

Perception of local children towards tourists visiting Bruges

By Diederik De Bruycker

Diederik De Bruycker studied tourism management at the NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences and the MA program in Tourism at the K.U. Leuven. His professional work is related to tourism, more specifically to international youth tourism in Flanders (Belgium).
E-mail: diederikdebruycker@hotmail.com

A B S T R A C T / R É S U M É

The impact of tourism on local children is an underestimated field of research. The objective of this research is to examine the perception by local children of tourists visiting Bruges. The field work for the research took place in two primary schools in Bruges (Belgium). One primary school is situated in the old city centre; the other one is situated outside the city centre. Several methods are used. A survey, a paper and drawings as a method of expression are used to understand the opinion of children. The children had to draw three different drawings: from very open and general to specifically linked to tourists.

L'impact du tourisme sur les enfants locaux est un domaine sous-estimé par la recherche. L'objectif de cette recherche est d'examiner la perception d'enfants locaux sur les touristes visitant Bruges. La recherche a eu lieu dans deux écoles primaires à Bruges (Belgique): une école primaire située au centre de la ville, l'autre située en dehors du centre. Plusieurs méthodes ont été utilisées: une enquête, un essai et des dessins (comme méthode d'expression) ont été utilisés pour connaître et comprendre l'opinion des enfants. Les enfants ont dû dessiner trois dessins différents: commençant très ouvertement et généralement, allant jusqu'au très détaillé, avec un lien touristique.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords

Tourism, children's perception, drawings

How to refer to this article

De Bruycker D., Perception of local children towards tourists visiting Bruges, 2007, Omertaa, Journal for Applied Anthropology, <http://www.omertaa.org/archive/omertaa0021.pdf>

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It occupies an important place in our society. It also has a deep impact on the environment of a large group of people. Most research on the impact of tourism on the host culture does not take into account the opinion of children. Nevertheless, it is very interesting to examine how local children experience the confrontation with tourists from all over the world. Those children are the future and will become the new hosts. The impact of tourism on local children is an underestimated field of research. This is regrettable because the impact of tourism on a host culture cannot be complete without the children's opinion.

The objective of this research is to examine the perception of local children towards tourists visiting Bruges. This perception is important because it can give an indication of the future hosts' attitude towards tourists.

Bruges can be seen as the most important tourist centre in Flanders (Belgium). The historical city centre joined UNESCO's world heritage list in 2000. Bruges was the European cultural capital in 2002 and will continue to be of high cultural relevance in a future Europe. The field work for the research took place in two primary schools. One primary school is situated in the old city centre of Bruges; the other one is situated outside the city centre. The final grades of the primary school were examined in each school. 66 children between 9 and 13 years old (82% were 10 or 11 years old) participated in the research: 41 city centre children and 25 children from outside the city.

Number of children by age and school:

<i>Age</i>	<i>Primary school city centre</i>	<i>Primary school outside city centre</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>19</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>01</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>10</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>08</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>11</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>31</i>
<i>12</i>	<i>04</i>	<i>04</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>13</i>	<i>01</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Total</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>66</i>

Hypothesis and methodology

From the Social Exchange Theory of Ap (Ap 1992), the Social Identity Theory (Tafjel & Turner 1986) and the Social Representation Theory (Moscovici 1981), three hypotheses can be derived. When all research work is done, these three hypotheses will be confirmed or denied.

The first hypothesis, based on the Social Exchange Theory of Ap, states that the school children from outside the city centre are not so much affected by inconveniences caused by tourists as the school children from the city centre. The first category tends to be more positive towards tourism.

The second hypothesis based on the Social Identity Theory, states that there is a clear 'we' versus 'them' attitude: 'we' means inhabitants from Bruges (in-group) and 'them' means tourists (out-group).

The third hypothesis, based on the Social Representation Theory, states that the perception of children towards tourists consists of the home environment, the school environment and own findings.

This research consists of a qualitative and a quantitative part. The use of drawings, openended questions, a paper and the Likert scale will produce qualitative and quantitative data.

Understanding the opinion of children

How can the opinion of children be examined? There are different qualitative research methods which can be used to listen to the children's voice (Davis 1998). Research with children is not easy and good results are not guaranteed. It is very important to use the most appropriate research method.

Using drawings and stories helps children to express their inner world and communicate their feelings (James 1995). Alternative methods like writing a story/paper (hypothetical situation), finishing an uncompleted sentence or making drawings make that children can participate in the research process (Morrow & Richards 1996).

Drawings as a method of expression

This research uses drawings as a method of expression. There is little research using this method to analyse the opinion of children. Children at the age range of 9-13, use drawings to show their knowledge. It is not easy to interpret the content of children's drawings, but it can produce crucial information. It is easier to analyse the content by using the opportunity to add textual information to the drawings (Gramradt 1995). A general consensus states that art (drawing as a method of expression can be seen as art) is personal and includes conscious and unconscious elements (Malchiodi 1998).

