



Nurturing nostalgia?: A response from rural tourism stakeholders

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ABSTRACT

The desire to relive bygone days stimulates nostalgia-seekers to travel to rural settings that have a kind of vintage charm. However, there is no evidence that stakeholders actually acknowledge the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia. This exploratory study sought to identify whether rural tourism stakeholders deliberately nurture visitor nostalgia with the intention of harvesting its positive outcomes. The findings suggest that the notion is credited as constructive, both at a personal and social level, but stakeholders do not seem to be fully cognizant of its potentiality. The study presents a diagrammatic tool that identifies those elements that need to be targeted so that nostalgia is triggered, strengthened and comforted.

1. Introduction

Nostalgia is one of the most appreciable new developments of postmodern tourism (Uriely, 2005). It addresses most of the tourist psychographic spectrum. That is, it is prevalent and universal and its effects are felt by more age groups than is generally recognised (Hunt & Johns, 2013; Sedikides et al., 2015). Recent studies have acknowledged the positive outcomes of nostalgia on tourism. For instance, it acts as a commanding motivating vigour (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) and it enhances marketing potentials of tourism organisations (Hunt & Johns, 2013). It also adds value to the overall tourist overall experience (Jarratt & Gammon, 2016). Furthermore, it impacts favourably upon destinations since it leads to future visit intentions (Leong, Yeh, & Chang, 2015a).

Reflecting on the importance of nostalgia within the tourism context, much of the literature is located within a historical experiential context. For instance, researchers investigated the effects of museum exhibitions and commercialised items on visitors (Brown, 2013). However, a number of more specific themes related to tourists' emotional and nostalgic experience have emerged more recently. These include the attachment of tourists to certain places (*topophilia*- Tuan, 1974) due to nostalgia (Yeh, Chen, & Liu, 2012). Hence, academic attention has been channelled towards investigations of the nostalgic notion from the consumer (that is, tourist) perspective. It has been argued that the rural setting, with its rural sense and traditional food (Renko & Bucar, 2014), give rise to a collective memory of a nostalgic and idyllic past. For instance, studies have examined tourists in search for nostalgic experiences (Russell, 2008) in farms and *kibbutzim* (Timothy & Ron, 2013; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003). It is also widely

recognised that rural settings bear a nostalgic character and reflect a desire for a past time (Creighton, 2015). They also offer emotional (i.e. nostalgic) experiences to their visitors (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

From the stakeholders' perspective, however, research on the notion of nostalgia remains notably lacking, despite calls for further research from the supply side (Sharpley, 2014). Despite this, recent studies confirm that stakeholder involvement is crucial for the success of the tourism sector in establishing a viable equilibrium between economic, environmental and social dynamics (Byrd, 2007; Jaafar, Noor & Rasoolimanesh, 2015; Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009). More specifically, there is no evidence suggesting the extent to which stakeholders deliberately promote a sense of nostalgia to their visitors, despite an increasing number of studies referring to people pursuing nostalgic countryside experiences (Creighton, 2015; Frisvoll, 2013; Frochet, 2005; Skuras, Petrou, & Clark, 2006). That is, stakeholders may not be aware of the beneficial outcomes of nostalgia, as recognised in recent studies (i.e. Cheung, Sedikides, & Wildschut, 2016). They may possibly trust that the rural constructed setting acts by itself as a nostalgic trigger, and therefore may not actively seek to evoke or comfort this emotion to their visitors. As a result, guests may be left with the nostalgic craving, unsatisfied. Even so, nostalgic references, based on Joyce and Lambert (1996), satisfy particular consumers' needs in an aesthetic and hedonic sense. Particularly, Hamilton and Wagner (2014) argue that small businesses, through nostalgic triggers, are effective at transforming an ordinary activity to an experiential one. Such owners, employ nostalgia via the construction of an idealized home through aesthetics, ritual and product; Photos in their study, display tearooms filled with vintage items such as tea pots, retro icons and furniture. As

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the tourism experience is based on an instantaneous production and consumption structure (Sharpley & Stone, 2014), it is necessary to consider stakeholders' perspectives in the process of developing and/or enhancing nostalgia amongst tourists. Cooper and Hall (2016) posited that supply and demand are inseparable components in the production and consumption of tourism experiences; thereby, tourism stakeholders play an important role in shaping the tourist experience. The involvement and support of stakeholders in tourism product development and destination marketing has been recognised by tourism scholars, particularly within a rural tourism context (Komppula, 2014). Specifically, Benur and Bramwell (2015) highlighted the importance of examining “how tourism product features and relationships are manifested in the co-creation of tourism experiences through the activities of both producers and consumers” (p.222). Indeed, through the development of social and symbolic cues in the environment in which the tourists experience takes place, tourists' emotions maybe positively influenced to achieve desirable outcomes, such as enhanced competitiveness and improved destination image amongst others. Hence, while seeking to address the aforementioned gap in the literature, this study considers the outcomes of an exploratory study which took place in the hinterland of Cyprus. The study sought to identify whether rural tourism stakeholders are consciously trying to promote nostalgia among their visitors. In so doing, we address persistent calls by academics to examine a socio-psychological notion that remains largely overlooked (Hunt & Johns, 2013; Kitson & McHugh, 2015; Stephan et al., 2015). The present study also contributes to the understanding of the tourism and nostalgia nexus. Finally, it provides useful guidance for managerial implications (through a proposed model) and highlights the need for further research.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. First, we review the notion of nostalgia and its importance within the tourism context (Yeh et al., 2012). More specifically, it focuses on people's emotional relationships with places (Manzo, 2003) and the nostalgic element this may hold. We then discuss settings and cues within such rural settings that may trigger nostalgia (Brown, 2013). This discussion serves as a framework for the methodology. Last, we present the findings of the exploratory study before discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the study. An agenda for further research is also established.

