In his founding work, Benedict Anderson (1983) defines the nation as an “imagined community” and presents nationalism as a vehicle for its creation. He identifies several institutions and instruments that contribute to the development of nationalism such as maps, censuses, and museums. In the light of this concept, in which museums can be seen as vehicles of nationalism, an increasing number of scholars have demonstrated how tourism can also constitute an important base for the fabric of a nation and serve as a support for nationalist productions. Numerous sites visited by tourists, including museums, national parks, and memorials, but also events indirectly involving tourism, such as commemorative ceremonies and historical anniversaries, are increasingly viewed through the lens of nationalism.

Nationalism, Tourism

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Nationalism tourism productions and experiences are highly dependent on the political, social and cultural contexts in which the industry is set. Nationalism can manifest itself through tourism by way of museums or heritage sites, where elements that are attributed to the greatness of a nation, like famous historical figures, are presented. Such is the case in Edinburgh, where the Scottish National Portrait Gallery is located, or in South Dakota, where one can find Mount Rushmore, a monumental sculpture of four American presidents. These types of museums and sites contribute to giving a nation its history and displaying evidence of its existence (Pretes 2003).

In more contested contexts, such as in post-war situations or in cases of new states, where legitimacy is still challenged by different groups or communities, nationalism tourism can be seen as problematic and as contributing to ongoing social and political struggles. Some scholars in the area of “dark tourism” have demonstrated that the production of a shared identity is often an official goal of countries, especially where “there exists a common urge to create a national identity” (White and Frew 2013). In Croatia, Vukovar, a war-torn location, became a national symbol of martyrdom and victimhood, and was visited at the end of the 1990s by many Croatian tourists interested in paying respect to this site of pain. This form of tourism, which was closely attached to the construction of the new nation, was nevertheless viewed as provocative by some members of the Serbian community (who still represent an important minority in this contested region) and, above all, as a base for the diffusion of a hegemonic discourse on the past war. In this sense, nationalism tourism may also be
considered as a vehicle that can enhance tension and contribute to the prolongation of conflict on a symbolic level.

Future research may examine the linkages between tourism and nationalism, particularly the conflicts that may be triggered by the interactions between these two dynamics. Notions such as identity, memory and image are additional elements of interest for further inquiry.

See also: Map, museum, experience, heritage, image, dark tourism.

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