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Is culture dead?

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* is a specific focus on culture. Culture was traditionally associated with civilizations (Eastern culture) or nations and societies (Thai culture), and it was associated with anthropological, ethnographic and sociological theory. More recently, the concept has been applied in marketing (consumer cultures) and tourism (backpacker culture), but the approach remains primarily sociological.

Culture is an important concept for tourism and hospitality. The traditional dominance of the Western (American) culture is being challenged by increasing numbers of travellers from China, Middle East and India. The novelty of exotic societies, with their unique tangible and intangible heritage and cultures, is a fundamental attraction for travellers, but it is at the same time challenged by our increasingly global perspectives and by the variety of travellers from different cultures to whom these novelties must be interpreted. The tourism sector could be thought of, in the past, as a predominantly Western cultural project. However, now tourism operators on the Gold Coast, Australia, must consider how to sell beach activities to Chinese visitors who neither want to tan themselves nor swim in the ocean, and to Muslims for whom beachwear should be modest.

A cognitive approach to culture focuses instead on shared knowledge. This is perhaps more useful in the post-global world of England-born Islamic religious extremists, Chinese heritage-Australian-born consumers and global sustainability. Here a culture is not a collective entity but instead a mental schema connecting ideas, symbols and ways of behaving that is shared to some partial extent by members of a group. We can no longer assume that culture is associated with particular social, national or racial characteristics. Instead we must discover cultural values and that these should not be defined only in terms of dimensions such as masculine–feminine, individualism–collectivism or strong versus weak uncertainty avoidance as discussed by Hofstede (1980).

The editors of *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* encourage submissions that challenge and extend concepts of culture and also the methodology of its study. Do cultures share the same values regarding the benefits of travel? Can the study of culture in tourism and hospitality benefit from new methods such as electroencephalography (EEG)? The editors hope to receive papers on these and other related issues. They would also value substantive literature reviews on such topics.

Reference

Hofstede, G.H. (1980), *Cultures Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values*, Sage Publishers, Beverly Hills, CA.

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