

## Conflict Resolution through Tourism Cooperation? The Case of the Partitioned Island-State of Cyprus

By: [Sevil F. Sönmez](#) and [Yorghos Apostolopoulos](#)

Sönmez, S. and Y. Apostolopoulos (2000). Conflict Resolution through Tourism Cooperation? The Case of the Partitioned Island-State of Cyprus. *Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing*. 9(3):35-48

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### **Abstract:**

Hostility and armed conflict can exist most easily in closed societies. Social science literature suggests that increasing contact among individuals from diverse groups creates an opportunity for mutual acquaintances, enhances understanding and acceptance among the interacting group members, and consequently reduces inter-group prejudice, tension, and conflict. International tourism has been recognized for the opportunities it provides for social contact to occur. This paper presents the conceptual framework for a more effective management of the intercommunal conflict on the island of Cyprus through tourism cooperation within the framework of the cooperation and inter-group contact theories. More specifically, the paper suggests how different groups of stakeholders can be instrumental in free tourist migration, joint tourism ventures, and tourism-based community interaction and collaboration between the Turkish-Cypriot north and the Greek-Cypriot south, and which in turn, may lead to an alternative—and more effective—solution to tension and conflict which has existed on the island for several decades.

**Keywords:** Cooperative marketing, conflict resolution, cooperation theory, inter-group contact theory

### **Article:**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, a considerable body of literature has been accumulated on the role of tourism in international peace, and in particular on how tourism can facilitate understanding between traditional foes.<sup>1-14</sup> The underlying assumption is that contact among individuals from diverse groups creates an opportunity for mutual acquaintance, enhances understanding and acceptance among the interacting group members, and consequently, reduces intergroup prejudice, tension, and conflict.<sup>15,16</sup> In the case of tourism, contact between foreign visitors and hosts of diverse and even conflicting groups may provide opportunities in which perceived notions and stereotypes are broken down and ultimately replaced with mutually positive perceptions of one another.

Existing studies, which have tested the foregoing assumption, present contradictory and often negative findings.<sup>1,17-19</sup> Simply setting up and observing the context of casual tour group interaction to test the relationship between tourism and attitude change is likely to be unsuccessful. To the contrary, careful planning and programming of such efforts by both tourist generating and receiving destinations are crucial for valid results.<sup>11</sup> “Tourism, by itself, neither leads to automatic prejudice reduction nor facilitates improvements in social relationships . . . [it] simply provides the opportunity for social contact to occur” (p. 641).<sup>1</sup>

While the potential for intergroup tension reduction through tourism-based interaction has attracted scholarly attention, what seems to be lacking is a clearly defined conceptual framework which sets up the context for exploring the feasibility of tourism cooperation among conflicting groups. Also lacking is the understanding of whether such cooperation can facilitate learning, understanding, and tolerance as well as serve common needs, reduce antagonisms, and facilitate reciprocity which will ultimately contribute to management, reduction and even resolution of conflicts. This paper, by suggesting a framework for cooperation for the divided island-state of Cyprus, attempts to illustrate how bi-communal tourism-based initiatives could enhance the overall political initiatives for a settlement of the Cyprus problem (discussed below). This multi-faceted model shows how residents, tourists, tourist enterprises, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can

be instrumental in antagonism reduction and how gradual free tourist migration and joint tourism ventures (cooperative marketing) will serve common needs, which can benefit both the Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots with considerable returns.