The children had to draw three different drawings. First, the children were asked to draw a pavement in Bruges. This drawing is very open and general. No specific link with tourists was asked for. Both tourists and local inhabitants can enjoy a drink on a patio in the street. Secondly,



Figure 1: Drawing of a boat on the canals of Bruges, Play guard (9 years old, school centre Bruges).



Figure 2: Giving tourism information on board (11 years old, school centre Bruges).

the children were asked to draw a boat on the small canals of the old city centre of Bruges. The boats navigating those canals are mostly used for tourist trips. The question evokes the connotation with tourists without explicitly mentioning the word 'tourism'.

The last drawing had to be one of a tourist in Bruges. This question obviously refers to tourism. The sequence of the three drawings can show at what stage tourism appears in the children's mind. The drawings go from general to tourist related. The analysis of the drawings in this study focuses on the way in which the children represent the tourists, the tourists' characteristics and their environment. The aesthetic aspect of the drawings was not important. The drawings were analysed on content. Content analysis is a manner to analyse the drawings systematically. It gives the opportunity to analyse qualitative information in a quantitative way (Finn et al. 2000).

A list of categories was set up in order to code the drawings. This was important to make relations between the different drawings and to write down conclusions. The categories were placed in two main dimensions: 'People and their characteristics' and 'environment characteristics'. Categories were divided as follows:

People and their characteristics

- Appearance, look
- Possessions (camera, umbrella, etc.)
- Nationality
- Added textual information

Environment characteristics

- Buildings
- Canals
- Nature
- Other elements

Survey

A survey research (open-ended questions and Likert scale) was used to obtain reliable and valid data.

The children answered a series of open-ended questions. Those questions gave more information on the children's knowledge about tourists: why do tourists visit the city of Bruges, what are their activities, where do they come from? The children were also asked to write a paper (15 sentences) with the following title: "This is what I think about tourists

visiting Bruges". The paper gave the children the opportunity to write down their own perception of the way they feel concerning tourists visiting Bruges. The papers were analysed on content and coded in three categories: positive thinking about tourists, negative thinking about tourists and neutral thinking about tourists. The use of this method allows the children to give their own opinion in a reliable way. They learn how to write a paper at school. The paper was coded by a number of words and statements.

Because of its simplicity and evident interpretation, a five-point scale was used as a third part of the survey. 10 propositions were stated and the children could choose one of the following answers: strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree. Smilies reinforced the meaning of the scales. The answers got a score from +2 (strongly agree) to -2 (strongly disagree). The questionnaire had positive and negative questions. An advantage of the Likert scale is that it results in interval-variables, even if the variables are ordinal. A disadvantage of this method is the risk that the children will often use the word "neutral".

The collected data were statistically analysed (SAS EG III). Significance was analysed for the variables of sex (boy/girl), mother or father working in tourism sector (yes/no), residence (city centre/outside city centre), school (city centre/outside city centre) and school-level (fifth year/sixth year). Because of the limited sample, a non-parametrical test (Wilcoxon two sample tests) was necessary. When significance occurred, the mean scores (-2 to +2) were interpreted. It was decided not to choose for a factor analysis because of the limited sample and also because there was no intention to bring different variables together.

The following ten propositions were submitted to the children:

- Proposition 1: The tourists in Bruges are pleasant.
- Proposition 2: The tourists in Bruges are rich.
- Proposition 3: The tourists in Bruges are friendly.
- Proposition 4: The tourists in Bruges are strange.
- Proposition 5: The tourists in Bruges are loud.
- Proposition 6: There are too many tourists in Bruges.
- Proposition 7: Tourists bring atmosphere in Bruges.
- Proposition 8: A lot of people would lose their job if there were no tourists in Bruges.
- Proposition 9: You can learn from interaction with tourists.
- Proposition 10: Tourists take no account of the local residents.

For the analysis of the negatively formulated propositions (proposition 4, 5, 6 and 10) polarity was changed. $P < 0,05$ means statistically significant.



Figure 3: Asians in front of belfry (10 years old, school centre).

Results Drawings

Based on the analysis of the drawings, the following conclusions can be made. When the children drew a pavement in Bruges, there were no elements referring to tourism. In these drawings, the children present their own environment and tourism is not part of this environment. Important is that the people represented in the drawings have no specific external characteristics. They seem just ordinary people and not specifically tourists.

Generally the pavement is drawn in combination with a café or restaurant. It is striking that a lot of restaurants or cafés have existing names. Even if certain names are not correctly written, it is nevertheless clear that the children are familiar with cafés and restaurants in Bruges. No difference is noticed between the school situated in the city centre of Bruges and the school outside the city centre. (Figure 1).

