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Shin, Youngsun

Honam University

15 January 2008

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/25371/>

MPRA Paper No. 25371, posted 24 Sep 2010 15:06 UTC

PEACE FESTIVAL PROJECT AS CULTURE COMMODIFIED IN THE DMZ AREA, KOREA

Youngsun Shin
Honam University

Tourism, because of its peculiar nature, depends much on security and safety at the destination. Likewise, Korea needs to assure concrete security and safety to develop tourism in particular. In new millennium, however, Korea has a major issue to be solved. That is to decrease the political tension between South and North so as to accelerate the reunification of the peninsula. In this context, the peace festival tourism project should be placed in the first priority since this will ease the strained political relations between South and North. This paper attempts to review the actual condition of the peace festival tourism project and to examine economic, socio-cultural and political impacts. To analyze the effects of the study, secondary data and information provided by the research & research agency, newspaper articles and the Bank of Korea were utilized.

Keywords: peace festival project, tourism, borderland, South and North Korea, the DMZ area

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, events and festivals of all kinds have been growing in number and diversity (Getz, 1997). In fact, many destinations now develop such events because of these economic benefits, as well as because of the fact that these events can act as image builders for the destination. On April 13-15, 2000 South and North Korean leaders met in Pyongyang for a meeting of peace ending nearly fifty of hostilities. According to this meeting, South and North Korea are believed to be among the economies most directly affected by the world peace process. This had a large effect on both countries in many aspects, socially, politically and economically. The objective of the study is to fulfil the main aim by identifying and detailing the effects of examples of peace festival in order to the future Korean reunification. This paper examines special events in general, and peace festival in particular. In order to



achieve these aims, one specific area- the DMZ area- was chosen to exemplify anticipated benefits and other objectives associated with such event. Likewise, this paper looks into range of festivals and special events, their various characteristics and finally assesses them in terms of planning and managing perspectives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Borderland and tourism

According to recent literature, and as indicated previously, tourism is a highly significant and growing industry in many border areas in much of the world. For example, Bulter (1996, pp. 217) addresses the Berlin Wall, where there were major tourists attractions before the demise of communism. A frontier region, especially where this may border on other states or disputed areas may, therefore, represent an attraction precisely because it is something that most people do not experience in their normal lives. Several scholars (Eriksson, 1979; Leimgruber, 1989; Arreola & Curtis, 1993; Timothy, 1999) suggest that the level of attractiveness of border areas for tourists depends on a number of factors, including the natural, social and cultural environment near the border and the degree of freedom or difficulty in crossing it. However, in addition to the role of borders as filters or barriers to tourism, one of the most obvious relationships between the two is that of political boundaries as tourist attractions (Arreola, 1999). It is this interface of differences which many travellers find fascinating about political boundaries.

In this context, the research is now focusing on cross-frontier cooperation in tourism planning and development (Leimgruber, 1998; Boyd, 1999; Timothy, 1998b, 2000). Some scholars studying borderlands, emphasize that the focus on cooperation is seen as promoting political harmony (Minghi, 1991; 1994; Newman, 1998; Timothy, 1998b; Sonmez and Apostopoulos, 2000). As Kliot (1996, p. 5) notes the model of development of cross-border cooperation from a hostile, closed border with no cooperation to a border with substantial cooperation. Timothy (2001, p. 172) thus notes "Cross-frontier cooperation is particularly consequential in assuring that the principles of sustainability (e.g. equity, harmony, holistic development, and ecological and cultural integrity) are supported".

Tourism appears to be an increasingly important industry in many border areas, and it deserves more attention by academics and

practitioners alike if it is to be effectively planned and promoted. Boundary monuments, parks, natural wonders, relict boundaries, cross-border shopping, gambling, welcome centres and international enclaves are just some of the attractions which are currently contributing to the development of tourism in many border areas throughout the world (Maier and Weberm 1979; Curtis and Arreola, 1989; Timothy, 1995a; 1995b; 1996; 1998a; 1998b, 1998c, 2001). In particular, transfrontier festivals, or border festivals, provide a special category of national events. These are protected areas located along the boundaries of countries and are increasingly recognized as "Peace Festival." Peace festival, on each side of a frontier, offer the benefits of larger, contiguous protected areas, increased cooperation between nations, and improved international understanding. The peace process enables the creation of cross-sector and cross-border linkages, of which South and North Korea is the key location.

Tourism cooperation of South and North Korea

In North Korea, central government bodies represent the tourism industry. In South Korea, national tourism development plans have been drawn up in which government decides which sectors of the industry will be developed, the appropriate rate of growth, and the provision of capital required for expansion.

