Towards Reviving Post-Olympic Athens as a Cultural Destination

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This paper examines the effects of global change on the status and qualities of the Greek national capital, Athens, focusing on how they affect the development of cultural tourism in the city. Although Athens constituted one of the most significant destinations for Greek tourism in the past, in recent years it started to weaken. Athens is characterised by a series of problems, amongst them the degradation of its environment and quality of life, and traffic congestion. However, in terms of tourism development the Olympic Games helped in re-imaging the city and upgrading its infrastructure. This study based on semi-structured interviews with top officials, reveals how global change has affected Athens' socio-cultural/economic status, identity and image. Despite the tourism policy/planning responses to global changes, Athens' tourism continues to decline leaving unexplored potential such as its rich cultural heritage, new multicultural identity, and the New Acropolis Museum. The paper suggests that cultural elements of capital cities must be multidimensional including a variety of attractions and amenities. The use of cultural heritage assets needs to be in line with global developments in order for cities to effectively leverage heritage for cultural tourism.

Introduction

The globalisation of tourism has led to new markets with unique needs that seek diverse experiences through the consumption of special forms of tourism. Amongst them the emergence of cultural heritage tourism represents an indispensable means for destinations to provide a unique tourism product. Specifically, transforming heritage into a tourism product meets the diverse market that was created after the 1980s, when tourism started becoming more flexible and segmented, compared to mass tourism standards (McManus, 1997). Cultural heritage hence, plays increasingly a central role for the lifestyles of a new service class with new cultural consumption preferences (Graham, Ashworth &

Tunbridge, 2000). Consequently, cultural heritage is one of the most important assets of a destination.

In this regard, many places endowed with cultural elements such as capital cities are by definition important cultural heritage destinations. Hall (2002) argues that many capitals portray important cultural/heritage or symbolic facets and that the capital city function has enormous benefits for cultural heritage tourism. Similarly, Russo and van der Borg (2002, p. 631) state: 'by investing in cultural attractions and infrastructure, cities seek to secure a niche position in the international tourism map, developing an industry that is sustainable and plentiful in synergies with other strategic sectors of the urban economy'. For this reason, capital cities have the potential to become important cultural destinations. However, globalisation affects the image of contemporary urban places and changes the landscape of many capital cities. It is crucial therefore, to examine the role of cultural tourism and use of heritage by urban destinations seeking to respond to the changing global conditions that have affected their status and qualities.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of global change on the capital city of Greece, Athens, and to investigate the potential of this city to capitalise on its rich heritage in synergy with the recent infrastructural improvements, in order to diversify its tourism product and promote the city in the global market as a cultural destination. The paper seeks to shed light on the complexities and responses of a small country's national capital to capitalise on its assets aimed at revitalising its tourism industry in response to global change pressures.

Globalisation and Cultural Tourism in National Capitals

The changes occurring in tourism production and consumption are an aspect of globalisation and as such tourism is integral to the globalisation process (Cole, 2009; Shaw & Williams, 2004; Theobald, 2005). Meethan (2001) argues that tourism can be best conceptualised as a global process of commodification and consumption involving flows of people, capital, images and cultures. This raises the issue whether the globalisation of tourism is a force of homogenisation or diversity (Chang, Milne, Fallon & Pohlmann, 1996; Meethan, 2001; Teo & Li, 2003). Specifically, the restructuring of space and the new urban aesthetic involves the incorporation of commodified symbolic forms of other cultures, while tourism itself involves at some level the commodification of places and the large-scale movement of people across national boundaries (Meethan, 2001). In this regard, the shaping of new urban forms results from two concurrent processes, namely urban historic preservation and contemporary innovative designs. These processes yield 'glocalised' urban landscapes that cultivate a distinctive spirit of place and simultaneously attract global tourism (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004).

In fact, tourism has brought significant changes for cities and national capitals. Due to the economic importance of tourism and the intensive competition many urban destinations had to reconfigure, reorganise and transform their tourism product mix. These modifications were frequently based on spatial re-distribution and they included the use of heritage elements (Maitland, 2010). Thus, heritage is inextricably linked with tourism.

Capital cities always had significant qualities that motivated people to visit them (Maitland, 2010) and heritage is one of their most important assets. As Pearce (2001) argues, many cities' historical centres are identified as important destinations since they amalgamate a series of attractions such as old buildings, monuments, and museums. Further to the tangible heritage resources of a destination, there are also the intangible characteristics, which entail the symbolic meanings embodied in a place. According to Park (2010), heritage places are tightly bonded to the symbolic meanings that exist in the material/tangible characteristics of the past. Considering that capital cities have rich heritage, they can be important cultural destinations providing tangible and intangible heritage elements.