2. Nostalgia as an emotion

The meaning of nostalgia is reflected in the words of Holbrook (1993, p. 245), who referred to it as ‘a longing for the past, a yearning for yesterday’. And since the past has disappeared forever, it carries a kind of melancholic charm (Bazin, 2013). Nostalgia has been referred to as a self-indulgent and maladaptive sentiment that individuals experience when they are trapped in their past. This entails remembering an event from someone's past and a longing to return to it. As a result, a person may feel sentimental, most often happy, but with a tinge of longing (Stephan et al., 2015). In the study of Jarratt and Gammon (2016, p. 131), ‘respondents became emotional when recounting memories of family holidays ...’

2.1. Forms of nostalgia

Batcho (1998) distinguished two types of nostalgia. *Personal nostalgia* is characterised by how much a person misses various personal past aspects (i.e. family). *Historical nostalgia* is a desire to return to a past not experienced by the individual yet believed to be superior to the present. Marchegiani and Phau (2011, p.108) also differentiated personal nostalgia (‘the way I was’) from historical nostalgia (‘the way it was’). While both principal analytical perspectives of nostalgia are evidenced, Papatthomas (2016) noted a dissimilar form of nostalgia that bears an antithetical direction. More specifically, he acknowledged two forms of nostalgia. The first is characterised by escapism from reality,

and the imagination, relating to memory and being slightly sad (i.e. historical nostalgia). The other form of nostalgia has an opposite, positive and ontological content. It antipathies the past escapism and memory's return to the past. Moreover, it looks fixedly at life and has an eschatological dynamic content relating to hope and expectation for the future.

2.2. Nostalgia and linkage with personal states

The negative emotion of ‘sadness’ as a result of past memories and the melancholy caused by nostalgic thoughts was once perceived as an illness. Hence, nostalgia designated a condition or sickness known as *Heimweh* (Prete, 2001). According to the Alsatian doctor Johannes Hofer, nostalgia was an illness caused by homesickness. The only treatment for it, was a return, or ‘repatriation’ (Rauchs, 1999). Nostalgia has been regarded as a negative emotion (Cappeliez, Guindon, & Robitaille, 2008). Academics have noted its adverse societal effects. In particular, Smeekes (2015) demonstrated how group-based (national) nostalgia is likely to be related to a positive in-group orientation. Furthermore, it has a negative out-group orientation since it fosters an exclusionary and essentialist sense of national identity based on common ancestry descent. Even so, Holak and Havlena (1998) revealed the complexity of emotions elicited in a nostalgic experience. These included negative and positive emotions, such as sadness being linked with warmth, joy, affection, and gratitude. Nostalgic posts in social media were found to include both negative and positive emotions (Davalos, Merchant, Rose, Lessley, & Teredesai, 2015). Based on Jarratt and Gammon (2016), reconnection with the past highlights dissatisfaction with the present. This hinges on the loss of childhood, yet it enables a positive re-telling of the past, underpinning family narratives. Hence, “nostalgia” may be regarded as the longing to return to a seemingly ideal past, which requires memory arousal and an amalgamation of positive and negative states, such as comfort, warmth and sadness.

2.3. Nostalgia as a relatively unexplored notion

Researchers have observed the concept of nostalgia shifting from an interest in its historical consideration (as an indicator of psychopathology) to something more positive (e.g. Specht & Kreiger, 2016). Likewise, another study confirmed that nostalgia is often experienced as a positive emotion. This is because it was found to be linked with optimism, despite a negative affect presence (Cheung et al., 2013). For instance, hearing old, well-loved songs has been noted to evoke positive moods (Chou & Lien, 2010). Stephan et al. (2015) put forward several beneficial impacts of nostalgia. For instance, it increases current levels of positive affect, self-esteem and social connectedness – a sense of acceptance, inclusion, and belonging. It also spawns inspiration via social connectedness and attendant self-esteem. A number of recent studies (Cheung et al., 2016; Sedikides & Wildschut, 2016; Sedikides et al., 2015) recognised that nostalgia potentiates an attainable future. In particular, it serves a self-oriented function by raising self-positivity and optimism for the future. Additionally, it serves an existential function by increasing perceptions of life as meaningful. It also has a social function, by increasing social connectedness and fostering pro-social behaviour. Studies have used different measures to assess the nostalgic emotion variable, most of which being associated with the past, and previous experiences. For instance, “revisiting childhood” and “remembering how things use to be” (Chen, Yeh, & Huan, 2014). The study results of Leong, Yeh, Hsiao & Huan, 2015b, make a strong case for attracting nostalgic-motive tourists to visit Macau, with its attractions of historical and heritage significance. Nonetheless, nostalgia remains an elusive concept; it “depends on each individual” (Yeh et al., 2012, p. 175). More specifically, nostalgia is a relatively unexplored notion, with not much research to support it; Firstly, its idiosyncrasy and interrelation with other constructs, makes the process of

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