### ***ETHNIC CONFLICT IN CYPRUS***

While tension, conflict, and war have characterized Turkish-Greek relations for several centuries, Cyprus has presented a comparatively new arena for dispute between the two countries. The major source of these problems in Cyprus began with the politicization of communal differences between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots created by the British (during the 1925-1960 period) in order to serve their own strategic interests in the Middle East.<sup>20</sup> This politicization of ethnic identity paralleled the rise of antagonistic nationalisms and the development of different “visions” between the two groups regarding their relationships to their respective motherlands. Particularly during Cyprus’ anticolonial struggle in the 1950s, Greek Cypriots sought *enosis* (union) with Greece, while Turkish Cypriots—encouraged by the British—favored *taksim* (partition) of Cyprus.<sup>20,21</sup>

The 1960 settlement and birth of the Republic of Cyprus (RC) was imposed by the three interested powers (Great Britain, Greece, and Turkey) without regard for local realities and for social and psychological needs and concerns. Instead, the subsequent constitutional provisions further intensified and institutionalized ethnic/identity differences and existing mistrust and antagonism. Further, the failure of local elites to promote a single national, Cypriot, ethnic identity reinforced existing ethnic identity differences, competition over power sharing, mistrust and intolerance, and adversarial intercommunal relations. All these, and especially the introduction of constitutional amendments by then President of Cyprus Makarios, triggered intercommunal clashes in 1963 and 1964 (with subsequent suffering and insecurity, particularly for Turkish Cypriots<sup>22</sup>) and the ultimate withdrawal of the Turkish Cypriot leadership from the government in order to pursue a separatist policy. By 1967, the first overt move for a partitioned island took place with the segregation of the Turkish Cypriot community and the beginning of its direct dependence on Turkey. Naturally, this intensified mistrust and suspicion between the two communities—a situation which was worsened by underground extremist groups active in both communities. In 1974, this chain of events led to the Greek junta-engineered coup against Makarios and the subsequent Turkish military intervention/invasion (differently interpreted by the two sides) which resulted in the *de facto* partition of the island.<sup>20,23-25</sup> The ensuing population exchange involved Greek Cypriots relocating to the south and Turkish Cypriots moving north. In 1983, a Turkish Cypriot unilateral declaration of statehood announced the establishment of the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus,’ which has since failed to achieve formal recognition by any country other than Turkey (see Figure 1). Since 1974, the United Nations peace-keeping force maintains peace along a demarcation line (called Attila Line or Green Line) slicing the island in two through Nicosia. The new generation of Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots are growing up separately and with little knowledge of each other, as the chasm widens despite various negotiation and mediation efforts to resolve the conflict.<sup>20,25</sup>

### ***ONE ISLAND—TWO TOURISM INDUSTRIES***

For the past 24 years, the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities have evolved separately. Despite numerous negotiations and mediation efforts to resolve the conflict—as well as a common United Nations, European Union, United States, and Russian offer of support for a single, demilitarized, and bi-zonal federal island-state—there is minimal free movement or contact between the two communities and, as a result, efforts to improve the situation are literally deadlocked. During this time, the economic fortunes of the two communities have followed divergent paths (illustrated by \$10,591 per capita income of Greek Cypriots compared to \$3,538 for Turkish Cypriots).<sup>26</sup> While the RC has shed severe handicaps inherited from the war and flourished into a relatively affluent, independent society, the ‘Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus’ (‘TRNC’)—as a result of international sanctions—has struggled to achieve economic growth and escape its economic dependence on Turkey.<sup>22,27-28</sup> Consequently, tourism development—crucial to the overall development of both regions of Cyprus—has also followed remarkably different trajectories.<sup>29</sup> The impact of tourism on the RC has been significant. In 1995, an influx of 2.1 million tourists visited the RC<sup>30</sup> and revenues totaled \$1.62 billion, accounting for approximately 20 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and representing 40.1 percent of total receipts of all exports in goods and services.<sup>30</sup> During the same year, over 34,100 were employed by the

hotel and restaurant sector, representing over 10 percent of the island’s gainful employment and over 100,000 people were directly or indirectly employed in the tourism industry. Residents of the RC, particularly those in the coastal areas, indicate that tourism has significantly improved their living standards in the last two decades.<sup>31</sup> The fortunes of the ‘TRNC’ tourism sector have differed markedly from those in the south. The north’s tourism sector has not had the widespread impact on the economy and society seen in the south. In 1994, over 351 thousand tourists visited the north, 73% of whom were short-term visitors from Turkey. The industry contributed 3.3 percent to the GDP, and tourism employment accounted for nearly 10 percent of the total labor force.<sup>32</sup> Although net earnings from tourism increased substantially between 1982 and 1992, they lagged behind those in the south—in 1994, net tourism revenues were U.S. \$172.9 million.