In this respect, On April 13-15, 2000 South Korean and North Korean leaders met in Pyongyang for a meeting of peace ending over fifty of hostilities. According to this meeting, South Korea and North Korea are believed to be among the economies most directly affected by the world peace process. This had a large effect on both countries in many aspects, socially, politically and economically. Under this peace meeting, tourism has been identified as one sector where discussion is most likely to occur. One of examples is the development of water-based activity holidays and cruising that promote the use of the Mt. Geumgang cooperation between the two Koreas. Following in the footsteps of Mt. Geumgang, a historic city in Kaesong, North Korea was expected to open its doors to South Korean travelers. In August 2000, North Korea and a Hyundai Group subsidiary agreed to build a free trade economic zone in the city adjacent to the border (Koreaherald Daily, 2001). With increased interaction between the peoples of South Korea and North Korea, with the current political settlement remaining in place, the negative image people hold of the province may be slowly changed, thus opening up North Korea as a viable tourism destination on the periphery of Asia and Europe.

Moreover, the reconnection of roads and train lines severed during the Korean War was one of the tangible inter-Korean rapprochement projects agreed upon following the historic summit between former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il in June 2000. In March of 2007, the two Koreas agreed to put humanitarian and economic inter-Korean projects back on track just days after North Korea promised to take the first steps toward its nuclear dismantlement in return for energy aid and other concessions from the other five members of the six-party talks. In May of 2007, a South Korean train crosses the heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and heads for Gaeseong, North Korea, after leaving Dorasan Station near Munsan, Gyeonggi Province. A North Korean train traveled from the North's Geumgangs Station on the east to Jejin Station in the South. The trains were crossing the DMZ for the first time in 56 years. Therefore, the cross border trains a cue to further inter-Korean relations and even the opening of the inter-Korean railways will lead to the building of peace and economic unity on the Korean Peninsula.

Festival and event tourism in South Korea

Festivals are now a worldwide tourism phenomenon (Chacko and Schaffer, 1993; Getz, 1991; Grant and Paliwoda 1998). The staging of festivals or major events is very important from the perspective of destination marketing (Mules & Faulkner, 1996). Community festivals and special events have grown rapidly in number throughout the world during the past decade. Local festivals are increasingly being used as instruments for promoting tourism and boosting the regional economy (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003). Getz (1993) and Formica and Uysal (1998) showed that the economic gains from festivals can be substantial because festivals provide interesting activities and spending venues for both local people and tourists. Moreover, because of their frequent interdependence with the physical environment, festivals are a travel attraction with unique features (Gursoy, Kim & Uysal, 2004). Festivals, in essence, are an indispensable feature of cultural tourism (Formica & Uysal, 1998; Rusher, 2003). Therefore, festivals have frequently been labeled as cultural events (Frisby & Getz, 1989). They are occasions that (re)interpret various symbolic elements of the social existence of a group or community, with the effect of re-creating social relations and the symbolic foundations underpinning everyday life (Turner, 1982). Festival tourism usually refers to events and gatherings that are staged outside the normal program of activities (Anwar & Sohail, 2003).

Festivals and special events can be found in all kind of societies in Korea. Traditionally, most of the celebrations started as rituals of traditions, beliefs and religions. There are special ceremonies to celebrate the end of harvesting season, and specific rituals to appease the spirits of sea, land and forest. There are strong evidences on the increasing popularity and diversity of festivals and special events in South Korea over the years. Every year there are major and minor events being planned and staged for public community and tourists alike. The South Korean government is increasingly organizing festivals and special events as an important part of its tourism destination planning and development. Thus, they have just become a significant component in the Korean tourism industry. As implied by Getz (1991), general reasons for the increasing growth of this festival and special event phenomenon is because of economic prosperity, a more leisure-oriented lifestyle, and ever-improving global communication. However, event as a special field of tourism in Korea is not yet developed like other countries such as other European Countries. Even through the festivals and special events are reportedly increasing, there are still much to be done in order to organize the industry better. Korea should develop a specific policy or strategy that directly caters the event tourism.

In supporting the event tourism, the Korean government and organizers have spent great amount of money in building and preparing expensive modern event facilities and infrastructure. In addition, there have been more initiatives from the Korean government to bid for major international events. Additionally, keen attitudes toward event tourism are also seemed to be growing and developing among the Koreans. More people have realized the various benefits of event tourism, especially the economics advantageous. Consequently, more local private companies have started to involve in production and sponsoring of festivals and special events in Korea. Meanwhile, for the general community, participation has increased through the concept of community involvement and voluntarism.