In terms of tourism development, destinations strive for differentiation by commodifying their unique characteristics, often based on their heritage that is capable of fostering the spirit of place through symbolic meanings. In this regard, the interrelationship between material tourism features and symbolic elements of a destination shape the ways that the local is conceptualised as a counterweight to the standardised tendencies of the global market (Meethan, 2001). Thus, cultural elements of capital cities become important signifiers of local identities in a global context. As McKercher and du Cross (2002) suggest, cultural elements integrate the exclusive features of a place, which reflect its culture and history with the promotion of the cultural traditions, background and landscapes. For capital cities, the deposits of culture provide an opportunity to represent themselves, and undertake a significant role for epitomising and signifying a nation (Maitland, 2010). Hence, cultural assets of capital cities under the

appropriate tourism development are important promoters of a nation's identity worldwide.

However, the impact of globalisation affects in a complex way the identity and culture of cities. In this respect, the construct of palimpsest is useful to help us understand the continuous transformation of heritage in cities. In particular, the palimpsest is the writing block of urban landscape that can be erased and reused several times while leaving traces and marks from the past and superimposing a new urban layer over the previous one (Khirfan, 2010). The reuse of palimpsest is a process that transforms the emerging urban form into a contemporary cosmic one by invoking interpretations of the symbolic significance of tangible and intangible heritage combined with innovative designs and urban rituals, hence forming a cosmic morphology that preserves and adapts historic spatial relationships and initiates new ones (Khirfan, 2010). The palimpsest analogy can guide place marketing to project the emerging image of a cultural destination and design tourist activities built in its constantly reconstructed culture. This is an important element in differentiating national capitals from their competitors and projecting their unique character and qualities.

Athens' Status and Qualities in the Post-Olympic Era

Athens, the capital of Greece, concentrates in its wider metropolitan region of Attica approximately the country's half population and the majority of Greece's most important economic sectors/activities. However, its status within the European (and global) urban network system is relatively low. According to different classifications, Athens' urban

conglomeration is merely a regional metropolis of small international importance and low-level influence in the South-East European periphery (Beriatos, 2006; Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004). In part, Athens' weak international status can be explained by the spatial disadvantages that the city exhibits such as unplanned residential areas, obsolescent infrastructure, degraded built fabric, traffic congestion, and environmental pollution caused by the unregulated urbanization growth the city has undergone after the WWII (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004; Papageorgiou-Venetas, 1996). As a result, Athens' reputation became synonymous to a city with limited natural scenery, unpleasant environmental conditions, non-functional infrastructure and overall lower quality of life compared to other European capitals.

Similarly, the spatial restructuring of Athens affected its tourism sector. Although Athens was one of Greece's most important destinations until the 1970s, since then its status has been declining steadily (Table 1) due to, among others, the negative city image and environmental problems (Apostolopoulos & Sonmez, 2001; Papageorgiou-Venetas, 1996). Additionally, following Greece's accession to the European Monetary Union, the cost of living has been raised, which thus has made Athens an expensive destination in comparison with neighbouring cities. Consequently, the decline of tourist arrivals in Athens exhibits the inappropriateness of mass tourism model that Athens' tourism sector was based upon (Dagli, 1998) and the inadequacy of associated ad-hoc marketing strategies applied (Zografos & Deffner, 2007).

[TABLE 1]

The hosting of Olympics was seen as an opportunity to address Athens' declining international position, urban qualities and tourism industry. In the course of preparation for the Olympics, the metropolitan area of Athens underwent a tremendous urban development (Potsiou & Zentelis, 2005). Hence, efforts were focused, on the successful organisation of the Games and on the overall restructuring/reshaping of the city (Tsartas, Koutoulas & Papatheodorou, 2008) in order to achieve a higher level of operation as a new emerging regional metropolitan centre in South-East Europe/Mediterranean (Beriatos, 2006).

The implications of these efforts concerned primarily Athens' urban network system and landscape. First, the location of Olympic projects followed a strategy of multi-nuclear urban reshaping and regeneration (Beriatos, 2006; Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004) that dispersed the sitting of permanent facilities, and of the accompanying large-scale development of activity centres in the entire urban tissue of Athens metropolitan region. This strategy, however, affected negatively the locational patterning of Athens by further promoting its current urban sprawling pattern (Gospodini, 2009; Zifou et al., 2004). Second, these new planned epicentres of athletics, culture and leisure clusters for the Olympics were dominated by innovative design schemes and built heritage projects, and thus acted as a catalyst for the city to transform its landscape towards a 'glocalised' physiognomy (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004).