FIGURE 1. The Divided Island of Cyprus



While the RC has clearly accrued economic benefits from tourism far greater than those in the ‘TRNC,’ tourism overall has proved a mixed blessing in the south. Although tourism fueled the RC’s revival, it has also seriously endangered natural resources<sup>31</sup> and, if not soon diversified, will face serious regional competition (from other Mediterranean destinations). Even though tourism in the north has begun to pick up during the past few years, the most important hurdle remains the lack of recognition of the ‘TRNC’ by the international community.<sup>31,33</sup> While the lack of recognition has perpetuated serious weaknesses for the sector, with low occupancy rates, high dependence on Turkish travelers, and a lack of diversification, no serious ecological or sociocultural

ramifications have been identified.<sup>22,31</sup> It is this unspoiled condition that the north may be able to use to its advantage in an effort to become a “threat” to the expensive and conventional south.

### ***CONFLICT RESOLUTION THROUGH TOURISM COOPERATION?***

While the rift between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities is undeniable, so too are their shared cultural characteristics and imperative need for a resolution of their conflict. Since conventional efforts to reduce the tension have failed, it may be necessary to utilize new ‘insights’ “. . . from fields other than politics . . . and from the business community for a vision of the benefits from international trade and the free flow of goods, people, and ideas” (p. 37).<sup>5</sup> Conflict resolution in Cyprus may be aided by: (a) the facilitation of greater and freer contact between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots as well as between locals and tourists through the removal of various types of restrictions, and (b) the initiation and management of cooperative tourism efforts between the north and south. In addition, and in the light of the RC’s current negotiations to join the European Union (EU), it is important to remember the reasons behind the EU’s formation. The EU (initially named European Economic Community) was established on the premise that if the peoples who were previous adversaries during WWII got to know each other better, there would be less likelihood of future wars. Still today, one of the main cornerstones of European Union policy is the freedom to travel and the minimization of frontier controls.<sup>5</sup>

History is replete with examples of how people’s efforts to understand each other are hindered by borders, whether physical, political, or ideological, and how “. . . closed societies are prone to suspicion, hostility, and armed conflict” (p. 37).<sup>5</sup> Cooperative marketing is believed to be beneficial for countries where tourism outcomes (i.e., tourism profitability, tourist flow) resulting from cooperative ventures exceed those the country would achieve by acting alone.<sup>34</sup> (Other examples abound, such as Israel-Palestinian Authority, Israel-Egypt, and Republic of Ireland-Northern Ireland, where countries can cooperate in tourism for their mutual advantage and gradually move toward conflict resolution.) In particular, “cooperative marketing may be particularly advantageous when a country’s tourism product is underdeveloped or when existing products are in an advanced stage of the product life cycle and it is desirable to attract new markets and/or formulate new products” (p. 25).<sup>34</sup> This is particularly relevant to the case of the ‘TRNC,’ where the tourism product is underdeveloped and the RC, where a saturated and declining tourism product needs rejuvenation.

A brief glance at Cyprus’ overall tourism industry over the past two decades and at the additional problems created by existing political restrictions leads to the conclusion that both communities stand to gain from a fresh, common perspective. Given the island’s limited tourism product, the increasing dissatisfaction of northern European and American tourists with conventional mass tourism products—such as those offered in Cyprus, the increasing competition by more diversified tourist destinations (e.g., Far East, Asia, Pacific), and shrinking market share, it makes a great deal of sense for the two sides to begin an alliance promoting Cyprus as a single destination.<sup>31,35</sup> Moreover, cooperation between the opposing sides in a mutually beneficial economic endeavor may boost the peace process more than other actions have in the past.

