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## ABSTRACT

*A historical district as a tourism destination encompasses various aspects, including ones as heritage, as an attraction for visitors, and as a living place for the locals. For investigations of visitors' gaze on aspects that depict lives of the locals in such a district, this study aims to present some of the theoretical backgrounds and the outlines of the potential methods. This study, which is the first step of a long-term investigation, discusses the nature of the local living culture of a historical district and proposes the use of techniques to obtain verbal responses related to visitors' perceptions, to capture objects of their focus as projected in photographs, and to record the traits of their behaviors. The difference in visitors' levels of previous visits is also considered as a variable that may affect their perceptions of the local living culture and the manners in which they interact with it.*

**Keywords:** *a historical district, local living culture, the caption evaluation method, tracking techniques, an observation survey, a previous visit.*

## INTRODUCTION

A historical district as a tourism destination encapsulates dimensions not only as a historical attraction, but also as a living place for the locals. The nature of visitors' gaze on the local living culture of such a district may be of interest for those who wish to promote tourism whereas alleviating its unfavorable impacts on the residents. This study focuses on such a gaze of visitors in light of its perceptual and behavioral aspects, and on the difference among visitors with diverse levels of previous visits. As the first step of a long-term investigation, this paper argues the nature of the local living culture of a historical district and presents the outlines of the methods that may be used for the future empirical investigations.

## LITERATURE

### The nature of local living culture

Desire for novelty has been discussed as a significant drive for people to travel (Lee & Crompton, 1992), and, as Urry (2002) maintains, visitors often gaze on "features of landscape and townscape which separate them from everyday experience" (p.3). A historical district, which could have been or may still be a residential place, could be the object of such a gaze. While attractions of a historical district for visitors can be attributed to physical links

with the past, such as the buildings and street/townscape (Orbasli, 2000), the life within it (Jansen-Verbeke, 1995 as cited in Orbasli, 2000, p.47) can also draw visitors. Ooi (2002) also advocates the importance of local living culture, as represented, for instance, by eating in locally-popular spots, which are relevant to the lives of many locals, for visitors' experiences. In these ways, visitors may focus not only on historical and notable features, but also on the aspects of local lives in a historical district.

Although the concept of local living culture has been discussed in studies of cultural tourism and heritage tourism, its constituents appear quite broad and vague. Timothy and Boyd (2003), for example, describe "living culture" as a type of heritage that involves "less tangible objects and activities, such as traditions, ways of life, ceremonies and rituals, dances, agricultural practices and culinary habits" (p.33). What is meant by living culture in their words seems to comprise mainly intangible objects. Ooi (2002) also uses a term, living cultural product, in his writing about cultural tourism. This concept seems to include, not only unique and notable aspects, but also more ordinary ones such as daily routines of locals, as seen in the following:

The types of cultural products focused on here are local "living" cultural practices, events, activities and places. Daily routines, religious festivals, shopping areas, living heritage sites, traditional but still popular crafts, and eating-places are included in this category because they are still significant and relevant to the lives of many locals (Ooi, 2002, p.157).

Ooi (2002) further claims that many of living cultural products "stem from the dynamics of local everyday social life, without the reference to commercial tourism" (p.157). Concepts of *romantic gaze* and *collective romantic gaze* (Ooi, 2002) further shed light on visitors' perceptions of the manifold aspects of local living culture. While the objects of the former gaze are things, such as an indigenous wedding, which can be perceived to be original and authentic, the collective romantic gaze is placed on objects like locals and their lives in ethnic districts, whose authentic charm can be strengthened by local participation (Ooi, 2002). Compared to the former, the latter types of objects may be felt more germane to locals' usual lives.

As observed in the above-mentioned descriptions, the aspects of local living culture could encompass some well-known, touristic and notable objects as well as others related rather to the ordinary everyday lives of residents. Nevertheless, the clear definition of local living culture does not seem to have been provided. In this study, the aspect of local living culture is tentatively defined as what visitors notice and regard as the aspect that is attributed to the fact that people have resided in a destination.

