



TOURISM AND INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN DEVELOPING NATIONS

Oyenuga Michael Oyedele¹ and Paul Iorkegh Akwen²

¹School of Business, Woxsen University, Telangana, India, 502345.

Email: oyenuga.michael@woxsen.edu.in

²Faculty of Management Sciences, Veritas University, Abuja, Nigeria.

Email: akwenpaul@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT: *The ease with which movements have become an exclusive avenue for intercultural understanding hence, the need to grow and venerate wide customs, values, and beliefs. Tourism provides one of the most effective tools for peaceful coexistence and a people-to-people approach. Using the theory of intercultural sensitivity, this research examines the complex relationship between tourism and intercultural knowledge-sharing, investigating how tourist actions can foster interactions of cultural significance beyond recreational enjoyment. By synthesizing literature from studies on resident attitudes toward tourism development, volunteer tourism and its impact on intercultural sensitivity, as well as the impacts of tourism in community participation at a destination this paper demonstrates how gaining more knowledge is important to gauge change-related-institutional perspective. This research delves into the complex association between tourism and intercultural understanding, investigating by what means tourism serves as a connection between assorted cultures, promoting worldwide support and communal respect. Strategies for promoting intercultural understanding by ethical and professional tourism practices, cosmopolitan drilling and community involvement are projected, accentuating the necessity for justifiable and all-encompassing tourism development. The research ended by reiterating the possibility of tourism to provide further pleasant sounding world as long as its problems are tackled through reliable and culturally subtle style.*

KEYWORDS: Developing nations, Intercultural sensitivity, Intercultural understanding, Tourism.



INTRODUCTION

A worldwide phenomenon of travelling for recreational and other purposes is referred to as tourism. Tourism is a wide industry in which the value cannot be overestimated; it plays a cornerstone position in promoting intercultural understanding and cooperation. Tourism links wider cultures and enables opportunities for cosmopolitan interactions and experiences.

Tourism contrastive comprehension is a complex notion that takes into account tourist-host community interactions, the fostering of cross-cultural sensitivity and cultural competence. One of the most important influencers in fostering intercultural understanding is tourism, as it brings together people from different backgrounds and cultures. It is one of the biggest influences on making cultures understand each other as it gathers people from different nationalities and backgrounds (Yu & Lee, 2013). Existent are studies which have gone in depth to investigate the importance of intercultural competence in tourism, supporting its significance for bettering service quality (Fan et al., 2021; Miguel, 2014). For instance, volunteer tourism has been highlighted as a context which facilitates higher levels of intercultural sensitivity and subsequent cross-cultural understanding through host engagement (Kirillova et al., 2015). This point of view underscores the importance and significance of supporting humanitarian cultural exchange through tourism as it contributed to identifying a crucial role played in acknowledging direct linkages (Kan et al., 2021). Furthermore, intercultural competence development is essential, especially for tourism students who will have to deal with globalisation and learn how to work under multicultural circumstances (Durko & Martens, 2021). Furthermore, the study of tourism shows how sociocultural and economic factors influence tourists' perceptions supporting a cultural exchange that improves residents regarding their attitudes toward some aspects such as Nazirullah et al. (2023), Alsakkaf et al. (2020); Alam et al. (2024) and Omale et. al (2021). Furthermore, sustainable tourism also appears in preserving cultural heritage (to protect the identity of culture) and encouraging all human beings both exchange their various cultures (Stanikzai, 2024; Anggraeni & Priatini, 2019). Tourism is an economic engine and tourism, via cultural exchange & empowerment provides a platform for us to learn about one another globally (Sormin, 2023). This dynamism in the nexus between culture, youth and tourism is an example of how tourism can contribute to enriching cultural experiences and enhancing intercultural dialogue. The analogy, provided for the case of Timor-Leste by Currie (2018), is that tourism development can be employed which will help in economic growth; generation of employment opportunities as well as facilitating cultural exchange. The nexus between tourism and intercultural understanding reveals some of the transformative possibilities associated with tourism in terms of increasing cross-cultural interactions, raising cultural awareness and nurturing mutual respect as well as appreciation among different communities.