Secondly, the children were asked to draw a boat on the canals situated in the old city centre of Bruges. Concerning the second drawing, there is a remarkable difference between the school children from the city centre and the schoolchildren from outside the city centre.

The school children from the city centre associate the small boats with tourism in Bruges. More than two thirds of them drew tourists in the small boats. Tourists can be recognized by several external characteristics: slit-eyed people (Asians), hand luggage and a camera. Other drawings show tourists taking pictures of passing boats.

Some drawings show the captain of the tourist boat, guiding and giving information to tourists. Sometimes the captain even has a microphone. Text balloons are added to show what kind of information the captain gives: "on the left side you can see the convent", "here you can see the fish market", "this is the smallest window of Bruges", etc.

Only a minority of the school children from outside the city centre of Bruges associates the boats with tourism in their city. Two thirds of the drawings show no visual indications relating the boats to tourism. Only in one third of the drawings is the presence of tourists clearly visible. This is however not always clear by external characteristics. Actually the text balloons show that there are tourists on board: "Cool" (English) and "Shi shang" (Asian). The presence of Asians only occurs in two drawings.

To draw a tourist in Bruges was the instruction of the third drawing. In these drawings, a big difference is seen between the drawings of the school children from the city centre and the drawings of the school children from outside the centre. All drawings of the school children from the city centre show visible tourist characteristics. The children place the tourists in front of tourist sights. The drawings of the children of the school from outside the city centre show much less of these tourist characteristics. The tourists are mainly drawn isolated, without certain tourist sights. Sometimes they even draw tourist types that normally do not appear in Bruges.

Survey

From the analysis of the Likert scale, following findings could be made:

- When the mother or father of the child is working in tourism, the child believes that many people would lose their job without tourists in their city. The child has not formed this opinion himself. The parents taught him. The children whose parents do not work in tourism believe that tourism is not important for employment in Bruges. They do not fully link employment with tourism because it has not been taught. Also the children of the school in the city centre believe that tourism in Bruges is important for employment. The children of the school outside the centre link employment much less to tourism in Bruges.

- The children who live in the city centre do not find they can learn from contacts with tourists. Those children come regularly in contact with tourists and have a realistic picture of the difficulties in the conversations with tourists. The children not living in the centre of Bruges believe that they can learn from contacts with tourists (for example: learning languages).

- The children of the school in the centre of the city do not really think that tourists are unusual. They are used to seeing tourists in the surroundings of the school which has as result that tourists who are in a way 'different' than we are, are considered as normal. The school children from outside the city centre have less experience with tourists and therefore the tourists are perceived as more unusual. The children have less contact with tourists and are not adapted to their presence.

- The school children from the city centre actually feel that there are too many tourists in Bruges. They come across tourists not only in the surroundings of their school but also in their way to and from school. They experience the crowd (tourists) in the city centre as normal.



Figure 4: Tourist at the beach? (11 years old, school outside centre).

The opinion of the school children from outside the city centre is different: there are not too many tourists in Bruges. They do not experience the presence of the tourists because there are no tourists in the surroundings of their school.

From the analysis of the open-ended questions, the following conclusions can be made:

- The children of both schools give four main reasons why tourists come to Bruges. These reasons are: the cultural and historical heritage, the beauty of the city, food/beverage and shopping. According to the children the tourists' main activities are related to the four main reasons of visiting Bruges. These activities are: visiting the cultural and historical buildings (belfry, museum, etc.), discovering the (beautiful) city, having dinner/lunch (French fries, mussels, etc.) and shopping. Furthermore, according to the children, taking pictures is also a main activity of each tourist.

- It is remarkable that the children of both schools have a good view of the origin of the tourists in Bruges. Only the Belgian and Chinese tourists are not properly placed within the scale.

- Almost all children agree that tourists look different than local people. The tourist has a different appearance and has other characteristic attributes with him. Tourists have another skin colour and are dressed in a different way. Typical tourists' attributes are mainly a camera, a suitcase or rucksack and a map.

The analysis of the paper "This is what I think about tourists that are visiting Bruges", leads to the following conclusions:

- More than 50% of the children of the school in the centre of Bruges think that the presence of tourists in Bruges has both negative and positive consequences. The negative consequences are related to the crowded streets. Positive consequences are towards employment. A minority of the children thinks only negative/positive or has no opinion about the presence of tourists in their city.

- More than one third of the children of the school outside the centre have no particular opinion on tourists in Bruges. One on four children has positive feelings towards tourists in Bruges, one on four thinks both positive and negative. Only 12% thinks negative towards tourists.