### **Approaches to studies of the local living culture of a historical district**

The first aim of this study is to identify the aspects of the local living culture of a historical district. Deliberation is then required especially when a noticed object is regarded as the usual aspect of the local life in a historical district. Unlike notable historical features such as buildings or performing arts, such aspects are less likely to take on unique and historical auras. Furthermore, visitors may not strongly sense unusual atmospheres attributed to a geographical distance when a visited district, such as a domestic district in contrast to overseas ones, is relatively close to their daily environments. Although even ordinary aspects of the local life can be perceived to be unusual in a certain context like travel, which is outside visitors' daily lives, such a unusual feeling is still likely to be different from what visitors feel when "seeing a unique object, such as the Eiffel Tower..." (Urry, 2002, p.12). On account of these, while Naoi, Airey, Iijima and Niininen's (2007) study suggests that visitors' desire to appreciate something outside their daily lives in a historical district could relate to old, unique and famous atmospheres, visitors' perceptions of more usual aspects may relate to different evaluative dimensions. In this sense, not only identification of what visitors see as the aspects of the local living culture, but also examination of how they perceive such aspects is of importance.

The next issue to note is visitors' ways of interaction with the aspects of the local living culture of a historical district. While some visitors may observe such local aspects, as the case may be, through participation in a tour (Ooi, 2002), more active forms of interaction between visitors and locals may also occur, for instance, when visitors purchase goods and services from locals, share facilities or come together with locals (De Kadt, 1979 as cited in Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, Shepherd & Wanhill 1998, p. 174), or do the things that locals would do (Ooi, 2002). Conversely, visitors in non-touristic places may prefer to remain unnoticed as their ideas about how to interact with the space and locals are limited (Wearing, Stevenson & Young, 2009). As to visitors' motivations, those whose primary motivation is not of a cultural nature may still consume the aspects of local culture, such as local markets (Ivanovic, 2008). It would be interesting to explore visitors' various intentional or unintentional ways of interaction with the local living culture.

Also important are visitors' spatial behaviors. Understanding of their routes and time-consumption patterns may offer some implications about the aspects of their experiences at touristic and non-touristic places. Although relationships between visitors' behaviors and characteristics (Debbage, 1991) and their initial purposes (Keul & Kühnberger, 1997) are questioned, it is still possible to examine their post-visit evaluations of their own behaviors. Investigations of these behavioral aspects hold managerial importance in light of possible pervasive nature of visitors' gaze on the lives of locals (Boissevain, 1996). Indeed, Fukunaga's (2006) survey to the locals of a Japanese historical district revealed that their negative views concerned not only pervasive actions of visitors, but also the residents' perception of themselves being gazed on. Identification of visitors' behaviors may merit tourism management and conservation of a historical district by offering clues for strategic visitor management.

The aforesaid visitors' gazes on the aspects of the local living culture of a historical district and their behaviors concerning these aspects may be influenced by their past visits. Studies of visitors in historical places by Gali-Espelt and Domaire-Bento (2006) and Shoval and Isaacson (2009) imply that repeaters tend to take more ramified routes and visit more places. Hanyu, Morita, Kokubo, Shoshiroda and Tsutsumi's study (2006) of a Japanese historical district also indicates that the district might have attracted repeaters because it might have been impossible for them to visit all the places that they wished to visit at a time. As implied by the notion of the latent loyal, who has genuine preference for a certain object, but has no consistent purchase history (Niininen & Riely, 2004), the frequency of visitors' previous visits does not necessarily indicate the degree of their inclination for the destination. Nevertheless, whereas various types could exist among first-timers, repeaters in general may tend to seek relatively unknown elements, like the facets of the local life, which may easily be overlooked.

## **PROPOSED METHODS**

This presentation only proposes the principle methods that may be used for the actual field works and presents the rough outlines.

In order to understand what visitors gaze on as part of the local living culture of a historical district, questionnaire surveys to actual visitors with use of open-ended questions can first be conducted. Another aim of this research phase is to identify types of visitors who gaze on a relatively wide range of objects as the aspects of the local living culture. To fulfill such an objective, an in-depth interview that usually necessitates a long time for its completion and often entails a small sample size does not appear suitable at this stage. Together with questions about subjects' socio-demographic profiles, their past visits, the characteristics of their visit at the time, such as the purposes and the length of their visit, and the places they visited, the questionnaire may include a question that asks subjects to mention what makes the district attractive and what makes them feel the lives of the locals there. It may be preferable to use self-addressed envelopes for subjects to return the questionnaires so that they can thoroughly consider their views about their visiting experiences in a calm frame

of mind. The visitors' types identified at this stage may be used as the index for sampling in the later research phases.