The Korean tourism authorities (both the government and private sectors) are now starting to emphasized more on festivals and special events as additional products to promote tourist into Korea. More states are now interested to organize themed year together with a prepared list of events. Thus, the events are considered as “value-added products” to the Korean’s tourism industry. Festivals and special events help to add diversity to the Korea’s current tourism products. They can serve as unique activities for the tourists during their tour in Korea, and also as an excellence tool attracting visitors to visit Korea. Hence, the events are

included in most of the tourism travel packages in Korea. Moreover, event tourism can also benefit the Korean people and culture.

In short, there is a clear potential for the event tourism to flourish in Korea. This may due to the wide variety and unique cultures and heritages of the various ethnic groups exist in Korea. These “special” events can potentially attract foreign visitors. Thus, this can truly be an exceptional competitive advantage for Korea over other countries. This may be one of the many reason why culture-based and sports events are viewed by the experts as promising types of events in the future. Festivals and special events can contribute to Korea’s attractiveness as a tourist destination. The attractiveness of the festivals and special events can successfully pulled great numbers of visitors to Korea, and provided physical settings for “tourist experiences” (Getz, 1991). Hence, event tourism can provide an excellence booster in securing higher prominence in the global tourism marketplace. Essentially through the festivals and special events, the Korean have the opportunity to show off their unique and interesting heritage, history and places to the world’s participants, spectators and visitors. Moreover, the events can help Korea to increase and boost its image and status in the eyes of the world. Thus, this will lead to increase of community’s spirit among the Koreans.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH AREA – THE DMZ AREA

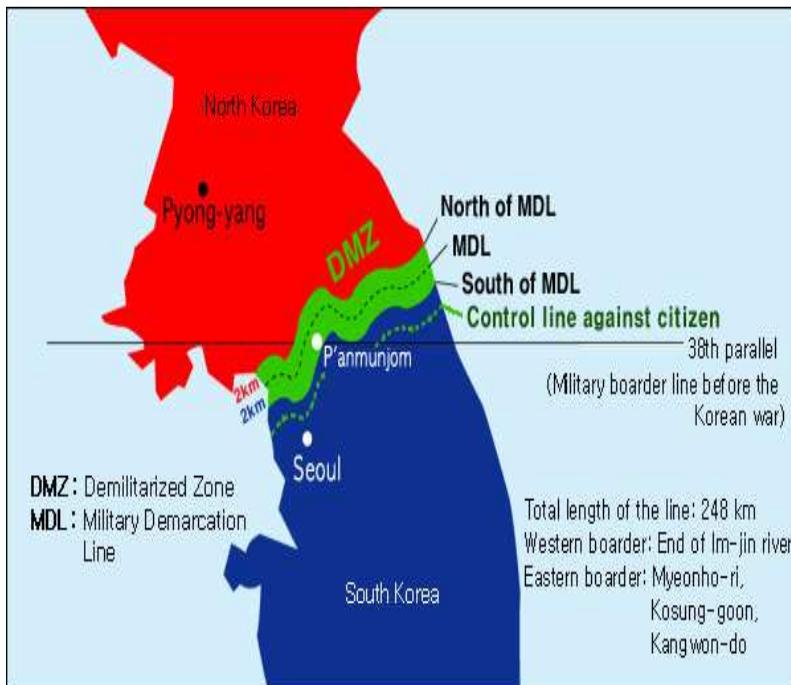
Geography and location

The Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) was created by the armistice at the end of the Korean War in order to maintain a safe and protected distance between North and South Korea. The DMZ, in the words of one writer, is one of the most “Phenomenal military edifices left on this planet after the end of the Cold War (Megastories, 2001). The Demilitarized Zone that divided North and South Korea is one of the last remaining ‘hot spots’ of the Cold War. More than a million heavily armed soldiers, thus minefields, artillery and barbed wire surround the zone. Inside, the DMZ has become a treasure of flourishing wildlife where humans are absent (Kotowitz, 2000).

The DMZ extends roughly 155 miles in length along the 38th parallel, and is two and a half miles wide, or six miles wide, if one includes each country’s Buffer zones, which are two to three mile strips on either side of the DMZ, used to facilitate border protection (Figure 1). The terrain is varied and spans Korea’s multiple ecosystems, which range from

mountains to jungles to water habitats. This strip of land has been virtually untouched by human hands since the signing of the armistice in 1953 (Neufeld, 1998). The 150-mile-long, 2.5-mile-wide DMZ is bisected by the military Demarcation Line (MDL). No fortifications are allowed in the DMZ. The MDL is marked by 1,292 rusting yellow-and-black Markers spaced every 110 to 220 yards. Tae Song Dong (also known as Freedom Village) is occupied by 240 South Koreans. They pay no taxes and are exempt from military service, but they have an 11 p.m. curfew. Only those living in the village before the Korean War or their descendants are eligible for residency. Villagers grow rice, ginseng and red peppers. The North Korea village is Gi Jong Dong, dubbed “Propaganda Village” by the South, because loudspeakers blast Communist slogans. There are 13 houses, but inhabitants are rarely seen. Many buildings have no windows (Kotowitz, 2000).

