

Tourism For Peace: Theory Put in Practice For Turkey and Armenia*

American, Turkish, and Armenian Fellows “ATA Fellows”***

Abstract

Tourism has been espoused by tourism academics, the United Nations (UN) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as an influential ambassador to champion cultural understanding, respect, goodwill and peace among different cultures and nations. In fact, the ultimate endorsement was offered by Mahatma Gandhi who described travel as ‘the language of peace.’ The prospect of promoting cultural understanding, mutual respect and peace via travel and tourism is an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen cross-border relations in regions such as the Caucasus, particularly between Turkey and Armenia whose relations have been strained by a number of historical and political issues. Tourism projects and partnerships between Turkey and Armenia can facilitate the normalization of relations between the two nations. This tourism project, funded by the U.S. Embassy in Ankara, Turkey, aims at collaboration between tourism academia and practitioners in both countries along with a U.S. institutional partner to research, educate, build and strengthen capacity within the context of sustainable regional tourism development. To that end, a Multilateral University Consortium to Strength Tourism Education, Research and Industry Outreach was formulated and branded as the American, Turkish, and Armenian Fellows (ATA Fellows). The partnership consists of the University of Florida, U.S.A., Dokuz Eylul University, Turkey, and Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia. To achieve the objectives, several activities have been proposed for implementation during the course of three years (2010-2013). Having completed several activities, ATA Fellows have already accumulated several success stories and developed an initial blueprint for the stakeholders of these countries, as well as others in the Caucasus and elsewhere.

Key words: tourism, peace, benefits of tourism, United States. Turkey, Armenia.

Virtue of Tourism

Generally, tourism development assists in the overall development of destinations through its contribution to sales, jobs, tax revenues, income, and foreign exchange. In addition, it offers diversification of export earnings, assistance in the balance of payments, stimulation of economic development, entrepreneurship and small businesses development and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Brown, 1998; Douglas, Douglas, & Derret, 2001; Eadington & Redman, 1991; Fridgen, 1996; Gartner, 1996; Gawler Visitor Information Centre, 2011; Pearce, 1995; Stynes, 1999). Travel and tourism has also been associated with the potential to create a heightened awareness about environmental and socio-cultural issues. The movement of people to various destinations and subsequent interactions with the host cultures generally creates a better appreciation of cultures, heritage, religion, and societies which further promotes tolerance, mutual understanding and respect, goodwill and peace (D’Amore, 1988; Fridgen, 1996; Gartner, 1996; Var, Brayley, & Korzay, 1989a, 1989b).

Potentials for a Region - Caucasus

The prospect to promote cultural understanding, mutual respect and peace via travel and tourism is an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen dialogue, especially in regions and among neighboring countries which have historically been at odds. Regions such as the Caucasus, with rich natural, cultural and heritage resources are in dire need of stimulating regional development, yet are hampered by issues and obstacles of political, sociocultural and physical nature. The Caucasus, known as ‘one of the pillars supporting the World’ in Greek mythology, includes a vast region of valuable resources shared by many small and diverse states and nationalities. Due to inter-ethnic conflicts, wars, and safety and security issues, the region has remained underdeveloped, which, ironically, reminds one of the Greek mythology that Prometheus was chained in the Caucasus by Zeus as punishment for presenting man with ‘the gift of fire.’ In particular, two Caucasus states, Turkey and Armenia, provide challenges for regional development due to the lack of dialogue, which was caused by a number of debilitating historical and political issues that has permeated across multiple generations.

Although relations between the two countries are burdened by a long history of conflict, Turkey did recognize the state of Armenia soon after its independence in 1991. There is still no formal diplomatic relationship between the two states. Numerous mediation attempts by regional nations as well as the U.S. to normalize relations have led to initiatives (e.g., Armenia-Turkey Cross-Border Dialogue and Cooperation Program) to contribute to the normalization of relations by strengthening the capacities of non-government, local government and business sectors to develop and maintain cross-border partnerships. These attempts led to fruition on October 10, 2009 as an official agreement to establish mutual diplomatic recognition was signed, which was a historic moment and a first major step towards normalization. Given the thaw in relations between Turkey and Armenia, there is an immense economic opportunity for trade, investment, and commerce. Additionally, the movement of citizens between the two countries, as well as mutual financial investment in tourism infrastructure (e.g. hotels, attractions, etc.) can accelerate the process to harness positive economic and socio-cultural communications and exchange.

