




Archaeodestinations and Their Post-COVID-19 Attractions

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ABSTRACT

With the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, many travellers who are locked in homes are stuffed with boredom and monotony, and they desire to relax by changing places as soon as possible. However, stay-at-home calls and restrictions on being out still keep these people indoors. As a result, the long-lasting pandemic environment has already established behaviour change to keep distance and stay away from the crowd. Archaeological destinations that are intertwined with the nature of serenity in rural areas will be among the first destinations that these masses will prefer in post-Covid-19. This study focuses on the definition and characteristics of archaeodestinations, which lack in the tourism literature. While filling the gap, the study highlights archaeodestinations in terms of their special features that will lead their promotions in the post-Covid-19 environments, creating social, economic and educational contributions to the developments in the local communities interacting with public archaeology.

1. INTRODUCTION

Attraction is the fundamental motive to initiate a touristic activity towards destinations (Timothy, 2011). There are almost endless incentives to attract masses from their daily environments. Wonder, curiosity, relevance, and love may be the igniters of some groups of tourists, while magic, mystery, secret, religion, and spirit may be the justification for other groups. There are still other interactional and cognitive tourists allured by the first, the primitive, or the different, the surprising, and the captivating. This is sometimes a long beach in tranquillity, sometimes a relaxing hotel on the seashore, sometimes a purely natural spot in the wild, and sometimes a heritage area with its indigenous cultural attractions. Archaeological destinations (ADs) most of the time contain these features within their own structures and usually tempt tourists to take part in the activities and the opportunities they offer.

AD, the derivative of the term ‘archaeotourism destination’, represents a sort of destination that has become increasingly popular (except for the pause stemming from the pandemic) with a wider variety of tourists than has traditionally been the case (Walker & Carr, 2013). Tourists go to an AD when they start their travel to visit ‘described or interpreted sites and artifacts such as fragments of pottery and bone that signify specific past cultures’ in an open area or in the museum. For ADs, it is critical to have such potentials to “stimulate interest, appeal to visitors’ emotions, and offer benefits or rewards for participation or visitation” (Hughes, et al., 2013).

This study hypothesizes that ADs serve satisfactory grounds to come together home-trapped travelers with natural and cultural relaxation areas while learning, entertaining, and being away from the infectious nature of crowds in unsocial settings in cities. This paper fills the gap in the literature of the tourism potentials of ADs during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a theoretical foundation for future research on ADs and their impact on the tourism industry.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

