

Bridging tourism and migration mobilities: Diaspora tourism as a coping strategy

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The fields of tourism and migration have been uneasy companions despite the fact that both study the two largest patterns of human movement across geographical areas. A recent emergence of the mobilities paradigm created potential for bridging the two knowledge networks and providing opportunities for crossover and mutual enrichment. Engaging with the intersection of tourism and migration mobilities, this study has a dual goal. Theoretically it explores diaspora tourism as a promising link between tourism and migration. Practically diaspora tourism is offered as a coping strategy that can be used by immigrants to alleviate stress associated with relocation to a culturally dissimilar society.

Objectives

In this dissertation diaspora tourism is explored as it pertains to the fourth wave of

Ukrainian immigrants in the United States by accomplishing three objectives.

1. The first objective was to chronicle identity formation and adjustment issues Ukrainian immigrants experience upon arrival to the United States, and how these issues affect their relationship with and desire to visit Ukraine.

2. The second objective concerned documenting immigrant imaginaries (i.e., images and ideas we hold in our consciousness) and the potential of diaspora tourism promotion through culturally grounded narratives created from accounts of immigrants' lived experiences. The processes of creating a culturally grounded narrative and its evaluation are presented.

3. Finally, the third objective was to detail the act of corporeal travel of immigrants, and investigate the possible predictors of such travel. Several predictors (e.g., context of migration, media use, self-construal,

destination image) were drawn from different bodies of literature and their effects on the likelihood of visiting the homeland were investigated.

Methodology

A two-phased mixed methods approach was used for this study. The first phase involved conducting in-depth interviews with Ukrainian immigrants of the fourth wave, and focusing on general themes of contexts of exit and entry, issues of acculturation, identity, and self-construal, and images and opinions of their homeland. The sample was comprised of members of the fourth wave of Ukrainian immigrants who arrived in the US from 1991 to as recent as a year ago and live in New York City. Multiple Ukrainian organizations were contacted (e.g., Ukrainian churches, women's leagues, business associations, and cultural clubs) in New York City to solicit help distributing recruitment materials (e.g., introductory note, flyer through e-mail or newsletters) to their members. The recruitment and interview process, which occurred over the course of a two-day trip to New York City, continued until saturation was reached and resulted in 13 usable interviews. After completing the interviews the recordings were saved as audio files. All respondents chose to speak in Ukrainian, so the interviews were translated into English and transcribed. The translation was verified by an expert fluent in both languages. Data analysis followed Marvasti's (2003) guidelines (i.e. data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing). Data reduction and display involved the researcher and her advisor individually reading the transcriptions, making notes, and highlighting important passages. They then met to compare findings and to draw conclusions, which were rooted in the displayed data. To make the analysis more manageable, only the data that related to the research questions and the conceptual framework of the project were maintained for further analysis.

The second phase was grounded in the results of the first phase and included an on-line survey containing questions about media usage, self-construal, and destination image.

The survey also contained an experimental treatment, where respondents were exposed to culture-centric promotional narratives, followed by post-treatment destination image and diaspora tourism (i.e., intention to visit) questions. Due to the difficulties of obtaining a comprehensive list of members of the population, nonprobability convenience sampling was used. During this phase 29 Ukrainian organizations, including but not limited to the Shevchenko Scientific Society of New York, Ukrainian National Women's League of America, Ukrainian-American Bar Association, Ukrainian Engineers' Society of America, New Ukrainian Wave, and Ukrainian American Veterans, were asked to distribute the survey to their members. A link to the survey was also posted on Ukrainian sites through *Facebook*® and *Vkontakte* (Ukrainian equivalent of Facebook). Several Orthodox churches frequented by Ukrainian immigrants also included information about the study in their newsletters. Due to the nature of these recruitment efforts it is impossible to estimate the number of Ukrainian immigrants who actually received the survey request. A total of 122 individuals responded to the survey, they were predominantly female, in their late 40s, well-educated, and married.

The relationships between contexts of exit and entry, media use, self-construal, destination image, and likelihood of visiting the homeland were examined with hierarchical regression. The first step in the regression model contained age as a control variable, while the second step contained the variables of context, media use, and destination image.

Results

The dissertation was written in a three article format. In the first article, the results of in-depth interviews were used to uncover the identity, context, adjustment patterns, and homeland related activity—all acculturation related factors—of the fourth wave of Ukrainian immigrants. Results showed that, unlike the third wave of Ukrainian immigrants, which was considered a victim diaspora, these Ukrainian immigrants exhibited characteristics of a labour diaspora. They

talked about the economic crisis in post-USSR Ukraine (i.e., context of exit) and the better life opportunities in the US (i.e., context of entry) as reasons for their relocation. According to acculturation theory, immigrants prefer integration (i.e., shedding their "Ukrainianness" for the sake of smoother integration in to the US and economic security, but simultaneously maintaining contact with their immediate family and friends in Ukraine). But, the results in this study demonstrate that this model may no longer be sufficient for new diasporas worldwide (van Hear, 1998) and more research needs to be conducted to understand, and theorize about, their acculturation experiences.