Tourism in Turkey & Armenia

Both Turkey and Armenia have distinctive tourism resources - unique natural features, beautiful landscapes, civilizations dating back 10,000 years, historical and cultural attractions, places of ethnographic interest, and excellent recreational opportunities. However, rapid development has created negative environmental and social impacts in some regions of Turkey (Korzay, 1994; Sezer & Harrison, 1994; Var, 2011). Despite its diverse cultural and heritage resources and tourism products; tourism development has largely been concentrated in certain key areas in Turkey (Korzay, 1994; Sezer & Harrison, 1994; Var, 2011). Although both the Black Sea Region and Eastern Anatolia have ample cultural and historical resources; their potential for tourism has not been reached yet. Similarly, Armenia, with her rich historical and cultural resources, can benefit from tourism development with an environmentally and culturally sustainable vision. Overall, sustainable planning methods along with informed decision making and service provision would diminish the negative consequences of tourism and contribute to more sustainable development for both Turkey and Armenia, leading to benefits for the other countries in the region as well.

Tourism education and research partnerships between Turkey and Armenia can facilitate culturally and environmental sustainable regional tourism development as well as the normalization of relations between the two nations. However, there have been marginal efforts in

programs between Turkey and Armenia, especially with the objective of regional tourism development led by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Academy for Educational Development - Armenia (AED), German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ, now GIZ - Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit), and Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF). To fill this void, this project proposes collaboration between academia and practitioners in both countries along with a U.S. institutional partner to research, educate, build and strengthen capacity within the context of sustainable regional tourism development.

ATA Fellows' Endeavor

The purpose of this project is to strengthen tourism education, research and industry outreach within and between Turkey and Armenia by formulating a Multilateral University Consortium between three universities: University of Florida, U.S.; Dokuz Eylul University, Turkey; and Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia (see Table for the consortium members from each institution). The consortium, also named as American-Turkish-Armenian Fellows (ATA Fellows) endeavors to create regional tourism development within a cross-border region of Turkey and Armenia, using the philosophy of sustainable cultural and heritage tourism. ATA Fellows' project of cross-border collaboration of tourism academics and practitioners through research, education and training for sustainable regional tourism development obtained financial support from the Embassy of the U.S. in Ankara, Turkey, and logistical assistance from relevant public, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and private sector authorities in all three countries.

Goals & Expected Outcomes

Four general goals guide the activities of ATA Fellows:

1. To enable higher education in the U.S., Turkey and Armenia with similar educational missions to develop and broaden institutional cooperation through exchanges of students, faculty members and administrators for the purposes of study, teaching, research and outreach;
2. To increase understanding between the U.S., Turkey and Armenia through cooperation in higher education;
3. To reinforce the impact of other Department of State programs, including Fulbright;
4. To support the current foreign policy priorities of the Department of State, especially efforts to promote the normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia and to improve educational outreach to non-elite populations.

ATA Fellows believe that this is a significant opportunity to strengthen the dialogue between Turkey and Armenia via tourism to promote peace and mutual understanding, which is supported by the shared cultural and heritage background between Turkey and Armenia. Visioning meetings in all three countries are to be conducted, followed by a general meeting open to external participants, and student and faculty exchanges are the primary activities towards achieving these goals. The main outcomes of the planned activities are to contribute to the region in several ways including: sustainable tourism development, increased cultural and environmental awareness, diversifying the tourism products (extending the triangle of sun, sand and sea to include cultural tourism, wine tourism, faith tourism, event tourism, thermal tourism, winter tourism etc.), branding the region as a sustainable quality tourism brand, improving the human capital with a focus on non-elite groups, and ultimately promoting cross-cultural understanding and regional peace.

To realize their potential sustainably, both Turkey and Armenia need to diversify their product mix beyond the traditional hubs of key cities. Visitor dispersals to other regions is paramount not only to avoid the negative environmental impacts from high concentration of visitors in few destinations, but also, more importantly, to provide an economic boost to the local economies of new and less developed regions. However, visitors are likely to visit new regions if the destinations have quality settings, attributes and attractions (natural or built). There is an immense opportunity to develop, package, and promote rural destinations with a focus on cultural and heritage tourism in Turkey and Armenia, both of which have rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets. One such potential exists at Ani, a ruined and uninhabited medieval city-site situated in the Turkish province of Kars, adjacent to the border with Armenia.

