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EDITORIAL: Special Issue, Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing: Marketing National Capital Cities.

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EDITORIAL



Special Issue, *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*: Marketing National Capital Cities

THE NEGLECT OF CAPITAL CITY TOURISM

Despite the growing volume of research in tourism, marketing capital cities have been neglected. As C.M. Hall (2002: 235) points out, “capital cities are an important component of the national fabric of almost every country in the world yet, surprisingly, very little has been written about their tourism significance.” In part this reflects broader gaps in our knowledge. Many commentators have pointed out that there is a lack of research on urban tourism generally—for example (Page, 1995; Page and Hall, 2003; Selby, 2004; Shaw and Williams, 2004) and particularly on visitors’ experience of cities. As Ashworth (2003: 143) put it, “those

studying tourism neglected cities while those studying cities neglected tourism.” At the same time, much of the research that has been undertaken on urban tourism has focused on the supply-side and the reconfiguration of cities for tourism. Although the tourist experience—in other words, the visitors themselves, their perceptions, the image they hold of the city, what they do when they visit—is at the heart of the activity of tourism, it has received little attention (Maitland and Newman, 2004; Hayllar and Griffin, 2005; Maitland, 2007), yet this research is vital to develop appropriate marketing strategies. This special issue begins to redress this double neglect. It explores tourism in a number of capital cities, with particular emphasis on visitor perceptions, image and branding,

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and what this can tell us about approaches to capital city marketing and development.

TYPES OF NATIONAL CAPITAL CITY

Categorising capital cities is not straightforward. There is wide variation in their size, function and history, and in the national culture and political structure in which they are located. Although all share a particular characteristic as the focus of political power, Campbell (2003:7) suggests that the “task of classifying all capitals might be as problematic as categorising the nations they govern.” Campbell (2003) proposes instead that capitals can be differentiated on the basis of three factors which determine their development—the size and structure of national government; local and national economies; and the timing of their establishment in relation to the formation of the nation state.

However, despite these difficulties P. Hall (2000 p. 8) identified six (possibly overlapping) categories of national capitals:

1. Multi functional—combining all or most of the highest national level functions (e.g., London, Madrid, Paris, Stockholm, Moscow, Tokyo).
2. Global capitals: a special case of 1, representing cities that also perform super-national roles in politics, commercial life, or both (e.g., London, Tokyo).
3. Political capitals: created as seats of government, and often lacking other functions which remain in older, commercial cities (e.g., The Hague, Bonn, Washington, Ottawa, Canberra, Brasilia).
4. Former capitals: often the converse of 2, representing cities that have lost their role as the seat of government but that retain other historic functions (e.g., Berlin, Leningrad, Philadelphia, Rio de Janeiro).
5. Ex-imperial capitals: a special case of 3, representing former imperial cities which have lost their empires though they may function as national capitals, and may also perform important commercial and cultural roles for the former imperial territories (e.g., London, Madrid, Lisbon, Vienna).
6. Super-capitals: functioning as centres for international organizations; these may or

may not be national capitals (e.g., Brussels, Strasbourg, Geneva, Rome, and New York).

As the examples make clear, the same city may appear in more than one category. We can see that these categories have implications for tourism—for example ex-imperial capitals are likely to have a rich heritage offer; super-capitals are likely to attract substantial business tourism. However the categories could be extended further with C.M. Hall (2002) suggesting the inclusion of cultural and brand capitals, for example. In this issue Pearce provides an extended discussion of what constitutes the essence of capital cities.

More importantly, national capital status and functions may be fluid and change as a result of the interaction of forces of globalisation, internationalisation, devolution and the assertion of competing national identities. “As globalisation intensifies, it generates pressures towards a reterritorialization of socio-economic activity in the form of subnational, regional and supranational economic zones, mechanisms of governance and cultural complexes” (Held et al., 1990:28). In Germany after reunification, Berlin changed its status to become the national capital once again, and has since seen very substantial growth in tourism, whilst visitation to Bonn, the former capital of West Germany has declined (Hall, 2002). Jerusalem—discussed in this issue—is the national capital of Israel, yet most embassies are located in Tel Aviv. At the same time, as the authors point out, it is a multi-heritage city, and many visitors who are not Israeli nationals see it as part of their heritage. Perhaps most significantly, some cities are asserting or re-asserting their status as national capitals as ideas of national identity change and political power is devolved. Barcelona increasingly sees itself as the national capital of Catalunya, rather than a provincial capital in Spain, Cardiff as the national capital of Wales, not simply a British city; both are examined in this issue.

