Research on Heritage Tourism in Athens

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Abstract: With the development of the global economy, heritage tourism has gained attention as one of the important leisure and recreation options. However, there are conflicts of interest and differences in viewpoints among governments, residents and tourists in heritage tourism. This thesis aims to explore the conflicts in heritage tourism and propose effective methods of coordination. Through a literature review and a case study, the researcher investigates two urban heritages in Athens: the Parthenon and the Academy of Plato. By comparatively analyzing the geographical location, the number of tourists, the economic income, and the attitudes of the stakeholders of these heritages, the causes of the conflicts between the government, the residents, and the tourists are revealed. Finally, this thesis proposes some future directions and work plans to achieve a balance between the interests of government, residents and tourists.

1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the global economy, people's demand for the quality of spending their leisure time is constantly improving. Tourism seems to be one of the best choices for leisure and entertainment, and heritage has become an important part of the contemporary tourism industry. Heritage tourism combines tangible and intangible elements to present to visitors, making visitors feel that the elements are part of their personal heritage, and therefore heritage tourism is a spatial experience[1]. Among many western tourist attractions, Athens is a very famous place, which is the birthplace of western culture and has a numerous of famous urban heritages, which attract countless tourists every year. In the tourism industry of Athens, the government converts local cultural resources into globalized products and increases income to promote national economic development. The original intention of protection and preservation of heritage is to preserve a "real and objective past", but sometimes inheritance of heritage is on based on a deliberately chosen, hidden or even fictional past [1]. As a result, heritage tourism in Athens has caused controversy, with locals interpreting heritage differently from tourists. Some unknown sites becoming part of the daily activities of their neighbors. Tourism in Athens commercializes the city's heritage, whereby conflicting views on how to use cultural resources may lead to a loss of support for tourism among local residents. Moreover, the government concentrates resources intensively on the development of representative and iconic tourist sites, inevitably making other urban space experiences less attractive. As these famous attractions grow in popularity, the remaining urban heritage often lives in their shadows and loses its visibility. The urban heritage of Athens is too concentrated in terms of

geographical distribution, naturally, tourists are not interested in other urban landscapes given such a dense heritage cluster. However, the local residents' demands for urban heritage have not been taken seriously, and there are still many hidden conflicts between various groups of stakeholders.

Therefore, a research is proposed to explore the conflicts embedded in heritage tourism. This research aim is to explore the contradictions between the needs of the government, residents and tourists for utilization of urban heritage, and put forward effective reconciliation possibilities. Based on this aim, the following questions are explored in this paper:

1) What is a heritage dissonance?

2) Why does heritage tourism lead to conflicts among stakeholders?

3) In the context of heritage tourism in Athens, how to balance the interests of the government, tourists and residents?

In order to answer these questions, I read relevant books and periodicals about the concept of "heritage dissonance", summarized and understood the definition of heritage, and explored the fundamental causes of "dissonance". At the same time, I tried to study some specific local urban heritage of Athens to analyze the interests, rights and attitudes of different stakeholders in the process of heritage commercialization. I also analyzed government documents, plans and policies to understand the government's attitude. A combining of the above two steps is needed to find a way to balance the interests of government residents and tourists in the context of heritage tourism in Athens.

Based on this goals, firstly, in the theoretical analysis, I used literature review method to debate 'What is a heritage dissonance' by combining the viewpoints of different scholars and secondary materials. In order to explore what the specific "heritage dissonance" is in Athens, I conducted two case studies of the Parthenon and Plato's Academy for analysis. In terms of data sources, I collected newspaper interview materials to study the attitudes and understandings of different groups of people towards heritage and explore the interest conflicts between different stakeholders. Then, based on secondary data collected from open sources such as government data, policies and official documents, in-depth desk research was conducted to find a balance between the government, visitors and residents. At the same time, I used the analysis method of horizontal comparative data to respectively compare the geographical location, number of tourists, financial revenue and attitudes of tourists and local residents towards the Parthenon and Plato's School. The number of tourists represents the popularity of the site, the financial revenue reflects the economic benefits of the heritage and the interests it brings to the surrounding residents, and the attitudes of different users towards the site represent the contradictory nature of the heritage interpretative nature. Finally, by comparing these data, I can figure out what is the fundamental cause of the conflicts between Athens government, tourists, and local residents.