Undoubtedly, Athens has significantly changed, and these changes in turn have influenced its tourism industry. The new infrastructure increased the quality of life and set the basis for its upgrading as a destination. Although, the number of Athenian hotels has not been increased, their improvement through refurbishments and upgrades due to

the Olympics led to higher quality of the city's supply (Tsartas et al., 2008). Table 2 summarises Athens' pre-Olympic status and post-Olympic improvements:

[TABLE 2]

Overall, the Olympics helped in re-imaging the city and upgrading its infrastructure (Asprogerakas, 2007; Kavaratzis, 2008; Kissoudi, 2008). However, the lack of strategic planning about the post-Olympic use of the constructed facilities (Beriatos, 2006; Gospodini, 2009; Zifou et al., 2004) has also led to an inability to develop a competitive post-Olympic tourism product (Weed, 2008). As a result, Athens is not as competitive as other Greek destinations, such as the Aegean Islands (EL.STAT., 2009b). Moreover, the percentage of the city hotels' capacity, despite the increased rates during the first three years after the Olympics (ETOAA, 2007) started to decline since 2008 (ITEP, 2010). Koutoulas, Tsartas, Papatheodorou and Prountzou (2009) argue that tourism in Athens drops because of the lost interest of tour operators for the city, the global economic recession, and the riots that recently took place.

In short, Athens has undergone dramatic spatial and landscape transformations as it is being restructured in the rise of post-industrial urban economic sectors and industries (Gospodini, 2009). While the Olympics gave an impetus to urban reshaping and status of Athens, the challenge for the city is to capitalise both on its heritage and modern 'glocalised' face in order to revive its tourism industry. The development and promotion of cultural tourism represents the most viable way to succeed in this endeavor.

Method

A qualitative research approach was employed in order to provide an in–depth analysis of the issues under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2009), pertaining to how global change affected Athens and its potential to be a cultural destination. The methods of data collection included semi-structured interviews with Athens' officials and review of archival material regarding the city's tourism plans. Purposive sampling of high rank representatives was applied for the selection of interviewees in order to draw knowledge from the most informed sources. Elite interviewing provides a rich and thorough source of data as the top executives of organisations hold strategic knowledge (King, 1994) and can express their ideas/experiences (Arksey & Knight, 1999). In this regard, the purposive sampling of individual informants was made on the basis that they held a key position in the organisations affecting cultural tourism in Athens and thus have expertise in this area. In total, seven interviews were conducted with representatives from Greek National Tourism Organisation (GNTO), Ministry of Tourism, and Athens' local authorities (Table 3). The interviews took place in the interviewees' offices and lasted on average 60-90 minutes. A team of two interviewers conducted and recorded the interviews.

[TABLE 3]

An interview guide was prepared to give a general direction to the interviews. This allowed flexibility to elicit probes and clarify unclear responses. The major interview directions sought to explore three main issues (Table 4):

[TABLE 4]

The interview transcripts were transcribed verbatim and then translated to English. Each author examined thoroughly the transcripts along with the archival material. In this process, important sections were highlighted and memos were written by each author to record initial interpretations (Strauss, 1987). A constant comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed in coding all data according to inductive themes derived from the emergent data. This allowed the data to be iteratively incorporated into the analysis enabling thus a continuing dialogue between theory and emerging data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results and Discussion

1) Global Change in Athens

1.1) Socio-Cultural and Economic Change. One respondent summarised the socio-cultural and economic change in Athens focusing on the transformation of its social fabric and low competitiveness:

> Globalisation changed Athens mainly in three ways. First, it changed the population's composition with the influx of a plethora of foreign immigrants, which has made the social structure of Athens more multi-national but brought some social problems such as criminality. Second, the increasing competitiveness among European cities in the Balkans and the Mediterranean left us a bit behind and subsequently there has been a lack of new foreign investment; so Athens has failed so far to become a peripheral business hub in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Third, we failed to attract new tourists and compete effectively with other destinations that offer either higher quality or cheaper tourist services.

Another official emphasised that Athens has not responded effectively to global trends:

> We are stuck in the middle. While the trends in international tourism gear towards offering specialised forms of tourism, Athens' tourism product remains stagnant mainly selling the Acropolis and ancient history. I don't think this is enough anymore to compete in the global markets.

The above quote illustrates the stagnation of Athens' tourism product also evident in literature (Koutoulas et al., 2009; Weed, 2008). But is this failure merely a policy issue or is it related to the changes in the city that neither have been understood by its residents nor have been capable to create a new cultural character? An official stated:

> The Americanisation influences a great deal the cultural character of Athens. This is more obvious in entertainment and popular culture. Although Greek customs and way of life have not been Americanised, I am afraid that contemporary Athens doesn't have a distinctive cultural 'face'. It is mostly a mix of miscellaneous elements that many times do not fit. For example, Athens-by-night clubbing, the Parthenon, malls and leisure clusters; what do they say about Athens?

