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A Brief History of a Popular Catchphrase

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Peace through Tourism: A Brief History of a Popular Catchphrase

Sune Bechmann Pedersen

‘Florence is nothing better than a vast museum full of foreign tourists’. This contemptuous statement on the manifestations of mass tourism sounds strikingly contemporary; yet the words belong to Stendhal and stem from a visit to Italy undertaken exactly two centuries ago in 1817.¹ The traveller’s belittlement of other itinerants as mindless tourists is a common trope of travel writing. It is even an integral part of the construction of self and other on the beaten track.² As Jonathan Culler has observed, ‘The true age of travel has, it seems, always already slipped by; other travellers are always tourists.’³ The two centuries that have passed since Stendhal visited Italy have produced an overwhelming amount of criticism directed towards mass tourism and the negative side-effects of increased mobility. Critics have taken aim at everything from the commodification and eradication of ‘authentic’ cultures to mass mobility’s devastating effects on the local nature and the global climate.⁴ The tourist practice observed already by Stendhal that ‘each nationality

1 Stendhal, *Rome, Naples and Florence*, translated by Richard N. Coe (London: John Calder, 1959 [1826]), 317.

2 James Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800–1918* (Oxford: OUP, 1993).

3 Jonathan D. Culler, *Framing the Sign: Criticism and Its Institutions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 157.

4 Classical texts in the genre of modern tourism critique include Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, translated by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 2000 [1957]), 74-77; Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Eine Theorie des Tourismus’, *Merkur*, 12 (1958); Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012 [1961]); Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013 [1976]).

brings with it its own manners and customs' has also been the target of much scorn. Cultural critics have lamented the sun-and-sea tourist's disinterest in local traditions and the resulting McDonaldization of the tourist experience in order to make the visitor feel at home. Mass tourism, and the greatly increased economic integration and human connectivity that undergirds it has, in many ways, been integral to the globalization processes of the twentieth century. Much of the critique levelled at globalization at large has thus also been directed toward mass tourism.⁵

At the same time, however, academics, politicians, and representatives of the tourist industry have repeatedly insisted on tourism's valuable role as a vehicle for mutual understanding and the bridging of differences. This article offers a brief history of the idea that tourism can somehow serve as a harbinger of harmony. It begins by briefly reviewing the spurious reasoning behind the argument that tourism produces peace. It then traces the connection of tourism to peace and its coagulation into a popular catchphrase – peace through tourism – embraced by an array of prominent international organizations during the Cold War. Finally, the article concludes that the adoption of the catchphrase was arguably a strategy to legitimize the economic interests of the tourist industry.

The logic behind the argument that tourism leads to peace is undergirded by three assumptions. First, it is assumed that tourism establishes contact between people. Second, it is assumed that this contact fosters mutual understanding and sympathy. Third, it is assumed that increased understanding and mutual friendship dampens conflict. The first and the second assumption build on contact theory, which basically maintains that tensions between different cultural or ethnic groups can be overcome simply by bringing the groups into contact with one another.⁶ The pitfalls of this logic are obvious. The success of mass tourism relied to a great extent on the reduction of friction. The jet age allowed for the quick and smooth relocation of the tourist from home to away rather than spending days on end crammed in a bus or on multiple trains. Once at the destination, new seaside hotel complexes equipped with modern amenities and offering full board made the tourist feel comfortable and reduced the necessary interaction with locals to a minimum. Moreover, when tourists and locals interact the relationship is usually very short-term and without common goals beyond the conduct of simple transactions. The third assumption implies that increased interpersonal or intercultural under-

⁵ On the multiple globalization processes and their critics, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Flughöhe der Adler: Historische Essays zur globalen Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017).

