Field Report

“The World’s Smallest Village”: Folk Culture and Tourism Development in an Alpine Context

GABRIELA MURI

Tourism has become one of the most important systems for transmitting culture worldwide. Its history also indicates a successful custom of transmitting tradition. According to the Guinness Book of Records, “the world’s smallest village” lies in Austria. A self-styled tourist attraction, it unites the most important characteristics of a structure of symbols selectively prepared in alpine regions to transmit standardized representations of a traditional hometown ethos. This article seeks to show how such representations were derived from folk culture but have now been refunctionalized through historic processes of European tourism development. “The world’s smallest village” thus serves as a case example illustrating the processes of global mass tourism.

In the Montafon valley, an alpine area in southwestern Austria near the Swiss border, lies a tourist attraction listed in the Guinness Book of Records as “the world’s smallest village” (FIG. 1). Actually, its entirety is a white-painted concrete cube subject to siege and penetration from all sides by gabled building fragments in the chalet style. From the exterior, the structure gives the impression of being a compactly built alpine village. But its interior houses only a disco and a restaurant where tourists can consume fondues and other “alpine-country” specialties.

This symbolic and eye-catching construction provides the starting point for my analysis of the traditional in the context of folk culture and its functionalization in the historic process of European tourist development.

Gabriela Muri is an architect practicing in Zurich, Switzerland. She teaches Cultural Studies at the University of Zurich.
TRADITION, GLOBALIZATION AND FOLKLORE

According to contemporary social and cultural scholarship, cultures are collective life-styles that grew historically, are group specific, and are linked to certain geographic areas. Recently, however, international migratory movements have caused a divergence between peoples and the geographic areas where they once carried out important survival functions and social relationships. As a result, what is now conventionally packaged under the fuzzy term “globalization” has created a problem: the loss of vital local ties with identity. In counterpoint to this forward-driving spiral of globalization, some have identified tradition as a reservoir of certainty and identifiable focus on native geographic and social values.

In everyday usage “tradition” commonly designates a transmission process ascribed to the past — often a far distant one. But from the inner perspective of a tradition’s devotees, tradition may simply be linked to habit — “the way we have always done things.” Working from these two perspectives, one can trace two essential elements of tradition. Regarded by outsiders, it marks out a field of interpretation and attribution that results from social discourse, an agreement process, and the imparting of symbols. Yet when viewed by an insider, tradition may merely result from consensus within a certain group or community through adaptation to the power of convention. Tradition, as a social matter, thus covers fields of both action and interpretation.

Traditional behavior is often nonhistorical — in other words, its subjective chronologies may flow in distinctly nonhistorical ways. It was in just this way that many apparently ancient pre-Christian rituals were reconstituted in Europe during the nineteenth century. Such examples show how the validity of tradition need not depend on any chronologically comprehensible reference to the past, only on a love of the tried and true. Nor does tradition depend on things or actions themselves, only on an aura of credibility. The transforming power of tradition is crucial: it declares “heritage” to be valuable.

Traditional elements have generally been assigned to the folklore area. Folklore, or “folk culture,” can be described as those systems of knowledge, sign and communication that human groups use to impart their uniqueness. Thus, so-called traditional cultural elements and values are normally the focus, and sometimes the outcome, of a retrospectively oriented interpretation process.

There is no such thing as a tried-and-true folk culture in its own right. In Europe, intellectuals discovered a number of traditional value systems during the mid-nineteenth century, which they then idealized and made to function as romantically transfigured folk concepts for nationalistic purposes. In the process, so-called “genuine” texts, melodies, gestures, rituals and customs were sought and collected as popular heritage. The attribute “genuine” here stood for first-hand folk culture, for a natural and untainted core of folk spirit. Yet it was precisely such rurally shaped folk cultural elements that had already lost much of their meaning to urbanization and industrialization.

Traditionally and genuinely interpreted folk culture may provide orientation, legitimacy and integration within a sociocultural community. For this reason, religious, political and business forces have long tried to integrate traditionally anchored folklore into their programs. This is usually achieved by attributing new meaning to existing forms of folklore. History shows it is easier to transform existing folklore
than to create new expressions, as was attempted through governmentally decreed festivals during the French Revolution. The Third Reich and the former Soviet Union understood well how to manipulate existing folklore. Their cultural programs showed how essentially artificial traditions could be made to function quite successfully in reference to preestablished and familiar symbol structures.

