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CULTURAL DIFFUSION THEORY AND TOURISM IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Cultural diffusion is defined as the spread of cultural elements due to the interaction among people from different cultures. Migration was one major reason for cultural diffusion for thousands of years. Through migration, cultural elements such as art, knowledge, language, poetry and religion were exchanged during the diffusion process. Diffusion usually occurs in a cumulative way starting from developed western countries towards developing Eastern countries. The characteristics of people starting diffusion process and the proximity of the cultures are the main factors influencing cultural diffusion. The change in the nature of the cultural element through diffusion process is inevitable. With the increase in the scope of tourism activities worldwide in the last century, the speed of diffusion has increased. The development of tourism activity in a region led an increase in the pace of cultural diffusion via interactions between hosts and guests. The impacts of cultural diffusion on a region can be both positive and negative. While the globalization can be a threat for the local culture, the increased tourism activity gave rise to the preservation efforts of local culture. The purpose of this paper is to review literature in cultural diffusion theory and discuss the tourism implications.

Keywords: Cultural Diffusion Theory, Culture, Tourism, Globalization

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INTRODUCTION

Alfred Kroeber was first to conceptualize the cultural diffusion theory in his article 'Stimulus Diffusion' (1940). In his paper author digs the nature of diffusion and redefines the process of it. According to the author diffusion occurs only in pieces and diffused piece is generally subject to change in parallel with the culture it was diffused to. On the other hand, while these diffusions may not be welcomed by the host communities all the time, there is no resistance to the stimulus diffusion. The diffusion process occurs in the following way; the utilization of a cultural element in a country creates stimulus in another country and the element diffuse to a new country with some modifications in its nature.

A more recent study defines diffusion as 'the process by which an idea, an invention or some other cultural item is borrowed from a foreign source.' (Ferrante, 2012: 57). The influence of the borrowing process is not limited to the cultural identity of a place; it is felt at the individual level as well. In her definition of cultural diffusion Reisinger (2009) is more precise about cultural elements. According to the author the cultural diffusion is 'the spread of cultural elements such as ideas, styles, food, religions, technologies etc., between individuals and groups within a single culture or from one culture to another.' (p.71). The first step in understanding cultural diffusion theory is to define culture and explore cultural elements in detail.

Some authors define culture within the frame of behavior and relationships among humans. For example, according to Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann and Price (2005) culture is defined as 'a communication system of acquired beliefs, memories, perceptions, traditions, and attitudes that serves to shape behavior.' (p.15). Authors also noted that culture is a dynamic, diverse and changing process. Wall and Mathieson (2006) define culture as 'behaviors as observed, through social relations and material artifacts and in a deeper anthropological sense, includes patterns, norms, rules and standards which find expression in behavior, social relations and artifacts' (p.15).

Kroeber (1922), in his research about California's culture, has listed cultural elements as; arts of life, society, and religion and knowledge. Elements of culture are important factors attracting tourists to a region. The role of cultural elements on the tourism development in a region was supported in many studies. For example, Wall and Mathieson, (2006) have listed elements of culture that attracts tourists as 'art, music drama and concerts, handicrafts, concerts, language, literature, history, heritage and tradition, gastronomy, archeological sites and museums, complete cultures and subcultures' In the following parts, firstly author will explore some examples of diffusion for each cultural element, followed by the migration and cultural diffusion, the factors influencing cultural diffusion, the process of cultural diffusion and the impacts of cultural diffusion. In the next section, the relationship between tourism and cultural diffusion will be discussed. The last section includes the discussion and conclusion.

DIFFUSION AND ELEMENTS OF CULTURE

Art

Art is a part of 'expressive culture' which is such cultural element to reflect emotions and to display the innate aspects of that culture (Chick, 2000). Similarities have been found within architecture performances between Greece and India, China and Europe. Japanese drama was affected by European drama as a result of colonialism (Kroeber, 1940). In his research in Singapore, Chang (2000) points out that, countries borrow acts and entertainment materials and blend them with their local cultural elements, before serving to tourists. Even if influential factors on cultural diffusion are not same in different centuries such as colonialism in sixteenth century, globalization in twenty-first century; process is similar. Cultural material is borrowed from one culture and it is adapted to host culture consistent with political, legal and economic environment. According to Li (2003) Chinatown in Singapore is being used as a tourism attraction. The purpose of building Chinatowns was not attracting tourists in the first place. Chinese have immigrated to different parts of the world and build districts for themselves for the purpose of living together and protecting themselves from assimilation. After a while, these districts have become the cultural elements for the host cities and the new Chinatowns were built in different cities mainly for attracting tourists.