Project Teams and Team Members (ATA Fellows)

University of Florida (UF) USA	Dokuz Eylul University (DEU) Turkey	Armenian State University of Economics (ASUE) Armenia
Faculty	Faculty	Faculty
Dr. Asli Tasci Project Director and PI	Dr. Gurhan Aktas Turkish Director of Project	Dr. Artak Manukyan Armenian Director of Project
Dr. Lori Pennington-Gray UF Curriculum/Education Director	Dr. Ebru Gunlu DEU Curriculum/Education Director	Dr. Armenuhi Burnazyan ASUE Curriculum/Education Director
Administrators	Administrators	Administrators
Dr. Brijesh Thapa	Dr. Burcu Selin Yilmaz	Dr. Samson Davoyan
Dr. Michael Sagas	Dr. Yasemin Arbak	Dr. Armen Ktoyan
Industry/Public Sector	Industry/Private Sector	Industry/Public Sector
Dee Ann McKinney Director of Research for Department of Missouri Tourism	Armin Zerunyan Hilton-Country General Manager Turkey	Armen Shahbazyan Business Association Specialist, Advisor for the Competitive Armenian Private Sector (CAPS) Project
Roland Loog Executive Director of Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau	Dr. Mustafa Tanyeri Secretary General and Member of Board, Aegean Young Businessmen Association (EGIAD)	Dr. Hasmik Hambarzumyan Faculty Member ASUE, Yerevan
Tourism Curriculum and Education Consultant		
Dr. Charles W. Lane Lecturer of Tourism at University of Florida		
Tourism Planning and Development Consultant		
Dr. Muzaffer Uysal Professor of Tourism at Virginia Polytechnic University		
Historic Preservation and Community Conservation Consultant		
Prof. Roy Graham Beinecke-Reeves Distinguished Professor and Director of UF College Historic Preservation Program		

The potential to develop a series of projects can create coherent, sustainable cultural tourism initiatives at both national and transnational dimensions. Culturally and environmentally sustainable tourism initiatives and research, coupled with education and service, can enhance the brand image of these countries as well as the Caucasus Region due to the aggregate impact of these factors on positive destination brand image (Tasci & Denizci, 2009; Denizci & Tasci, 2010). Sustainable tourism development leads to cultural and environmental preservation and

enhancement at the regional level since it involves multiple cultures and societies, which, consequently, require culturally sensitive tourism training in the region. Education and research for determining and disseminating the important knowledge gained about cultural assets and similarities and differences in the region is of utmost importance for such an endeavor of sustainable quality tourism brand development. Also, tourism growth is dependent on a number of factors, including developing a qualified, trained and skilled labor force. For sustainable quality tourism for both Turkey and Armenia, investment in human capital is a necessity. In addition, cross-border cooperation on regional tourism routes can be the basis for an exchange of expertise, personnel, information, and strategies as well as goods and services. Through this initiative, the Caucasus region may likely emerge from the image of a small and troubled region to a sustainable tourism brand, and ultimately a prosperous region in peace and economic development.

Accomplishments & Future Directions

Based on the strengths of the team members, ATA Fellows delegated tasks among members to achieve a synergy for this 21-member team. In addition, multilevel communication channels including the popular social media such as Yahoo! Groups and Facebook have been initiated to achieve efficient communication among the team members. The first visioning meeting occurred in November 2010 at Gainesville, Florida, U.S.. This initial meeting built relationships among the team and also with diverse stakeholders who were involved in several productive activities organized by the UF team. Existing curriculums and updates for each institution were reviewed; funding opportunities for Turkish and Armenian faculty were discussed; creative public and private sector and academy collaborations were identified; research needs for further action and subsequent plans were defined. The trip was sealed with a great level of cross-cultural understanding, and outcomes of the activities exceeded expectations for all institutional partners.

The second visioning meeting occurred in March, 2011 in Istanbul and Izmir, Turkey. Several meetings and presentations were conducted during the visit. All domains of the project goals were reviewed and several outcomes were achieved. The trip was very productive, featuring quality meetings and site visits to various attractions organized by Hilton Conrad, Istanbul and Dokuz Eylul University. Project partners not only familiarized themselves with the Turkish tourism industry but also built mutually beneficial relationships with diverse stakeholders. Educational needs for the tourism workforce as it relates to culturally and environmentally sustainable regional tourism development were identified. All external participants, including tourism practitioners, and Armenian and Turkish community members were involved in and supportive of the overall project's objectives.

The third visioning meeting was conducted in Yerevan and Gyumri, Armenia in September 2011. Similar to the first and second visioning meetings in the U.S.A. and Turkey, several meetings were conducted during the visit, and several presentations were also delivered by the team members and guests. Through productive discussions, all domains of the project objectives and goals were visited and several outcomes were achieved; meetings and site visits enabled the team to have a first-hand experience with diverse aspects of tourism as well as build contacts and network with the industry stakeholders in Armenia. Academic faculty, tourism practitioners, as well as students and other relevant members of the community were involved in and supportive of the project.