Viewed globally, it is today apparent that individualizing and differentiating processes, as well as modern mass communication, have caused folklore to lose much of its power to endow life with meaning within communities determined by geography, society, and culture. Folklore has thus been largely freed to serve as the artificially pliable raw material for impressive effects and showcase tactics. Sensational presentation of folklore was considered bad taste within cultural scholarship until the 1960s. Nevertheless, folklore criticism has long recognized the romanticized basis behind the concept. Indeed, second-hand presentations of folklore have been known in Europe since the Middle Ages. Other waves to renew supposedly genuine folk customs appeared during the nineteenth century, and again during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1950s. But only during the last fifty years has interest in folklore and customs been widely revitalized with the help of mass media. In this sense, the media has been instrumental in preserving traditions that only appear to have been imparted continuously. Folklore is thus part of a process whereby mass and folk culture have had a mutual influence on each other.

Tradition thus marks out a field covering communication, action and interpretation. Depending on historic context, it may be embedded in established structures of communication and symbol systems. As part of this process, the essential qualities of cultural objects imparted as traditional may originate in folk culture. But regard for them as “genuine” only emerges from a process of historic interpretation. Both the communicators and the recipients play a role in orchestrating the values, actions and objects that emerge from this process. In Europe, tourism has long been part of this process of cultural revaluation.

“THE WORLD’S SMALLEST VILLAGE”: THE SETTING

Das kleinste Dorf der Welt, “the world’s smallest village,” lies in the Montafon valley, an area surrounded by mountains in the south of Austria’s Vorarlberg state. In addition to the textile and energy industries, tourism is one of the most important business activities here. About a quarter of the population comes in professional or other contact with tourists every day.

The valley’s orientation to tourism emerged as the result of larger patterns of development typical of Europe’s alpine areas. A fascination with nature first arose in Switzerland during the eighteenth century, but it spread to the Vorarlberg at the turn of nineteenth century. Mineral springs and summer-holiday tourism originally accounted for the discovery of the Montafon valley as one of Austria’s first tourism regions. By 1871 an association for common purposes had already assumed responsibility for the organized exploitation of tourist resources.

As in most alpine areas, the valley itself had not formed a closed or traditional farming community for more than five hundred years. Instead, emigration and immigration had caused it to fall under the influence of transregional and urban cultural forces. During the Middle Ages the area’s meager agricultural potential had already led to the development of subsidiary income-producing strategies, such as homemade textiles, seasonal migration of male artisans, and the sending of children to Swabia (southern Germany) to work. Outside factors were thus instrumental in the formulation of so-called traditional and domestic cultural values. Specifically, such values were developed within contexts that reflected both economically motivated mobility and the spread of mass tourism among the European middle class.

For these reasons Montafon folk music, folk dance, and customs cannot be said to have arisen from the centuries-old cultivation of folk culture. Instead, they were revived, or created from scratch, by cultural associations at the end of the nineteenth century. In comparison to earlier informal ways of upholding customs, the association structure permitted the enhanced sense of a “proper” folk cultural aesthetic. Thus, the Tirolean National Custom Association created a Committee to Preserve the National Costumes in 1893, and this group engaged in a selection process to determine the single most expressive costume (i.e., the most colorful and richly decorated), which it then designated as traditional.

A second wave of interest in folk customs emerged in the 1970s, which is now amply reflected in the current tourism program of the Montafon valley. Among the most important tourist attractions today are so-called folklore-imparting “home village evenings,” handicrafts from grandfather’s era, alpine hut tours for cheese-making, and trips to old Walser settlements. The associational field of traditional customs, alpine culture, cow stalls, and village idylls further asserts itself in the design of tourist-oriented buildings and menus. Beside internationalized foods like spaghetti and Wiener schnitzel, rustic pubs offer revitalized regional specialties such as shepherd’s meals eaten out of bowls with wooden spoons or “original Bregenz forest cheese pastas.”

Seen from such a historical perspective, “the world’s smallest village” can be understood as uniting some of the most important characteristics of a symbolic structure prevalent in all alpine tourism regions. Such tourist activity succeeds by linking cultural outsiders to an insider interpretation of traditional and local domesticity.