⁶ R. Tomljenovic, 'Tourism and Intercultural Understanding or Contact Hypothesis Revisited', in *Tourism, Progress and Peace*, edited by Omar Moufakkir and Ian Kelly (Wallingford: CABI, 2010), 17.

standing is easily translated into international politics of peace and conflict resolution. Although the intercultural understanding of politicians is arguably conducive to the successful realization of foreign policy goals, so many other factors play into the equation that no obvious correlation can be traced, as recent research has demonstrated.⁷

The roots of the idea that tourism can be a vehicle for international understanding and peace trace back to the various strands of interwar internationalism.⁸ The international institution invented to safeguard the peace after the First World War, the League of Nations, embodied the internationalist spirit. However, the League of Nations recognized that culture was a potentially dangerous weapon that could be invoked in border disputes and the original pact thus omitted co-operation in that field. Ethnographers and folklorists nevertheless managed to win the institutional support from a League of Nations sub-organization for an international congress held in 1928. The support led to delighted responses. A Belgian journal considered it ‘highly possible that this congress will be an effective tool for universal peace. [Folk] art will increasingly become the flower of peace’.⁹ The logic behind the argument was that the congress would uncover the shared roots of diverse folklore traditions and thereby ‘serve as an element of reconciliation, the awakening, in some way or other, of a source of friendship, stronger than any diplomatic approach’.¹⁰

The Second World War dented these internationalist hopes, but only augmented the importance of building a lasting peace after the war. In this project, the travel industry was envisioned an important role. As *The Times* reckoned in July 1941, ‘[w]hen peace comes, [Cook’s] will have a great work to do for civilization in helping to reopen the channels of intercourse between the nations.’¹¹ In Nazi occupied Denmark, the labour movement’s travel agency, *Dansk Folkeferie*, insisted that by ‘getting to know each other better [...] our children and grandchildren will not experience the same Ragnarok that our generation has had to endure’.¹² Shortly before the peace, Swedish social

7 Stephen Pratt and Anyu Liu, ‘Does Tourism Really Lead to Peace? A Global View’, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 18, no. 1 (2016); Anna Farmaki, ‘The Tourism and Peace Nexus’, *Tourism Management*, 59 (2017).

8 On internationalism, see Akira Iriye, *Cultural Internationalism and World Order* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); For a Swedish perspective on interwar internationalism, see Ingela Nilsson, *Nationalism i fredens tjänst: Svenska skolornas fredsförening, fredsfostran och historieundervisning 1919–1939* (diss. Umeå University, 2015).

9 Quoted in Bjarne Rogan, ‘Folk Art and Politics in Inter-War Europe: An Early Debate on Applied Ethnology’, *Folk Life*, 45, no. 1 (2006), 10.

10 Quoted in Rogan, ‘Folk Art’, 10.

11 Quoted in Piers Brendon, *Thomas Cook: 150 Years of Popular Tourism* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 279.

12 Quoted in Anja Warschawsky, ‘Folkeferie – ferieformer, ferieindhold og dannelseideal 1938–1988’, *Arbej-*

democratic internationalists also encouraged post-war tourists to ‘seriously learn and to build friendship with the war-tormented people!’¹³

Internationalism also guided the pioneers of tourism studies. In 1946 the first issue of *The Tourist Review* appeared, a quadrilingual Swiss-based journal dedicated to the promotion and study of tourism. It included ‘A Plea for International Understanding’ authored by the English Lord Hacking, who insisted that ‘[n]ever in the history of the world has the need for international understanding and amity been more urgent than it is now.’¹⁴ The remedy, however, was close at hand. ‘There is one easy way by which nations may come to understand each other, and that way is a reciprocal interchange of tourists.’¹⁵ A year later, the Marshall Plan was launched aiming to reconstruct European industries and infrastructure. Tourism offered an easy way of counterbalancing the European trade deficit with the US. As a consequence, much effort was put into the selling of European holidays to Americans. Investments in infrastructure, hotels, and advertisement paid off and boosted especially the French tourist industry.¹⁶ The national European tourist offices joined forces in 1948 and formed the European Travel Commission (ETC) to lobby for the tourist industries and to coordinate the advertisement of holidays in Europe. Early on, the ETC adopted the slogan ‘understanding through travel is the passport to peace’. This slogan was also embraced by the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), the US government agency established to manage the Marshall Plan. In 1950 the ECA supported a poster competition with prizes awarded to posters which touted travel as the passport to peace.¹⁷

The Soviet Union denied its East European sphere of influence participation in the Marshall Plan. Here the leaders regarded international mobility as a potential threat to national security. The Stalinist regimes thus excised pre-war traditions of international travel, and tourist visits to this part of Europe became next to impossible. Tellingly, Temple Fielding’s best-selling *Travel Guide to Europe* – first published in 1948 and reprinted many times since – contained only succinct entries for the countries east of the Iron Curtain, and all of them centred on the new travel impediments.¹⁸

After Stalin’s death in 1953, however, measures were taken in the Soviet

derhistorie, no. 2 (2008), 5.