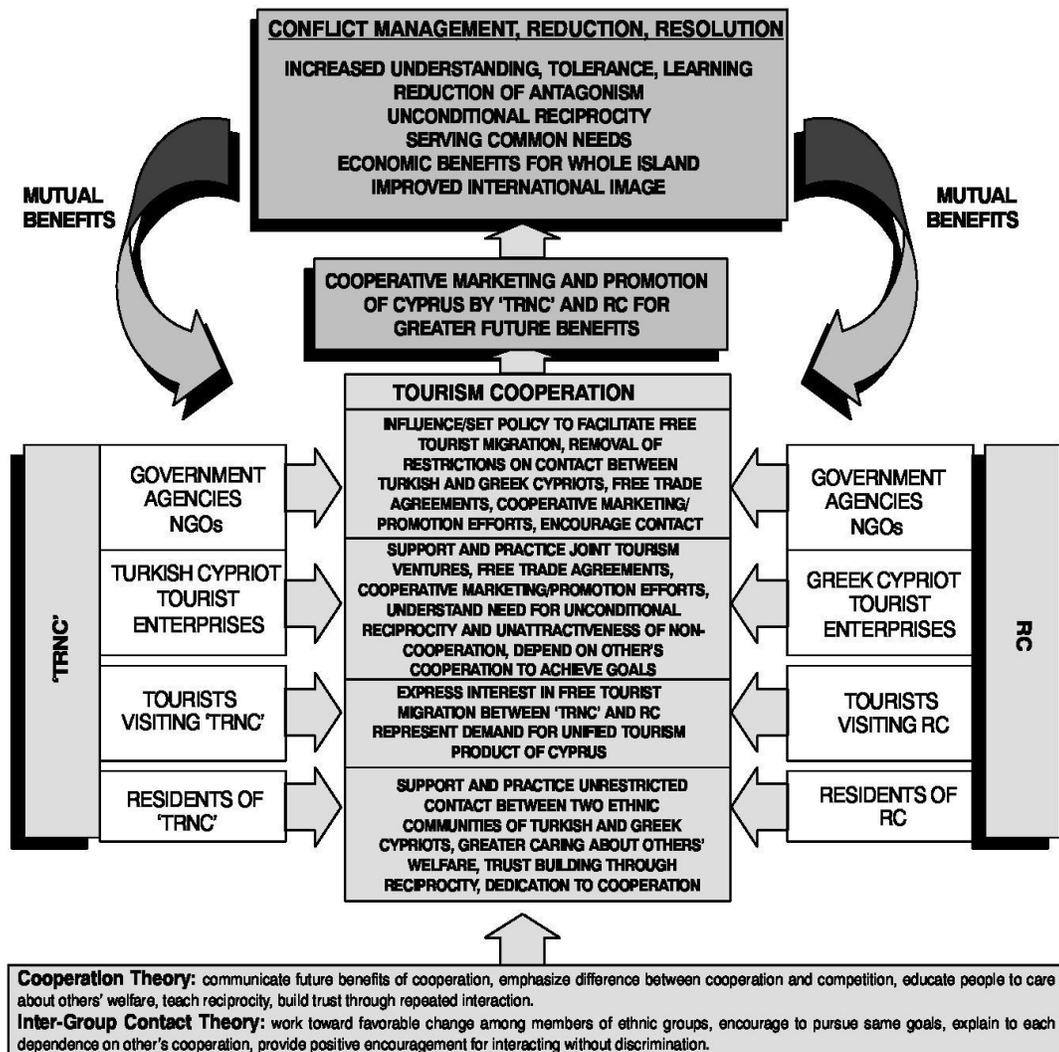
### ***MODELING TOURISM COOPERATION***

The conceptual framework for tourism cooperation on the island of Cyprus, which is influenced by various stakeholders and which, in turn, can potentially lead to conflict resolution is illustrated in Figure 2. The model is supported by the cooperation<sup>36</sup> and the inter-group contact<sup>37</sup> theories, which stress the importance of increased contact between groups with conflicting interests in order to improve cooperation and understanding.