Language

Kelley (1997) and Kroeber (1940) mentioned similarities between hieroglyphics of different cultures located far from each other. After the invention of writing in one culture, other cultures have developed a stimulus towards the use of this new tool. And other cultures adjust writing styles for themselves to express their culture better. Therefore, innovations were exposed to change through transmission in between cultures. Another example is the Sequoya's creation of a different system for Cherokee language. So his involvement in Caucasian culture led him to create this system. He borrowed some items from Caucasian culture and tailored them for Cherokee language (Kroeber, 1940).

Because of the huge number of Turks immigrate several times in history, the word 'Turk' was used to call large amount of people even if they are not ethnically Turks (Golden, 2006). Nowadays, most common examples of diffusion effect on language may be the spread of names of technological devices such as mp3, laptop, GPS, etc... The innovations spread in a pace that leaves officials no time for creating a name for the device in local language.

Knowledge

The speed of diffusion of knowledge has increased unprecedentedly due to the recent technological advancements. However, the knowledge has been transmitted between cultures for centuries. In 1300 China has developed a different form of algebra; however no further study was done about this until 1600 when Japanese took and worked on it (Kroeber, 1940). Pemberton (1936) conducted an empirical research on diffusion of compulsory school laws in USA and found out that the adaptation to the new system was smoother in Southern states with African American population. The reason of the smooth transition is that compulsory school laws were an opportunity for the residents in these areas to have education. Improvements in information technology help information to spread easier and faster. Through Web 2.0, information diffuses between cultures without any mediators, boundaries or control mechanisms.

Handicrafts

Diffusion of porcelain from China to Europe can be an example for the diffusion of handicrafts. Before Europeans realized that there is proper material to produce porcelain in Europe, they were importing it from China. High cost of import forced Europeans to find and alternative way of producing it (Kroeber, 1940).

Religion

Religion is another cultural element that has been transmitted all over the world throughout centuries. The scope of the diffusion of religion may be the largest in all cultural elements. Most of the Muslim countries adopt Arab culture after they switched to Islam. Burka is traditional dress for Arab women; however, some women in other Muslim countries also wear it. On the other hand, different religions have a lot in common.. For instance, the story of Adam and Eve was known also in polytheistic religions as well as monotheistic ones.

Poetry

Coss (1985) observed French influence on English poetry in his research. Bourgeois class started French influence on English poetry and those of under French influence are written in a more romantic style. Quantitative meter system in poetry was seen in Greeks, Indians and Persians. The grammatical influences of Dutch and Latin on Japanese language were also observed (Kroeber, 1940).

MIGRATION AND CULTURAL DIFFUSION

Cultural interaction is an essence for cultural diffusion. Migration was the only way of cultural interaction for thousands of years. Migrants take some cultural habits and practices, and bring them back to their countries. Different types of diffusion were seen among immigrants. Relocation diffusion occurs generally in chain migration. Chain migration happens when one group of people migrates from one country to another in order to find higher standards of living and as they settle down during time, they are followed by their countrymen. Return migration occurs when immigrants return to their own countries. In this way they will bring some cultural elements to their own country (Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann and Price, 2005). According to Golden (2006), Turks have influenced the cultures of the countries they passed through their immigration from Southern Siberia to northwestern lands of China.

Lewitt (1998) argues that the effects of host culture on migrants are minimal, unless there is a need of interaction among host and the immigrants. Migrants do not accept host cultural elements as is, they put them into a transformation process to adopt their own culture. Ferrante (2007) also points out the change of cultural elements in the process of diffusion. However he mentions more about diffusion which is directly comes from an outsider, not an insider such as migrants. This change can be related the strategy of 'think globally, act locally'. . Globalization gave power to big companies which operate worldwide and these companies act in the global market as in the local market. To sell their product in that specific local market, global companies combine local cultural elements with their global product (Morley and Robins, 1995). 'For example, most franchise restaurants include local items in their menus; even franchising idea itself was adopted by local restaurants and shops' (Ferrante, 2007: 109). Further, Riesman and Denney (1951) analyzed American version of English Rugby. According to authors, American football is based more on competition compared to British rugby, because of the competitive environment of American culture. Diffused ideas or

practices do not stay unchanged through diffusion process, degree of change and the distance from origin is positively correlated. However, with the fast improvement in technology and the influence of media, diffusions spread faster than ever and do not lose much from the original version. As a result of the increased speed of diffusion recently, a global culture has been formed (Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann and Price, 2005).