Another respondent explained the change on a more anthropological ground:

> The character of modern Greeks keeps changing. As Greeks are adopting the western norms of individualism and competition, they lose the traditional spirit of philoxenia [hospitality] that characterised them. This change affects how Athenians, as hosts, treat the tourists.

It becomes evident that as with the majority of capital cities, globalisation has brought to Athens socio-economic changes. Yet there is little effort by the city to creatively integrate these changes into its social fabric and culture.

1.2) Identity. The socio-cultural change has transformed Athens' identity. One official mentioned the lack of promoting the positive aspects of Athens' new multi-cultural identity that the advent of foreign immigrants has brought to the city:

> Instead of projecting the diversity and multi-culturalism that the arrival of new immigrants brought, we keep on projecting the negative aspects (e.g., criminality, dirt, degradation) of Athens' [downtown] historic centre. We could organise a multi-cultural festival to showcase the new multi-cultural identity of Athens.

Another official noted Athens' insistence to promote selectively the heritage of its classical ancient era:

> The identity of Athens starts and stops in its classical era. There is no projection about later eras such as the Byzantium, the Greek revolution or the city's modern multi-cultural identity.

Furthermore, another respondent pointed out the creation of new cultural spaces:

> There are interesting places of culture and arts, but the local authorities don't seem to understand the changes in Athens that can appeal to new cultural tourists and so nothing is being done to promote these places.

Despite that the identity of Athens is unclear and needs to be identified, the results of this study indicate that little is being done either towards understanding this new identity or promoting elements from other periods of Athens' heritage and its modern multi-cultural composition. Instead the city chooses to capitalise on the renowned identity of its classical antiquity.

1.3) Image. The image of Athens is derivative of the socio-cultural/economic and identity change. As with identity, the interviewees emphasised the lack of promoting an image that reflects Athens' new character/qualities. One respondent stated:

> Potential visitors do not know what Athens is really about. This is avoided because the new image includes negatives such as traffic congestion and environmental pollution. But along with that we forget the positives as well.

The development of a unique image enhances a destination's competitiveness (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004). Cultural/heritage tourism plays significant role to the regeneration of urban places and contributes to the enhancement of their image (Smith,

2003). One respondent underlined the lack of linking Athens' heritage with its present for building a new image for the city:

> The image we promote has to do mainly with our past. There is little about the 'now' of the city. The underlying issue here is to manage the city's heritage and link it with the present image of Athens. Athens is not only the Acropolis. Athens has changed. […] We could invent events and festivals to build a new image for the city.

It appears that there is incongruity between the projected image of Athens and the city's current status/qualities. While globalisation challenges constantly the traditional characteristics of Athens, a more careful use of its heritage can effectively associate Athens' past and present in order to build a more representative and unique image of the city.

2) Responses of tourism policy and planning to global change

The organisation of Olympics shaped Athens' tourism planning and its subsequent response to global change. While Athens is a traditional destination for European markets (EL.STAT., 2009b), the tourism policy seized the opportunity of the Games' worldwide promotion to expand to new markets (Tsartas et al., 2008). According to one respondent, after the Olympiad and the agreement to connect Athens with Beijing through a direct flight once a week, there was an effort to improve Athens' existing products/services. This agreement gave the opportunity not only to expand to Chinese market but also to adjust the city's tourism product according to their preferences.

Another respondent stated that tourism planning needed to pay attention on service quality: 'there was a reformation both in external and internal spaces, an increase

of the hotels' stars, and an improvement of their services'. Hence, service quality has been significantly improved (Gospodini, 2009; Tsartas et al., 2008) and this contributed positively to the upgrading of the city's image.

During the last decades the tourism policy endeavoured to develop a multidimensional product for Athens in order to lengthen its tourist season. Prior to 1990s, Greece, including Athens, used to offer only one specific pattern: sea and sun (Wickens, 2005). After that period and in anticipation of the Olympics, efforts focused on the enrichment of Athens' attractions. Culture played a significant role in these efforts as a respondent noted: 'Athens has a history and symbols such as the Parthenon that are at the core of our tourism product. This enforces its cultural identity and makes it a very strong destination'. Moreover, other elements such as the modernisation of resorts surrounding Athens, the construction of the New Acropolis Museum, the promotion of the area as a city-break destination, the development of business tourism were also included in the city's tourism planning.