This paper is divided into four parts: the first part is the introduction of problem statement and research outline, and the second part is the literature review, which reviews relevant concepts and definitions of "heritage dissonance" and provides theoretical basis for the research. The third part is the case studies. I choose two local urban heritages of Athens to study, whereby I use comparative analysis to provide some critical practical data. The last part is Discussion and Conclusion, in which I combine the previous theories and data together to draw a conclusion and put forward some future development directions and work plans.

2. Literature Review

The main book I want to review is Dissonant Heritage: The Management of the Past as a Resource in Conflict, Tunbridge, J. E.1995. The book clearly defines what a "heritage" means and explains the reasons for dissonance. The book is widely accepted and has become a benchmark text

for future generations to study concepts such as heritage tourism and contradiction. The authors redefine the concept of heritage, arguing that history is "a selective description of the past time", while heritage is "a product shaped by history in modern times"[2]. From this point of view, "heritage" is not an objective existence, but the result of human subjective choice. Inheritance is not about the past, but the use and even abuse of the past to educate the public. The authors make it clear that heritage is the contemporary people's understanding of the past and based on the needs of future development, so heritage itself is controversial.

The book uses case studies to illustrate the author's definition of the nature of heritage. During the production and marketing of heritage, interpreters incorporate their own special understanding of history and society, and different elements and stories can be selected, enhanced, or avoided. This explains the nature of heritage as "dissonance", and this dissonance leads to contradiction. Culture is fluid and therefore dependent on the interpreter. Implicit information in the interpretation of related or identical urban heritage may be contradictory, resulting in disharmony among consumers[3]. In order to legitimize a certain ideological framework and social order, governments often turn heritage into a means of heritage tourism. Legacy is the process of using heritage as a resource for a certain social purpose. Therefore, when a group or society legalizes the same heritage for a certain purpose, they will create their own discourse, which inevitably leads to dissonance.

In addition, the authors clearly explains the object of heritage protection. The importance of residents' sense of place, security and stability has been reflected through the physical characteristics of the city and has become the main reason for protection. The authors believe that the heritage of the general public should be protected, more specifically, heritage protection should focus on the vulnerable groups in society[4]. The dominant group fails to understand the needs of the subordinate group in the city and its contribution to the environment[5]. Therefore, Tunbridge and Ashworth developed three approaches to mitigating inheritance-induced conflict, but did not describe in detail how the approach would be linked to the actual planning. The authors suggest that the focus of heritage management should be shifted from the methods of use to the users themselves and designs the route of self-awareness of the form of estate management. Unfortunately, the heritage sectors cannot provide the theory and tools of mismanagement, so it is impossible to achieve this in the management.

Drawing to the case of Athens, the city owns a large amount of urban heritage, but at the same time, there are some phenomenon such as urban space being ignored and stakeholders' rights being unequal. Ashworth and Tunbridge[6] offer a powerful theory to argue that the nature of heritage is dissonance, and therefore "Dissonant Heritage" is the fundamental cause of these contradictions. This book is very helpful for my research topic on the contradictions between the needs of the government, residents and tourists for utilization of urban heritage. Therefore, I use "dissonant heritage" as the theoretical research basis to explore the future possibilities of balancing the interests of the government, tourists and residents.

3. Case Studies

3.1. Background

3.1.1. The Context of the Parthenon

The Parthenon is a former temple on the Acropolis in Athens, built in 447 BC and completed in 438 BC. It is one of the most important surviving buildings of classical Greece and encapsulates the essence of Greek art. Although after the baptism of war and the erosion of time, the main building of the Parthenon has been seriously damaged, but it is still considered by experts as a collection of all Greek architectural art design characteristics. The Parthenon attracts seven million visitors a year

and generates an estimated $84 million in revenue for the Athens government. The government also promoted the Parthenon as a symbol of the city and put it on a list of must-see attractions in Athens. The icon of the Parthenon has also been widely used in the logo design of various websites, products and even national institutions. The Parthenon is no longer simply a city heritage, but a bearer of political propaganda by the state. However, due to earthquake and tourist damage, the Parthenon is under threat. The government has launched a plan to repair the temple, but progress has been slow, and the damage area has been growing. And the Parthenon faces the problem of taking up a numerous of social resources that it obscures the reputation of other heritage sites.

