

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: [The Hong Kong Polytechnic University |
Unit of Assessment (UoA): [23 hotel management & tourism |

Title of case study: [A Cultural Tourist Typology]

(1) Summary of the impact

[The work of researchers at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) has led to changes in national tourism policy and influenced how national and international tourism organisations position their products in the cultural tourism market. **Tourism Kent** has become the globally accepted standard for segmenting the cultural tourism market, which was previously considered homogeneous. Researchers at PolyU have shown that it is instead highly segmented, based on both centrality of motive and depth of experience. This research has also transformed how the industry evaluates the cultural tourism market and influenced a key policy document on cultural tourism issued by the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO); the findings have become part of the UNWTO's cultural tourism policy (UNWTO 2018). The segmentation model has since been widely adopted by a variety of national and regional tourism organisations, including the Council of Europe (EU), NeToUr (Russia) and Visit Britain and Myanmar. |

(2) Underpinning research

[**The Need:** Cultural tourism has emerged as an important tourism product. A number of studies have found that up to one third of international tourists participate in cultural tourism every year (UNWTO 2018). However, as with most forms of special interest tourism, there is a great divide between the large number of people who participate in this activity, and those whose trips are substantially motivated by the activity. Tourism, like other sectors, is beset by phantom demand – demand that only appears to exist due to flawed methodologies, versus actual commercial tourism opportunities.

The reason for such errors is the conflation of participation and motivation. According to this logic, if a trip is organised according to a special interest in particular attractions or activities, then assessing visitation to these attractions or participation in these activities is a valid proxy for motivation. Unfortunately, this type of research fails to appreciate that people participate in an activity for a number of reasons. Sometimes the activity is the central motivation for the trip; sometimes it is only one reason among many; often, travellers are simply looking for something to do that has little or no connection with why they travelled.

Much early research did not appreciate this fact, and instead assumed that the market was homogeneous and that tourists were deep cultural tourists. This line of enquiry was politically appealing, but there was very little empirical evidence to support it. Instead, as with most special interest segments, the net result was an underperforming sector, typified by phantom demand.

The Research Team: The key staff associated with this research are **Prof. Bob McKercher** (Associate Professor, 1998-2005; Professor, 2005-present) and **Dr Hilary du Cros** (Part-time Research Fellow, 2000-2002).

The Studies: In one of the first detailed studies of cultural tourism, the study team examined the interaction between centrality of motivation and depth of experience to gain a deeper understanding of the market's dynamics. Research led by the School of Hotel and Tourism

Management (SHTM) at PolyU involved a series of consumer surveys of visitors to Hong Kong. The first survey was conducted as part of a project supported by the Research Grants Council General Research Fund (RGC GRF, formerly known as Competitive Earmarked Research Grant, CERG), and sought to identify the profile of the market. This study identified participation rates in line with global norms, but also indicated substantially different behaviour patterns among various groups of tourists [3.1].

Two subsequent studies, undertaken as part of the annual SHTM Omnibus Visitor Survey, sought to refine the findings and define the market more precisely. The first survey linked depth of experience with centrality of motivation [3.2]. The model was tested empirically using Hong Kong as a case study. A follow-up study tested the validity of the typology by testing the segments against a variety of trip, demographic, motivational, activity, awareness and cultural distance variables [3.3]. Significant differences were found between the groups, suggesting that the model may be effective in segmenting the cultural market.

The outcome: Five cultural tourism market segments were identified and validated:

- *purposeful cultural tourist* – an individual for whom cultural tourism is the primary motive for visiting a destination, and who has a deep cultural tourism experience;
- *sightseeing cultural tourist* – an individual for whom cultural tourism is the primary or major reason for visiting a destination, but the experience is shallow;
- *serendipitous cultural tourist* – an individual who does not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who ends up having a deep cultural tourism experience;
- *casual cultural tourist* – an individual for whom cultural tourism is weak motive for visiting a destination, and the resultant experience is shallow;
- *incidental cultural tourist* – an individual who does not travel for cultural tourism reasons, but who nonetheless participates in some activities and has a shallow experience.

(3) References to the research

- 3.1 McKercher B. & H. du Cros (2002) Cultural Tourism: The Partnership between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management. Haworth Press, Binghamton N. Y. (with a second edition published in 2015 - Du Cros, H & McKercher B. (2015) Cultural Tourism 2nd Edition. Taylor and Francis. 0415833973). DOI:10.1108/09596110310496060
- 3.2 McKercher B. (2002) Towards a Classification of Cultural Tourists International Journal of Tourism Research, 4: 29 – 38. DOI:10.1002/jtr.346
- 3.3 McKercher B. and H. du Cros (2003) Testing a Cultural Tourism Typology International Journal of Tourism Research, 5(1): 45 – 58. DOI:10.1002/jtr.417

(4) Details of the impact

Dr du Cros of the research team was commissioned to conduct a study for the UN World Tourism Organization examining cultural tourism. The findings disseminated through this study became part of the UNWTO's cultural tourism policy (UNWTO 2018) [5.10].

