

THE SPIRIT OF PLACE BETWEEN THE INTANGIBLE AND THE TANGIBLE

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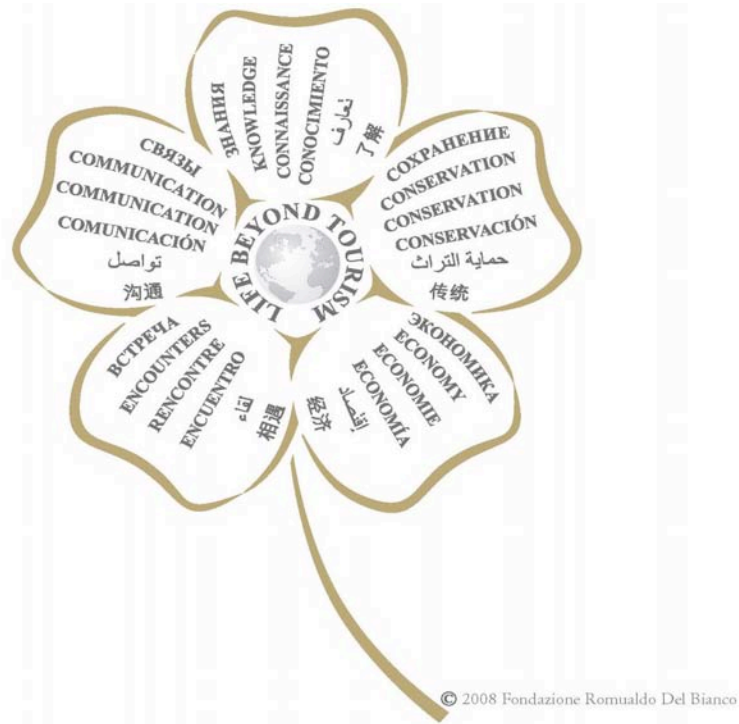
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Abstract. “Life Beyond Tourism” is a project for a new style of tourism. Currently being tested in Florence, it can be experienced, measured, criticized and improved on. It's a flower whose petals are the “encounters”, “communication”, “knowledge”, “conservation” and “economy” (Figure 1). It's a new vision of tourism, not consumer-driven and not standardized but strategically designed:

- to safeguard “spirit of place”;
- to communicate “spirit of place”;
- to encourage visitors of all cultural levels to truly familiarize with their destination;
- to promote acquaintance and friendship among tourists from different countries;
- to foster a sense of respect in a non-standardized context.

In “Life Beyond Tourism”:

- people working in the tourist business give their work added value by not only providing a service but also by being aware that they are working to promote peace;
- tourists become potential heralds of peace;
- sites reaffirm their identity as “laboratories” for familiarization with, and for the enhancement and communication of “spirit of place”.



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Figure 1. The flower of “Life Beyond Tourism”

The soul of a place

The soul - the “spirit” - of a place is subject to its own kind of evolution as time goes by, but in recent decades the exceedingly rapid development of travel has impressed such speed on this otherwise natural process that the changes taking place cannot easily be assimilated by local culture; thus that culture is increasingly subject to an internal malaise which sometimes turns into outright rejection of change.

The fall of the Berlin Wall led many countries to aspire to freedom and to self-determination; there was an increased need to respect cultural diversity; and intercultural dialogue, along

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with the need to boost awareness of the multiplicity of cultural expressions and traditions, began to take on crucial importance. If diversity is to be respected, it has to be known. And to be known, it has to be properly communicated. To ensure genuine intercultural respect, globalization must mean awareness of, and the proper communication of, even the simplest daily habits and the most basic beliefs (or non-beliefs) that make up a people's true culture.

Mass tourism

Mass tourism is making a major contribution to the destruction of all of this, because industrializing the services offered to tourists makes travel simpler to organize, with standard services being offered internationally and having an immediate appeal for most tourists. While all of this might be understandable from the point of view of the tourist industry that provides the services, it is unacceptable on account of the way in which it erodes spirit of place, and because it prevents visitors from acquiring a proper perception of their destination's true roots. Selling Coca Cola at the foot of the pyramids is not offering the tourist a service, it is feeding him or her disinformation. The way Michelangelo's David is depicted on souvenir aprons is another mark of the degradation and deterioration of the creativity inherent in the noblest form of trade.