The Concept of Tourism

Tourism is not a simple thing which means just travel of people from one place to another for the different purposes like relaxation, education or each other that comes in tourism. Tourism as an aspect of a wide array of industries makes up anything that contributes to commercial enterprise in which goods, services or everything else integrated is used in exchange for money. Such activities incorporate urban, seaside, rural and ecotourism; wine tourism as well as food tourism (Camilleri C., 2017). Given the potential of tourism to contribute towards sustainable development goals and a more sustained future (Buhalis et al., 2023). A substantial amount of research has investigated tourism and its relation to the growth economy revealing that tourism



might positively affect economic development through different mechanisms (Иванов & Webster, 2007; Kozhokulov et al., 2019).

Tourism in Developing Nations

Tourism in developing countries is a complex thing, and this means that it has many economic, social and environmental aspects as a whole of sustainable development. In these contexts, tourism is more than just an economic sector; it becomes a fundamental force for community empowerment, cultural exchange and ecological preservation. The potential of tourism for economic development in developing countries was hampered during the COVID-19 pandemic (Omale et al., 2023; Omale & Oyenuga 2021). In their study, Osinubi et al. (2022), reveal that tourism exerts a robust positive influence on sustainable development in MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria and Turkey) with a 1% growth in tourism receipts causing a concomitant increase of 0.062 units in sustainable development. Such revitalization can result in more jobs, infrastructure investments, and a more robust local economy offering better lives. Additionally, the integration of sustainable tourism practices remains the necessary precondition for the equitable distribution of the benefits from tourism. For Indonesia, the sustainable tourism development policies are aimed at community-based tourism that sustains local economies while also establishing social cohesion and cultural preservation according to Nurjaya (2022). Such an approach is also in accord with the overall ethos of sustainable development: Protecting cultural and environmental resources while promoting economic sustainability.

Not only the economic impact, tourism is also a space for intercultural dialogue and exchange. In an increasingly globalized world, this awareness is important; interactions between tourists and local communities can foster greater appreciation. Notably, Pentahelix supports sustainable tourism development by establishing the completeness of local voices in planning with communities as suggested through synergic collaboration among government, academia, business, community and media (Fatimah & Naldi, 2019). But at the same time, not shutting our eyes towards the challenges tourism in developing nations brings with it. As tourism grows, it can also lead to environmental destruction, the commodification of certain cultures income gaps, etc. Although tourism is effective in generating wealth, it can worsen income inequality, which acts as a conflict between tourists and citizens leading to inflationary pressure or high living costs for the local population (Alam & Paramati, 2016).

This necessitates the design of a tourism policy that prioritises sustainability and inclusivity so as to limit these negative consequences. Thus, tourism in developing countries is a paradox of development, globalization and sustainability. If we build this around sustainability and the local community, tourism can be an effective vehicle for other development objectives. Notes Future research should focus on finding more creative solutions to protect the economy, society and nature at the same time to make tourism a way of sustainable development rather than exploitative activity for this region.

Intercultural Understanding

One of the most important conceptual constructions in intercultural communication is that of intercultural understanding. It refers to the capability of valuing and understanding cross-culturally, similarities and differences in people. That is important in our globalised world as we mix more and closer with people from different cultures. Cultural awareness is one of the first steps towards achieving intercultural understanding. Understanding, accepting and appreciating all the beliefs, own values systems norms and behaviour patterns of every culture.



With that, people can have a better scientific knowledge of other societies to prevent conflicts with them which are caused by cultural differences. Empathy is also an important more of intercultural understanding. An aspect of empathy is stepping into someone else's shoes and attempting to comprehend their point of view, feelings, life, etc. Empathic practice can help people to have a more thorough understanding of the cultural background of each other, leading eventually through empathy-building activities like this game- to better connection in engaging across cultures. Intercultural communication is also an important part of achieving intercultural understanding. Different cultures have different rulebooks for communication being able to successfully navigate these differences can be an essential part of a successful intercultural interaction. That goes for spoken language as well as non-verbal signals like body movements, hand gestures and the look on your face. Cultural competence is similar and a major linked concept to intercultural understanding. Cultural competence: stems from social work, defined as a set of congruent behaviors and attitudes that come together in an environment or among the professions to work effectively with cross-cultural clients. Cultural competence is a life-long learning process, involving self-reflection and the choice to examine one's own biases over time.