In order to promote sustainable cooperation among players, the cooperation theory advises the gradual elimination of obstacles to cooperation by transforming strategic settings. Recommended stages include clearly communicating—to all stakeholders—the greater future benefits of cooperation as opposed to lack of cooperation (*enlarging the future’s importance*); emphasizing the difference between cooperation and competition (*changing the payoffs*); educating people to care about the welfare of others and stressing that individual benefits are positively affected by others’ welfare (*teaching people to care about each other*); requiring unconditional reciprocity by making non-cooperation “unprofitable” and therefore unattractive (*teaching*

*reciprocity*); and finally focusing on positive results and repeated interaction to build trust and strengthen dedication to cooperation (*improve recognition abilities*). According to the inter-group contact theory, contact between people from different ethnic groups can lead to a favorable change when members of each group have equal status, pursue the same goals, depend on one another's cooperation to achieve their goals, and receive positive encouragement for interacting with one another without discrimination. Although, both Greek and Turkish Cypriots stand to gain from tourism cooperation and they depend on the other's cooperation for success, they are not of equal status—the Turkish Cypriots comprise only 22 percent of the island's population. Considering the caveat of unequal status, it may be possible to apply the inter-group contact theory to the Cyprus situation.

**FIGURE 2. Conceptual Framework to Explore Feasibility of Tourism Cooperation Among Conflicting 'TRNC' and RC**



As suggested by the cooperation theory, it is imperative to communicate to all stakeholders that the long-term benefits to be accrued to both the RC and the 'TRNC'—by pooling efforts to market the entire island as a single destination and cooperating in all facets of their tourism industries—are clearly greater than those resulting from their competition against each other. As a starting point, it is imperative to make interactions between parties more durable and frequent. Prolonged interaction facilitates the establishment of patterns of cooperation based on reciprocity, whereas, more frequent interaction increases the importance of each imminent action to be taken by the parties.<sup>36</sup> The primary stakeholders that have the power to influence tourism cooperation and that need to be aware of the benefits of cooperation and importance of reciprocity include *government agencies, tourist*

*enterprises, residents, and NGOs.* As implied by the two theories, for successful and sustainable cooperation, active participation of all stakeholders is necessary. Educating people about others' welfare, requiring reciprocity, and increasing contact between groups (i.e., business owners, residents) that depend upon one another's cooperation are essential.

The cooperation, input, and support of each group of stakeholders are imperative to enable both sides to unite in a cooperative effort that will ultimately move the entire island of Cyprus toward probable mutual benefits, which may ultimately lead to the resolution of the long-standing conflict. Although each group of stakeholders has its specific area of influence, the support of each and all of the groups—can significantly contribute to the success of the model. For example, although local and central government agencies (i.e., governors'/mayors' offices, chambers of commerce, ports of authority, tourism boards, police/health departments, regional planning offices), as well as NGOs (i.e., Friends of Earth, refugee groups, Greek Orthodox Church) are in the position to institute or influence policies regarding free tourist migration, removal of restrictions on the contact between the two communities, trade agreements, and cooperative marketing efforts between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots—they are very much affected by public support and the willingness of the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot residents to accept such policies. Therefore, the attitudes of residents toward the 'other' ethnic group or 'other' government, toward peace and conflict, toward tourism development on the island, as well as their confidence in the outcomes of such cooperation are important to assess. Similarly, enterprises providing tourism services (e.g., accommodations, airlines, tour operators, automobile rental companies) must be willing to participate in joint tourist ventures involving citizens, governments, and businesses from the north and south. This can be possible only if they see that such ventures can satisfy common needs, interests, and reciprocal relations, assure sustainable cooperation, and lead ultimately to conflict management and resolution. The role of tourists in this model should not be underestimated. A clear profile of tourists visiting north and south Cyprus is necessary in order to understand their travel motives, level of interest in visiting the 'other' side of Cyprus, level of awareness of the conflict in Cyprus, and perceptions of travel risks. Travelers will define demand for Cyprus as an integrated tourism product and in turn encourage tourist enterprises to support joint tourism ventures.

