Understanding Western Tourists in Developing Countries

Bridging the North-South Divide through Sustainable Tourism Development

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Issues

- destinations (policy makers, managers, product developers) are product- or need-oriented rather than market-oriented
- destinations (in rural areas and developing countries in particular) lack knowledge of markets
- destinations (in developing countries in particular) don’t have access to markets (knowledge, network, organization)
- destinations (in developing countries in particular) don’t understand tourists

Western Countries

- well-travelled countries
- the world's biggest spenders per capita
- most prosperous countries per capita
- most environmentally conscious countries
- most development-minded countries

These elements are definitely linked to each other!

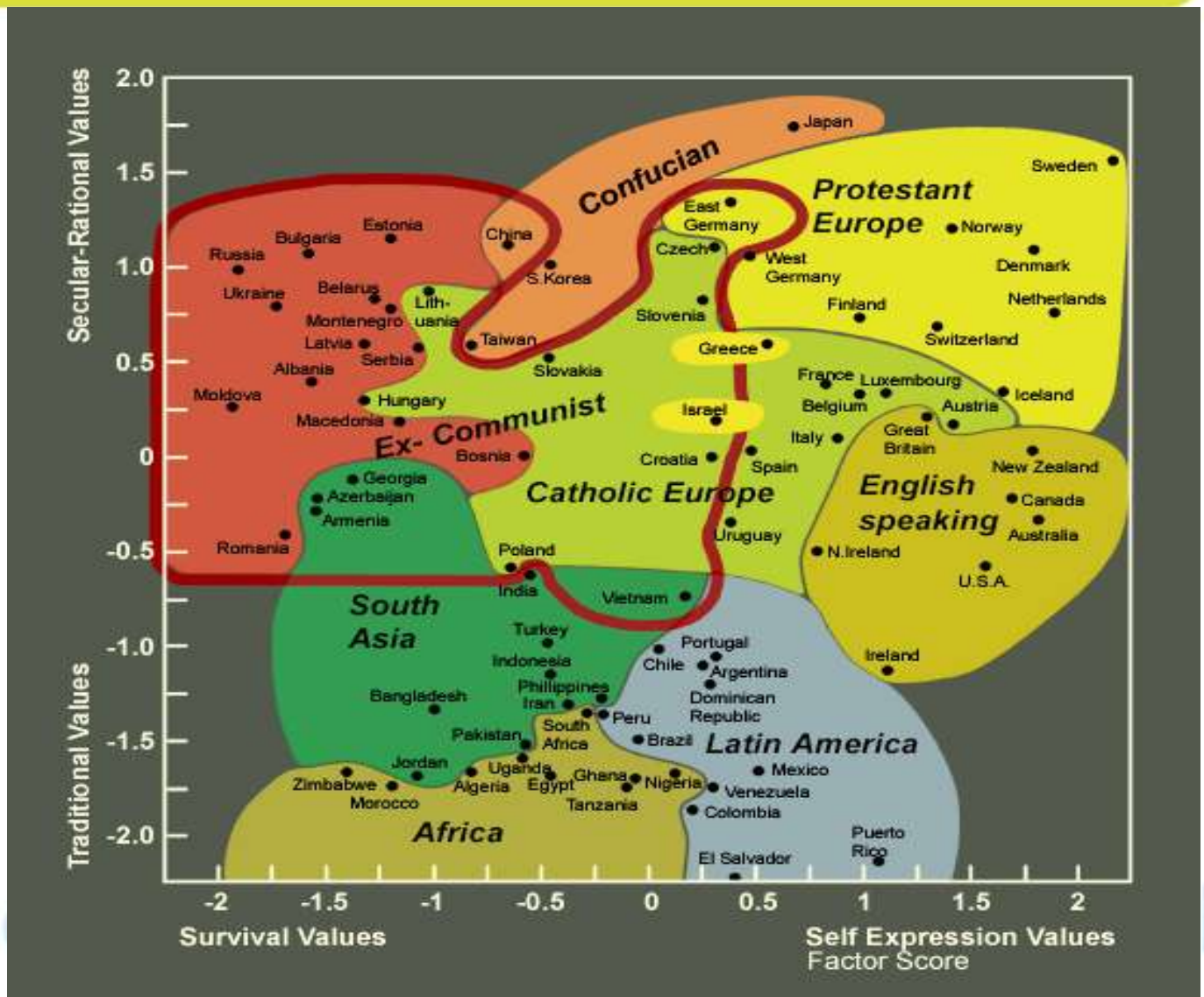
Western Countries (continued)

- Historically Protestant European countries (Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, the Netherlands, United Kingdom) plus North America and Australia (Austria special case).
- Part of a modern consumer culture; tourism is not escape from but symptom of this culture: looking for ever new experiences
- Moved from a materialist to a postmaterialist society (according to Inglehart *et al.*)

McCannEricson survey → Youth are Hedonistic Idealists

Sustainable consumption: the BIG IGNORANCE

Inglehart's World Values Map



Protestant Ethic ≠ Protestant Religion

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Characteristics of Protestant Ethic