The way ice-cream is displayed in ice-cream parlors on the streets most heavily frequented by tourists is designed solely to lure the customer and to sell the product; this inevitably means that it is displayed at too high a temperature, which flies in the face of basic health and hygiene standards, and of common sense as well. The concept of "serving the customer" is thus turned completely on its head; and another good opportunity for acquainting visitors with good, honest local drinks and ice-cream without resorting to needless, bedazzling "special effects", is wasted!

Anonymous high street standardization is taking over all around the world, with the shop windows displaying the same designer brands in the most important streets in virtually every city nowadays. This once again contributes to the erosion of local character and it ensures that all these streets around the world end up being difficult to tell apart. But that is not all. One

has but to think of the fridge in any hotel room around the world. They all contain the same international products and make it well nigh impossible for a tourist to tell what part of the world he is in! All of this is pure disinformation! All of this amounts to millions of wasted opportunities for communicating “spirit of place”!

Another minor example: a mere eight years after the Berlin Wall fell, a hotel in Prague's St. Wenceslaus Square was already urging its customers to visit its “Sushi bar”! Far from being a way of helping the visitor to get acquainted with the city's unique culture, it was a purely commercial operation on the part of the hotel management, which was jumping on the bandwagon almost as though it were trying to make up for lost time! Now, while that may be understandable, it is a eroding “woodworm” that in this instance certainly wasn't doing the promotion of Czech culture any favors. People so often fail to realize that they're providing a shortsighted (dis)service, because visitors with only a few days' holiday don't want to stupidly invest their precious time and money in discovering a “spirit of place” that has nothing whatsoever to do with the place they're in!

So, we were saying that the kinds of services being offered to tourists have gradually become more and more standardized as a result of procedural simplification. In other words, without realizing it, those working in the tourist industry are undermining the image of the very place they're trying to promote, by offering standardized products to make sure they don't stray from the consolidated habits their international clientèle is deemed to have acquired. What on earth is the point of travelling to Japan to “enjoy” an English or a Continental breakfast, rather than sleeping on a futon in a traditional hotel and enjoying a typical Japanese breakfast when you wake up?

What sense is there in demanding eggs and bacon for breakfast in an Islamic country? Given the short length of their stay, tourists would like to be allowed to familiarize as much as possible with their destination; in other words, they would like to learn that there is a world out there asking to be known, and that it can't be fully appreciated in the small time available. So, a few less certainties and a great deal more awareness, please!

Thus, what tourists need more than anything else is to be helped to tune in to the right wavelength so that they can become aware that it is necessary to respect others in order to

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get to know them, and that you can't do that by being sold Coca Cola at the foot of the pyramids or sushi in a Prague hotel.

Managing tourism to avoid being managed by it

Tourism is, a positive phenomenon per se, yet it is increasingly feared and disputed on account of its devastating impact on destinations with a strong tourist “calling”; often it is not so much managed as grudgingly put up with. Local governments have frequently underestimated its development potential, failing to make allowances for its massive presence and attendant impact when devising their urban development plans. It is easy to fault local governments, but that's not my intention here. I am merely pointing out a fact. We in Florence are very familiar with what has happened to Venice: it has become an open-air museum. Yet despite the tangible experience of its close neighbour, Florence too has become “Venetian”; in other words, it has fallen into the very same trap. The historic center of Florence is slowly emptying of local life, and the locals' place is being taken by tourists. All of this means that the center offers fewer and fewer facilities for residents and more and more services exclusively for tourists, which naturally deters an increasingly large number of Florentines from wanting to live there. Florence has gotten to the stage where there is such an inflation of tourist structures that the hotel industry is often forced to resort to the kind of competition one might term “cannibalism”!

A postwar city planning document reckoned that Florence would have a population of 700,000 by the end of the 20th century; well today it has a population of just over 350,000. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that the city's urban planning document for 1994 mentions tourism on just one page - - page 291 - under the heading “Resources”; but tourism is the resource in Florence. Why is this? Well, it's because people think tourism can look after itself. But that's not true: the result is that all of the downtown shops and businesses are tourist-oriented in terms of the goods they sell and the services and facilities they offer, in terms of their design, their colours, and their opening hours; that's a surefire way of killing off the memory and spirit of a place. The city's façade is still there, but its life and its authenticity have gone. A historic center without

residents isn't a city any more, it's an international fairground where tourists move about in groups. And they're often "quick-kill" tourists who get there by taxi from their cruise ships in the nearby port of Livorno, reaching the city at 11 a.m, and by 4.30 p.m. they've gone! But they'll be perfectly entitled to say "I went to Florence"! The important thing is being able to say you've been to somewhere famous, and that is another surefire way of killing off spirit of place.