Intercultural Land Scape of Tourism

Travel and tourism open up individuals or groups to a wide range of cultural principles, each showing its own peculiar cultural attributes. Tourists have their cultural differences using different means such as; physical visits to sites, videos, and other social media. These usually, in the final analysis, widen their scope, and clear misconceptions across and around the world (Bruner, 2005).

Nevertheless, intercultural understanding in tourism is not a straight-jacketed concept. There are challenges involved which include but are not limited to; cultural confusion, preconceived ideas, and language barriers among others could generate tensions. It could be a feeling of being stunned by tourists' cultural shocks or upset by communication challenges. On the other way round, indigenes might face rigidities where tourists have no regard for local traditions (Edensor, 2018).

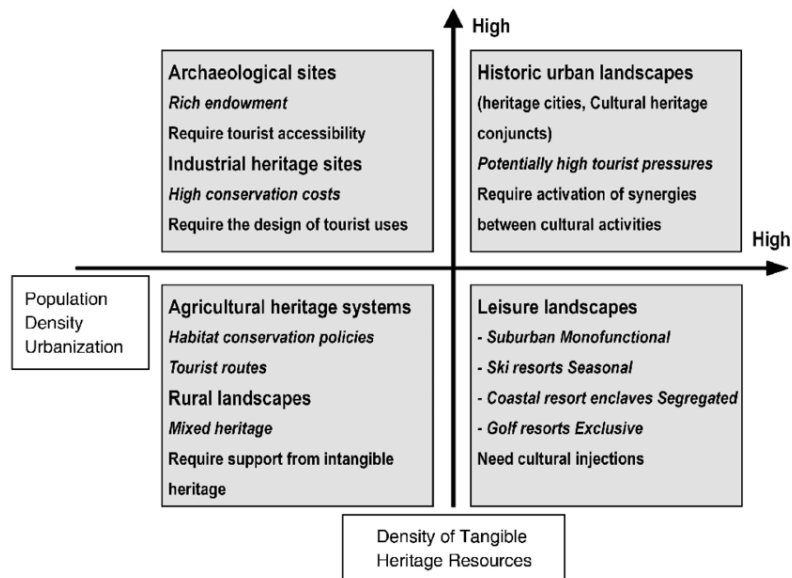


Figure 1. Intercultural Landscape by Jockey Baker

Source: *ResearchGate*.

Types of Tourism and Intercultural Understanding

1. **Special Interest Tourism:** Special interest tourism is a type of tourism that, such as olive oil or other types of rural, nature and cultural aspects which are at scale level offers benefits to travellers with specific preferences (Fernández et al., 2019).
2. **Cultural Tourism:** This is expressed when tourists move from one place to another to have first-hand experience of a particular culture, heritage and other attributes art of that place. The intercultural understanding creates profound perceptions of the traditions, customs, and way of life of various communities promoting respect and gratitude for cultural differences.
3. **Community-Based Tourism (CBT):** CBT is an alternative to traditional tourism, characterized by the involvement of communities in underdeveloped destinations and emphasizing sustainable development (Maldonado-Erazo et al., 2020).
4. **Eco-Tourism:** This is a deliberate controlled movement, basically to natural sites that keep the environment, while advancing the general welfare of the inhabitants. This brings about sustainable practices fostering mutual interaction with the indigenes which attract consciousness concerning diverse lifestyles and environmental stewardship.
5. **Smart Tourism:** The definition as suggested by Gretzel et al. (2015) states that online tourism results from the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the travel industry, supported by excellent electronic services to improve overall experience through data-based value propositions.
6. **Adventure Tourism:** This movement includes investigation of a percentage of danger (practical or imagined), which may need unique training. Getting to the interior areas. And having chances to participate with the indigenes and learn about their ways through



hiking, rock climbing etc (Vasilieva, 2021). Other forms of tourism include religious tourism (Heidari et al., 2018), sports tourism (Qi & Tang, 2022), dark tourism (Stone & Sharpley, 2008), rural tourism (Wang et al., 2022), medical tourism, culinary tourism, education tourism, business tourism, cruise tourism (Papathanassis, 2017), and volunteer tourism (Raymond & Hall, 2008)