Figure 1. The DMZ area



Peace festival project in the DMZ – SWOT analysis

Strength

- The region is located within a few hours flight from much of Central and East Asia- Japan, China, Taiwan, Thailand, as well as countries comprising the former Soviet Union.
- The principal natural asset of the DMZ areas.
- Physical proximity between the countries can reduce cultural distances and trading costs.
- DMZ development may help advance the cause of sustainable development in terms of infrastructure, human resources, conservation, and promotion.

Weakness

- Lack of financial sourcing initiatives especially in North Korea
- Disparity in overall tourism development in the DMZ.
- Each area has limited space, for which tourism competes with other industrial uses.
- Insufficient infrastructure for access in North Korea.
- North Korea perceived as a unsafe country.
- Lack of incentives for hotel projects in North Korea.
- Shortage of accurate data on tourism in North Korea, especially with regard to revenues, expenditures and volume which make planning, and conducting a feasibility study difficult.
- Difficult climatic conditions in both areas during the winter.
- Intensive military activity in the North Korea area.
- Both South and North Korea DMZ areas are peripheral regions. The remoteness from the centre hinder future industrial development
- Inadequacy of basic infrastructure in North Korea.

Opportunities

- Increased peripheral hinterland for tourism (both in North and South Korea).
- Transportation systems connections between North Korea, South Korea, China and USSR. At the historic inter-Korean summit meeting in June 2000, the two leaders agreed to the re-connection of the Gyeongui railway. This is significant as it re-connects the entire Korean peninsula by rail and will allow Korea to serve as a transportation hub to link up with the trans-Siberian railway.
- DMZ areas as a prime for tourism destination in the region.
- Sharing international airport in the future.

Threats

- Regional instability.
- Over-development and land use conflict in South Korea region.
- Industrial pollution at the South Korean border
- Irreversible damage to the environment due to tourism development, for example, railway and road, and increased tourist activity in the region.
- Severe shortage of basic infrastructure – water, sewage treatment, roads.

CONCLUSIONS

This overview has highlighted peace festival project for regional cooperation between South and North Korea under peaceful conditions in the subregion of the DMZ. The potential for development of tourism in DMZ areas is great. In addition, the increasing openness of North Korea is important window of opportunity. Through this common purpose – restoring environmental health to the Peninsula and transforming the bitter experience represented by the DMZ into a shared place of pride and value to the entire world – the two Koreas can rebuild common traditions and consider a common future.

In this paper, the process of environmental protection and biodiversity conservation through a peace festival project in the DMZ has also been discussed. Globally, festivals and special events are now treated as a part of tourism products. More and more events are initiated and established by countries as an added value to their tourism industry. Thus, events are now increasingly perceived as an industry of its own. Similar to other countries, Korea is also starting to concentrate more on producing festivals and special events in order to assist its tourism development. The government and private sectors seem to take various initiatives related to events. However, in order to achieve maximum potential of the event tourism, various aspects of the industry in Korea need first to be studied and understood. In this paper, a basic but essential analysis of the supply side of the Korean events has been produced to assist the initial study of growth and trends of event tourism in Korea. Basically, festivals and special events in Korea are going through a considerable growth in numbers, size and attendance, diversity, and professionalism. It is evidence now that there is an apparent growth in the event tourism in Korea. The Korean government is aiming to offer the festivals and special events as a unique and genuine attraction or product, to expand its tourism

development.

Consequently, the economic and political relations will certainly contribute to narrowing the geographical and ideological differences, and the increasing level of tourism development and cooperation between South and North Korea will accelerate the establishment of peace and prosperity in the Korean peninsula. There are several projects promoted in the border region including the Mt. Geumgang tourism project. Other projects such as the Imjin River project, Gyeongui and Donghae railroad and road connection project and Gaesung industrial complex development work are presently being considered. The DMZ area is a symbolic space, which is part of the border region between two Koreas. This area should represent peace, harmony and prosperity as well as inter-Korea cooperation and peace. In other words, the DMZ tourism development is required to activate cooperation, and confidence-building between South and North Korea, to lay down the foundation for reunification, and promote the Northeast Asian economic cooperation.

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SUBMITTED: JANUARY 2008

REVISION SUBMITTED: MARCH 2008

ACCEPTED: APRIL 2008

REFEREED ANONYMOUSLY

Youngsun Shin (yshin@honam.ac.kr) is an Assistant Professor at Honam University, Department of Tourism Management, 59-1, Seobong-Dong, Gwangsan-Gu, Gwangju, 506-714, South Korea.