CHAPTER EIGHT

DISHING UP THE CITY:
TOURISM AND STREET VENDORS IN CUZCO

Griet Steel

Tourism has proven to be a vital strategy for urban regeneration, and governments and the tourist industry are spending increasingly large sums to transform their cities into tourist paradises (Holcomb 1999: 54). In cooperation with private entrepreneurs, local governments are spending a lot of money to establish the physical facilities required to accommodate large numbers of visitors and to make cities attractive to tourists (Fainstein & Judd 1999: 7). Governments generally invest in infrastructure that is intended to attract and fulfill the needs of tourists; governments are also important actors in the promotion of tourism, that is, in marketing the city. Local governments must provide clear markers, or tourist icons, in order to ‘sell’ their cities to tourists. Because competence has increased on a worldwide scale, they have to construct—whether or not intentionally—landmarks that put their cities on the tourist map (Holcomb 1999: 58). By advertising their images, they transform their cities into objects or commodities that can be exchanged, possessed and owned.

Cuzco is an interesting example with which to illustrate the process of the objectification of the tourist city. 1 Each year, this city located high in the Peruvian Andes attracts more tourists than it has residents. The tourists are attracted by the historical and cultural heritage of the Inca Empire, which are the tourist landmarks or icons of Cuzco. These landmarks give the impression that Cuzco has not changed much since Inca times; that the city is still as famous, vivacious and beautiful as it was. However, this rather stereotypical way of presenting the city has important repercussions for contemporary urban life in Cuzco, as its residents experience the city in another way than the tourists do. For tourists, the city is a place of leisure, while for the local population it

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1 On the concept of ‘tourist city’, see Fainstein & Judd 1999.
is a place in which to live and work. The historical centre has been transformed into an island of affluence isolated from urban life in the poor neighbourhoods, which are characterized by crime, poverty and urban decay. This context of fragmentation raises questions about the position of the local population in the tourist picture of Cuzco: are they included in or excluded from these tourism developments? In this chapter, I look at this issue by focusing on ambulant street vendors and their position in the construction of a tourist city.

Street vendors are very visible actors in the tourist scene and form an illustrative example of the global-local encounter. However, as I show in this chapter, street vendors have an ambivalent position in tourism developments. I first look briefly at the Inca civilization and the decline of the Inca Empire, because the Inca and the colonial heritage are always used as symbols of local pride as well as to profile the city as the centre of national culture. I then illustrate the alienation of the historical centre from the rest of the city and describe how Cuzco has been transformed into a schizophrenic city in which the affluence of tourists stands in sharp contrast to the poverty of a large proportion of the local population. I follow this by describing the role of the local government in these tourism developments and in the process of alienating the tourist centre from the rest of the city. Finally, I focus on the ambivalent position of street vendors in the tourism picture that reinvents and glorifies the past.2

Reinvention of the past

Between 1200 and 1532, the city of Cuzco functioned as the ceremonial, political and economic centre of the rapidly expanding Inca Empire (Tahuantinsuyu), which at its peak stretched over the entire Andes and embraced a part of the rainforest and coastal strip of South America. The Inca civilization is generally regarded as a strong, well-organized civilization that achieved a substantial level of material well-being and cultural sophistication (Klarén 2000: 12). The sophistication of the

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2 This article is based on my PhD dissertation ‘Vulnerable careers, tourism and livelihood dynamics among street vendors in Cuzco, Peru’ (Steel, 2008). It is a result of the fieldwork I conducted between 2004 and 2007 in Cuzco as part of my project on the way street vendors can benefit from tourism in Cuzco. The project was financed by WOTRO.