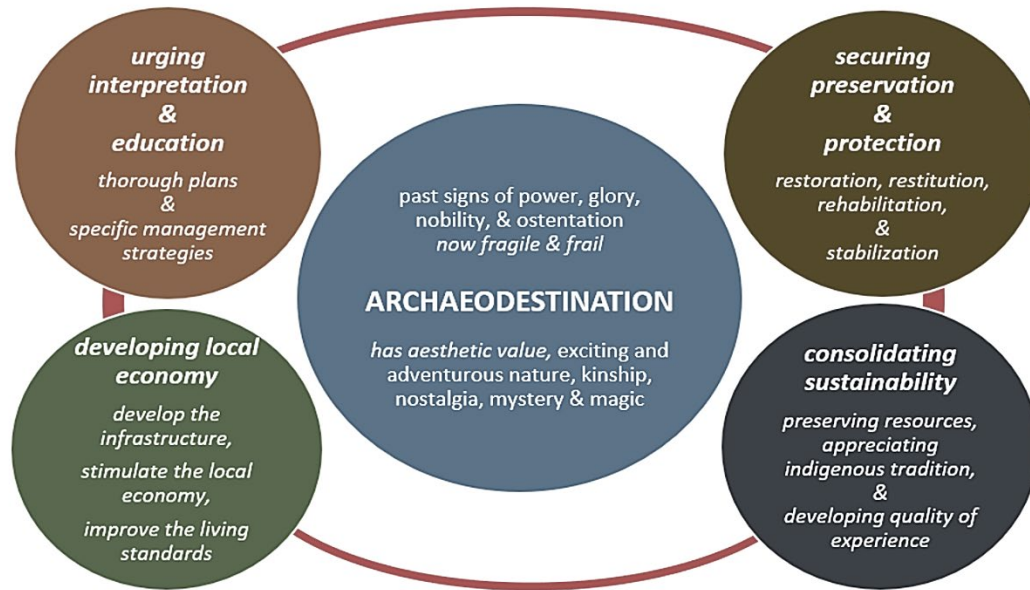
An important part of dynamic tourism industry, culture and heritage tourism prior to the pandemic had experienced a progressive growth worldwide with almost 20 percent of tourist trips incorporating some form of archaeological heritage facilities (Foxell & Trafford, 2010). Archaeotourism (AT), a critical component of culture tourism (Herbert 1995:15-17), is a term to represent the sub-form of tourism, involving how archaeological areas are potential tourist destinations (Oehmichen-Bazán, 2018). AT covers a range of issues like sites, monuments, and museums, where one is likely to find answers to basic questions like who created what, why, and how (Erdogan, Forthcoming 2022). The majority of traditional archaeologists stood aloof from archaeotourism planning and management regardless of their huge contributions to the tourism industries (Banks et al., 2011; Niknami, 2005). Namely, archaeology and tourism had never conspired traditionally since one of the principal obligations of archaeologists was regarded as the preservation of the sites and monuments (Al-Belushi, 2014) from the negative effects of tourism. However, for the majority of tourism professionals, these prohibited areas of ancient cultures of great interest and curiosity should be open to tourism industry. Some thought 'Clearly, steps need to be taken to avoid a catastrophic situation' (Budowski, 1976). Some proposed that combining the two to make such hidden wealth more tangible for the cultural, social, environmental and economic development (Ruoss et al. 2013:68) would first be to the benefit of humanity as well as to rural caretakers of the heritage sites. Archaeologists did not want many people in their areas. There was well-established fear of the trivialization and commercialization of archaeological vestiges and zones, resulting from the arrival of tourists (Oehmichen-Bazán, 2018; Brown et al., 2015). In contrast, tourism professionals did not know what to do in such frail areas, so they did not dare to fulfill their desires for any venture. The established intellect in this respect was that archaeologists with almost no background of tourism principles do their jobs on archaeologically critical heritage sites (Smith, 2000) and ceased their projects when completed. However, the popularity of AT among the tourists has reached a considerable extent recently. To illustrate, Machu Picchu in Peru attracted just 77,295 visitors in 1991, whereas that number in 2015 was 1,282,515 (Oehmichen-Bazán, 2018:1). ADs offer unique experiences along a continuum anchored at one end by education (Lipe, 2002) and by entertainment at the other end (Hughes et al., 2013; Mckercher & du Cros 2012). Enthusiasts seen in ADs need the opportunity to visit destinations, consume tourism products while observing, experiencing, and evaluating their maintenance and management strategies. They discuss over the wellbeing of the fragile assets as a part of tourism production and consumption (Ettenger, 2009). In this context, experiential learning and in particular entertaining in the tranquillity of nature have become to be recognized as useful alternatives to emerging in a daily home setting. The activities offered in ADs broaden one's experience about the past civilizations in archaeological parks (Kołodziejczyk, 2019; Thomas & Langlitz, 2019) and in nature. Hence, a day in an ADs contributes to the learning process through the links between theory and practice (Gretzel et al., 2008), providing opportunities for socializing (Jakubowski, 2003) in the clear and open air.

These areas evoke emotional feelings to react to travel, express behaviours, and fulfil activities (Landorf, 2019) that are engaging and personal, rather than only focusing on goods, services, and relaxations. ADs are mostly the products of the coordinated work of ancestors and their descendants (Ruoss et al., 2013); that is, these spots of heritage are the complementary work of past and present craftsmanship committed to the heritage interests of descendent-stakeholders. Therefore, ADs are somehow reconverted destinations for publicly engaged maintenance, sustainability, and economy through the collaboration with indigenous communities to create the destinations of in situ ruins (Castaneda, 2013). Namely, scholars from a lot of distinct areas like anthropology, archaeology, history, and tourism work together to transform such ruins in deserted areas into well-known ADs (Erdogan, 2020:139) with their alluring historical, ethnographic, and archaeological materials.

3. RESULTS

ADs can be dissociated from other tourism forms as regards the contributions they provide for the local communities and national governments. The benefits are in the forms of urging interpretation and education, securing preservation and protection, consolidating sustainability, and developing the local economy in/around ADs (Figure 1). Interpretation and education are principal priorities for ADs, which require thorough planning and specific management strategies. Otherwise, natural destruction and human vandalism of archaeological assets will assure the total extinction of such delicate heritage areas. Proper preservation and protection will bring about a constituency for resource protection and preservation. Restoration, restitution, rehabilitation, and stabilization are among the major treatments for this purpose. Surface surveys and scientific excavations for interpretive purposes should contribute to the long-term stabilization and maintenance of ADs.

Figure 1: Dissociation of ADs from other tourism forms



Source: the author

Area managers should be equipped with required financial structures to develop and ensure strategies for long-term protection and preservation through the positive impacts on the indigenous communities. This is especially significant for sustainable archaeotourism programs in promoting the principles of preserving resources, appreciating indigenous tradition, and developing the quality of experience. Sustainable ADs contribute to the development of infrastructure in their vicinities and improvement in the economic situations, rehabilitating the general conditions of local communities through stimulating the local economy.