As the model illustrates, residents and tourists can influence tourist enterprises and ultimately NGOs and government agencies into developing and implementing policies to support a cooperative rather than a competitive tourism effort. As suggested by both the cooperation theory and the inter-group contact theory, increasing encounters between ethnic groups and representatives of tourist enterprises will help the two sides overcome some of the tension and move toward greater understanding and trust. The combination of free tourist migration, removal of restrictions on contact between ethnic groups, free trade agreements, and joint tourism ventures can lead to cooperative marketing. In the case of Cyprus, cooperative marketing can involve the development of an integrated tourism marketing plan, cooperative promotion of Cyprus as one destination (made possible by free tourist movement between the north and south), and a clear positioning strategy to provide Cyprus with a competitive advantage over other Mediterranean islands. The tourism industries of both north and south Cyprus will benefit from cooperative marketing efforts, especially because they are at different stages of the tourist destination life cycle. Visitation will be distributed throughout the island, alleviating the more developed locations from the high concentration of tourists and allowing the less developed areas to enjoy the economic benefits. By integrating the unspoiled natural environment of the north and the developed resorts and attractions of the south, Cyprus will be more competitive with other destinations in offering a more diversified tourism product to its visitors. A potential result from this tourism cooperation will be an additional and very important benefit for Cyprus—the development of a more positive international image as an open and cooperative society. It is not unrealistic to believe that this cooperative effort has the potential to benefit both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots economically, socially, and politically, to serve common needs, to facilitate reciprocity, to increase understanding, tolerance, and learning, and ultimately to manage, reduce, and resolve the conflict.

The suggested model has the potential to prove a new—and urgently needed—approach to conflict management efforts between different ethnic groups. As most regional conflicts proceed to a gradual resolution (i.e., former

Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, Middle East), policy makers might be able to consider using the potential of tourism in their efforts to restore peace to the island. Finally, testing this model empirically—within the framework of the cooperation and inter-group contact theories—may also lead to research efforts moving beyond simple observations of diverse tourist group interaction to direct investigation of the attitudes of all involved parties toward tourism-based cooperation and its capacity to promote peace, which may affect policy making.

## CONCLUSIONS

The successful management of ethnic conflict in Cyprus constitutes a fundamental step in the process of establishing political stability and peace. Generating trust and understanding between the two communities which may facilitate the development of cooperative partnerships such as joint commerce ventures, trade, as well as other economic activities can lay the foundation for inter-communal cooperation. Cyprus needs both ethnic groups in a symbiosis of peace and collaboration in order to be able to compete in the regional and international tourism market. Consequently, a stable sociopolitical climate will attract foreign investment and subsequent employment opportunities, which would improve the chances for further economic development, growth, and prosperity for the locals. In turn, this will contribute positively to regional and global security in the geopolitically sensitive region of the southeastern Mediterranean.

Taking into account tourism's immense role in the economic development of developing regions, the case of Cyprus underscores the need. On a small island with limited resources as Cyprus, tourism can constitute a development tool, which may contribute to the long-term viability of the economy. In this context, tourism can become not only the impetus for economic sustainability of Cyprus but also for political stability and peace. It is encouraging that the view put forth in this paper was recently echoed on a larger scale by a Turkish tourism official, who at a meeting in Turkey, called on Greek tour operators to cooperate in order to compete against Far East and African destinations. Tahla Camas, President of the Tourist Agency Union, also noted that “. . . this cooperation will contribute to peace and brotherhood between the two countries.”<sup>38</sup>

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