Typical of these conditions, the architecture of “the world’s smallest village” calls upon modern technologies to achieve contemporary leisure-oriented social and economic values. But while surfaces, designs, and food may impart traditional alpine symbols, they fail to correspond to tradi-
tional alpine proportions, materials or recipes. Nevertheless, according to Ackerknecht and Kenworthy, this strategy has been a mainstay of the tourist industry worldwide:

At traditional events in tourist regions, but even in the case of political folklore, relics of an apparently genuine traditional folk culture are prepared in altered contexts with new functions. The culture industry in the background produces building components and souvenirs in rustic style. It sells advertising brochures serving up tradition with the esthetic originality that tourists expect, and they consume a staged and decorative pseudo-folklore — one communicating the facade of an unorchestrated, original, spontaneous, and grown tradition. A result of this are the corresponding role conflicts that can be summoned among the mountain population no longer living traditionally.10

ALPINE METAPHOR AS A TRADITIONAL MESSAGE

The concept of the alpine village stands at the heart of the symbol structure of “the world’s smallest village.” The image of mountains looming far above grazing lands, and not just a village — but the “smallest village,” are successfully blended in a mural near its entry (fig.2). For 150 years high mountains have been an essential component of the European identity exploited by tourism. For example, during the mid-nineteenth century, bourgeois-oriented circles in Germany discovered the advantages of mountain trips (fig.3). The house organs of the alpine associations formed by these groups further contributed to the spread of alpine tourism through the stylization of an image that is still effective today. According to this image, the purifying effect of heights, the state of being deprived of civilization’s comforts, and the asceticism of mountain climbing are all ennobling and regenerating to the human spirit.11

It was in this context that the construction of aerial cable cars began during the 1920s. Cable cars were initially seen as an efficient means of attaining spiritual uplift and independence.12 They contributed to a new mountain aesthetic that emerged from a synthesis of measurement, designation, and occupation of the landscape. This aesthetic (which also included construction of mountain huts and trail networks) was well represented in the publication of pictorial volumes. Images here contrasted bold pylon construction and alpine highways with snow-capped mountain peaks, and were rarely complete without a circling airplane in a radiant blue sky.

However, at the same time that cable cars were opening alpine regions to tourists, a countervailing natural aesthetic arose in dialectical opposition to the modern forms (fig.4). Thus, during the 1920s the alpine associations came to accept the reform ideas of environmental and historic preservation based on conservative ideals. Given the background of World War I, they also came to oppose occupation of the homeland’s ideologically elevated mountains by masses of people. In particular, while the aerial cable car was thus viewed as a means of escape by many people, for others it became the symbol of the very civilization that they desired to flee. Mountain climbing eventually became the activity of choice for those for whom individual, national, and ecological causes were paramount.13

The mountain — the shining alp reduced to poster size and providing the background for traditional cultural activities — thus belongs to a long-standing Central European symbolism (fig.5). But it is not necessarily nature, but the alpine cultural landscape, that has best served as a collective treasury of such identity-creation. Alpine landscapes promoting tourism...
are thus the product of a deliberate ideology of innocence: they aim to impart a slice of the world as an integrated whole, as an intact cosmology. In this way, the cultural landscape of the Alps functionalizes so-called traditional relationships and interpretative patterns for specific target groups, according to a defined historic context. Toward this end, the aesthetic view of foreigners has been combined with the utilitarian perspectives of the local population.

Those who first imparted such patterns of cultural interpretation were aristocratic foreigners. But they soon came to include all manner of middle-class groups: tourists, people seeking relaxation, scientists, painters, authors. It was these people who actually measured the tourism landscape: who literally put it on the map, took inventory of its cultural objects, and brought a certain image of it back home. Such groups also imported value and behavior imagery into the region, and created a distinctly middle-class ideology. And their efforts were soon complemented by the activities of nature romantics, alpine associations, and skiers, who sought and imparted their own visions and practices. Local people further functionalized the alpine tourism landscape and shaped its present image, both as entrepreneurs (caterers, mountain guides, cable car builders, etc.), and as institutional agents (local politicians, association members, and leaders of folkway groups).

While nature’s innocence forms the backdrop to “the world’s smallest village,” the building itself seeks to foreground an equally appealing social innocence. In purely structural terms, the “village” is composed of a densely clustered gabled-roof superstructure atop a cement cubicle. Colorful, higgledy-piggledy fragments of holiday homes, built in the so-called chalet style, are made to blend with one another in front of nature’s scenic background.
But this eye-catching array maintains little continuity with the building’s concrete support structure (Fig. 8).