Based on the discussions of the three visioning meetings, a few areas of research have been identified for immediate attention to improve the cross-border travel between Turkey and Armenia. Focus group studies have been conducted on students at DEU and ASUE to understand

the potential issues regarding image, cultural distance and tourism between Armenia and Turkey. Results indicated perceptions that are on the spectrum of lack of any perception to somewhat biased perception. Additional future studies on both supply and demand side of tourism identified as potential future studies include a study on travel agents who currently serve tourists between Armenia and Turkey versus those who do not; a study on youth travel market (intention, past experience, image, cultural and social distance); a study on the general public with respect to barriers to cross-border travel; an assessment of tourism readiness (resident attitude towards tourism development); an inventory of infra/supra structures; a study on social media, especially among youth segment; and a study on Armenian and Turkish diaspora.

Also, few courses have been planned for capacity building in Turkey and Armenia with the vision of sustainable tourism development. The Tourism English course is designed specifically to address the language needs of tourism and hospitality industry workforce. Since English is commonly the medium of communication for international travelers, it is important for current and potential employees to be able to communicate the basics of tourism terminology. Using a highly interactive interface, this online course will focus on tourism terminology, and cultural differences in expressions. The course will be delivered during the second and third year of the project at no cost to participants (30 in total) among both students and industry workers in each country. However, priority will be given to individuals from disadvantaged communities and non-elite groups. In addition, based on the needs of both Turkey and Armenia in tourism development and the guiding philosophy of ATA Fellows, a new certificate program entitled “Sustainable Regional Tourism Development” was outlined. The courses for the certificate program were identified during the second visioning meeting in Turkey with special emphasis in destination development procedures, including analysis, planning and development at the initial stages followed by management and marketing. Based on this framework, four courses were identified to be further developed by the team: Tourism Resource Analysis, Tourism Planning and Development, Sustainable Destination Management, and Cultural Tourism. Based on the success of these planned courses, other training modules for specific sectors of the tourism industry can be designed with input from interested industry stakeholders.

The student mobility and exchange which includes a field trip to Ani, Turkey and a service learning experience in Florida, U.S. is designed to increase the value and educational outcomes of the new courses, in addition to enhancement of language and communication skills. In the summer of 2012, the DEU team in collaboration with industry stakeholders, particularly in Kars province of Turkey where Ani is located, will organize a 10-day field trip to Ani for U.S., Turkish and Armenian students (10 from each country) to apply their knowledge on a major cultural and heritage tourism site shared by both Turkish and Armenian cultures. Following this field trip, the UF team, in collaboration with the Alachua County Visitors and Convention Bureau, will organize a 10-day tourism service learning project in North Central Florida for U.S., Turkish and Armenian students (9 from each country). This project will allow students the experience of a successful application of regional tourism development initiatives. Additionally, the Bureau will also assist in the coordination of field trips and learning opportunities to various tourism operations within the greater North and Central Florida regions.

A larger scale meeting (workshop/symposium) is planned for the spring of 2013 to focus on issues concerned with achieving environmental, social and economic sustainability of tourism for regional development. A multi-disciplinary approach will be promoted to foster greater understanding and collaboration between social science experts, tourism scholars, practitioners, government officials, policy makers, relevant international and local organizations, NGOs, SCOs, institutions, experts, authorities, local communities and other stakeholders from the U.S., Turkey,

Armenia, and other countries in the Caucasus region. The meeting is intended to provide attendees with a platform to discuss and address the issues related to education, research, and industry outreach within the general framework of sustainable tourism for regional development in the cross-border region.

Conclusions

It is imperative to highlight that this partnership is mutually beneficial for not only involved institutions but also for the involved countries. Educational, research and service aspects of tourism industry have been visited. More importantly, project partners built relationships not only among themselves but also with diverse stakeholders who were involved in meetings. Warm and friendly connections built among team members were further nurtured into true fellowship; hence the name of the project team is confirmed as ATA Fellows (American-Turkish-Armenian Fellows). Cross-cultural understanding and relationships developed among team members and diverse industry stakeholders who were involved in several activities organized by the project team in each country proved that normalization of relations between Turkey and Armenia through tourism, particularly focusing on the youth segment, is already under way. Encouraged by the outcomes of the three visioning meetings, ATA Fellows are geared towards effective implementation of the educational activities planned for the next 12 months.

