CITY TOURISM
National Capital Perspectives
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Edited by

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Capital cities represent a special case of urban tourism. Yet, in much of the literature on capital cities, the planning and policy significance of tourism is seemingly ignored, while similarly, little is made of the significance of capital status in the tourism literature. (Hall, 2005, p. 219)

Introduction

Twenty years ago, Ashworth (1989) pointed to a double neglect of city tourism. Tourism researchers had neglected the city, though so much tourism took place there, and urbanists had neglected tourism, despite its rapid growth and increasing influence on cities. Much has changed. For developers and policy makers, city tourism is now mainstream, and no longer associated just with resorts and historic cities. Former industrial cities have taken to tourism as an important part of the way they must make their living in a changing world, and national capitals have given more attention to tourism. As is shown elsewhere in the book, national capitals have always had special qualities that attract visitors, but their attitudes towards tourism have at times been ambivalent. For example, London has long been a leading – on some measures, the leading – national capital destination, but until the 1980s city policy makers saw tourism primarily as a problem to be managed, while admitting some benefits, mainly to unskilled workers (e.g. Lipscomb and Weatheritt, 1977). For their part, tourists have shown an increasing desire to visit cities, as global tourism numbers have grown and trips have multiplied. Now as Fainstein et al. (2003, p. 8) say, ‘virtually every city sees a tourism possibility and has taken steps to encourage it’.

Growth in city tourism has been accompanied by increasing interest from researchers, and much more attention is now paid to the phenomenon.
However, as Selby (2004) argues, a clear and analytical framework for understanding city tourism is still lacking. Studies have tended to focus on tracking, describing and considering the impacts of tourism, often through isolated case studies; systematic analysis has been limited. Longitudinal analyses of tourism policies and their impacts have been rarer still (Maitland, 2006). One aspect of the problem is the lack of data. It is ironic that despite the widely acknowledged growth of city tourism, and the often-repeated claims by the tourism industry that it is the biggest in the world, even basic information on visitor numbers in cities is hard to find in any consistent form, so that comparisons between cities over time are virtually impossible. This difficulty applies even to leading cities and national capitals like London, Berlin and Paris (Maitland and Newman, 2009). Limited theoretical frameworks and lack of data inhibit a nuanced understanding of how the different qualities of cities interact with changing tourism demands to produce different outcomes – for both city and visitor – in different places. While there is no shortage of descriptive categories of city types (e.g. Page and Hall, 2003), analysis and connection to broader theory and conceptual schemes is limited.

This may explain the disregard of national capital tourism, to which Hall refers, which has been accompanied by a similar indifference by urbanists – ‘until recently, comparative urban research on capital cities has been a fairly neglected subject matter, nor have capital cities received much special attention in general urban histories’ (Kolbe, 2007, p. 81). This lack of attention is surprising for a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, many national capitals have long been leading destinations in their own right, and also act as gateways to their countries. Second, capitals have a key role in presenting a nation to the rest of the world: they ‘play such a vital role in establishing national identity’ (Capitals Alliance, 2003, p. 9). Third, the era of the growth in mass tourism has also seen growth in the number of national capitals, as empires have fallen and peoples have asserted their independence (Hall, 2000). Decolonization, beginning with Indian independence in 1947, saw new national capitals in newly independent states around the world in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, while the disintegration of the USSR in the late 1980s and early 1990s saw cities in central and eastern Europe and elsewhere adopting, re-adopting and reinforcing roles as capitals of independent and more autonomous nations – a process that both paralleled and contributed to a growth in urban tourism.

The effects have been profound: three-quarters of today’s national capital cities were not capitals 100 years ago (Capitals Alliance, 2003, p. 9). The process of dismantling global empires is now largely complete, but pressures for devolution and national identity mean that ‘new’ capitals continue to arise – Cardiff, Edinburgh and, by some measures, Barcelona, for example. The effects of these radical role changes on tourism, as well as other activities, are still being played out and provide a fruitful opportunity for study. Finally, national capitals have long displayed the rivalry, search for advantage and distinctiveness, and emulation of competitors that now characterizes almost all cities in a globalized and competitive era. As Gilbert and Driver (2000) show, European capitals in the 19th and 20th centuries were at the heart of national and imperial competition, and this was played out in their architecture, planning and geography, as
well as their museums, galleries and other attractions. However, these same forces affected other cities too: ‘the form, use and representation of modern European cities have been shaped by the global history of imperialism in ways that continue to matter even in an apparently post-Imperial age’ (p. 23). National capitals then deserve study in their own right, to help gain a more nuanced understanding of cities and tourism, but they also provide a lens through which to gain fresh insights into city tourism more generally.