Nonetheless, despite the promising plans for Athens' tourism revival, many of the above actions did not manage to fulfil their purposes. Thus, tourism in Athens, despite its positive progress during the first three years after the Olympics, still declines (EL.STAT., 2009b; Tsartas et al., 2008). It seems that this outcome stems mainly from two factors: the lack of appropriate management and insufficient policy (Apostolopoulos & Sonmez, 2001; Asprogerakas, 2007). One official suggested:

> All these opportunities [that globalisation brings about] create a context that has benefited Athens…However, we haven't utilised them enough. It [Athens] could become a city-break destination –and this was one of the aims for the post-Olympic era– but this didn't happen.

The temporary positive image of the city due to the successful organisation of the Olympics was not strong enough for eliminating the problems of the public sector. One official stated that there are many bodies engaged in tourism decision-making complicating the situation. Furthermore, another respondent explained that the image of post-Olympic Athens was not supported by marketing: 'the post-Olympics marketing plan didn't consider how to maximise the positive impact of the successful organisation of the Games'. Thus, the promotion of post-Olympic Athens remained inadequate while many of the Olympics' facilities are not managed/promoted appropriately (Alevizopoulou & Bitsika, 2008; London-Assembly, 2007). Additionally, the valuable know-how that the Games left behind was not fully utilised. One official argued:

> We had obtained significant experience and knowledge with the organisation of the Games. We learned a lot about organising catering operations, translation services, and hosting meetings for large amounts of people. Unfortunately, we haven't used this knowledge for other purposes, since then.

Moreover, the forest fires of 2007, the recent economic crisis, the social problems that resulted in mass strikes, contributed negatively to the city's image. One official stated: 'The economic crisis affected Athens' tourism industry with all the strikes and protests that hindered transportation around the country and forced planes to stay on the ground for days'. Despite the efforts for improvement of the tourism services, another respondent noticed that service quality still lacks high standards:

> Modern tourists are more demanding. Some suppliers have not adjusted their services according to these new preferences. Although, in recent years there is a stride concerning the increase of business dexterity in the tourism sector, there is a group of people that do not provide quality services and affect negatively the city's tourism product.

Overall, in terms of responding to global trends, tourism planning/policy had the opportunity with the Olympics to create a series of strategies for Athens' long-term development. However, some of these strategies did not manage to reach their goals because of several problems, among them the lack of coordination between the organisers of the Games and the tourism bodies (Singh & Hu, 2008), and the inadequate city marketing (Asprogerakas, 2007). Within this context, the question raised regarding Athens' cultural tourism is how the city can maximise the Olympics' legacy in synergy with its heritage in order to become a competitive cultural destination.

3) Cultural tourism development

3.1) Athens as a cultural destination. All the respondents agreed that the most important element of Athens is its rich culture. One official stated: 'Athens offers culture. Period! Till this moment and despite our efforts we haven't managed to sell successfully anything else except culture'. Another respondent added:

> Either we want it or not this is the cradle of the western civilisation. This is very 'heavy'. The asset is huge and inexhaustible. Athens will remain a cultural place. The issue is how you deal with it.

The significance of Athens as a cultural destination led to some actions for enhancing the city's cultural tourism product. One important action encompassed the pedestrianisation of Athens' historic centre. One official stated: 'the pedestrianisation of Athens' centre led to the partial unification of the archaeological sites. Tourists can visit the cultural attractions easier than the past'. Additionally, there is a large number of museums in the

city acting as the 'gatekeeper' of Athenian cultural heritage and hence attract many visitors annually.

Moreover, the Olympics provided new infrastructure such as state-of-the-art venues for organising events. An interviewee noted:

> The cultural heritage of the Olympics offered facilities for contemporary cultural tourism. However, only some of them -such as the Badminton theatre- were promoted but only in a limited scale and through the private sector.

The New Acropolis Museum added value not only to the city's current cultural tourism assets but also constituted one of the most important developments that enhanced Athens' post-Olympic tourism. One official stated:

> The Acropolis Museum is a significant change. Besides its tourism purposes, it promotes the identity of the city as a modern destination. The audiovisual material explains also all the history of Parthenon.

On the whole, culture in Athens is an important element for its tourism development (Khirfan, 2010; Papageorgiou-Venetas, 1996). This is also evident, since Athens was the first European Cultural Capital in 1985, instituted by the European Capitals of Culture Programme (Van der Borg, 2005). However, a series of problems limit the competitiveness of Athens as an international capital destination.

3.2) Constraints and opportunities for cultural tourism development. One of the most important constraints for the development of cultural tourism in Athens appears to be the cost of managing the existing cultural areas and/or developing new ones. One respondent argued:

There are large cultural areas in Athens and it costs much money to maintain them -and to create new places of archaeological interest. The budget for the preservation and creation of new spaces is low.

