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# Tourist Recommendations With a Touch of SPICE: A TRS With Deep Cultural Understanding

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## ABSTRACT

Even though tourist recommendation systems (TRS) try to maximize user satisfaction by providing recommendations which will be rated highly by the user; there is room for trying to provide recommendations which normally do not rate highly, but during the experience provide content which will be thought-provoking. This will be beneficial both to the visitor and the host country.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• Information systems->Information systems applications->Mobile information processing systems •Human-centered computing->Collaborative and social computing->Collaborative and social computing theory, concepts and paradigms->Social content sharing

## KEYWORDS

diversity tourist recommender systems, community model

## 1 Goals

In the SPICE<sup>1</sup> project, we aim to promote social cohesion by researching and developing tools and methods, validated by implementation in five case studies, to support citizen curation with groups at risk of exclusion from participating in shared culture and interacting with other groups. Tourism is a domain that offers a variety of opportunities for achieving this goal. When considering tourism and specifically providing information to tourists about cultural heritage attractions, usually we can easily find multiple points of views regarding places and events that took place there over time. Different people from different origins and/or with different cultural background may feel differently about places and events. Enabling visitors to explore diversity of opinions and points of view may help them understand other groups and cultures, be more tolerant and empathetic and this, in turn may contribute to a better social cohesion. A TRS which while not only focused on recommending POIs, but also focus on introducing diversity of explanation and information representing diversity of opinions of local groups about the place and events may help tourists and locals alike to better understand the place and culture and by the use of technology support the goal of enhancing

social cohesion. This paper is the outline of an idea how such technologies could be expanded to create a different type of TRS.

This methodology is of extreme importance when it comes to areas where conflicts existed or still exist. In fact, the association of an area with conflict (past or present) can actually lead to new forms of tourism. Dark Tourism, originally identified by Lennon and Foley (1996), is used to describe an area that can be connected with conflict, tragedy, disaster, suffering or death becoming a site of tourism, visitation or pilgrimage. Sharpley (2009) discusses how an area of Dark Tourism can become a site used to convey (possibly conflicting) political messages and ideologies. Sharpley (2009) provides as an example The Troubles in Northern Ireland. He notes that numerous sites related to the Troubles, in particular in Belfast, have an associated tourist industry presenting alternative, conflicting perspectives on historical events. Dark Tourism in North Ireland has attracted recent media attention of local tourist initiatives such as walking tours, each telling their own stories, which the providers of the tours may consider unheard in, or contrary to, official narratives (BBC, 2018).

Another example is Jerusalem is a city considered to be holy for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Hence, over the years, it attracted all three religions attention, but not always in a peaceful manner. The city was conquered over and over again and currently is a place of dispute between Palestinians and Israelis where every side claims to own it due to various reasons. Visiting the city and getting the diverse points of view may lead visitors to understand better the complexity and possibly, get to know both sides of the issue. By providing diverse content in the form of material generated by citizens can lead to authenticity and acceptance. This can even be important for the host country, e.g., Israel, in that it allows her to present the conflict and address issues in a manner that adds to trust and understanding but at the same time not dismissive of the visitor's intellect.

## 2 Methods

In areas associated with conflicting political ideologies, there can be prejudice and a lack of social cohesion among both the inhabitants and visitors who subscribe to alternative political viewpoints. Allport (1954), in his influential work that become known as contact theory, proposed that prejudice and conflict between groups can be lessened by bringing people together, allowing them to recognize each other's common humanity. Zaki

<sup>1</sup> <https://spice-h2020.eu/>

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(2019) describes how contact theory become operationalized as an approach in which groups were brought together in a context that gave them each equal status (even if one group had more power outside the intervention) in order to learn about each other and build cooperation.

However, Zaki (2019) reports on examples where the intervention did not work as anticipated. A three-week contact-based programme between Catholic and Protestant boys in Northern Ireland, descended into a fight. Although elements of contact could be effective, such as sharing your point of view and listening to the views of others, full contact may not necessarily work. In another example described by Zaki (2019), Israelis felt better about Palestinians after hearing their stories but Palestinians felt better about Israelis after telling them their stories. The assumption of contact theory that all should participate equally, both giving and getting perspectives did not hold. Recent work has broken down contact into more specific empathetic processes such as perspective giving and perspective taking (Bazalgette 2017, Zaki 2019). These processes can be effective in reducing prejudice but participants need agency over how they engage with them. For example, a person who perceives their group as having less power may benefit from perspective giving (telling their story) but not perspective taking (receiving the stories of others).

This suggests ways in which TRSs could be enhanced to promote understanding in tourist areas associated with alternative, conflicting political viewpoints. The TRS could be used as a platform for the members of different groups to share their stories. Contributors could potentially receive feedback on the number of people who have engaged with their stories, in order to receive affirmation that their voice is being heard. The TRS could provide a diversity of viewpoints associated, for example, with locations, monuments and buildings. However, this must be done in a way that gives the end-user of the TRS agency over how and whether they engage with the recommended stories. Getting the perspective of another group demonstrably reduces prejudice (Kalla and Broockman 2020). However, contact-based interventions show that receiving alternative perspectives can be counterproductive if forced.

Use technology and a means for offering the user to experience a diversity of opinions concerning the various POIs that he visits including local opinions gathered from local social opinions, these can be classified so a variety of opinions can be presented to him. In order to provide appropriate content methods of Citizen Curation (Neill, 2017) and Participatory Heritage (Roued-Cunliffe & Copeland, 2017; Simon, 2009) can be used to encourage citizens to tell their side of the story. This can provide interesting content. In many cases citizens can be considered the “experts” and provide material that normally would not be available. (Dai et al., 2019; Lu et al., 2011). We then can use ontologies and theories such Schwartz Human Values (Schwartz, 1997, 2011), Empathy and Emotion, through text analysis to classify the text. Through User and Community modeling we can classify the user. Using these infobases we can then find interesting content which could be from members of the community who are either sympathetic to values held by the visitor or content while provocative would still induce empathy in order to present to the user.

## 2 Challenges and Pitfalls

The quest to bring different viewpoints has many challenges and pitfalls. On one hand one may choose items that are a bit bland in order not to upset the appearance of social cohesion, this may prove to be uninteresting and not reflect reality and thus be of less use to the visitor. On the other hand, material that is inflammatory may cause people to ignore the material completely or cause further distancing in distinct opposition stated goals. Thus, the need to search for material that states opposing views but still either invokes empathy or discusses the issue alongside a shared value.

## 2 Conclusions

While the SPICE project was intended to promote social cohesion within the different communities which make up the society surrounding a museum or cultural heritage organization; we see the advantages in using the methodology to introduce “outsiders” to the complexity surrounding a culture that they may be visiting and promote a new type of tourism which encourages diversity as opposed to popular “more of the same” recommender systems.

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