For further in-depth investigations of visitors' perceptions of the objects that they think depict the aspects of the local living culture, photographs taken by subjects may be examined. Subjects, who have just arrived at the targeted district, can be asked to take photographs of settings that are felt to portray the local life. Such a strategy is expected to enable real-time assessments by subjects (Chenoweth, 1984; Oku & Fukamachi, 2006), deepen consideration of their views and experiences (Garrod, 2007; Markwell, 2000) and ease the evocation of their experiences (Garrod, 2007; Loeffler, 2004). These advantages are beneficial particularly in view of the difficulty of collecting visitors' articulated responses about their unusual travel behaviors (Asakura & Hato, 2009). Whereas many studies that employed photographs taken by subjects to study their views of places attempted contents analysis of the photographs (Cherem & Driver, 1983; Taylor, Czarnowski, Sexton & Flick, 1995, Haywood, 1990; MacKay & Couldwell, 2004), Naoi and Iijima (2008), and Naoi, Yamada, Iijima and Kumazawa (2009) analyzed the written open-ended reasons for photographing settings in a historical district. While the former can be used to identify the objects of visitors' gaze, the latter may elicit the evaluative dimensions as represented by the words that subjects used to modify such objects. Thus, the combination of both the approaches is worth consideration. Identification of perceived relationships between the elicited evaluative dimensions and the objects, as done by Naoi and Iijima (2008) and Naoi et al (2009), can then be attempted with reference to subjects' open-ended responses.

As for visitors' spatial behaviors, various tracking devices, which provide accurate data in time and space, are available (Shoval & Isaacson, 2009). Among these techniques, GPS has been reported as the most suitable for micro-level studies of spatial behaviors in a location of small size, such as an old district (Shoval & Isaacson, 2009) although there still remain issues of the possible low rate of usable responses (139/246 in Tchetchik, Fleischer & Shoval, 2009). A study of this type may be conducted with visitors who have just come to the district, and the data, for instance, of the visited areas and the proportion of the time spent at each spot, can be analyzed to examine the characteristics of their visit to certain areas. The areas they visited may be divided into touristic and non-touristic places on the basis of the land-use patterns and the results of the examination of what was stated or photographed in the aforesaid questionnaire survey and research using photographs.

In all the above-mentioned phases of research, the results may be compared between visitors with different levels of past visits, such as first-timers and repeaters.

Recording of visitors' actual modes of interaction with the aspects of the local living culture of a historical district may be facilitated by an observation survey. This can be performed at the locations where the aspects of the local living culture have been noticed particularly frequently, according to the results of the research involving subjects' photographing. Given the transient nature of many types of visitors' behaviors, forms of behaviors to be recorded may be listed in advance with reference to the findings of the previous research phases using questionnaires and visitor-employed photographs. It may also be realistic to conduct observations at regular intervals, as done in Saito, Soshiroda and Tsutsumi's study of street dancers' behaviors (2006).

## **EXPECTED RESULTS**

Although concrete hypotheses are difficult to establish owing to the explorative nature of this study, the following general outcomes are expected. Some objects that visitors regard as the aspects of the local living culture of a historical district are expected to involve features that are perceived to be relatively renowned, prominent and unusual in a sense that these features are unfamiliar to visitors and also unavailable in their daily places. Others may, in contrast, be perceived to offer weak senses of these kinds and take on more familiar atmospheres for visitors. As to the difference between visitors in their past visits, whereas first-timers are unlikely to be monolithic, including people who may or may not become

repeaters, repeaters in general may be apt to step into non-touristic areas and gaze on objects that they feel more connected to the usual aspects of the local life. It is open to question whether and how they interact or come in touch with such aspects, as suggested above with reference to Wearing et al (2009), but repeaters who are more accustomed to the district may feel less uncertain about the visited environments and openly interact with the settings and locals.

### CONCLUSION

Investigations of visitors' gaze on the local living culture of a historical district are of importance to understand such a historical district, which often serves as a place for the local life, could draw gazes of visitors. The combination of techniques proposed here is expected to aid comprehension of the local living culture, which may be complex and inconspicuous, but could still be influential for visitors' experiences. Studies of this kind also hold importance for managers who seek to foster visitation to their districts while considering possible impacts of visitors' gaze on the lives of locals. Future empirical studies based on the proposal illustrated in this presentation are expected to extend the knowledge of the local living culture of a historical district.

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