TOURISM IN NATIONAL CAPITALS

Like other cities, national capitals are multi-functional. Capital city functions are just

one element of the offer and it is difficult to isolate capital qualities from other attributes; for example, whilst ‘must-see’ collections of art may be housed in galleries in the capital, visitors may not see the capital status as important for their visit. Even so, national capitals have distinct features that sets them apart. The special flavour that national capital status brings to a city’s tourism can be briefly summarised by three main themes: national focus, clusters of cultural resources and connectivity.

National focus. As the location of national government power and authority, the capital attracts business tourism. Business people will travel to the capital for meetings and for lobbying, and organisations may establish offices or headquarters there in order to be close to government generating further business travel. This reinforces the attraction of the capital for conventions and conferences (Ritchie and Pierce, 2007). Indirectly, media coverage of government spills over into city image (Hall, 2002). Equally, capital status brings with it national institutions that add to the tourist offer, including some designed to educate citizens in their country’s history and way of government. This is particularly important for domestic and educational tourism. There is a complex interaction between the image and status of the capital and that of the nation. At the same time, there may be tensions between a city’s role as a capital and its symbolic role and its other qualities. A national capital is unique in that it is required to address national, local and even international needs (through diplomatic embassies for example).

Clustering and concentration of heritage and cultural resources. In a long established national capital, there will be an accumulation of heritage sites and monuments intimately related to national history and development, and rich in symbolic value. Historic quarters will play a major role in its identity and image, and it is likely to be the home of major national museums, galleries, performance spaces and sports arenas, and major events. In political capitals, created as seats of government, monuments, museums and galleries, cultural venues and other institutions are used to express and reinforce national identity and underline the role of the national capital in the face of other larger cities. Whilst rarely specifically designed to pro-

mote tourism, these clusters of assets will be attractive to cultural tourists in particular.

Connectivity. Recent work that has sought to improve understanding of world cities through emphasising their degree of connectivity is relevant here (see Newman and Thornley, 2005 for a discussion). National capitals may tend to enjoy superior connectivity, most obviously in terms of air transport, which has obvious benefits for tourism.

These attributes give national capitals unique advantages in terms of what they can offer, but also present particular dilemmas in marketing and development, many of which are explored in this special issue.

In this issue Pearce considers the attributes of capital city tourism, and explores them in the case of Wellington, seeking to distinguish capital dimension from other aspects of city tourism. He examines the perceptions of visitors, providers and the destination marketing organisation and shows that capital dimensions are multiple, including for example business tourism and visits to the National Museum of New Zealand. However, the effect of capital dimensions on tourism are often indirect—for example, through fostering a resident population that supports cultural life, and thus the cultural offer—and should not be over stated. Most visitors see the capital role as having little effect on their decision to visit. There is scope for further development of the city’s capital elements, but more comparative research is needed to understand their potential better.

Puczkó, Rátz, and Smith examine national capital status as one of many roles a city fulfills with a discussion of Budapest in its international, European, regional and national context. They draw on perception studies and visitor profile studies to explore how Budapest is being marketed to actual and potential visitors, drawing attention to the particular challenges of marketing post-socialist cities. They identify tensions between tourist promotion of Budapest as a quintessentially Hungarian city and as an international city. They conclude that to position the city better, marketing and development should look to expand the product base, improve services and focus on its unique features—including those linked to capital status.

Mules, Pforr and Ritchie extend the discussion of the interaction between the perception of a national capital as a destination in its own right and as a place that reflects national values. They explore the mixed effects that stem from Canberra being seat of government and home to national institutions and values. Their research shows that association with government and negative media coverage could create a poor image for the city. However this changed for those who had actually made a visit, and they were also more likely to think the capital represented national values. Encouraging more visits to the capital will both counter its negative images and promote feelings of nationhood.