13 [Ivan Ohlson], ‘Öppna porterna mot världen!’, *Fritiden*, no. 1 (1945), 5.

14 Lord Hacking, ‘A Plea for International Understanding’, *The Tourist Review*, 1, no. 1 (1946), 9.

15 Hacking, ‘A Plea’, 8.

16 Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

17 Brian A McKenzie, ‘Creating a Tourist’s Paradise: The Marshall Plan and France, 1948 to 1952’, *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 21, no. 1 (2003), 48.

18 Temple Fielding, *Fielding’s Travel Guide to Europe* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1951 [1948]).

Union and its European buffer states to open up to western tourists again. Khrushchev's discourse of mutual respect and peaceful co-existence proved fully compatible with the optimistic view of tourism as a vehicle for peace and mutual understanding. In August 1955, the first western tourists were allowed into the Soviet Union and a month later, the first Soviet tourists were granted a trip to the West.¹⁹

Two years later, more than hundred diplomats and representatives of the travel industry from 29 countries convened in Prague for a five-day conference on international tourism. The meeting was organized by the Czechoslovak State Travel Bureau (Čedok), and had the promotion of tourism to Czechoslovakia as its primary objective. However, the conference also aimed simply to facilitate contacts and sow the seeds of future collaboration between airlines, railways, and tourist associations on all continents.²⁰ In the opening address the director of Čedok entertained the hope that the conference 'will contribute to the expansion of international tourism and to the strengthening of that ideal which is so dear to all of us — the ideal of peace and undisturbed work for us all.'²¹ During a subsequent debate, an Air France participant lauded the chance for representatives from the East and West to meet at the conference and insisted that an increase in tourism would 'foster international friendship'.²² Shortly before the Prague conference, the travel bureaus of the socialist states had held a separate meeting in Carlsbad at which they concluded that 'the most effective path to mutual understanding and comprehension is for nations to speak to nations in the most direct manner, by tourism.'²³ Six years later tourism across the East–West divide was growing steadily, benefiting from de-Stalinization in Eastern Europe. On the international scene, tourism was once again bestowed with peace-related qualities at the 1963 United Nations Conference in Rome on International Travel and Tourism. The resulting resolution highlighted tourism's contribution to the 'promotion of international good will and understanding and to the preservation of peace between peoples'.²⁴ A few years later, the United Nations General Assembly declared 1967 the International Tourist Year under the motto 'Tourism, Passport to Peace' – a variation on the original ETC catchphrase.

19 Sune Bechmann Pedersen, 'A Paradise behind the Iron Curtain: Selling Eastern Escapes to Scandinavians', in *Eden für Jeden? Touristische Sehnsuchtsorte in Mittel-und Osteuropa nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart*, edited by Bianca Hoinig and Hannah Wadle (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018); Anne E. Gorsuch, *All This Is Your World: Soviet Tourism at Home and Abroad after Stalin* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 11.