Cultural diffusion is more likely to happen between people with similar cultures (Kaufman and Patterson, 2005). On the other hand, according to the assimilation theory, migrants will no longer want to utilize their old cultural elements and will be ready to leave their cultural habits (Faist, 2000). The direction of migration is generally from Eastern, developing, poor or politically unstable in other words 'other countries' to western countries and diffusion is more powerful when it comes from stronger country to weaker one. Therefore, immigrants in a developed country would more likely to adapt to the host culture.

FACTORS INFLUENCING CULTURAL DIFFUSION

Exploring the factors influencing the diffusion process will be helpful for a better understanding of cultural diffusion. Sundqvist, Frank and Puumalainen (2005) have conducted a research on the difference of adaptation and diffusion of innovations in different countries depending on the degree of uncertainty avoidance, individualism, wealth, power distance, masculinity and distance from origin. Study results showed that wealthy countries adopt innovations faster, countries with higher uncertainty avoidance adopt by imitation and countries which are closer to origin of innovation adopt earlier. On the other hand, there were no relationship between power distance, masculinity, individualism and speed of diffusion.

The most important factors influencing the cultural diffusion are the groups of people helping the process. According to some authors the first adopters should be prestigious people, so the rest of community will feel an urge to follow them (Henrich, 2001; Kaufman and Patterson, 2005). Upper class in a society possesses all means to reach and experience different cultures and borrow elements from it. The pace of the diffusion process depends on the degree of the popularity and prestige of those people who have a power to create a strong stimulus among other citizens (Henrich, 2001). Departing from this assumption, we can say that companies use celebrities in their commercial activity to create need for their product among society. Global celebrities in global culture, who have influence all over the world, become useful tools for diffusion of global culture.

On the contrary, Kaufman and Patterson (2005) state the reasons for diffusion of cricket between American elites is their contact with the elite class of British society and to differentiate themselves from other classes of society. If this sport becomes a common, ordinary sport like basketball they would leave it and try to find something else. In this respect cultural diffusion is not only a function of borrowing activity, but serves to keep status differences within a community. Diffusion occurred in this way would not be intentional.

In her research on immigration behaviors among Miraflores, Lewitt (1998) found that they are more eager to borrow some practices from host culture, if the first adopters are 'men, individuals with money, older community members, or longstanding leaders.' Author also points out that in some cases the other members of society are forced to accept new culture. In transmission process, one other important factor is the direction of diffusion. It tends to occur from developed countries to developing ones. Power distances between countries affect the nature of transmission. If diffusion occurs between equally powerful countries, influence will be smaller.

PROCESS OF CULTURAL DIFFUSION

Pemberton (1936) explains cultural diffusion process quantitatively, as he states that 'diffusion occurs in a cumulative curve of a normal frequency distribution'. The author inspected three cases of diffusion by measuring how many cultures adopt the element during a period of time. The cases are; the distribution of stamp usage within countries in Europe and America, the diffusion of local taxation rates and the adaptation of USA schools to compulsory school rules. A cumulative diffusion is revealed in the first two cases. In the third case diffusion occurs differently in South and North, but they both fit the curve. Study results showed that the pace of cultural diffusion is slow in the beginning, becomes faster in the later phase and declines in the end. The process of cultural diffusion fit a normal curve. Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann and Price (2005) have reached similar results, according to the authors the diffusion occurs in three steps; in the first step people slowly become aware of innovation, in the second phase diffusion spreads faster, (process will be even faster within neighborhood) and in the third step process slows down again.

Some authors have investigated the process of diffusion in two categories; relocation and expansion (Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann and Price, 2005). 'Relocation diffusion occurs when individuals or groups with a particular idea or

practice migrate from one location to another, thereby bringing it to their new homeland. In expansion diffusion ideas spread through a population in a snowballing process' (p.9). Expansion diffusion is divided into two; hierarchical and contagious diffusion. 'Hierarchical diffusion occurs when ideas pass from one important person to another from one urban center to another, temporarily bypassing other persons or rural territory. Contagious diffusion moves throughout space without regard to hierarchies.' (p.10). Popular culture is generally diffused hierarchically, for example spread of Cricket within American elites is a hierarchical diffusion, as it occurs only in upper class.