- highly developed work ethic
- wasting time is a sin
- view of the world relatively pessimistic
- suspicion of self-indulgence and excessive consumption
- strong bias in favour of self-discipline
- morally rigorous religion, high value on consistency
- individual moral responsibility: stewardship
- relatively egalitarian religion: basis of democracy
- nature has spiritual significance, counterpart to the ills of industrial capitalism
- guilt culture, as opposed to shame culture
- quest for solitude and paradise

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Characteristics of Consumers from historically Protestant Countries

- restlessness
- doing nothing is ‘not done’
- looking for ever new experiences ⇒ experience economy / imagineering
- pushing back frontiers, more and more extreme pursuits
- consumption is not satisfaction, but duty
- balancing between hedonism and asceticism

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Characteristics of Tourists from historically Protestant Countries

- “doing nothing is not done”
- “seeing much, doing much”, “don’t miss something”
- spending time usefully (i.e. educationally)
- tight time schedule
- romantic perception of nature
- romantic perception of culture
- feeling of personal moral responsibility: don’t spoil
- feeling of responsibility and guilt: doing “something”
- balancing between hedonism and asceticism
- sometimes: renouncing of luxury temporarily; even “suffering”

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Why are Western Tourists interested in Exotic Destinations?

- search for roots, sociality, simplicity, authenticity (nostalgia) because of discomfort with technological society
- a rush on the last paradises; valuable because they are disappearing
- romantic perceptions of ‘natural peoples’
- romantic counter-movement to standardization and uniformity
- new ‘political correctness’ based on postmaterialistic values: citizens from the former colonial powers feel guilty
- comforts and benefits of home are reinforced through the exposure to difference

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Life-worlds of ‘hosts’ versus ‘guests’

Life-worlds of ‘Western’ tourists fundamentally different from / alien to life-worlds of residents in most developing countries, in rural areas in particular.

- E.g. organized tourists: tight travel schedules, restless dashing around, voluntarily renouncing Western comfort, feelings of guilt or embarrassment when confronted with poverty, interest in local rural life, search for authenticity, etc.
- E.g. backpackers: travelling individually, not having social or family obligations, renouncing Western comfort, wearing ripped cloths, loose sexual morality (+ drug use and petty crime)
- E.g. volunteers: paying a lot of money to work with poor locals, wanting to connect with locals, renouncing Western comfort

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Understanding Tourism Concepts

- *Ethnic tourism* and *ecotourism* are 'Protestant' Western concepts.
- Historically Protestant countries main target markets for these types of tourism, Europe more than North America / Australia.
- The proportion of European tourists is limited, regions and communities in the 'South' that like to welcome these tourists are numerous: 'fishing from the same limited pond'.
- 'Protestant' countries are *dark green*, Catholic European countries and Confucian countries in Asia are *light green* (Vogel 2001).
- *Deep ecotourists* (as opposed to *shallow*) are Western 'dedicated' tourists from historically Protestant countries (Acott et al. 1998).
- *Sustainable tourism development* essentially a Protestant concept.
- *'Search for Authenticity'* is essentially a Western concept

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Literature

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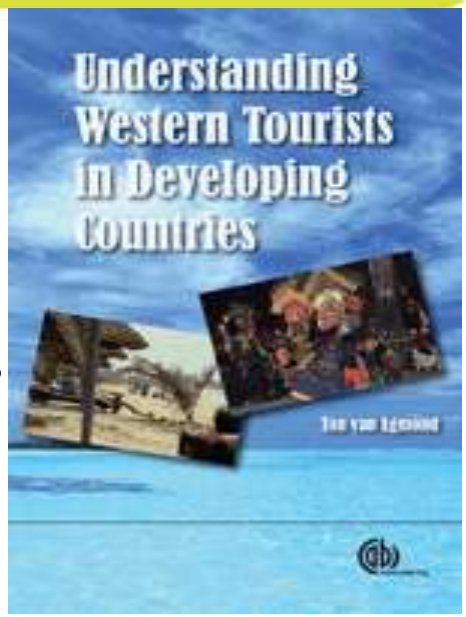
A Classification of ‘West’ – ‘South’ Tourists (van Egmond 2007)

- Organized tourists:
  - Mainstream tourists
  - ‘Accidental’ tourists
  - ‘Dedicated’ adventurous tourists
  - ‘Hard-core’ tourists
- Backpackers:
  - Mainstream backpackers
  - ‘Hedonists’
  - ‘Dedicated’ backpackers
  - ‘Pioneers’



Consequently,

- Many developing countries are dependent upon Western markets (particularly where nature-based, community-based and beach tourism are concerned)
- Competition is fierce on most markets
- Rather than introducing Western concepts, consultants should adopt local perspectives
- Product development and communication can only be effective when destinations understand their markets

Asian Tourists

- Mainly domestic
- VFR dominated
- Much shopping tourism (in particular to major cities)
- Much (small) business tourism
- Some conference and other MICE tourism
- Not much conventional (European) holiday tourism
- Interests: cities, casinos, man-made facilities rather than ‘unspoilt’ nature and culture

Needed ....

- Cross-Cultural Studies (between nationalities, classes, ethnic groups, etc.)
- Understanding markets in order to develop the ’right’ products and the ‘right’ management systems, including effective communication
- Qualitative Research Methodologies (in addition to quantitative methodologies) to understand phenomena