"Being there, done that"

If all of this is true, then we need to start with precisely those words - "been there, done that place" - and turn them into: "I got to know...", "I realized...", or "I've woken up to the fact that there is so much to understand in this world and that I'm unlikely to be able to understand it in such a short time". So, once again, a few less certainties, and a lot more awareness, please! Beyond the current "mask" of tourism, so desired yet so dreaded, there is a neglected world, a world of boundless potential. Just as people relatively recently failed to perceive how far tourism could change the life of a city and, in many instances, turn it completely inside out, today it seems people are failing to grasp tourism's latent yet enormous potential.

It is precisely this crucial aspect that the Fondazione Romualdo Del Bianco mulled over at some length, on the basis of the experience that it has built up with young people from the various universities it works with. Its aim was to highlight the fact that beyond tourism as we know it today, there is a precious world of opportunity which we have called "Life Beyond Tourism", using the emblem of a flower to put the idea across. The petals on this flower are "encounters", "communication", "knowledge", "conservation" and "economy". This flower, these petals, indeed "Life Beyond Tourism" itself, enshrine the knowledge that it is possible to foster a new style of tourism strongly aware of its own potential, not as a force for standardization in the world but as a force for the enhancement of difference. This, to allow the visitor to become closely acquainted with his or her destination in terms both of its tangible and of its intangible heritage, thus fostering knowledge and, consequently, respect. This awareness focuses on the heritage available to the tourist industry, an asset so huge and so important that it is at least equal to, if not greater than, crude oil

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itself. This is the heritage available to tourists worldwide, for their time which is even more precious than money these days -- a full fledged act of confidence in the tourist industry on tourists' part. The tourist industry has the advantage of enjoying the undivided attention of its customers, who are simply there, asking for nothing better than to be allowed to listen; and the leisure time to listen and to understand is more valuable than crude oil itself -- a divisive asset if ever there was one!

Life Beyond Tourism: a radical reversal of perspective

“Life Beyond Tourism” is based on the realization that the tourist industry, which can only operate in peace time, has failed to take on board the importance of its potential role in the world today -- a role of crucial importance for understanding and preserving “spirit of place”, but also for promoting “intercultural dialogue” and an awareness of “cultural diversity and traditions”. So we're talking here about a radical reversal of perspective: the very people who contribute today to the standardization of the world, in other words who represent a threat to the preservation of “spirit of place”, can rapidly begin to make an active contribution to its preservation and to spreading awareness of it throughout the world via “Life Beyond Tourism”; they can also become leading players in the task of promoting intercultural dialogue to foster an awareness of cultural diversity and traditions, simply by being pointed in the right direction; and the right direction will be the new trend in tourism. It doesn't sound like much as revolutions go, but its impact can be enormous.

On 15 March this year, “Life Beyond Tourism” was presented in the Salone dei Duecento council chamber in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence's city hall (<http://www.lifebeyondtourism.org/>) and simultaneously implemented at the Vivahotel Pitti Palace al Ponte Vecchio close by. The updated results of this initial experiment will be presented in Quebec in September 2008. “Life Beyond Tourism” has attracted the sponsorship of ICCROM, of the Tuscan Regional Authority and of the Florence Provincial Authority, and it was presented by the Florence Municipal Authority's councillor for international relations, by the director of the Uffizi Gallery, and by the director of Center for Romantic

Studies and the “Vieusseux-Asia Project” with the Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario G.P. Vieusseux, as well as by the chairman of the ICOMOS International Committee for the Theory and Philosophy of Conservation and Restoration.

The Life Beyond Tourism initiative

“Life Beyond Tourism” is designed to contribute to the dissemination of such universal values as respect and harmony among peoples. To achieve this, Life Beyond Tourism aims to turn travelling from a purely leisure-driven experience into a precious moment of encounter between people from different cultural backgrounds. Thus it seeks to foster the overcoming of those barriers that hamper our acceptance and acquaintance of those different from us.

There is way of travelling that goes beyond snapshots, souvenirs and shopping. Building an interactive network between travellers and their destination provides an opportunity for promoting intercultural awareness that we cannot afford not to seize. In the spirit of Life Beyond Tourism, it is absolutely crucial that the relationship between a traveller and his destination not become a mere offering of standardized services; it must get the traveller involved with his destination, with its past, its present and its future. The practical implementation of the “Life Beyond Tourism” theory entails a broad series of suggestions offered, of attention lavished, and of tools designed to foster that involvement.