Roles Of Tourism in Intercultural Understanding

One of the key ways that tourism fosters intercultural understanding is through people-to-people communication. One such approach that has received wide endorsement is volunteer tourism interactions with host communities (Kirillova et al., 2015) which is a medium that promotes intercultural sensitivity among the volunteers. Moreover, tourism practices promote the creation of an intercultural dialogue that is indispensable to nurture mutual understanding (Asten, 2022). The main purpose of offering cultural awareness training for hospitality and tourism professionals is to help them acquire the requisite background knowledge and skills required to manage cross-cultural issues so that they can deliver quality services, especially among foreign customers as well (Miguel, 2024). Furthermore, the idea of intercultural capacity in tourism and hospitality is also important when it comes to tourists' engaged behaviour and consequential cultural experience which can lead to a greater insight into another culture (Fan et al., 2021). It is a type of competence that brings self-efficacy beliefs and effective communication across cultures together (Koç, 2021), which would be beneficial for intercultural appreciation. Moreover, it is emphasized that the role of reflexive thought plays an integral part in both adjusting to new cultural environments and engaging authentically with others across cultures (Matthews, 2020). Meanwhile, Poetra (2024) states that tourism has high potential as a tool for intercultural exchange and cooperation where it allows tourists visits to communicate interactively with visitors who then can be useful in providing educational value regarding different cultures or local wisdom associated with the attractions visited (Fan et al., 2021). Among these opportunities, (Kirillova et al., 2015) assert that multidimensional measurements enhance tourist intercultural competence which stimulates active participation and promotes recollection of memorable cultural experiences which in turn enhances cross-cultural appreciation of volunteer tourism. The research accentuates volunteer tourism contextual factors that could enhance volunteers' intercultural sensitivity and indeed bridge the cultural divide. Everingham (2014) also suggests that volunteer organisations intentionally promote intercultural learning and understanding to create greater recognition of each other's cultural concepts. Raymond & Hall (2008) delve deeper by examining the functions of volunteer tourism-sending organisations in facilitating cross-cultural awareness amongst volunteers on these trips, highlighting the potential for such initiatives to enhance intercultural dialogue. As well, tourism allows for cultural exchange and understanding of other cultures back home. In regard to intercultural dialogue with drawing borders, tourism helps culture interface (Ferraz & Serpa, 2021), more likely predicting a utopic universe providing intervention which could give rise to cross-cultural interaction. Sharma (2018) further added that effective communication would help in overcoming cultural gaps and simultaneously provide better services to the visitors, hence training employees becomes inevitable for the hospitality sector about intercultural communication. Regarding the festivals and events context, Gürsoy et al. (2006) note that the behaviour of festival attendees at these cultural events portrays two dimensions - the hedonic experience they are seeking whilst also exhibiting utilitarian values, which reinforce their role as a method by which instances of multicultural exchange can be provided making them forums for intercultural dialogue. Richards & Wilson



(2004) explain that cultural events in cities can influence the image of a city as well as attract visitors, bringing with them exchange and understanding among diverse populations. Tourism eventually promotes intercultural understanding, due to volunteer projects and opportunities through tourism services, cultural awareness education and the development of professional competencies in terms of cross-cultural communication between professionals or tourists themselves. Tourism is an important area of cultural exchange and by initiating intercultural dialogue, tourism serves as a basis for promoting mutual respect and understanding among cultures.

Gains of Tourism in Intercultural Understanding

1. Education and Awareness: Tourists are usually exposed to different ways of life, customs, and traditions through education. Education creates awareness and awareness clears labels and biases, developing a more robust understanding of other cultures.