3.1.2. The Context of the Platonic Academy

Platonic Academy, founded by Plato in 385 BC, is the first comprehensive school in Europe, which has a special position in the history of European culture. The school not only provided philosophy, politics, law and other aspects of education, but also paid special attention to the natural sciences, which had been respected by people for hundreds of years, and was finally closed in 529 due to the war. However, geographically, Platonic Academy is three kilometers from Syntagma Square, the center of Athens, and Parthenon is only one kilometer from the center of Athens, and Parthenon is located in the ruins of the Acropolis, where there is a lot of communal urban heritage. So Platonic Academy had no advantage over Parthenon in its location. Platonic Academy attracts just two million visitors a year compared with the Parthenon, less than half the number of visitors to the Parthenon, and because it does not have admission fees, it generates no revenue for the government. Judging from the development of tourism in Athens in recent years, the government seems to have given up on the promotion of Platonic Academy, and Platonic Academy is gradually disappearing from the view of international visitors. However, many local residents live near Plato's Academy, where they hold meetings, organize open lunches and picnics, and children play. Urban heritage has been integrated into the daily activities of the neighborhood.

3.2. The Data Analysis

3.2.1. Stakeholders' Attitudes towards the Parthenon

Based on the interviews, I analyzed the comments and policies of local residents, tourists and the government on Parthenon to explore the differences between them.

"Greek culture or not, the Parthenon is well worth a visit. After all, the Acropolis side ticket price is not expensive! To feel the Greek civilization, to see what the great ancient civilization left behind, I think seeing the Parthenon does not come to Athens in vain."

"Attractions are more concentrated, into the gate after all the ancient Greek buildings are linked together, follow the flow of people can go. Ancient Greek architecture is indeed magnificent, showing the glory of the day, compared with today's Greece is far from the same."

It can be seen from the interview that international tourists are extremely impressed by the Parthenon and are attracted by the Greek culture it represents. In addition, the collective urban heritage can satisfy the tourists' experience, so that tourists can concentrate on feeling the cultural impact brought by heritage tourism in a short time. The Parthenon is considered a must-see for international travelers as a symbol of Athens.

"The temple was so badly repaired that the scaffolding had not been completed since 14 years ago. The exquisite decoration of the roof and walls can only be seen in the Acropolis Museum. I have always felt that maintaining the old is the most basic respect for the historic site."

"The Parthenon has been completely commoditized and has long since lost its original appearance because of too many artificial restorations. We locals never go there. There are too

many people and thieves."

Compared with tourists, local people's comments on the Parthenon are completely opposite. They think the Parthenon is a product of heritage in the current commercial context, and the government's restoration work has been questioned and made it lose its value. Residents are also reluctant to visit the Parthenon because of poor visiting conditions.

"Promote the Parthenon to the world as a major attraction and play to its cultural and historical value." (Athens Tourist Board).

The Parthenon as part of the Acropolis was listed as a World Heritage Site by the World Heritage Committee in 1987.The Greek government has also included the Parthenon on the tourist route as a priority for the development of heritage projects. In 2011 the Parthenon was included in the UNESCO World Heritage City Plan, through the development and adoption of supportive policies to promote the implementation and monitor its impact on the preservation and management of the historic city. So far, residents have built new houses and opened shops to sell souvenirs near the Parthenon site, which brings in considerable income for the surrounding residents. However, according to the Athens government's revenue report in 2020, the second phase of the restoration of the Parthenon is estimated to cost 5 million euros.

"Our district is poor and close to the Acropolis. We have been applying for relief from the government and the government claims there is no extra money, but why is it spending so much money to repair the temple?"

The economic benefits brought by urban heritage can only radiate the surrounding residents, but cannot provide help to other socially vulnerable groups. At the same time, as the influence of the Parthenon expanded, many nightclubs, bars and strip clubs moved into the area, which caused disturbance to the surrounding residents.

3.2.2. Stakeholders' Attitudes towards the Platonic Academy

Then, I researched users' attitudes toward Platonic Academy and found that there was also a great deal of controversy.

"I'm sorry. I haven't heard of Plato's Academy. Is it fun? My friend didn't recommend it to me."

"The Platonic Academy is really the place to be in Athens, it's the best place to represent the history and literature of Athens, and there are activities on the weekends that I take my children to."