The “Life Beyond Tourism” Manifesto

- Tourism is a crucial source of prosperity;
- Tourism, in its various forms goes way beyond the mere satisfying of personal needs;
- Tourism offers an opportunity to familiarize with spirit of place, cultural diversity and traditions;
- People working in the tourist industry foster familiarization with spirit of place and facilitate intercultural dialogue;
- The tourist is a potential harbinger of intercultural dialogue and awareness;
- The tourist’s destination, whether natural or built, is a “laboratory” of knowledge and awareness for all visitors;

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- In our multicultural society, land and environment planning and management must take into account the need to foster intercultural dialogue and awareness.

On 16 March 2008, a *Declaration of Intent* (Figures 2-3) was signed (<http://www.lifebeyondtourism.com/uk/index.php>), approving the “Life Beyond Tourism” project, the promotion of that project with the loftiest international institutions such as the WTO, UNTO, UNESCO, and the start of an experiment in Europe to be conducted over a five-year period from 2008 to 2013. To follow up on this *Declaration of Intent* the Fondazione Romualdo Del Bianco has sponsored the establishment of an international association for the enhancement of tourism for the purposes of intercultural dialogue, and for promoting an awareness of cultural diversity and traditions. In pursuing its aim, the association will subscribe to the “Life Beyond Tourism” philosophy.

Practice, product, procedures and methods, which have already been laid down, will accompany the project's development in its ongoing drive to become known and appreciated around the world. We in Florence are ready to meet that challenge.

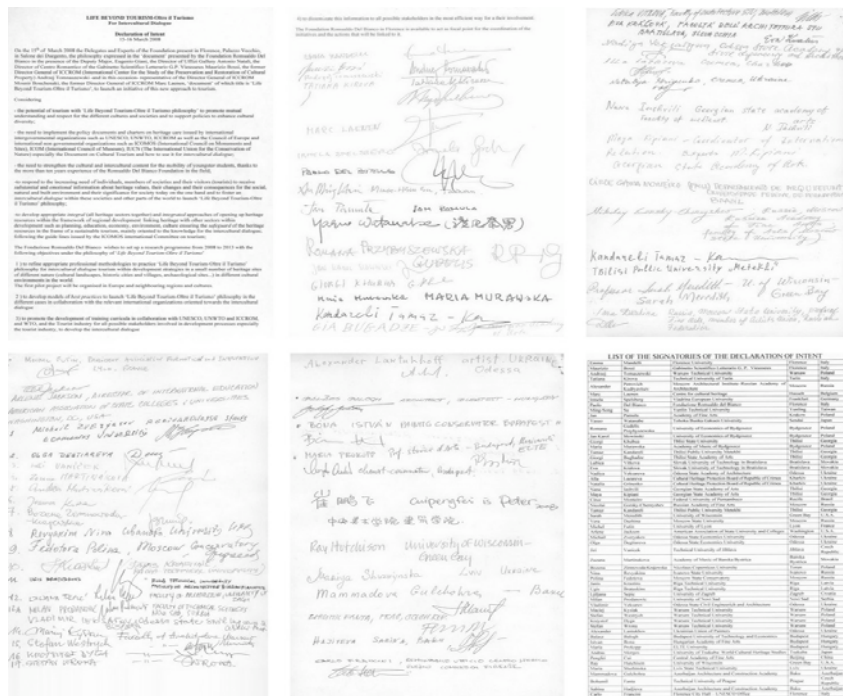


Figure 2. The Declaration of Intent, the signatures and institutions; the declaration is downloadable from www.lifebeyondtourism.com.