20 Czech National Archives [NA], Státní úřad plánovací II [SUP II], 1177, 471.

21 NA, SUP II, 1177, 471. Bulletin no. 2. 23 October 1957.

22 NA, SUP II, 1177, 471. Bulletin no. 4. 24 October 1957.

23 NA, SUP II, 1177, 471. Bulletin no. 2. 23 October 1957.

24 United Nations, *Recommendations on International Travel and Tourism* (Geneva: United Nations, 1964), 17.

From that point on, the assumed positive effects of tourism on interpersonal understanding and international relations attained a seemingly unquestionable status. When the tourist bureaus from Eastern Europe met in Bucharest in 1970 they again declared tourism to be ‘one of the most important instruments of strengthening mutual appreciation’.²⁵ Tourism was included in the Helsinki Final Act’s second basket on economic cooperation which repeated ‘the contribution made by international tourism to the development of mutual understanding among peoples’.²⁶ Although a 1983 review of the Helsinki process’ contribution to the promotion and facilitation of tourism concluded that ‘progress has been slow and tangible results limited’ the industry did not hesitate to repeat the mantra.²⁷ As a matter of fact, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) had already adopted the Manila Declaration on World Tourism in 1980 stating that ‘world tourism can be a vital force for world peace and can provide the moral and intellectual basis for international understanding and interdependence’.²⁸ In 1988, the tourist industry upped the ante again. Under the self-congratulatory motto ‘Tourism – The World’s Peace Industry’, five hundred industry professionals, academics, diplomats, and NGOs from 64 countries convened for five days in Vancouver. US President Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II addressed the participants on taped messages and expressed their support for tourism’s peacebuilding effects.²⁹

The academic literature on tourism which began to emerge in the 1970s had done little to quarry the tourism–peace nexus. On the contrary, one of the pioneering tourism readers stated in 1974 that ‘[i]n creating a better appreciation of other people’s ways of life and institutions, tourism may create goodwill for a country.’³⁰ While this is undoubtedly true, the reader neither problematized the underlying assumptions of the tourism–peace nexus nor considered the necessary conditions behind the creation of goodwill for a country. In an often-quoted literature review published in 1984, Erik Cohen scrutinized the claim that tourism ‘improves international understanding’ and concluded that, so far, advocates, as well as opponents, of the hypothesis had only meagre evidence to show.³¹ In other words, the jury was still out. With

25 Quoted in Karin Taylor, ‘From Trips to Modernity to Holidays in Nostalgia – Tourism History in Eastern and Southeastern Europe’, *Tensions of Europe/Inventing Europe*, Working Paper no. 1 (2011), 14.

26 *Helsinki Final Act*, p. 32.

27 Ilkka A. Ronkainen, ‘The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10, no. 3 (1983), 425.

28 *Manila Declaration on World Tourism*, p. 1. <http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/unwto/declarations.1980.6.4.1>. Last accessed 17 May 2017.

29 C. R. Goldner, ‘Tourism — A Vital Force for Peace’, *Tourism Management*, 10, no. 2 (1989).

30 Arthur John Burkart and Slavoj Medlik, *Tourism: Past, Present, and Future* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 57.

31 Erik Cohen, ‘The Sociology of Tourism: Approaches, Issues, and Findings’, *Annual review of sociology*, 10, no. 1 (1984), 381.

the 1988 convention's canonization of tourism, however, tourism scholars finally began to question the industry's enigmatic effects on world peace. As a direct response to the Vancouver conference, two tourism researchers pointed out the obvious: 'The danger in considering relations between peace and tourism is of reversing causation. Tourism is an institution that does not prosper in the absence of peace. This observation precludes the prospect that tourism causes peace'.³²

In the decades since the Vancouver conference tourism research has finally questioned the tourism–peace nexus and put to rest the idea that a growing tourism industry causes a reduction in societal conflicts.³³ Much of the 'Tourism, Passport to Peace' discourse was arguably a brainchild of blue-eyed interwar internationalism embraced by the tourist industry as it offered a cloak of legitimacy to the nascent mass tourism. In the Cold War, for instance, the regimes of Eastern Europe often sought to gain hard currency through western tourism, but this project was legitimized through appeals to mutual understanding and international peace.³⁴ Nowadays, in the post-Cold War international disorder, the omnipresent threat of terrorism to tourism appears to have rendered the catchphrase obsolete.

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32 GW Burnett and Muzaffer Uysal, 'On the Nature of Peace in Relationship to Tourism: Three cases', *The Tourist Review*, 45, no. 1 (1990), 2.

33 Stephen W. Litvin, 'Tourism: The World's Peace Industry?', *Journal of Travel Research*, 37, no. 1 (1998); Sashana Askjellerud, 'The Tourist: A Messenger of Peace?', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 30, no. 3 (2003); Farmaki, 'Tourism'; Pratt and Liu, 'Peace'.

34 Taylor, 'Trips to Modernity', 14; Bechmann Pedersen, 'Selling Eastern Escapes'.

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