Subsequently, a number of member countries adopted the framework in their own policy documents. In particular, it has been widely applied by European Union (EU) members, including organisations such as the Council of Europe (2013) [5.5], Russia (NeToUr 2013) [5.7] and regional centres [5.9]. It has also been adopted in Canada [5.2], by Visit Britain and Myanmar (Business Innovation Facility 2016) [5.3], and the cities of Cape Town [5.4] and London (2014) [5.6].

The value of the model has been recognised by the UNWTO (2018: 78 [5.10]), whose policy document on tourism and cultural synergies commented on the challenge of defining the cultural tourism market. The document states, “the fairly one-dimensional measurement of motivation or involvement was later elaborated into more multidimensional approaches. For example, a typology of cultural tourists was produced, based on the importance of culture in the decision to visit the destination and the depth of experience sought.”

Thomas and Scott (2018: 12) [5.9], in a policy document for Tourism Kent, note that this “move towards understanding the full range of cultural tourism consumers (from purposive to the Incidental cultural tourists), thus, has been transformative. The Culture Kent consumer research applied this model to identify the relative importance, for Kent cultural tourists, of culture in the decision to visit Kent (level of engagement with culture) and the depth of experience sought (from shallow to deep).”

The Tourism Northern Ireland document *A Prospectus for Change* (Northern Ireland 2017:9) [5.8] indicates, “importantly, the more culturally-motivated the visit, the higher the levels of engagement with the destination. This is essential where a destination wishes to change or challenge its public perception.” It then proceeds to identify the framework as a means to segment the market and thus move from a narrowly focused strategy, based on a stereotypical understanding of cultural tourists, to a more comprehensive appreciation of their heterogeneity and the variety of ways in which they engage with the cultural tourism offerings at a destination.

The Council of Europe (COE 2013: 25) [5.5] has adopted the model. Its policy document recognises the model’s marketing implications: “the implication is that not all attractions can appeal to all cultural tourists, and that many visitors will have only a tangential interest in the specific cultural offering. This is important in marketing terms, since it means that attractions need to think about the specific and general appeal that they may have for tourists and have to develop appropriate product-market combinations.”

The City of London (London 2014: 26) [5.6] recognises that “most visitors to London are likely serendipitous and sightseeing cultural tourists. These are the bedrock of London’s visitor economy. However, as this report will show, there is a big growth of purposeful cultural tourists to London. A new generation of visitors who like to explore further, stay longer and spend more.”

Even media in the Caribbean have acknowledged the importance of the research. The *St Lucia Times* (Anon 2015) [5.1] published an article about the five basic types of cultural tourist.

In this way, the research conducted at PolyU has not only influenced cultural tourism policy on an international scale, but has also had a substantial impact on the framework for understanding cultural tourism around the world.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Anon (2015) Caribbean American Heritage Month Celebrations. *St Lucia News Online* –June 15, 2015. <https://www.stlucianewsonline.com/caribbean-american-heritage-month-celebrations/>
- 5.2 British Columbia (2014) Cultural and Heritage Tourism Development Guide.
- 5.3 Business Innovation Facility (2016) *BIF Burma (Myanmar): Tourism Market Analysis and Strategy*. Business Innovation Facility. https://www.bifprogramme.org/sites/default/files/attachments/bif_burma_tourism_market_analysis_strategy.pdf
- 5.4 Cape Town (nd) *Niche Market Study*. City of Cape Town

- http://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/City%20research%20reports%20and%20review/Niche%20Market%20StudyM_Final.pdf
- 5.5 Council of Europe (2013) Impact of European Cultural Routes on SMEs' innovation and competitiveness – Provision Edition. Council of Europe:
<https://rm.coe.int/1680706995>
- 5.6 London (2014) Take a Closer look: A cultural tourism vision for London 2015 – 2017. London: Mayor of London.
https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/cultural_tourism_vision_for_london_low_res_version.pdf
- 5.7 NeToUr (2013) *Cultural Tourism in Russia: A Situational Analysis*.
<http://rguts.ru/templates/Rguts/images/sector/international/reports/1.pdf>
- 5.8 Northern Ireland (2017) *A Prospectus for Change*. Tourism Northern Ireland.
<https://tourismni.com/globalassets/grow-your-business/2018-european-year-of-cultural-heritage/tourism-ni-heritage-framework-a-prospectus-for-change.pdf>
- 5.9 Thomas, K., and Scott, J. (2017) Culture Kent Research Programme Summary of Findings Report. <https://ckproject.files.wordpress.com/2018/01/culture-kent-summary-of-findings-report.pdf>
- 5.10 UNWTO (2018) *Tourism and Culture Synergies*. Madrid: UNWTO.
<http://interaccio.diba.cat/sites/interaccio.diba.cat/files/9789284418978.pdf>