Moreover, the lack of tourism planning/management is also evident in cultural tourism development. One official stated:

Unfortunately, the policy scheme concerning the management of cultural places is horizontal. The shared responsibilities for managing culture are a 'thorn' for Greece. The responsibilities of the Ministry [Tourism] were mostly procedural rather than creative. The GNTO has the part of promotion. So to make a decision and until the specific organisation to support it, there is much time lost.

In terms of the city's cultural tourism promotion, another respondent underlined: 'Culture was not promoted in the past. There are campaigns that promote cultural tourism but they project Greece generally rather than Athens specifically'. The lack of adequate promotion/management has made Athens a cultural destination for short-breaks rather than a city capable of keeping tourists for longer periods. One official indicated: 'Athens has not reached the level of a destination such as Paris. It is a stop rather than a destination. People will come here for some days to see the Acropolis and then they will go to the islands'. The above problems resulted in the development of Athens' cultural tourism based only on its classical era, excluding other important periods such as the Roman or Byzantine eras.

Even for tourists visiting Athens to admire its antiquities, there are not many attractions/activities offered, other than those that exist in the historic centre. Moreover, the current cultural tourism product does not follow the high standards that the globalisation of tourism sets in the international arena of destinations. An official underlined:

[…] The lack of developing, diversifying and enriching the current cultural tourism product. There is no modernisation of the product that you offer to the visitor of the classical antiquities and unfortunately there is no presentation of something new.

As it has also been evident in the literature, the lack of appropriate tourism planning, systematic research, and inefficient marketing management (Kavaratzis, 2008; Moutafi-Galani, 2004; Wickens, 2005), led to a hesitant tourism policy (Leontidou, 1991, 1998). All the above constraints limit the potential of Athens to become a competitive cultural destination in comparison to other national capital cities.

Despite the aforementioned limitations, the findings of this study showed that there is also an unexplored potential of Athens' cultural tourism development. One respondent described:

The cultural deposits of Athens exist and will exist in the future. They may fade through the years but they will always be there. People once in their lives would like to see the classical Athens. However, for the repeat visitors you need to enrich the product with other features.

One potential for Athens' cultural tourism is the diversity and multicultural character the city exhibits nowadays. One official mentioned:

Unfortunately, multiculturalism and its benefits have not yet been fully promoted. All these people from different cultures are gradually incorporated in our society. I think we'll eventually take advantage of this and we'll promote the multicultural character of the city.

Moreover, the Olympics created a unique context where visitors had the chance to participate in various cultural events and gave an impetus for interaction among different

nationalities and exchange of ideas. The Games set the basis for enhancing the current

cultural tourism product. As a respondent mentioned:

> The Olympics created a wave of people that came to Athens and had a good time.
> Those people participated in different cultural activities adding something new to
> the city and this is very important for bringing tourists. You will find this new
> 'street' culture in several places in Athens such as Psiri and Gazi but in an amateur
> way and without being promoted.

The Olympics helped towards the modernisation of the city. Similarly, the New

Acropolis Museum continues Athens' modernisation in terms of enriching its cultural

tourism product, wherein the archaeological items of Acropolis are exhibited in a

contemporary international museum. However, the museum by itself is not enough for

fully exploiting the potential of the city's heritage. One official argued:

> The Acropolis museum must be complemented by other attractions. It must be
> integrated with Athens' modern identity. To do so, the museum must be
> incorporated into a comprehensive development policy to promote it
> internationally as a unique attraction.

As the above quote indicates, the New Acropolis Museum is only one element of the

city's cultural tourism planning and therefore needs to be connected/complemented with

the other attractions that the city can offer.

Overall, within the context of post-Olympic Athens, the New Acropolis Museum

represents a unique attraction imbued by rich meanings and symbolisms that can enable

Athens to develop cultural tourism, offering visitors a variety of experiences and high

quality services. According to Richards (1996), a significant percentage of Greek cultural

attractions are concentrated in Athens. Considering that cultural tourists are an important

segment -i.e., they tend to be of higher income/education levels, are environmentally

conscious, and spend more money on the destination (Fraser, 2001; Richards, 2001, Silberberg, 1995)- the city's need to reposition itself as a cultural destination, is critical.

Synopsis and Implications

Table 5 summarises the major findings of the study demonstrating that the perceptions of city officials focus primarily on the changes of Athens' socio-cultural/economic fabric, identity and image that take place due to globalisation processes. Although, the impact of globalisation is multidimensional, the identified changes are important and bring not only challenges but also significant opportunities for the rejuvenation of Athens' declining tourism industry. To take advantage of these opportunities, the changes must be further studied and understood in order to effectively encompass heritage in the strategic management of the city.