Conclusion

Our research has produced the following conclusions concerning the three possible hypotheses:

- The first hypothesis, based on the Social Exchange Theory of Ap, states that children who go to school outside the city centre do not feel so much the negative consequences of tourists as children do who go to school in the city centre. Because of this, they look in a more positive way to tourism. The quantitative analysis (Likert scale) and the paper written by the children shows that the children of the school outside the centre of the city have more positive feelings towards tourists than the children of the school in the centre. The children of the school in the centre opine that there are too many tourists in their city while the children of the school outside the centre do not share that opinion. The feeling of 'there are too many' comes from their own experiences with tourists. This experience relates to the territorial aspect: tourists walking in the middle of the street and parking their car in front of the school while the parents of the schoolchildren can not park their car. The traffic from and to the school also contributes to this feeling.

- The second hypothesis, based on the Social Identity Theory, states that there is a clear 'we' versus 'them' feeling. 'We' means: inhabitants from Bruges (in-group) and 'them' means tourists (out-group). There are several elements proving that the children develop a 'we' versus 'them' feeling. The feeling is not particularly 'we' inhabitants of Bruges versus 'them' the tourists, but 'we' inhabitants of Flanders (Dutch speaking part of Belgium) and 'them' the people who look different and speak other languages. Tourists from Flanders who are visiting Bruges are not considered as an 'out-group'. The 'out-group' wears different clothes, their skin colour is different and they do not speak Dutch with a Flemish accent. Remarkable is that the slit-eyed people are mostly seen as Chinese while only 0,1% of all tourists in Bruges are from China. There are much more Japanese tourists (3,5% of all tourists in Bruges). Although the children recognize the differences between the tourists, they see the tourists as one group (in exception to the tourists from Flanders). Tourists are coming for the same reason to Bruges and are participating in the same activities. They are seen as an ethnic group. According to Horowitz (1985) ethnicity can be recognised as differences in skin colour, languages, religion or other items, which can be related to people's own background. Baumann (1999) describes ethnicity as a social construction. Normally people are not aware of having an ethnicity. This awareness

only comes into existence when compared with other cultures. The same is valid for children. Through contact with tourists, children perceive the difference (languages and appearance) between 'we' (the inhabitants of Flanders) and 'them' (the tourists).

- The third hypothesis, based on the Social Representation Theory, states that the perception of children towards tourists consists of the home environment, the school environment and own findings. The analysis of the data shows and confirms the hypothesis that the perception of the children towards tourists is based on the children's own findings, the perceptions of the parents toward tourists and in a limited way by the school. The drawings of the children show that their own experience is an important factor in developing their perception towards tourists: the schoolchildren give their own habitat a central place in their drawings when they are asked to draw a pavement in Bruges (people who order soda, a play ground, etc.). The drawings of a boat on the small canals show that the children reproduce the boats as they see them in reality. The fact that the children who come across tourists often (children of the school in the centre) do not think that tourists are strange means that the schoolchildren experience the presence of tourists as normal or familiar. Parental influence is of great importance for children's perception of tourists. Children whose parents are employed in tourism are convinced that a decrease in the number of tourists will threaten their parents' job. This shows a strong socialisation by the parents. Therefore, parents appear to offer a strong educational environment for their child. The child is convinced that what he/she learns from his parent is necessarily true. Research shows that children used knowledge they picked up at school to answer the survey. For example, one child mentioned that tourists come from France and that France counts 58 million inhabitants (after learning this at school). Also several children provided answers that were linked to India. One week previous to the survey, they had special courses related to India in which a traditionally dressed woman visited the school. This proves that what children learn at school affects their perception of tourists.

References

- Ap, J. (1992). Residents' perceptions on tourism impact, *Annals of tourism research*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 665-690.
- Baumann, G. (1999). *The Multicultural Riddle, Rethinking National, Ethnic, and Religious Identities*. Routledge, New York.
- Davis J. M. (1998). *Understanding The Meaning of Children: A Reflexive Process*, *Children and Society*. John Wiley and Sons, Vol. 12, pp. 325-335.
- Finn, M., Elliott-White, M., Walton, M. (2000). *Tourism & Leisure Research Methods, Data collection, analysis and interpretation*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow, p.285.
- Gamradt, J. (1995). Jamaican children's representations of tourism, *Annals of Tourism Research*, Elsevier Science, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 735-762.
- Horowitz, D. L. (1985). *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press.
- James, A. (1995). Methodologies of competence for competent methodology? Youth 2000 conference, Guildford.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (1998). *Understanding Children's Drawings*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, p. 251.
- Morrow, V., Richards, M. (1996). The ethics of social research with children: an over view, *Children and Society*, Vol. 10. pp. 28-40.
- Moscovici, S. (1981). On social representations. In Forgas, J. P. *Social cognition. Perspectives on everyday understanding*, European monographs in social psychology 26, Academic Press, London, pp. 181-209.
- Tajfel, H., Turner, J.C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour. In S. Worchel & W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations*, Nelson-Hall, Chicago, pp. 7-24.