Meanwhile, the main interior court serves multifunctionally as a disco, bar, and scenic setting, complete with an artificial mountain brook (Fig. 9). Wagon wheels, a medieval mountain ruin, a crucifix, a Michael Jackson doll, and other set pieces decorate the ceilings and walls (Fig. 10). Other props seem thrown together from a rural farm-furnishings catalog. Naturally, tourists fill this successful bar. But young residents of the surrounding area are also regular customers. Their strikingly youthful age is consistent with the clientele of similarly conceived ethnic taverns in Switzerland.

From this central room, guests may enter various anterooms representing different alpine regions, mostly paneled with wood (Fig. 11). But references here also confine themselves to simple, quickly decodable signals, such as differences in wall décor, furniture styles, and the regional culinary specialties offered on the menu. Thus, the Canton Valais room is a narrow, low-ceilinged space with simple furniture where one can order fondue and other cheese dishes. The Tyrolean room features ornately carved tables and chairs with heart openings in the back and matching curtains. By contrast, the complex’s few hotel rooms and offices are located in a hidden annex with no architectural link to the main structure.

Above all, the most important architectonic effect achieved by the structure is compactness. Iconography and semantics speak a clear language: the small — yes, even “the smallest” — village exists in dialectical contrast to the mod-
Thus, small villages remain places where closeness, self-determination, and clarity prevail; where the validity of traditional construction technology, building materials, and picturesque customs are all retained. The “world’s smallest village” presents an aesthetically stylized image of just such a community’s superimposed desires.

Viewed historically, however, compactness has hardly been a continuing determinant of villages in the Vorarlberg. Indeed, since the sixth century there have been many types of village and social structure, and one might equally point to the widely scattered settlements of pre-feudal times. Neither has nature been valued so much for the enjoyment of a beautiful view as for the basis of life. Wood, for example, was long viewed primarily as a building material, and only secondarily as part of a home-spun tradition for creating a picturesque village image (fig. 12).

Furthermore, the social structure of villages in the Vorarlberg was long characterized by low vertical mobility and high social control. Political relationships were mainly reinforced by choice of marriage partners and family ties. Idealized forms of village communication — familiarity, participation, and communal experience — were confronted by equally typical forces of narrowness, supervision and control (fig. 13).

The traditional alpine farming village is also thought of as a place exhibiting an intense care for customs and festival activities. But there is no evidence that such activities were ever stressed more in remote rural regions than elsewhere. What practices did exist were often influenced by urban ideals, and traditional village culture often had little to do with self-made cultural objects.

Indeed, the purpose of many of the cultural associations that arose during such innovative periods as the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries was often to ensure the institutional character of customary practices (e.g., carnival processions). Prior to this time, such practices may have been largely informal (as was the case with boyhood rituals and courtship customs). Many such associations actually created their own traditions. Thus, they might produce their own carnival figure (if one was lacking), and make the claim in newspapers that it was a “symbolic figure with a rich tradition.” Often against their will, villagers were also forced to relearn from urban specialists how to renovate their buildings (e.g., with small windows and rooms). And in the process, they came to internalize typical urban middle-class aesthetic images.

![Figure 11](image1.png)

**Figure 11.** Guests may dine in various anterooms representing different alpine regions.

![Figure 12](image2.png)

**Figure 12.** Traditional alpine stable buildings. (Courtesy of G. Bodini, Menschen in den Alpen, Rosenheim, Rosenheimer, 1991, p. 79.)

![Figure 13](image3.png)

**Figure 13.** Idealized images of alpine life were established in sharp contrast to rural realities. (Courtesy of P. Pfrunder, Ernst Brunner: Photographien 1937-1962, Zurich, Offizin, 1995, p. 83.)
Indeed, the current touristic view of the alpine village bears striking resemblances to that which influenced middle-class education in Europe during the nineteenth century. This expressed certain functional divisions of space characteristic of the modern age. On the one hand, vacations were ascribed to so-called holiday regions stylized as rural or as villages; on the other, spheres of work and everyday life were assigned to cities and industrial areas like the Ruhr, or to regions of high-performance farming.22

A WORLDWIDE SYSTEM FOR IMPARTING TRADITIONAL IMAGES

“The world’s smallest village” can be seen as only one element in a worldwide system of imparting culture through tourist imagery. Tourism has today become one of the most important systems for imparting culture at the global level. Its growth in postmodern society has been striking. Social and cultural frontiers are hurdled by tourism, while space is redefined and culturally reevaluated.23

Today’s forms and symbolic structures for tourism emerged from specific historic processes that were largely introduced in the nineteenth century. One common feature of such processes has been a tendency to impart tradition according to value districts — areas where touristic products and practices can be spatially localized as pure and customary, untouched by civilizing influences.