IMPACTS OF CULTURAL DIFFUSION

The consequences of cultural diffusion for a region may be positive and negative. Investigating the impacts of diffusion on the local culture is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of that particular culture (Jordan-Bychkov, Domosh, Neumann and Price, 2005). The diffusion influences local culture from various aspects. 'The effect of cultural diffusion is changing local cultural features (dressing style, food) and traditions, creating new products, services and jobs; changing belief and ideas and improving quality of life.' (Reisinger, 2009: 72). On the other hand, Henrich (2001) argues that not only beneficial habits diffuse among different countries, but also harmful ones, such as bottle feeding. Despite well-known benefits of breast feeding, third world countries borrowed bottle feeding habit from developed countries. The direction of diffusion is important at this point; as the habits, practices or materials coming from developed countries are perceived as better compared to the ones coming from the primitive third world countries. In order to avoid cultural diffusion, in countries such as North Korea and Iran, government forbids using foreign products or services (Ferrante, 2007: 109). Such nationwide small scale precautions are not strong enough to stop the globalization. For example, it is illegal to watch American movies in Iran. However, upper class Iranian people watch those movies when they travel to the neighbor countries. Considering that the diffusion starts from the upper class, it is inevitable to stop cultural diffusion at some point. Similarly, all Western websites are forbidden in China, but residents are able to reach those websites by using certain apps like VPN.

There are some critical approaches to Cultural Diffusion Theory in the literature. For example, Kelley (1997) argues that similarities between cultures should not be all assumed as borrowing. Two different cultures may have gone through the same environmental conditions and formulated same strategies to deal with them. It is not unusual to give the same names for star constellations in different cultures, as sky does not change depending on culture. According to Reisinger (2009) cultural diffusion is theory assumes that some cultures are devoid of capability for development, no one can assert that if there was no diffusion this cultures would ever evolve. Furthermore, cultural diffusion theory falls short to answer the question 'Why some items diffuse and others not?'

TOURISM AND CULTURAL DIFFUSION

As previously mentioned, cultural diffusion has occurred through migrations for thousands of years. One other important factor causing cultural diffusion is the increase in the scope of tourism activities as a result of the advancements in transportation.

Wall and Mathieson (2006) defines tourism as 'the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created and services provided to cater to their needs.' Leaving their usual environment is the first step for cultural interaction. 'Tourism is often conceived as being predominately about experiencing something "different from home."' (Caton and Santos, 2009). In the history there were always explorers who actually involved in tourism process without knowingly. The mass tourism is relatively new concept. After the end of World War 2, the planes used for wars became redundant. The idea of using these planes in tourism gave birth to the mass tourism. More Westerners started to travel to exotic East in order to explore something 'different than home'. Developments in transportation systems decreased the cost of travelling and tourist flows started to go into reverse direction (from East to West) as well. Western cultures have stronger impact of Eastern cultures during the process of diffusion (Faist, 2000). According to the dependency theory; tourism creates a dependency in the economies of developing countries to the developed countries from which they receive tourists (Robinson, 1999). In addition, post-colonial theory assumes that the east is 'exotic, mysterious, sensual, splendid, cruel, despotic and sly' while the western world is modern, superior. Because of this 'primitive' other cultures are always in need of help from western cultures (Etcher and Prasad, 2003).

According to Kariel and Kariel (1982), small rural communities have access to technology through cultural interaction with people urban and modern areas, in the context of tourism. One of the common scenes in some movies is that African children get cameras or mobile phone from tourist, in return of a valuable diamond. This may not be the exact case all the time. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the diffusion occurs from urban-wealthy countries to rural, isolated,

poor countries. However, cultural interaction is always mutual and the one main reason for travelling is experiencing 'something different' than home. Even if the global culture seems to be a threat for the local culture, tourism destinations in Eastern countries have recently realized the value of marketing their local culture to tourists visiting the area. It is not unusual that Western tourists take some part of the local culture to their homes, such as souvenirs, customs, cooking styles, etc. Unlike migration, the direction of cultural diffusion may be in both directions; West to East or East to West.

In their research tourism impacts on Australian indigenous community in Djabugay, Dyer, Aberdeen and Schule (2003) revealed that tourism has created both positive and negative impacts on the local culture. Unlike previous assumptions, in Djabugay there is a cross-cultural interaction between tourists and locals. This interaction gives tourists a new perspective of local community free from some stereotypes, as they learn more about aboriginal culture after they watch the show and they are impressed by the aboriginal life style. Locals are happy about presenting their culture to tourists coming from different parts of world, even if there is a threat of misrepresentation of their culture. Tourists are aware that these shows do not represent real culture of local community. However, it is more comfortable for them to watch the dance shows performed by local people while drinking their cocktails, instead of joining their primitive lives.