It is expected that this partnership will continue beyond the duration of the project providing that a tourism community of practice and research initiatives in the region are in place through the planned project activities. The project team will also coordinate with the funding agency to highlight and promote successful private-public partnerships based on this project. Lastly, it is expected that the enhanced capacity in research among faculty will be a major instrument to mobilize other universities involved in research, education and training in the region. To that end, several information dissemination channels will be utilized including verbal, print, and news media. A website was set up during the first year of the project (<http://hhp.ufl.edu/trsm/ctrd/atafellows/>) and will be continually updated. The project website as well as the website of Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute (www.uftourism.com) in the Department of Tourism Recreation and Sport Management at UF will continually highlight developments. Through these activities and information clearinghouses, ATA Fellows seek to share with the academic and practitioner communities the philosophy that has been energizing them:

It isn't enough to talk about peace. One must believe in it. And it isn't enough to believe in it. One must work at it (Eleanor Roosevelt).

References

- Brown, F. (1998). *Tourism Reassessed: Blight or Blessing*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- D'Amore, L. (1988). Tourism-The World's Peace Industry. *Journal of Travel Research*, 27, 35-40.
- Denizci, B., & Tasci, A.D.A. (2010). Modeling the Commonly-Assumed Relationship Between Human Capital and Brand Equity in Tourism. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 19, 610-628.
- Douglas, N., Douglas, N., & Derrett, R. (2001). *Special Interest Tourism*. Brisbane: Wiley.
- Eadington, W.R., & Redman, M. (1991). Economics and Tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 18(1), 41-56.

- Fridgen, J.D. (1996). *Dimensions of Tourism*. Educational Institute of the American Hotel & Motel Association, East Lansing.
- Gartner, W.C. (1996). *Tourism Development: Principles, Processes, Policies*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Gawler Visitor Information Centre. (2011). Tourism Fact Sheets- The Social & Cultural Impacts of Tourism. Retrieved February 3, 2011, from http://www.gawler.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/5_Gawler_Impacts_Tourism.pdf.
- Korzay, M. (1994). Turkish Tourism Development. In A.V. Seaton, et al (Eds.), *Tourism-The State of the Art*, (pp. 85-99). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Pearce, D. (1995). *Tourism Today: A Geographical Analysis*. Harlow: Longman Cheshire.
- Sezer, H., & Harrison, A. (1994). Tourism in Greece and Turkey: An Economic View For Planners. In A.V. Seaton, et al (Eds.), *Tourism-The State of the Art*, (pp. 74-84). John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Stynes, D. J. (1999). Economic Impacts of Tourism. Retrieved July 31, 2010, from <https://www.msu.edu/course/prr/840/econimpact/pdf/ecimpvol1.pdf>.
- Tasci, A.D.A., & Denizci, B. (2009). Destination Branding Input-Output Analysis: A Method For Evaluating Productivity. *Tourism Analysis*, 14(1), 65-83.
- Var, T. (2011). The Role of Coastal Tourism in Turkish Tourism Development-A Historical Perspective. Retrieved February 3, 2011, from <http://web.deu.edu.tr/smbm/turgut%20var.pdf>.
- Var, T., Brayley, R., & Korzay, M. (1989a). Tourism and World Peace: Case of Turkey. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16(2), 282-286.
- Var, T., Brayley, R., & Korzay, M. (1989b). Tourism and World Peace: The Case of Argentina. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16(3), 431-434.

Acknowledgement

The authors would like to thank the Embassy of the United States in Ankara, Turkey for supporting this project through funding as well as technical and logistics assistance.

*: The information about this project was shared with the academic and practitioner communities through a presentation at the Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Marketing and Management Conference, Istanbul, Turkey, 19-24 June, 2011; and a short manuscript published in the proceedings as: "ATA Fellows: A multilateral university consortium to strengthen tourism education, research and industry outreach."

** : Asli D.A. Tasci (corresponding author, adatasci@ufl.edu), Gurhan Aktas, Artak Manukyan, Lori Pennington-Gray, Brijesh Thapa, Michael Sagas, Yasemin Arbak, Ebru Gunlu, Burcu Selin Yilmaz, Mustafa Tanyeri, Armenuhi Burnazyan, Samson Davoyan, Armen Ktoyan, Hasmik Hambarzumyan, Armin Zerunyan, Roland H. Loog, DeeAnn McKinney, Armen Shahbazyan, Muzaffer Uysal, Charles W. Lane, and Roy Graham.