[TABLE 5]

In this regard, the palimpsest analogy is heuristically useful in helping us understand the continuous transformation of heritage that reshapes the historic spirit of a city and its distinctive sense of place. Khirfan (2010) described that the New Acropolis Museum is a characteristic example of how the palimpsest operates on an urban environment with significant heritage. The museum concentrates on exhibiting a

collection of different eras of the city in one place. The modern museum is built on ancient remains where the visitors can admire through a glass floor. As the visitor moves around the floors of the museum they can observe continuous layers of heritage from different eras, and can make comparisons with the contemporary urban one. The use of glass in the design of the building gives the visitor the chance to browse through the city and illustrates the multiple character of its cultural heritage. Khirfan (2010) argues that the design avoids any interpretations of the ancient layer, allowing instead for individual and collective interpretations thus addressing local and global audiences; through this design the museum acquires its own symbolical significance because it revives Athens as the cradle of western civilisation, and gives emphasis on a collective Greek national identity through the projection of the city's heritage.

In terms of Athens' response to globalisation, the findings of the study illustrate that the city's tourism policy and planning based on the Olympics achieved to enhance the city's image as a contemporary capital city. However, there was insufficient response to leverage the Olympics for the city's tourism development mainly due to the lack of effective public management and the lack of utilising the expertise obtained from the Games.

Nonetheless, the findings indicate that Athens' heritage is the major competitive advantage for developing cultural tourism. However, as the city officials recognised there are factors constraining the development of cultural tourism such as cost, shared responsibilities, inadequate promotion, and the one-dimensional character of the Athenian cultural product. On the other hand, the respondents indicated that there are unexplored opportunities to substantially develop Athens' cultural tourism including the

multicultural character and the development of a 'new culture' in the city, its modernisation, and the New Acropolis Museum.

To realise this unexplored potential of 'glocalised' Athens, the city's tourism planning should synergise its heritage with the Olympic legacy. The Olympics influenced positively the image of Athens as a modern destination that can offer several activities, among them visits to cultural/heritage attractions. Athens with the hosting of the Olympics gained world-wide exposure that provided an opportunity to reposition itself from a mass tourism destination to a high-quality/diversified one. Furthermore, the Olympics provided the opportunity to eliminate the seasonality problems that the country's tourism faces by enriching and upgrading the existing tourism product (Weed, 2008). The fact that there is increased city competition in urban marketing due to globalisation requires urgent strategic planning responses. One way that Athens can enhance its tourism product is to develop a portfolio of events aimed at projecting its new multi-cultural character and classical heritage by including a variety of cultural performances and activities. Such an event portfolio can enrich the city's cultural tourism product functioning as complementary recreation for tourists with a primary purpose to visit the Acropolis.

In this context, as Tsartas et al. (2008) state, the city must be developed as a self-sufficient destination with multiple characteristics. For doing so, the national policy needs to focus on the statutory, developmental, and political interventions as well as on the marketing management of its assets. This policy must be concerned not only with tourism per se but also with other sectors that contribute to the development of the city as a destination such as heritage management. As Asprogerakas (2007, p. 97) argues: 'the

problem in the case of Athens is that the management and marketing of the cultural sites seems to be inadequate and unable to reach the potential visitors and revenue'. Since, Athens as a national capital is endowed with diachronic cultural/heritage assets that epitomise the history and qualities of a whole civilisation, their effective management and marketing can build the foundation for substantially enhancing its cultural tourism product, improving its image and upgrading its status among other capital cities.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

A series of mistaken actions that took place over the last 50 years in Athens created an environment, characterised by unplanned development, pollution, and diminished quality of life. Within this inherently problematic context, the organisation of the 2004 Olympic Games contributed towards upgrading Athens' status from an inhospitable urban centre to a European destination of global magnitude. The successful hosting of the Olympics signifies the improved qualities of Athens in terms of its enhanced infrastructure system and image that were promoted globally. These transformations reshaped Athens, bringing a new urban aesthetic and structure that altered the city's spirit and identity.

Nevertheless, the interplay of global changes and city responses (or lack of) has not yet resulted in the increase of Athens' competitiveness. To the contrary, Athens' economic sectors and tourism continue steadily to decline without effectively exploiting its cultural heritage and post-Olympic status. Whilst Athens' cultural tourism product has preserved the potency of its classical character, there has been little effort to reorganise and diversify this product mix by incorporating a variety of cultural/heritage elements

from Athens' rich tapestry. Such an endeavor could not only project an intended image but also contribute towards building its contemporary multi-cultural identity, while enriching Athens' tourism product and upgrading its status among other national capital destinations. Therefore, Athens represents an example of a post-industrial national capital that its recently shaped 'glocalised' context stands as an unexplored potential in terms of repositioning this city as a cultural destination. However, this raises one crucial question for 'glocalised' Athens and its role as a national capital that needs to be further studied: to what extend does Athens represent contemporary national identity, or perhaps other Greek destinations are more representative?

