Tourism and refugee-crisis intersections: co-creating tour guide experiences in Leeds, England

YHRMP ID
355
Author(s)
Elisa Burrai, Dorina-Maria Buda and Emily Stevenson

Aims

Through the intersections of tourism tour-guiding and forced displacement, this article aims to examine the socio-cultural integration of refugees and asylum seekers through tourism.

Methodology

The research was based on a qualitative methodological research design with an interpretivist analytical approach in investigating the intersectionality of refugee-crisis and tour-guiding. The authors argue that this approach enables them to ‘investigate the multiple subjectivities at play in such sensitive

matters pertaining to forced migrants' (p.10).

The research was based in Leeds with 'Tales of a City Tours' as the main research site. 'Tales of a City Tours' is a social entrepreneurship founded by one of the researchers. Data was generated through in-depth individual interviews with 20 participants, including seven refugees, three asylum seekers and ten local support workers (from the public, non-governmental and non-for-profit sectors) who work with refugees and asylum seekers. Additionally, a focus group interview was conducted involving four of the ten refugees and asylum seekers who participated in the individual interviews.

Key issues

By bringing together the concepts of 'strangerhood', 'ethical responsibility' and 'hospitality', the study and its role in the socio-cultural integration of refugees. The findings highlighted that refugees engaging in the tourism industry such as by becoming tour-guides provides an opportunity for them to connect with their receiving country and promote inclusivity, inter-cultural understanding, mutual respect and acceptance.

Findings included three key themes as summarised below:

- Tourism experiences of 'participative strangerhood': The study found that the ideas of 'strangerhood' and fluidity of human identities can help us understand the ways in which the socio-cultural integration of refugees and asylum seekers can be facilitated. The authors observe that in

providing tourism services such as tour-guiding, ethnically diverse refugees can enrich tourism service provisions through the unique stories they share with visitors. Yet, they note that this diversity can cause some concerns and be perceived as chaos, instability, and a threat to the 'stable and fixed identities modernity has established' (p.11). Participants in the project were reported to focus on the importance of their collective 'territorial identities', including nationality, ethnicity, and cultural heritage. It was noted that leaving home and having refugee or asylum status shaped the subjectivity of the research participants as 'strangers' and 'bodies out of place' (p.12) because of their experiences of social exclusion and suppression. On the other hand, for some refugees and asylum seekers, moving away from home was said to reinforce a sense of freedom as displacement meant asserting their identities and expressing themselves without fear of oppression. As the research suggests, involving refugees as tour-guides is thought to allow them to 'assert and reform their identity' (p.12) by deciding which aspects of their stories to tell and which ones to silence in order to avoid any stigma associated with being labelled as 'refugee'. As the authors observe, tourism can help reconcile the tensions and differences between 'order, strangerhood and freedom when we accept our moral condition' and responsibility towards the other.

- Meaningful integration through ethical responsibility in tourism: The study shows that refugees and asylum seekers in Leeds faced challenges of strangerhood such as

‘discrimination and isolation’ (p.13). It points out that, being characterised as ‘disturbing strangers’ (ibid), refugees and asylum seekers may be hindered from expressing their true identities. This challenge of strangerhood can be mitigated by engaging refugees and asylum seekers in tourism that could foster cross-cultural understanding and connections between diverse groups. In this way, connecting refugees and asylum seekers with other refugees who share similar experiences and/or tourists could create positive experiences and relate them to and make them feel part of a community. Participants highlighted the sense of ‘ethical responsibility’ towards one another that can be achieved through acceptance of diversity and cultural understanding at societal level. Tourism is taken to enable connecting to ‘the other’ by way of serving as a site of sharing a ‘multitude of voices and backgrounds’ (p.14). In line with the notion of ‘ethical responsibility’, participants commented that societal and cultural connections can be created by focusing on common humanity among the refugees and tour-guests. For instance, they highlighted ‘music and love’ as universal topics that can bring people together.

- Co-creative hospitable tourist experiences: Participants in the study commented that for tourism to play a vital role in the settlement of refugees and asylum seekers, it ought to be ‘affordable’, less ‘elitist’ and not always driven by commodifiable profit. It was highlighted that asylum seekers who live on meagre asylum support lack the financial resources to experience tourism. Participants thus

emphasised the importance of alternative and meaningful ways of involving refugees and asylum seekers in the experience and delivery of tourism. Refugee-led tours were considered as important conduit through which awareness raising of different cultures and cultural exchanges can take place and meaningful societal change achieved by critiquing and deconstructing less welcoming, too rigid approaches to welcoming refugees.

- Situates the intersectionality of refugee-crisis and tour-guiding in the tourism industry

Conclusion

This study has sought to explore how the ideas of strangerhood, ethical responsibility and hospitality can be employed to help facilitate meaningful integration of refugees and asylum seekers through the ways of creatively reimagining, rethinking, reorganising and redesigning tourism. It found that engaging refugees and asylum seekers in the tourism sector can facilitate cultural understanding and socio-cultural integration by fostering local cosmopolitanism—as a tool to deconstruct socio-cultural barriers present in current societies. The authors contend that tourism experiences, as exemplified by the ‘Tales of a City Tours’ in Leeds can give rise to an opportunity for rethinking and redesigning asylum and hospitality.

It concludes that refugees’ tour-guiding works have the potential to ‘transcend strangerhood’ and ‘acquire localhood’ (p.8). As the

authors show, refugee guided city-tours may allow individuals to become a new part of the shared intangible cultural heritage in a host city such as Leeds and have the potential to bridge gaps between ‘us’ and ‘them’. To this end, they stressed the importance of collaborating, co-designing and co-creating tourism services with refugees so that different perspectives and knowledges are valued.

The authors also noted that guided tours such as this can only be sustainable if they are taken as part of long-term dynamic processes in which current socio-cultural discourses are critiqued, challenged, and dismantled by the emergence of powerful participatory (grassroots) approaches of welcome.

Web Link
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09669582.2022.2072851
Migrant Group
Asylum seekers
Refugees
Topic
Community and society
Community cohesion
Integration
Migration
Public perceptions
Place
Leeds
Year
2022
Resource Type

Journal article

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/tourism-and-refugee-crisis-intersections-co-creating-tour-guide-experiences-leeds*