The touring culture introduced to the European middle class in the nineteenth century drew its ideological basis from Enlightenment thought. It borrowed from the polar relationship between human beings and nature formulated by Descartes. Western ideology also presented romance, nature and simplicity as an antidote to mass production and industrialization. And as social organization was increasingly rationalized, leisure and tourism came to be valued as a form of compensation.

In alpine regions, tourism’s “counter-cultural” value came to rest on four basic interpretations: the transfiguring power of nature and of the Alps; the simplicity of living at tourist sites (as if on a trip into the past); the middle-class practice of adventure holidays (overnights in alpine huts, cooking on an open fire, etc.); and culture as compensation — specifically, as imparting testimony from a past, harmonious world.24

Today such original touristic concepts have been subject to additional individualizing, pluralizing and rationalizing pressures — and to a disorienting compression of time and space. At the same time, postmodern social change has caused international economic restructuring and a breakdown of differentiation between classical spheres of culture. The inflation of images propagated by the mass media further reinforces the need to economize on imparted signs, while second-hand information, arriving in an almost continuous flow, allows a nearly habitual reshaping of aesthetic life-styles. Nevertheless, a search for traditional values — untouched and genuine — continues to serve as an essential component of middle-class romantic travel ideology. Only the functioning of tourism ideals has experienced a basic change.

In particular, one might note how the counter-cultural significance of tourism has waned today — just as there has been a lessening of the romantic polarization between the pure/genuine and the socially rationalized. “Authenticity” was only important within European tourism to the extent it could be imparted or experienced as staged hyper-reality. But even this has now been replaced by a blend of colors, an aesthetically designed scenery that includes the pluralizing of tour semantics. In other words, the symbolism of simulated worlds now seems to fulfill the needs of tourists better than “reality,” and postmodern adventure environments treat nature, history, experience, culture and style with playful irony.

Given these conditions, however, satisfaction with tourist products remains weak, and there is an ever-present demand for fresh escalations of experience. In response, tourist activities increasingly avoid links to value spheres or cultural interpretations that depend too closely on an ongoing relationship with history. The same may be said for contexts that may be overly determined by actual societies or spatial locations.

CULTURE FOR TOURISTS AND TOURIST CULTURE

As a result of the above transformations, certain symbolic behaviors (as well as the processes for imparting them) have assumed a foreground position. The cast today includes tourists as actors as well as recipients; global and local scenes incorporate professionally composed images; and the mass media has become crucial in the process of imparting meaning within tourist environments. Furthermore, while people from visited cultures still may influence cultural values and practices at a supporting level, their actions and attitudes are compromised by tourist expectations, prior tourist behavior, and the requirements of professional travel agents.

Today the individual tourist stands at the center of a global marketing process. Among other things, this has meant the establishment of behavioral norms on the part of tourists themselves. Tourists now must learn to identify and appraise vacation options, play the proper role while on holiday, and correctly set their priorities according to consumer preferences. They are assisted in this role by standardized visions produced by the tourism industry through vacation programs, brochures, leisure-time articles, etc.25

Tourist culture and behavior has thus been marked by increasing levels of standardization and ritualization. For example, group sightseeing now occurs over standardized routes that guarantee nonstop activity. A fixed repertoire may include craft demonstrations, photo opportunities, visits to monuments, ritualized frontier crossings (e.g., of the Arctic Circle), targeted and selective meetings with residents, and the
consumption of local culinary specialties. During such events, representative signs and symbols of a showcased culture may be arranged in two ways: by confirmation and fixation through recordable contact (photos, videos, postcards, souvenirs, etc.); and by systems of appreciation based on simple cognitive categories such as “everyday” versus “festival,” “city” versus “countryside,” “poor” versus “rich,” and “beautiful” versus “ugly.”

Culturally standardized role transfers on the part of tourists may also underscore the desired contrast between the visited culture and “everyday life.” Thus, tourists are often noted for their demonstrative and expressive vacationing behavior. They may adorn themselves with amulets and hats bought on the tour, or dress in traditional costumes and lose their self-restraint at folk dances. A program of such evening festivals, diving excursions, and so forth may be used to break up the sightseeing routine.