ADs are unique landmarks, identifiable with their archaeologically and historically special significance full of relics of past cultures encapsulated physically in the tranquillity of nature in a remote part of a county. ADs exhibit perfect harmony between the indigenous settlers with their vernacular sociocultural characteristics and the outsiders coming from different parts of the world with their distinct peculiarities. Unlike the others, ADs need special care under exclusive area management systems, which act as facilitators to empower the productive development of visitors rather than supplying services (Ross et al., 2017). Firstly, the conservation, preservation, and maintenance of ADs should be secured as sustainable tourist destinations. Only then are there sustainable ways of partaking the customers in authentic experiences as a sense of self-expression that is rare in traditional tourism experiences.

ADs themselves are of enough aesthetic value to attract masses depending on the specialty of each destination. They are alluring for some tourists due to their exciting and adventurous nature. They bring in special experiences through exotic curiosities and strange wonders, often depicted in images of ancient life. ADs make ideal destinations for such tourists since they are old, usually huge, extraordinary, and even inaccessible. Archaeological studies at these destinations and even archaeology itself are adventurous for some. These areas are usually in the tranquillity of nature with scenery, referring to the quality and the visible form in a dualistic relation of the viewer's perception with the actual state of ADs. The view is a potent stimulus, comforting, inspiring, soothing, and hence generating emotions, which develop the spectrum of imagination associated with the aesthetic value (Mosler, 2009). Some tourists usually associate the assets with religious, spiritual, or sacred meanings ranging from pagans to God worshipers. The mystery and magic surrounding ADs incite people to these areas (Holtorf 2005). People are curious by nature, and there are a lot of ADs full of traces of deities, prophets, apostles, or disciples and unexplained mysteries with hidden surprises such as the stone statues signifying the signs of the first religious community ever in the history of mankind at Neolithic Göbeklitepe in Turkey. Therefore, ADs provide their visitors with a rare opportunity to experience the divine products of holy ancestors of modern humanity in a form of nostalgia. This characteristic of ADs constitutes one of the main reasons why heritage tourism is booming today (Caton & Santos, 2007).

In order to create additional charms, area managers host various events as part of enriching alternative attractions as competition for consumers' money. Also, these events allow tourists to learn about the specialty of destinations and experience entertainment while learning through taking part in leisure activities and thus integrating into the ancient and contemporary indigenous cultures. Managers devise educational programs at times for the visitors and the public in the

vicinity to appreciate the significance of the unrepairable ADs. Visitors develop a sense of kinship ties linking them to the wider cultures as a powerful and emotional focus for collective and personal identities (Holtorf, 2005). Such programs are indispensable components for the preservation and sustainability since archaeologists are provided with an incredible opportunity to reach out to the public instead of secluding themselves in the study area, educate them, and nurture their interests for better conservation, preservation, and maintenance of ADs.

4. CONCLUSION

Although most of their components were once signs of power, glory, nobility, and ostentation, most of the ADs are now physically brittle, fragile, and frail areas as a result of ages of damage stemming from both nature and humans, making ADs vulnerable and susceptible to destruction. Thus, these destinations need to be secure from those with limited knowledge of features, artifacts, and their uniqueness and fragility. That's why, there is a need for two critical things; interpretation and education. Effective interpretations of these features and artifacts contribute to the establishment of clear links between the visible and the represented. Therefore, intermediate and basic tourists can make sense of their significance as well as of what they experience in a more interesting and entertaining way. Such effective interpretations by archaeologists alone are not sufficient because destination planning and management in ADs require a collaborative effort that must take place at all levels within the tourism industry. A recreated Neolithic village with the sounds, smells, textures, and tastes of 8000 BC, for example, cannot be promoted without contributions from anthropologists, architects, soil specialists, scholars from communication, marketing, and public relations.

No previous research has directly related the ADs. Although heritage sites have been among the hot topics in high-indexed papers for the past decades, less scholarly attention has been given to the evaluation of ADs. It is this literature gap that this paper seeks to address. In arguing for thinking of ADs as potential tourist destinations, the emphasis is on the change in tourists' destination perception during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper concludes by outlining the value of AD perspectives in utilizing archaeological heritage in its tangible form to create memorable tourism experiences.

5. IMPLICATIONS

Theoretically, it is clear that the collaboration and cooperation of scholars from distinct areas like tourism professionals, local communities, and tourists will build a more peaceful world through archaeological tourism. The products of such scholarly endeavors are the ADs that are mostly in the rural areas in the tranquility of nature away from city disorders. It is proposed in the paper that ADs produce better alternatives for tourists to prefer in a daily fashion.

From the practical point of view, this paper focuses on the creation of ADs to add the value to a more specific theme of archaeotourism. New insights into the relaxation, education and entertainment can lead a paradigm shift in the tourism industry where tourists find themselves in peace. However, local governments, tourism managers, and planners need to invest in ADs for the maintenance of sustainability in ADs.

6. FURTHER RESEARCH

This literature review paper focuses on archaeological tourism destinations within the scope of touristic attractions. However, there is a need for future research reviewing a wider scope of secondary data on the educational and archaeological values of ADs to add to the archaeotourism theory and practice. Moreover, empirical studies are needed to better handle tourists' perception change during the pandemic.

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