The case of Athens suggests that capital cities must benefit from their cultural heritage. Heritage represents the locality of cities, forms their identity through the years, and are significant attractions for tourists worldwide. However, the cultural elements by themselves are not adequate to develop a core destination without strategic planning. Strategic tourism planning should take into account the dynamic and complex processes of both heritage and globalisation that interact with a city's culture, hence re-constructing its social conditions or identities.

In this regard, the palimpsest analogy is useful in projecting a city through (re)presenting its different heritage eras. It can be used to identify the continuously reconstructed culture of capital cities in the era of globalisation and the changes that this entails. The palimpsest warrants future research in the context of national capitals to understand the transformations of heritage that affect their identity/image. Similarly, future research should explore the strategic use of heritage in synergy with other elements of a capital destination's tourism product mix. From this standpoint, future research

should also investigate how the interplay between globalisation and local heritage/culture impact on national capitals' status and qualities.

To conclude, this paper suggests that cultural elements of capital cities must be multidimensional including a variety of attractions and amenities. For example, cities can include a portfolio of events aimed at projecting different aspects of heritage in order to enhance their cultural tourism product. This can contribute to the diversification of a capital city's heritage/cultural tourism product mix, the connection of cultural heritage with the present culture, and the city's image enhancement. In other words, the use of cultural heritage assets needs not be stagnant (focused primarily on preservation) but dynamic in line with global developments in order for cities to effectively leverage heritage for cultural tourism development.

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Table 1: Total nights spent at Attica's tourist lodging facilities

Year	Total nights spent
1975	8,773,598
1991	6,697,403
2003	5,810,426
2004	5,907,270
2005	6,149,738
2006	6,772,536
2007	7,706,563
2008	7,315,351
2009	7,055,609

Source: Avgerinou-Kolonia (2002); EL.STAT (2003); EL.STAT (2005); EL.STAT (2007); EL.STAT (2009a)
Note: Although the Olympics boosted in a degree the tourist movement in Attica during the first years, after 2007 there is a steady decrease.

Table 2: Athens – Pre-Olympic status and post-Olympic improvements

Pre-Olympic Status	Post-Olympic improvements
-Unplanned residential areas -Obsolescent infrastructures -Degraded built fabric -Traffic congestion -Environmental pollution -Lack of pedestrian areas -Limited accessibility to the coast of the city -Outmoded tourism superstructure	-Expansion of the metro network -Construction of the tram network -Pedestrianisation of streets for connecting the city centre's cultural areas aiming to the reunification of Athens archaeological sites -Aesthetic improvement and renovation of the hospitality industry and built fabric -Urban and cultural regeneration (i.e. culture clusters like the areas of Psiri and Gazi) -New Acropolis Museum -Transport system (tram, metro stations, airport, etc.) -Connection of the city to the Southern coast

Table 3: Demographic profile of respondents

A/A	Gender	Age	Representative body	Post during Olympics
1	Male	More than 40 years old	Tourism	Yes
2	Male	More than 40 years old	Tourism	Yes
3	Female	Less than 40 years old	Tourism	No
4	Male	Less than 40 years old	Local authority	Yes
5	Male	More than 40 years old	Tourism	Yes
6	Male	More than 40 years old	Local authority	Yes
7	Female	More than 40 years old	Tourism	Yes

Table 4: Interview guide main directions

Issues to explore
-Identify the ways that global change has affected Athens' status and qualities as a national capital in the global hierarchy of cities and how this in turn has affected its tourism position and competitiveness; -Explain the ways that the tourism policy and planning responded to global change and how the Olympics affected the city's status, qualities and tourism development; -Analyse the factors that facilitate or constrain the development of cultural tourism in Athens and examine the Athens' potential to achieve its revival as a cultural (city) destination.

Table 5: Summary of findings

Global change in Athens		
-Socio-cultural & economic change -Identity -Image		
Responses of tourism policy/planning		

Improvements/advancements:
  -Infrastructure
  -Quality of services
  -New markets
  -Image
	Weaknesses:
	  -Lack of leveraging the Olympics
	  -Lack of effective public management
	  -Economic crisis/social problems
	  -No utilisation of obtained know-how from Olympics	

Cultural tourism development		

Heritage/culture as the major competitive advantage	Constraints:
	  -Cost
	  -Shared responsibilities
	  -Inadequate promotion
	  -One-dimensional cultural product
		Opportunities:
		  -Develop the city's new multicultural character
		  -Diversification/enrichment
		  -New Acropolis Museum