The second article placed in focus what Wood would call the "imaginaries" of migration and tourism experiences through the construction of a culturally-grounded narrative. A model for culturally grounded narrative development was designed by Larkey and Hecht (2010) who suggested collecting interviews with the members of the culture (formative stage) and then creating a generalized cultural narrative that would reflect a culturally appropriate scenario – one coined from the recurrent themes found in respondents' stories. A culturally grounded narrative was created based on the recurring themes of migration uncovered through interviews with fourth wave Ukrainian immigrants: immigration due to economic and political hardship in the homeland; immigration for family reasons; support from co-nationals; adjustment issues and associated stress; feelings of sadness, despair, and stress; family dynamics; and how immigrants' keep in touch with family back home and/or traveling to Ukraine helps them overcome the stress and frustration associated with adjusting to the US. Effective narrative guidelines (i.e., sequence, coherence, plot development) were used to create the generalized cultural narrative. Then, the narrative was structured as a fictional story about a Ukrainian family migrating to the US. In addition, the narrative's effectiveness over a neutral factual text had to be determined. Thus, in the later survey respondents were exposed to either

the culturally grounded narrative or a neutral factual text describing the geography of Ukraine. Subsequently they were asked to rate how credible, compelling, interesting, and informative the text they read was. They were also asked how much, after reading the text, they believed going to Ukraine was good for immigrants. The results of independent t-tests showed that respondents found the culturally grounded narrative significantly more credible and informative. Although not at a significant level, culturally grounded narratives received higher ratings on all other items as well. This finding points out the potential that culturally grounded narratives have for the promotion of diaspora tourism and delivery of information to immigrant populations and other ethnic groups.

The third article focused on the actual corporeal travel component of diaspora tourism, and explored predictors of Ukrainian immigrants' intentions to travel back home. The predictive power of the independent variables on the likelihood of visiting Ukraine was explored through hierarchical regression. Since scholars suggested acculturation processes depend on age, it was entered in the first step as a control variable. The variables of context of exit and entry, media use, self-construal, and destination image were entered as predictors in the second step. Age explained about 15% of the variance in the likelihood of visiting at a significant level. The variables entered in the second step did not contribute a significant change in variance explained. This finding may be an artefact of a small sample size (Vaske, 2008). While there were no significant relationships between the variables entered in the second step and likelihood of visiting, it is notable that most of the relationships were in the expected direction (e.g., more exposure to US media results in a greater likelihood of visiting, longer length of stay results in a reduced likelihood of visiting, etc.). Hence, given the small sample size and the fact that the hypothesized relationships were primarily in the expected direction, this model deserves further investigation.

Theoretical conclusions

Theoretically, this study provided additional inquiry into the link between migration and tourism, two subject areas that “have been uneasy companions until recently” (Coles & Timothy, 2004, p. 2). The three articles that comprise this dissertation address the three conceptual strands linking migration and tourism identified by Wood (1998), each providing contributions on its own. Diaspora tourism research holds theoretical potential, expanding our knowledge of the intersections of the two major forms of mobilities. The conceptual framework of transnationalism has never been applied to the Ukrainian diaspora before, nor have its implications been discussed for this group’s identity and acculturation. Although the results of this study pointed to the potential of the transnational character of the fourth wave of Ukrainian immigrants, much remains to be investigated. Transnationalism is a complex process that involves “the flow of people, ideas, goods, and capital across national territories in a way that undermines nationality and nationalism as discrete categories of identification, economic organization and political constitution” (Braziel & Mannur, 2003, p. 8). While the flow of people has been somewhat uncovered in this study, other components remain to be explored. For example, the power of transnational diasporic activity to undermine economic and political organization will be particularly pertinent in the case of such a young nation as Ukraine, which is currently undergoing a tumultuous process of national re-identification.

Practical application of the dissertation

This project discusses practical benefits such as the therapeutic effects of sharing one’s immigration experience and providing rich material for practitioners willing to undertake diaspora tourism promotion. This latter benefit is of timely importance as Coles and Timothy (2004, p. 21) noted that “state tourism organizations have [already] started to engage with ‘their’ diasporas overseas in order to tap into markets which they perceive to be culturally close.” Migration is difficult for immigrants and can lead to psychosomatic illness (Aroian, 1992; Baptiste et al., 1997;

Falicov, 2007). In response, researchers and practitioners have called for the identification and creation of coping strategies, which in the context of tourism may include diaspora tourism. Culturally grounded narratives, with their ability to appeal to emotions and “capture the richness of cultural elements that most effectively reaches minds and hearts for [...] behaviour change” (Larkey & Hecht, 2010, p. 115), are a promising method of diaspora tourism promotion. However, appealing to the emotions of a diasporic community through a culturally grounded narrative can be challenging, as they may be resistant to advertising and they likely have a strong emotional connection to the destination. This study’s investigation of creation and use of culturally grounded narratives in diaspora tourism promotion is therefore most timely.

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