeed a world that is often unknown. Well, that world needs to be discovered, to be given its true value, and to be made proper and full use of for the good of the international community.

Tourism today has its main chance. It can buck the trend and doff its mask. The time is ripe for it to do so.

Thus they, who work in the tourist industry, need to make sure that they do this:
- so that they do not just provide the tourist with a roof over his head,

- but they endeavor to ensure that the industry takes on a role of its own in fostering the harmonious development of this increasingly global society in which we live; after all, there can be no doubt that such a role is proper to tourism.

If the world of tourism wakes up to its importance at the global level, it can work to offer its unique contribution to the international community thanks to the philosophy underpinning the Life Beyond Tourism project. This, in order to foster:

- intercultural dialogue,
- respect for cultural diversity,
- a new function for cities on UNESCO's World Heritage list, and
- a debate on new ways of helping the man-made (and man-managed) environment play a new role with the express intention of fostering intercultural dialogue and respect for cultural diversity.

THE MANIFESTO OF LIFE BEYOND TOURISM

What message are we trying to get across when we claim that *the flower of an awareness of a new kind of tourism, LIFE BEYOND TOURISM, has blossomed in Florence?*

Life Beyond Tourism

highlights the strategic aspect rather than the consumer aspect of tourism, in an effort:

- . to safeguard 'spirit of place';
- . to communicate 'spirit of place';
- . to stimulate and foster knowledge in each and every tourist;
- . to promote interpersonal acquaintance among tourists from different countries, which means promoting dialogue among different cultures;
- and
- . to foster respect for cultural diversity.

The MANIFESTO:

1. Tourism is a crucial source of prosperity;
2. Tourism, in its various forms, goes way beyond the mere satisfying of personal needs;
3. Tourism is an opportunity to get to know a destination's spirit of place;
4. People working in the tourist industry are *ipso facto* working to promote peace;
5. The tourist is a potential herald of peace;
6. The tourist's destination, whether natural or built, is a 'laboratory of familiarization, knowledge and awareness' for all visitors.

The Romualdo Del Bianco Foundation's experience in promoting and practising intercultural dialogue and respect for cultural diversity has prompted us to consider tourism and hospitality as representing an invaluable part of our strategic heritage, inasmuch as they foster:

- encounters
- communication
- knowledge.

Moreover, *tourism*

- represents *a major and widespread opportunity* because it has become a consumer phenomenon on a worldwide scale
- is *a major opportunity that is being underused throughout the world* because it is being used almost exclusively as a machine for making money.

Thus tourism is one of the most effective tools for fostering intercultural dialogue, yet very few people seem to be aware of that tool's existence.

With Life Beyond Tourism the Foundation hopes:

- that local cultural identity can be preserved;
- that tourism can take on a new role in promoting the development of human relations at the international level, thus allowing the destinations visited by tourists, especially the sites included in the UNESCO World Heritage list, to play a role as laboratories for promoting knowledge at every cultural level, for helping to spread that knowledge, and for fostering cooperation;
- that the way the territory - the built environment in particular - is "used", is firmly linked to the need to contribute to intercultural dialogue;
- and finally, that our Intangible Heritage can include
 - . the 'ethos of commitment' to fostering intercultural dialogue
 - . the ancient tradition of hospitality.

PILOT SCHEME

The "Life Beyond Tourism" project is an experiment that got under way in Florence on 15 March 2008. It was launched in the Salone dei Duecento in the Palazzo Vecchio, the city's 13th century town hall. It is the product of over 10 years of activity on the part of the Romualdo Del Bianco Foundation in coordinating and promoting intercultural encounters among the students of the universities in three different continents with which it has been working for many years. It has organized over 60,000 man-days with students and their faculty in international encounters, without competition, in a framework of respect for individual identities, discovering the past together and working to build a shared future: a small but concrete contribution to intercultural dialogue in this year, 2008, which as we saw has been designated European Intercultural Dialogue Year.

The experience that we have built up through these encounters and this dialogue, which has allowed us to link our activity to the world of tourism, has revealed to us the potential (a potential that is far from easy to detect) lying beyond the "mask" of tourism with which we are all familiar. That is precisely why our project is called "Life Beyond Tourism".

The Life Beyond Tourism project sprang to life on 15 March, and since that date it has been visible, tangible, measurable, and open to criticism and to improvement; moreover, it is being monitored in accordance with international standards that ensure that the results achieved will be reliable.

The committee that developed the project consisted of:

- . Antonio Natali (Director of the Uffizi Gallery)
 - . Maurizio Bossi (Director of the Center for Romantic Studies with the Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario GP Vieusseux)
 - . Stephen Tobin (historian)
 - . Serafino Degli Innocenti (economist)
 - . Carlotta Del Bianco (Promo Florence Events)
- and
- . Paolo Del Bianco (Chairman of the Romualdo Del Bianco Foundation)
- with the participation of
- . Antonio Paolucci (Director of the Vatican Museum)

OTHER PARTNERS

The Gabinetto Vieusseux has embraced the project in cultural terms, thus it will continue to work by our side in testing and disseminating the project, which we will be jointly presenting to the ICOMOS General Assembly in Quebec in September 2008, together with any other institutions that join us in subscribing to this ethos.

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, ICCROM, has granted the project its patronage, identifying it as representing a strategic contribution to the promotion of responsible tourism. Also the Tuscan Regional Authority and the Florence Provincial Authority have granted it their patronage, while the Florence Municipal Authority's Department for International Relations joined with the Foundation and with the Gabinetto Vieusseux in presenting the project in the Palazzo Vecchio on 15 March.

The Foundation and the Gabinetto Vieusseux hope to receive positive assistance from the tourist industry itself in disseminating this experiment, thus imparting a concrete thrust to the "Declaration of Intent" signed on 16 March by the Foundation's ... experts, from ... countries on three continents, who attended the Life Beyond Tourism project's recent public début.

CONCLUSION

Thus what has blossomed in Florence is the flower of an awareness of tourism's huge potential: this flower is called "Life Beyond Tourism" and it is designed to help foster the rebirth of the concept of travel.

The petals of this flower represent the main aspects of the project and of its experimental phase:

Encounter, Communication, Knowledge, Conservation and the Economy.

(Animated photo)