There are lots of cases like Djabugay community which has nothing to offer to tourists other than their culture. In order not to lose the income coming from tourism activities, they need to protect their culture. Robinson (1999) argues that in order to ensure sustainable tourism development the culture of host countries should be preserved. According to the author there are three obstacles for protecting the local culture. The first reason is the culture being treated as a commodity, especially in poor regions. Tourism generates good income in touristic destinations, especially in poor countries; locals are willing to offer tourists whatever they have. Tourists want to experience mysterious, Eastern other culture and locals want to earn money. Locals assume that tourists have lots of money, as they have means to come all the way from different parts of the world and they are in search of a story to tell when they return their countries. Therefore, they start to produce cultural elements just for tourist consumption. Regarding this point, culture of a place is commoditized and has no longer deep and sacred meaning for locals. According to Caton and Santos (2009) tourists realize that what they have experiences is not representing real culture, but as long as they have fun, authenticity of their experience is not important. On the other hand Grünewald (2002) states that even if culture has lost its meaning when it was commoditized and staged, there should be a cultural base that locals constitute a performance out of it. Second reason the author lists is the difficulty of defining the characteristics of the culture. Culture is an intangible phenomenon which has a dynamic and changing nature. It is very difficult to conceptualize such process objectively. According to Robinson (1999) the third reason is the 'difficulty of articulating the culture in policy terms'. Defining cultural identity in political terms is a sensitive issue. Governments experience difficulties in balancing protection of culture and economic growth.

Singapore and Hong Kong revised their tourism strategy after the decline in tourist arrivals. Both countries focused on their cultural assets and put more effort than ever to preserve their culture (Li, 2003). Indians in USA, Canadian Inuit and the Maori in New Zeeland found a way to control commoditization by training people, producing qualified art and protecting their philosophy. On the other hand, tourism contributes the deterioration of traditional art forms, such as decrease in quality and fake artifacts, producing non authentic artifacts tailored to tourist demand (Wall and Mathieson 2006).

Reisinger (2009) states that the reason for host communities borrow cultural elements from tourist generating developed countries is to provide same standards for tourists and make them feel at home. As a result of this process host culture becomes weak. On the other hand, International franchise hotels follow the strategy of 'Think global, act local' by offering international standards with some touches of local culture. International hotels include cultural elements in the architecture, menu, and service style. Tourism development process in Singapore is an example for this kind of strategy. 'Encapsulated by the maxim 'Bringing the World to Singapore, Bringing Singapore to the World', the city-state borrows world-class cultural and entertainment acts, while also cultivating and disseminating home-grown artistic talents' (Chang, 2000: 829).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this paper was to review literature in cultural diffusion theory and discuss the tourism implications. For thousands of years cultural diffusion has occurred through migration. The increase of tourism activity gave rise to the speed of cultural diffusion process in the last century. Previously, the direction of diffusion of cultural elements was mostly from Western developed countries to Eastern developing countries. However, through tourism activities the Western tourists also started to borrow cultural elements of the host country during their visit. The locals saw this

income opportunity and started selling both authentic and non-authentic artifacts to tourists and consequently local culture is commodified.

On the other hand, because of its income generating potential, local culture has become a marketing product. Protecting and sustaining local culture and traditions become priority for tourism officials in many countries. For example, tourism authorities Hong Kong and Singapore realized that their cultural heritage gives them uniqueness which is primary strength in the market to attract tourists. While there is the global culture growing day by day and eliminating cultural boundaries, tourists demand new, exotic, mystic, different experiences. Nowadays, social media platforms such as Instagram create opportunity to discover new places every minute of the day. Therefore, the desire to discover the unknown lands is at peak. The number of tourists visiting developing countries is increasing. Due to economic problems and the huge difference in foreign exchange rates, developing countries became dependent to tourist generating countries. Because of this dependency, tourism planners had no choice but to prioritize tourist needs. While people in power taking some decisions about tourism planning, local communities in tourism destinations are not involved any of decision making process, even if they are the ones who are affected by the changes that tourism brought. On the other hand, tourism creates a positive impact on the economy of tourist receiving countries. The standard of living will be higher due to advances in local economy and locals will accommodate global culture easily as a result of their interactions with tourists. The local culture will be more appreciated and preserved by local people, as it brings easy money to the region.

An understanding of the relationship between cultural diffusion and tourism is beneficial for both scholars and practitioners. Globalization constitutes a threat to local cultures. Therefore, local community should comprehend the vitality of preserving their culture for the sustainability of tourism activities in the region.

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