2. Economic and Cultural Preservation: Tourism has the capacity to preserve cultural heritage. It can create economic gains for local communities, catalyses the maintenance of cultural practices and historical sites. The income obtained from tourism activities could be ploughed back into the conservation of cultural legacy (Richard, 2018)

3. Social Cohesion and Peace Building: Socially, when people are brought together from different backgrounds, there are bound to be dialogues and interactions, which have the potential resulting to mutual respect in particular, and global peace on a large scale.

Challenges and Criticisms of Tourism

a. Cultural Commodification: Commodification of culture has been pointed out as one of the vital reproaches of tourism. As long as cultural process, practices and traditions are parcelled and traded to tourists from different background, the possibility of resulting in a menace trailing its validity and essence is very high. The commodification could result in insincere grasps of cultures, especially in areas where tourists assimilate cultural experiences in error without a real important framework.

b. Over-tourism and Impact: When the number of tourists surpasses the resources of the terminus it is known as over-tourism. This occurrence can have damaging results on both the environment and the residents. Including more pressure on the infrastructure, competition of the available facilities, congestion, and unhealthy relationships resulting in at times to commotion of the local life. Hence clashes between host communities and tourists (Seraphin, 2018).

c. Inequitable Economic benefits: The gains accrued to tourism activities are not evenly distributed. Instances like multinational companies controlling the tourism industry, seizing the greater percentage of the revenue gains, and leaving a negligible percentage to the local communities would result in tensions. These economic disparities can aggravate the already established differences, generating strains between the inhabitants and the visitors (Ashley et al., 2007).

d. Survey Design: One of the challenges tourism is faced with, is survey design. To have a survey that would capture related perspectives of tourism quality and satisfaction suitable for the targeted population and context has been a great challenge (Aina Aliieva, 2024).



e. Data Collection: Getting adequate data from representatives of a wide range of tourists and making sure its validity is not compromised is also a big challenge (Celine Azzi, 2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theory of Intercultural Sensitivity

This theory suggests that direct interactions between tourists and host communities may greatly increase mutual understanding and respect between cultures. This framework is especially pertinent in the context of developing nations where tourism can foster cultural exchange and social integration. The argument is that contexts of volunteer tourism (which typically include direct interaction with the local community) have substantial potential to lead tourists to reflect more on cultural differences, promoting cross-cultural understanding (Kirillova et al., 2015). This is in line with the results by Fan et al. (2021) who state that tourists' intercultural competence is not just a side effect of having experiences, but can be explicitly measured and triggered through contact with local people. Intercultural competence is a broad concept that implies different reasons (i.e. more personal interaction, living in closer contact with foreigners) so it could be an answer to how tourists experience and who will perceive things. Not to mention the role of community-based tourism (CBT) in developing countries. Yanes et al., (2019) explain the role of CBT initiatives in the empowerment of local communities and make sure tourism development is socially inclusive and ecologically sound. Not only does this make it much more economically sustainable in the realm of tourism, but also stimulates interpersonal dialogue and understanding between tourists and locals. This helps to achieve an authentic and balanced experience for both parties because according to (Nurjaya, 2022) sustainable tourism development enhances the preservation of culture and tradition in destinations. The responsible manner of conducting tourism development is highly influenced by the psychological characteristics of the residents' perceptions towards tourism, which was addressed by Almeida-García et al. (2016) as a key factor influencing local attitudes attached to this question. It is important to recognize these perceptions in the context of developing processes related to managing cultural differences that may enhance intercultural understanding and prevent possible conflicts. These findings highlight that a favourable perception of residents can result in increased support of tourism initiatives, ultimately improving the quality of intercultural social exchanges for both tourists and local populations.

Practical Implications

When investigating the applied impact of tourism and intercultural understanding in developing countries, there are a few crafts that can improve both the sustainable development of tourism practices and intercultural experiences for tourists and their host communities.

