

A UNESCO PROJECT TO TRAIN AND EMPLOY CULTURE OF PEACE ENTREPRENEURS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

By David Adams and Lou D'Amore
January 21, 2007

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO, following its Constitutional mandate, is called upon to take a pro-active approach towards achieving a "Culture of Peace" More than ever before, the effective implementation of this mandate has been needed to reverse the spiral of violence and reduce the widening gap between rich and poor.

As eloquently expressed in the most recent Nobel Prize acceptance speech by Mohamed Yunus, the challenge is to give young people the opportunity to use their creative talents and become "entrepreneurs" in a broader sense that does not seek profit but rather to do good for the benefit of people and the world. Youth are looking for such a challenge, according to the recent study for the Alliance of Civilizations which interviewed representatives from 475 youth organizations in 125 countries.

One industry stands out as being ready to provide such opportunities: global tourism. It is the largest industry in the world and is especially important for the economies of the poorest countries. As stated by the International Institute for Peace through Tourism, travel and tourism can become "the world's first global peace industry," and "a leading force for poverty reduction" in which "every traveler is potentially an 'Ambassador for Peace'". The infrastructure for this transformation already exists: ministries of culture and tourism; local tourist industries; and regional conferences of tourism for peace involving all facets of the industry.

As the experience of eco-tourism has shown, tourists can contribute to inter-cultural understanding and solidarity as well as the preservation of biodiversity and poverty reduction while enjoying life enhancing experiences from their travels.

Within this context, a program is proposed that would establish regional training institutes for each region of the "South" to train "Culture of Peace Entrepreneurs" The program would embrace cultural, social, and environmental dimensions and be modeled on the UNESCO literacy institutes in Mexico, Egypt and Iran that were very effective in the 1950's and 1960's.

Emphasis will be given to training young people, women and indigenous persons, especially from the regions concerned, to become "culture of peace entrepreneurs." They will obtain a diploma by learning skills of culture of peace theory, methods of promoting inter-cultural exchange and understanding in the context of the "host- guest relationship" and learn the traditional skills of both the "receiver" end (tour-guiding; hospitality training; community tourism; ecotourism; cultural tourism, etc.) as well as the "sender" end of the industry (designing tour packages that include personal inter-action with host communities; ethical tourism; fair trade tourism; volunteer and philanthropic tourism; and targeted marketing to attract tourists who seek these types of experiences.

Students for the Institute will be sponsored by both governments and various sectors of the tourism industry that are prepared, to employ them in the tourism industry once they have obtained their diploma. This would include employment in local travel agencies, relevant government ministries, community projects, hotels, airlines, youth organizations, NGO's, etc.

Knowledgeable experts will be engaged to serve as instructors on a rotating, visiting basis, including teachers of tour guides, tourism entrepreneurship, hospitality trainers, ecologists and ecotourism operators, and culture of peace promoters. The trainees would not only learn the relevant skills, but also begin to develop the connections and networking they will need to develop entrepreneurial careers.

INSTITUTES AS SOCIAL BUSINESS INCUBATORS

The "students" at the institutes should learn by doing.

A major task of the "faculty" should be the supervision of student projects that can serve as incubators of "social business" as conceived by Yunus and the Grameen Bank. This requires visiting faculty with the relevant experience and desire to teach and encourage the skills and principles of entrepreneurship including teamwork, capital accumulation (accessing investment capital from investors, capital markets, foundations, development agencies, etc.), product development, capital management, advertising and marketing including development and production of advertising materials such as brochures, videos and DVDs and Internet websites.

Just to give some idea of the potential of this approach, here are some possible projects, without attempting to be exhaustive:

- development and presentation of seminars and booths for culture of peace tourism with attractive written materials, videos, etc. at the various major events and conferences of the tourism industry.
- development of kiosks in airports and at major tourist sites that sell local products and provide printed and video information on culture of peace tourism
- linkages to and exchanges with academic programmes at other institutions
- linkages to initiatives for environmental protection and development
- alumni services including employment opportunities
- development of "peace tourism websites" that could advertise culture of peace tourism opportunities and attract clients from heavily-visited search engines for cheap air flights (Orbitz, Travelocity, Expedia, etc.)

development of services for young people who are "traveling to see the world" such as websites, supported by advertising, that provide them relevant information on accommodations, work opportunities, personal announcements, etc.

- Collaborate with governments and the private sector so that plans for the development of new tourist sites and accommodations, and expansion of existing ones, give emphasis to the development of local and indigenous employment and utilization of local and indigenous skills and traditions

FINANCING

Although some start-up funds may need to be obtained from government grants, foundations, private investors, development agencies, etc., the operations of the Institutes, once they are established, should be self-financing.

Students should pay tuition which is provided by the sponsoring organizations who intend to hire them once they receive their diploma; in other words, students should be sent by sponsoring organizations as investment in personnel development.

Faculty should arrive with their travel, accommodation expenses and salary paid by sponsoring organizations who are committed to supporting the Institute, e.g. faculty could be sent "on loan" from corporations in the tourism industry and related industries. As well, educators might volunteer for assignments during academic holidays.

Administrative expenses should be kept to a minimum. Classrooms and accommodation facilities should be rented from a host institution rather than requiring direct investment and administration (see below for the lessons learned from UNESCO's literacy institutes).

ROLE OF UNESCO

The full success of the project requires the flag of UNESCO in order to make it universal, to ensure quality control and to give confidence to the relevant ministries from the countries of the South whose involvement is essential.

To ensure quality control, UNESCO should supervise the Institutes, with a framework of relevant decisions by the Member States, responsible secretariat and oversight bodies.

National Commissions for UNESCO should be engaged in the project from the beginning, and wherever possible, the involvement of relevant ministers should be integrated with the National Commissions of the countries concerned. Similarly, UNESCO field offices should be involved from the beginning, as well as relevant international non-governmental organizations with formal relations to UNESCO.

The project should be consistent with, or integrated with, relevant ongoing UNESCO activities and institutions such as the World Heritage Committee and Fund.

Financial resources for the Institutes should not depend on UNESCO, as the Institutes should be self-financing (see above). In fact, one of the lessons learned (through mistakes) from the UNESCO literacy institutes of the 50's and 60's is that investment should be in people rather than buildings. Institutes should be located within existing organizations from which space for classrooms and accommodation facilities for students and faculty can be rented or leased. Otherwise, the Institutes may get bogged down in the tasks of administering tasks that are unrelated to the training itself.