Standardized activity patterns are also useful in relieving the strain of traveling and preventing any sense of disappointment with the tourist product. Typical, globally established tourism rituals now include visits to historic monuments, showplaces, museums, natural spectacles, markets, harbor facilities, impressive transportation infrastructure, artisans at work, and staged folklore. Sightseeing also reflects a global system of order and orientation, and significant objects are presented in specific attention-getting ways. They may be framed, isolated, enhanced, illuminated, and even written upon. Whatever historic references may attend them may thus be suitably mythologized or stylized to increase the validity of the object and confirm its value within tourist culture.

The design of supporting buildings in tour areas is further important to this process. Such structures — from the bank to the grand hotel — are often matched to the local style through the use of subdued associative symbols. Postmodern architecture thus becomes the aesthetically prepared ambassador for the postmodern production of accumulated signs and symbols.

In a similar manner, tourist souvenirs may be understood as fundamentally alike. They aim at immediate impact and wish fulfillment, referring at once to local uniqueness and universal values. As such, they belong to a certain global image and object culture. Their underlying symbology is most effective when it unites the historical and the materialistic, permitting forms and materials that are typically recognizable and easily reproducible. Stereotypical images are often imparted in advance through tourism advertising to generate corresponding levels of consumer expectation.

Tourism operators take similar pains to avoid both disappointment and surprise at staged “home-town evenings.” The function of these events is to conjure up a suitably symbolic mysticism of pseudo-archaic customs, without forcing tourists to engage in lasting contact with the host country. Ironically, however, such displays may have a transfiguring effect on the host culture itself, as local people lose sight of the fact such customs have only recently been promoted for tourist purposes. Thus, alpine tourists and their hosts may come to believe certain elements are as old as mountains themselves, just as many people in the Montafon valley now assume that the forest costume worn only by older farm women after World War II was popularized by young women far into the twentieth century.

TOURISM AND GLOBAL CULTURAL-EXCHANGE PROCESSES

As I have been trying to show, tourism belongs within the context of all-inclusive globalization processes. Both modernization and postmodernity have had far-reaching impacts in this regard, involving the standardization and “McDonaldization” of experience as well as an increasing lack of reference for signs and symbols.

Space is newly constituted in this process to the extent that new meanings are attributed to it and experience is structured to support tourist activities. Such a restructuring allows the reality of specific tourist regions to recede in favor of self-referential stage enactments. It also allows the tourist to feel temporarily anchored anywhere. Contrasting spaces must, of course, be clearly established within such a homogenized tourist milieu. But as “the world’s smallest village” shows, these can be rationalized according to symbolic structures that impart the expected life-style for only a brief period.

Once an area is seized by tourist activities, constituent and homogenous standards for infrastructure, quality and taste produce a comprehensive impact. Typically, as original spatial structures, previously experienced as a continuum, disintegrate, tourism brings a loss of local identity and traditional ties. Within this context, newly built hometown areas are interpreted as spheres of possibility, while real spaces are selectively revalued and restructured symbolically to allow their successfully decoding according to global norms.

Once such a restructuring is underway, “global players” may use streams of data, information, and images to generate tourism proposals for realization at the local level. Once these are marketed worldwide, the expectations they arouse can only be satisfied through a further alteration of the tourist area. Thus, through an essentially circular process, staged constellations of experience and atmosphere achieve a satisfactory pretense to the “authentic.” In reality, however, such mass-tourism localities, attractions, events, behavior patterns, and products easily deduce into resolvable structures such as good and bad (the penitentiary on Alcatraz; tourists as Mafia hunters in Palermo); poverty (sightseeing in Harlem, Manila, etc.); and wealth (Buckingham Palace). The symbolic structure presented as “genuine” is merely accepted as part of a game (FIG. 14).

Such a tourism culture, imparted by the mass media, has fit seamlessly into the development of global leisure markets. Today the cultural practice of touring has even been
According to these principles, the tourist industry has now made it possible to experience everything from standardized evenings of folk entertainment to comprehensive and exotic programs of sightseeing. In addition, theme parks such as Disney World offer “mock” tourist attractions for leisure consumption. The acceleration of modern lifestyles is thus cushioned by a guaranteed dramaturgy, as tourist experience presents at least the sense of identification with important cultural concepts tied to traditional, national, or childhood symbols.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, tradition marks out a field for imparting, acting and interpreting. Tourism has long played a role in this cultural transmission process. But today social interaction and activity structures, as well as institutionalized regulatory systems, have established a globally determined background for tourism. These forces are accompanied by a leveling process inherent within mass culture. Individuals can thus choose from among a variety of touristic spheres based on their own emotional and cultural viewpoints. The selection criteria are prepared by the tourism industry and renegotiated over and over in a cultural exchange process regulated worldwide.