Sustainable tourism is a participative process, which requires the involvement of local communities in the development of tourism. Community-based tourism (CBT) has been recognized as an appropriate model of equitably distributing cash flows from tourism to local populations. Studies show that community participation in tourism planning and management, can lead to the promotion of intercultural understanding and also safeguard the culture (Nurazizah & Darsiharjo, 2019; Benu et al., 2020). As an example, Dwiatmadja et al. (2019) emphasise that green event implementation for tourism villages can inspire sustainability in the environment, economy and socio-culture of the community. Furthermore, Benu et al. (2020)



highlight conservation awareness programs and cultural art exhibitions as an increase in community involvement and the development of sustainable tourism through this.

In developing countries (Oyenuga & Omale, 2024), tourism can also turn local cultures into products. Managing cultural heritage well can improve the cultural experience for tourists while ensuring that local practices are kept intact. According to Król (2021), cultural assets do realize one of the key functions in development they contribute to economic growth and enable social inclusion therefore cultural heritage should not be seen as something external to sustainable development. Moreover, Nurjaya (2022) argues the same how tourism development should be designed in such a way that it keeps local tradition at the core of its potential, thus avoiding superficialization which leads to commoditization. Li et al. (2022) share a similar view, in which they suggest that social value for tourists and residents of local communities should be an essential feature of cultural tourism.

The rise of smart tourism technologies brings the potential to improve tourist interaction, but also intercultural competence. According to Romão and Neuts (2017), information and communication technologies have the potential to establish better links between tourists and local resources, adding value to the visitor experience while promoting intercultural exchanges. They can also platform cultural narratives and local practices that foster tourist engagement of a host community, by bridging the gap between visitors and those sharing their culture. Additionally, technology can also help achieve better communication within the tourism experience while simultaneously giving tourists relevant information about cultural customs and gaining greater engagement through the local community (Ismail, 2023). Also, educational programs about cultural heritage and sustainable tourism can play a key role for tourists (Oyedele et al., 2024), as well as locals by training local tourism operators and community members about cultural sensitivity, customs of the locals, and social interaction with tourists which eventually leads to more meaningful interaction between tourists and residents. This style not increases the experience of tourists, but also gives confidence to local communities about their pride in cultural heritage (Anggraeni & Priatini, 2019; Imon, 2017) Additionally, instilling the understanding of sustainable tourism principles in tourists can enhance responsible behaviour which respects cultures and environments in locations they are visiting (Wehrli et al., 2012).

CONCLUSION

The relationship of tourism with intercultural understanding in developing countries is a complex step towards creating effective opportunities to raise respect and admiration for different cultures against one another. Tourism may be used as an effective tool for developing intercultural competence especially through volunteer tourism and community-based tourism. For example, work from Fan et al. (2021) emphasizes that tourists intercultural competence is effectively developed through their active participation in local cultural contexts, which generates enjoyable moments and meaningful positive appreciation of the local culture. This is consistent with Kirillova et al.'s (2015) findings that underline the role of direct interactions with host communities in fostering intercultural sensitivity among tourists. More importantly, a long-term effect of tourism student exchange programs which was explained by Priyanto and Andrianto (2022) and Oyedele and Iember (2021) is not only enhancing the language competencies and self-confidence of international students but also providing deeper



intercultural awareness. This holds importance in developing nations where the tourism industry is usually at the forefront of economic development and cultural sharing. According to Kuluşaklı (2023), the incorporation of intercultural communication training into tourism curricula would provide future tourism professionals with an additional tool to adapt better to different cultural environments. Lastly, we cannot ignore the importance of social media which maximizes our intercultural communication skills in a tourism context. Social media intervention can be an effective means to enhance intercultural learning for both tourists and local communities thus strengthening tourism experiences (Jin, 2023). There, it reveals how important it is that tourism stakeholders use digital platforms to promote intercultural dialogue. The conclusion is that tourism has a lot of potential to promote intercultural understanding in developing countries. Stakeholders can do their part in creating a more global inclusive and respectful society by enabling spaces of meaningful interaction between tourists and local communities.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research should continue to explore the dynamics of these interactions and the implications for sustainable tourism development, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably shared among all participants.

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