Creating a Competitive Advantage through Cultural Heritage – Entertainment

This week's article will continue to focus on the immense potential for the development of cultural heritage tourism in Barbados and the Caribbean. The local and regional entertainment sector will be discussed in terms of its prospects for becoming a more viable export service, especially as the region seeks to differentiate itself from other parts of the world offering sun, sea and sand that are not so blessed with creative artistes and art forms.

Traditionally the Caribbean has focused on the development of the manufacturing and agricultural sectors. However, in the new globalised economy it is estimated that copyright, cultural and media industries are the sectors registering the most significant growth. As Barbados and the region seek to diversify their economies, they must endeavour to capitalise upon the wealth of talent existing in the unique cultural capabilities and expressions of their people.

Without a doubt, relative to its size, the region has made a phenomenal contribution to the global cultural economy. Jamaica is one of the best examples of a Caribbean island that has achieved mass-market appeal and made a significant impact on the world scene in terms of commercialization. That island first achieved international recognition and acclaim through the music of the legendary Bob Marley back in the 1960s and 1970s. Over the years, Jamaica has used its entertainment industry to successfully promote its rich culture and reggae is one of the main elements prominently featured in the island's destination image, especially in terms of its tourism industry. Reggae is now recognized internationally as being one of the major musical genres and has successfully catapulted the island on to the world stage.

While not on the same scale as Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, and several other Caribbean countries are presently also enjoying some success in the music trade on the regional and global market. Bands such as Krosfyah, Square One and Xtatic have achieved widespread acclaim and so have several individual performers. Festival tourism, which draws heavily on indigenous music, has grown into a multimillion-dollar industry in the Caribbean. The Crop-Over festival for example is responsible for stimulating economic activity in excess of BDS$60 million annually and for substantially increasing visitor arrivals during the traditionally slow summer period. Trinidad's carnival, the biggest and most renowned in the region in terms of visitor and tourist expenditure, is promoted as being the "Greatest Show on Earth". Caribbean music has been exported throughout the region and in many international cities with large diasporic populations. The success the various overseas Caribbean carnivals, whose tourism expenditure is in the hundreds of millions of dollars, is also an illustration of the popularity of West Indian culture on the global scene.

Despite these examples of the great export potential of the local and regional music industry, the reality is that the economic contribution of media such as our musical bands and other forms of cultural activities to the national and regional economies, have been underrated and plagued with many difficulties. A 2001 study that was commissioned by the Caribbean Export Development Agency on the export potential of the music industry in the region revealed that there are many challenges stifling the growth and development of the entertainment industry. The report found

that the home markets for Caribbean music were subject to high levels of piracy and other forms of copyright infringement, weak marketing and distribution channels, low levels of airplay in the electronic media and weak governmental support in terms of industrial, trade and educational policies relative to other sectors in the economy.

In this age of globalization and trade liberalization, it is imperative that a much more professional and organized approach be taken to the development of this potentially lucrative industry. Music must now be seriously viewed as a commodity and be consciously and systematically pursued as a cultural industry for its economic impact in the local market for export. A strong, indigenous Barbadian product and by extension, in our quest for regional unity and integration, an equally compelling Caribbean product must be developed that is resilient enough to compete on a global scale. Thus far, the entertainers, largely on their own, have proven that the demand for our unique culture does exist. The region must therefore very purposefully exploit the opportunities that are available in the international market for the distinctive product that it has brought to the global entertainment sector. Support systems must therefore be created by both the public and private sectors, as well as through foreign investment to enhance this potential for economic benefits, by improving the quality and marketability of cultural goods and services.

Additionally, the different forms of cultural expression should also be more widely used in the marketing of Barbados to better demonstrate to the international market who we are as a people and what we represent. This is essential in an age of globalisation where cultural homogenisation and penetration is one of the biggest threats to the national identities of small vulnerable states like Barbados.
Negotiations on the entertainment sector at the hemispheric and global level have been focusing primarily on the issues of protecting intellectual property, supporting the free movement of entertainers and musicians and their product, seeking penetration of markets abroad through commercial presence, ensuring that entertainers are given equal treatment and protection in overseas markets, maintaining policies that promote cultural industries and supporting the introduction of competently regulated competition in telecommunications services.

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