From translocal to transnational: WHS articulations

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ABSTRACT

This study examines South Korean print media coverage of two traditional Korean clan villages, Hahoe and Yangdong, both designated World Heritage Site (WHS) in 2010 after nomination to the tentative list in 2001. The study explores the representation of these villages by Korean mass media leading up, and after the process of WHS designation. Findings suggest that the evolution of articulations of heritage and tourism require an event or concern that disrupts the existing interests and needs, and calls upon social agents to consider future implications and opportunities. Some articulations remain for longer periods of time if they continue to serve the needs of the present. The sociocultural significance and implications of the findings are discussed.

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Introduction

Nations have typically sought the UNESCO bestowed designation of World Heritage Site (WHS) for the prestige this international recognition conveys, as well as a means of protecting and preserving their most valued heritage sites while also increasing tourism demand. Despite its often lauded opportunities and benefits, much has been written about the challenges surrounding WHS designation such as the forceful removal of the local population in Borobudur, Indonesia (Timothy, 1999), the loss of social space by residents in the historic district of Cuzco, Peru (Silverman, 2008), and the disruption of vernacular life in Luang Prabang, Laos (Dearborn & Stallmeyer, 2010). Moreover, tourism studies has brought about understanding of the characteristics surrounding WHS site management and stakeholder collaboration (Li, Wu, & Cai, 2008), as well as the financial impact of WHS designation (Buckley, 2004), tourists' experiences and perceptions of WHSs (Halewood & Hannam, 2001; Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003), tourism development and promotion of WHSs (Yang, Lin, & Han, 2010), and conservation and visitor management (Hall & Piggin, 2003; Shackley, 2006).
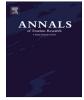
The extant research on WHSs has, therefore, brought about much needed understanding and advancement of the literature regarding sociocultural, economic, and policy challenges and opportunities surrounding post-WHS designation (Adams, 2010; Bott, Grabowski, & Wearing, 2011; Jamieson, 2006; Poria, Reichel, & Cohen, 2011; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). However, despite the growing literature regarding the various challenges and opportunities arising post-WHS designation, critically missing from the tourism studies literature is an understanding of the articulations of a site's heritage and tourism development as these intersect prior to WHS nomination, while a site is on the Tentative List (i.e., prior to UNESCO's vote), and after a site is inscribed on the World Heritage List (post-designation). Such an analysis of before, during (at the time of nomination), and following WHS designation is imperative if we are to answer tourism studies calls for "distillations of the hegemonic force of iconographic cultural warrants over long-run cycles of symbolic activity... [in order to address] acute interpretative and political matters of agency, authority, appropriation and aspiration" (Hollinshead, 2009: 543). Considering

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that WHS designation has long been thought to be a powerful ideological tool deployed by governments in the construction of national identity for both domestic and global audiences, an analysis and understanding of the articulations of heritage and tourism as they intersect leading up and following WHS designation reveals the evolution of ideological dynamics and associated strategies present in the contemporary seeking and keeping of the accolade of WHS.

One approach to exploring articulations as these unfold is to engage with the contemporary mass mediated cultural dialogue surrounding WHSs. With this in mind, the current study examines South Korean national print media coverage of two traditional Korean clan villages, Hahoe and Yangdong, which earned WHS designation in 2010 after nomination to the tentative list in 2001. Hahoe and Yangdong were selected due to their uniqueness as the only 'living heritage' WHS in South Korea (i.e., residents live and work inside the villages). These villages are amongst a handful of successful WHS nominations of 'living heritage,' with several others such as Thembang fortified village in India (42 households); traditional settlement at Nagari Sijunjung in Indonesia (76 households); villages of Hollókő and Rimetea in Romania (126 households); and, the railway village of Paranapiacaba in Brazil (450 households) currently in the World Heritage Tentative List. Considering WHS designation as an instrument for construction of national identity, the increase in 'living heritage' sites nominated provide and call for a more nuanced approach to cultural dialogue compared to sites that consist mainly of built or natural environments.

As such, this study asks: 1) how did South Korean media articulate the significance of these two 'living heritage' villages prior to, during and after the process of WHS designation? and, 2) what are the unfolding articulations of heritage and tourism leading up to and surrounding WHS designation? Adopting Laclau and Mouffe's approach to discourse, which aims "to affirm the meaningfulness of all objects and practices; to show that all social meaning is contingent, contextual and relational; and to argue that any system of meaning relies upon a discursive exterior that partially constitutes it" (Howarth, 2000: 112–113), the current study examines a total of 127 articles in the top three most circulated newsprint media in South Korea published between 1978 and 2015 inclusive. The articles were selected based on their specific focus and relevance to the Hahoe and Yangdong villages and analyzed sequentially.

In so doing, the current project advances the literature on media as a powerful resource for exploring and understanding the critical role of tourism and heritage in shaping and constructing both national identity and the way we see and understand the social world. Moreover, it provides insight to other 'living heritage' sites around the globe facing similar representational dynamics and challenges, as well as highlights the importance of pre-inscription investigation, particularly as concerns tourism development and management and stakeholder desires rather than emphasizing building conservation and site protection.

Literature review

Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) approach to discourse is premised on the notion that everything social is not objective or structured, but always contingent. Hence, discourse can only be partially and temporarily fixed in "moments" with relatively undisputed meanings (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 110). As such, social phenomena and their embedded discourse are not fixed or permanently completed but rather are always flexible and changeable depending on social context. Laclau and Mouffe, therefore, view the social world as a discursive construction and ongoing process of meaning making, and is in line with a post-structuralist approach to discourse which calls for the critical questioning and rethinking of the underlying assumptions of the structuralist traditions of viewing the social world; that is "the historical construction of systems, the fixed relations between elements and systems, and the exclusion of human subjectivity and agency from the social world" (Howarth, 2000: 11).

In tourism studies, approaches to discourse formation have largely drawn upon Foucault's viewing of individual subjects as determined by structures shaped by the systems of power and knowledge. Laclau and Mouffe's approach to discourse differs in their modification of "Foucault's monolithic view of knowledge regimes with a more pluralistic model in which many discourses compete" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 17), as well as the deconstruction of Foucault's distinction between "discursive and non-discursive dimensions" and practices of the social (Howarth, 2000: 104). Indeed, Laclau and Mouffe argue that there is no dialectical relationship between the two dimensions and suggest instead "every social configuration is meaningful" (Laclau & Mouffe, 1987: 84). Despite their distinct approach to discourse, criticisms exist regarding their basic assumption that everything social is contingent; all articulation practices are relational; and that all possibilities are open (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). However, Laclau and Mouffe position discourse as "fully constitutive of our world" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002: 19), and in so doing extend "the scope of discourse theory to embrace all social practices and relations" (Howarth, 2000: 101).

Assuming social phenomena as ongoing articulatory practices of meaning making, meaning is then contingent on the systems of social relations which are "always political constructions involving the construction of antagonisms and the exercise of power" (Howarth, 2000: 104). In this regard, discourse inherently involves struggle and contestation over what is included and excluded, as well as the definition of society and identity, the ways in which certain social phenomena are represented and interpreted, and how they are reproduced, challenged or negotiated (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Different stakeholders may hold different perceptions or perspectives in understanding and defining the social world, which can be contested and problematized in the process of their articulations.