Through a simple comparison of the views of tourists and residents on Plato's Academy, it is found that Plato's Academy is not well known among tourists, but it is loved and recommended by Athenian residents.

Tom Poulsen of the International Monetary Fund（IMF）stressed that they could no longer wait in vain for money to be lent back to Greece, either through sectoral bailouts or cuts in the main surplus targets and spending. Without financial support, it would be difficult for the government to focus its attention on Platonic Academy because it does not bring economic benefits. The Platonic Academy provides activity space for the surrounding residents and serves as a link with the local people, but the tourists know little about it and lack of tourism experience. Therefore, stakeholders have unequal rights regarding to heritage. Compared with the Parthenon, Platonic Academy has not been listed as a world cultural heritage, and has not been promoted as a tourist area. The relevant laws and policies are very limited, which leads to the low popularity of Platonic Academy.

3.3. Comprehensive Analysis and Conclusion

In the context of heritage tourism in Athens, "heritage dissonance" is the conflict between Athens government, residents and tourists on the cognition of heritage. Tourists value an urban heritage that is widely known, popular, and famous representative of Greek culture and worth visiting. Local

residents believe that it is more valuable to keep the heritage in its original state and closely connected with life. In the context of commercialization, those forgotten corners that have not been over-packaged should be appreciated in their perspectives. The government, on the other hand, considers the problem from the perspective of fiscal income and actively promotes urban heritage that can bring economic benefits, but often ignores the development of other urban experience projects. Athens' urban heritage brings benefits to different groups, and there is bound to be imbalance in the distribution of benefits. This imbalance of interests is the root cause of conflicts among stakeholders. Then, based on the previous analysis, I put forward some modest suggestions for the government. If the government wants to change the model of urban tourism in Athens, it should start with new projects or a branding strategy for attractions. This can draw attention to the fact that the area is not part of the main tourist route of the city and change the stereotype of tourists regarding specific items as the main tourist destination. The Athens government should update the tourism product, reveal some of the hidden city assets, connect the famous attractions with the neglected heritage, and create a new city tourism experience, which can also solve the problems of the archaeological museum and other poor areas. The government should promote new tourist areas to improve the image of Athens. Laws related to heritage management should be improved to ensure stakeholders' rights, such as improving traffic, providing access for people with special needs, strengthening security management, etc. Funds should be distributed fairly and resources should be concentrated to help the disadvantaged groups in society. Finally, heritage developers and managers should play a synergistic role between different policies on heritage tourism in Athens and work more closely with stakeholder groups.

4. Conclusion

Due to the epidemic, I was unable to go to Athens for field investigation. All the analysis in this paper is based on secondary public-accessible data which cannot guarantee the timeliness and integrity of the data source. The opinions of users collected through interviews with Athens newspapers are subjective and limited. Only some representative opinions are selected, which cannot fully summarize the universal rules. Secondly, the research on the benefits brought by urban heritage is not deep enough and only remains a superficial phenomenon. There are still many blind spots in the analysis of stakeholder rights. At the same time, due to the reason of authority, only part of the public government information, including laws and policies, can be found.

The Parthenon, the first case study, is a famous urban heritage, attracting a large number of tourists, bringing considerable revenue to the government, and making a prominent contribution to the heritage tourism of Athens. The second case is Plato's Academy, although it is also a typical representative of Athenian culture, but its popularity is very low. It is not recognized by tourists and government in terms of value, but it provides a space for local people to live, and provides a different urban experience for residents. Through the lateral comparison of the two cases and data analysis, it can be concluded that in the context of Athens heritage tourism, "heritage dissonance" refers to the different understanding of the government, tourists and residents about the heritage, and such disharmonious impact eventually leads to the conflict of interest among stakeholders. The status of "Heritage dissonance" in heritage tourism is deeply rooted and unavoidable (the essence of heritage is "disharmony"). When we analyze urban heritage issues in the future, "Heritage Dissonance" will give us some significant inspirations. It may not be possible to instantly shift the understanding of heritage among different user groups, so the focus of reform should be on the government. The government is using this shift in tourism promotion to try out new heritage Tours to create more tourism experiences for tourists. Heritage sectors should reshape brand strategies, change old publicity images and try to develop new narratives. In the future, I will study the

practicality of these methods in the heritage tourism in Athens and explore the way to modify policies in order to achieve more sustainable development.

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