Byrne and Skinner examine the way in which the marketing the capital interacts with marketing the nation with a study of the Dublin brand for business tourism. Ireland has developed a consistent leisure brand over some decades and it has proved effective, but it is unclear whether this can transfer to business tourism marketing for Dublin. Interviews and focus groups with respondents from international organisations based outside Ireland were used to explore country and capital attributes. The authors find that for distant destinations like the USA the national brand has a much greater profile than the city's, whilst within Europe both city and national brands are important and seen as clearly distinct. The appropriate brand to stress depends on the market being addressed.

Peirce and Ritchie add to the discussion of national capital branding with a comparison of Canberra and Wellington, using interviews with destination marketers and documentary analysis. The advantages of national focus resulting from capital status are offset by disadvantages—as the home of government, the cities could be seen as boring and full of politicians. Whilst agreeing on the impacts of capital status, marketers drew different conclusions in terms of how the cities should be marketed and branded. Canberra makes considerable use of national stories and symbolic concepts, whereas Wellington focuses more on broader elements of what the city offers. This illustrates the difficulties and dilemmas in using national stories in capital branding. Like Pearce, the authors call for further research on a comparative basis.

Smith examines the role of tourism in a newly emerging capital, Barcelona. The city is of particular interest to debates about the capital dimension in tourism as it is seeking to reassert its historic role as the national capital of Catalunya, and more broadly, capital of the southwest Mediterranean. He examines the role of urban design and monumentalism in creating and developing the city's image in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and more recently as the city sought to communicate its capital status from the 1980s, including through hosting the 1992 Olympics. He argues that urban design is playing an increasingly important role in image making and place marketing, and that tourism marketing of capital cities can reinforce wider political objectives, although global significance and local identity need to be communicated simultaneously.

Dunne, Buckley and Flanagan consider how far capital attributes attract short break leisure visitors. Dublin has proved to be one of Europe's most successful city break destinations, and the city has a substantial cluster of cultural attractions, a rich literary tradition, impressive built heritage and monuments deriving from its national capital status. In-depth interviews with visitors were used to examine the 'push' and 'pull' factors that motivated their visit. Pull factors—attributes of the destination—proved to be particularly important, and included ease of access and cheap flights. The city's image as an attractive and fashionable destination was also important, but the link with capital status proved to be implicit and indirect, and requires further investigation.

Haven-Tang, Jones and Webb focus on how national capital status can improve the attraction of a destination for the potentially lucrative business tourism sector. They review four successful UK business tourism destinations to identify the key factors in their success: leadership; networking; branding; skills; ambassadors; infrastructure and bidding. They consider these factors in the case of Cardiff, and explore how they are linked to national capital status. Cardiff has been modest in embracing its national capital status as part of its branding strategy and the authors argue that the city should exploit its status much more to take advantage of opportunities to compete with longer established business tourism destinations.

Finally, Poria, Biran and Reichel draw attention to the ambiguities in meaning that national capitals can have for different groups of visitors. They point out that national capitals are rich in heritage sites—but these may mean different things to different people. They use interviews with visitors to investigate the motivations of tourists visiting particular sites in Jerusalem, and their perceptions of the city as part of their personal heritage. They stress the importance of understanding differing visitor motivations, and find that different tourists assign different meanings to the city. They argue that this should be reflected in interpretation and marketing. Rather than marketing promoting an identical image of the city to all visitors, in multi-heritage capitals the emphasis should be responding to different preferences and interests.

THE NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The articles in this issue cover a wide range. They examine tourism in capitals in the old and the new world, political capitals and those that have developed along with the nation state, and cities asserting their place as national capitals as well as those whose role is firmly established. They demonstrate the complexity of capital city attributes in attracting visitors, and the difficulties in differentiating them from other attributes of the city. They tell us more about how visitors of all types perceive the cities and what they seek from them. This adds usefully to our knowledge in this under-researched area. But, there are inevitably many omissions, and this is only a beginning; as several of the authors point out, there is a need for much more research. We need more studies, from a wider geographical range, and continuing attention to the perceptions of visitors to assist capital city marketing initiatives. Furthermore, we need to establish consistent and systematic approaches, and to develop more

comparative studies in order to understand better the idea of ‘capitalness,’ how it varies between different categories of city, what it adds to a city’s offer, how it affects the tourist experience, and how capitalness should be integrated into tourism marketing and branding strategies.

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