At the local level, a simple system that promptly decodes signs, symbols and representations imparts an appropriate staged identity. Modern time and space structures then generate a program of tourist activities according to international norms. In the case of alpine tourism, these activities promote anti-urban values which individual tourists may perceive as a contrast to their everyday lives.

Such programs of activities may, however, produce relationships between the visitors and visited that are influential in their own right. Thus, preparation of cultural objects and practices for touristic viewing may result in new forms of custom, cuisine, music, dance, and folk stereotype. In this way the social sphere of the people visited may become a theatrically structured projection of tourist desires.

THE THEATER OF TRADITION

“The world’s smallest village” provides the stage set for a cheaply staged theater of tradition. The mural near its entrance imparts in pictures and words a symbol structure that can quickly be decoded as traditional. There are four basic elements of McDonaldization: efficient flow of work; simple food dispensed in equal portions; predictability of food composition and quality worldwide; and monitoring of employee behavior. Similar components can be found within the mass culture of tourism: efficiently planned sightseeing; vacation options detailed in travel brochures, catalogued and priced to avoid surprise; anticipated sights and food options identically structured worldwide (specialty “local” buffet plus familiar international fare); and monitored contact with strangers.

According to these principles, the tourist industry has marketed successfully in such places as amusement parks, where staged cultural components may be represented as conflict-free utopias for deliberate enjoyment as inauthentic. Considering their increasing worldwide interchangeability, one has to wonder why such leisure-time activities continue to exert such magnetic appeal. One compelling explanation involves the interaction between social structures and cultural objectification.

Worldwide, globalization has been accompanied by a new far-reaching sense of insecurity, as employees and consumers feel powerless in relation to large corporations. At the same time, communications and transportation systems have liberated people from community interaction based on geography. Cultural objects, media products, political ideas, and identities can now be projected simultaneously around the globe. Although similar waves of mobility, motivated largely by economics, had great impacts in earlier eras, the twentieth century has been characterized by an increasing linkage between spheres of everyday life. Individual activity spheres have now expanded beyond residential areas, so that work, consumption, social contacts, leisure time, and vacations have all been delocalized.

The concept of “McDonaldization” originally arose to describe the impact of fast-food culture, but the capabilities summarized by this term have also had a major impact in the fields of leisure time, travel, and tourism. There are four basic elements of McDonaldization: efficient flow of work; simple food dispensed in equal portions; predictability of food composition and quality worldwide; and monitoring of employee behavior. Similar components can be found within the mass culture of tourism: efficiently planned sightseeing; vacation options detailed in travel brochures, catalogued and priced to avoid surprise; anticipated sights and food options identically structured worldwide (specialty “local” buffet plus familiar international fare); and monitored contact with strangers.
imparting tradition operate globally, and traditional symbol structures are made to function for commercial gain. The power of tradition, once produced by agreement within specific social groups, has now shifted to a global scale, where its products are accidental, variable and incoherent, and where ties between tourists are evident only as abstract trends of consumption.

In response to these conditions, tourists now expect programs of activities that are standardized and symbolically stereotyped. Thus, the symbol structures of tourism are imparted simply as consumable objects and practices. Traditions associated with this process no longer derive their meaning within defined social groups, but rather emerge as the result of stylistic differentiation within a common value sphere. Tradition thus imparted loses its ability to function as a group tool for coping or for survival. No longer a collective force lending meaning to existence, it serves only as a distancing factor within a system of individually designed life-styles.

REFERENCE NOTES

3. E. Hobbsawm and T. Ranger, eds., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). In his chapter, Hobbsawm describes numerous examples of success in discovering tradition: by the British monarchy, 1820–1977; by the nation-states comprising Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century; and in connection with worldwide developments in tourism since the nineteenth century.
5. Ibid., pp.6–9.
8. Ibid., pp.67–79.
26. Ibid., p.229.
27. Ibid., p.235.


39. Ibid., p.49.


All photos are by the author except as otherwise noted.