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LIST OF THE SIGNATORIES OF THE DECLARATION OF INTENT				
Emma	Mandelli	Florence University	Florence	Italy
Maurizio	Bossi	Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario G. P. Vieusseux	Florence	Italy
Andrzej	Tomaszewski	Warsaw Technical University	Warsaw	Poland
Tatiana	Kirova	Technical University of Turin	Turin	Italy
Alexander	Petrovich Kudryavtsev	Moscow Architectural Institute–Russian Academy of Architecture	Moscow	Russia
Marc	Laenen	Centre for cultural heritage	Hasselt	Belgium
Irmela	Spelsberg	Viadrina European University	Frankfurt	Germany
Paolo	Del Bianco	Fondazione Romualdo del Bianco	Florence	Italy
Ming-Song	Su	Yunlin Technical University	Yunling	Taiwan
Jan	Pamula	Academy of Fine Arts	Krakow	Poland
Yasuo	Watanabe	Tohoku Bunka Gakuen University	Sendai	Japan
Romana	Gudelis Przybyszewska	University of Economics of Bydgoszcz	Bydgoszcz	Poland
Jan Karol	Slowinski	University of Economics of Bydgoszcz	Bydgoszcz	Poland
Giorgi	Khubua	Tbilisi State University	Tbilisi	Georgia
Maria	Murawska	Academy of Music of Bydgoszcz	Bydgoszcz	Poland
Tamaz	Kandareli	Tbilisi Public University Metekhi	Tbilisi	Georgia
Giorgi	Bughadze	Tbilisi State Academy of Arts	Tbilisi	Georgia
Lubica	Vitkova	Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava	Bratislava	Slovakia
Eva	Kralova	Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava	Bratislava	Slovakia
Nadiya	Yeksareva	Odessa State Academy of Architecture	Odessa	Ukraine
Alla	Lazareva	Cultural Heritage Protection Board of Republic of Crimea	Kharkiv	Ukraine
Natalia	Grinenko	Cultural Heritage Protection Board of Republic of Crimea	Kharkiv	Ukraine
Nana	Iashvili	Georgian State Academy of Arts	Tbilisi	Georgia
Maya	Kipiani	Georgian State Academy of Arts	Tbilisi	Georgia
Circe	Monteiro	Federal University of Pernambuco	Recife	Brasil
Nicolai	Gorsky-Chernyshev	Russian Academy of Fine Arts	Moscow	Russia
Tamaz	Kandareli	Tbilisi Public University Metekhi	Tbilisi	Georgia
Sarah	Meredith	University of Wisconsin	Green Bay	U.S.A.
Vera	Dazhina	Moscow State University	Moscow	Russia
Michel	Futin	University of Lyon	Lyon	France
Arlene	Jackson	American Association of State University and Colleges	Washington	U.S.A.
Michail	Zveryakov	Odessa State Economics University	Odessa	Ukraine
Olga	Degtiareva	Odessa State Economics University	Odessa	Ukraine
Jiri	Vanicek	Technical University of Jihlava	Jihlava	Czech Republic
Zuzana	Martinakova	Academy of Music of Banska Bystrica	Banska Bystrica	Slovakia
Bozena	Zimnovoda-Krajewska	Nicolaus Copernicus University	Torun	Poland
Nina	Revyakina	Ivanovo State University	Ivanovo	Russia
Polina	Fedotova	Moscow State Conservatory	Moscow	Russia
Janis	Krastins	Riga Technical University	Riga	Latvia
Ugis	Bratuskins	Riga Technical University	Riga	Latvia
Ljiljana	Sepic	University of Zagreb	Zagreb	Croatia
Milan	Prodanovic	University of Novi Sad	Novi Sad	Serbia
Vladimir	Yeksarev	Odessa State Civil Engineerich and Architecture	Odessa	Ukraine
Maciej	Kysiak	Warsaw Technical University	Warsaw	Poland
Stefan	Westrych	Warsaw Technical University	Warsaw	Poland
Krzystof	Dyga	Warsaw Technical University	Warsaw	Poland
Stefan	Wrona	Warsaw Technical University	Warsaw	Poland
Alexander	Lantukhov	Ukrainian Union of Painters	Odessa	Ukraine
Balasz	Balogh	Budapest University of Technology and Economics	Budapest	Hungary
Istvan	Bona	Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts	Budapest	Hungary
Maria	Prokopp	ELTE University	Budapest	Hungary
Andras	Morgos	University of Tsukuba/ World Cultural Heritage Studies	Tsukuba	Japan
Pengfei	Cui	Central Academy of Fine Arts	Beijing	China
Ray	Hutchison	University of Wisconsin	Green Bay	U.S.A.
Maria	Sluzhinska	Lviv State Technical University	Lviv	Ukraine
Mammadova	Gulchokra	Azerbaijan Architecture and Construction Academy	Baku	Azerbaijan
Bohumil	Fanta	Technical University of Prague	Prague	Czech Republic
Sabina	Hadjieva	Azerbaijan Architecture and Construction Academy	Baku	Azerbaijan
Carlo	Francini	Florence City Hall – UNESCO Office	Florence	Italy

Figure 3. The Declaration of Intent, the signatures and institutions (detail of the list of the signatories).