This chapter reviews city tourism, and links it to the particular qualities of national capitals. In doing so, it summarizes and synthesizes the most important forces driving growth and change in urban tourism. They are considered from three perspectives. First, tourism and the economy of cities: the expansion of tourism has been linked to and shaped the fortunes of cities, while tourism itself has been fashioned by them. Second, tourism in a world of increasing mobilities and dissolving boundaries: over 20 years, travel has become generally easier, the flow of images and information between people and places has both expanded enormously and become more interactive, and the nature of tourism and its place in an expanding range of mobilities has changed. Finally, from the perspective of the tourists and how they experience cities, which until recently has been particularly neglected in academic discussion (Page, 2002; Maitland and Newman, 2004). The discussion draws on the developing literature on city tourism, and literature on national capitals, which rarely takes a tourism perspective.

At this point a note of caution is required. The story of city tourism since the late 1980s is one of growth. Cities have been affected by the series of crises that have hit tourism – including terrorism, and health and natural disasters – but have withstood them robustly; recovery has been quick and drops in visitor numbers have been temporary. However, as I write, the world is contemplating unprecedented problems. The immediate effect on companies of a worldwide economic crisis has also had immediate effects on consumers and their disposable income, and on governments and their finances. However, a more profound impact may be on the market-based and globalized institutional arrangements that prevailed from the latter part of the 20th century into the 21st, and which favoured tourism growth – for example through the expansion of low-cost carriers in deregulated air travel markets. As the Financial Times (London) has pointed out: ‘The assumptions that ruled policy and politics over three decades suddenly look as outdated as revolutionary socialism’ (Wolf, 2009). At the same time, scientists argue that climate changes are proving worse than feared, and that ‘there is no excuse for inaction’ (Guardian, 2009). In a world of prolonged economic crisis, and in which serious action to counter climate change may be taken, the past is a limited guide to the future. While the World Travel and Tourism Council expects an immediate effect from economic crisis, and forecasts a decline in tourism industry GDP of −3.5% in 2009, it also forecasts annualized growth over the next decade of 3.6% (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2009). It is not clear whether such growth will be realized, or how the nature and distribution of tourism will be affected. While not presuming to resolve these momentous issues, it cannot be forgotten that we live in interesting times. The future prospects of national capital tourism are discussed in the concluding chapter.
Tourism and the Economy of Cities

There is substantial literature on the way in which cities have been reconfigured or ‘converted’ (Judd and Fainstein, 1999) into centres of consumption, with tourism playing a central role. As Harvey (1989) notes, tourism has both material and symbolic effects: on economic and physical structures, and on representation and image. Although there has been a particular emphasis on former industrial cities – and former industrial areas of large polycentric cities – the argument extends to urban tourism generally. The need for restructuring in the face of economic change and competition leads to product reorganization, product transformation and spatial relocation (Agarwal, 2002). Tourism becomes a more important element in the economy, and efforts are made to transform and vary the offer. Frequently, this involves spatial change as areas are reconfigured as tourism zones or precincts (Hayllar et al., 2008).

In a familiar model, a tourist bubble (Judd, 1999) can be created, including a more or less standardized mix of attractions – a museum or gallery, conference centre, entertainment or edutainment, such as an aquarium, branded bars, restaurants and shopping. This is typically located in a former industrial area, with historic buildings restored and revalorized as heritage. Waterfronts have been particularly popular locations (Jones, 1998). Thus, tourism contributes to a process of area ‘regeneration’, in which spaces of industrial production are replaced by consumption of industrial heritage or spaces of leisure, entertainment and predominantly middle-class urban living. Other approaches, intended to be less solipsistic than the tourism bubble, have included the designation of cultural quarters, ethnic quarters and heritage precincts (see Hayllar et al., 2008, for a review of types of tourism precincts in cities).

Tourism zones or precincts then have been at the heart of cities and tourism. A number of points follow. First, and most obviously, city tourism is concentrated in particular areas, and not dispersed evenly across the city. Usually the idea of tourists visiting Brussels or Canberra implicitly means visiting very particular areas of the city, usually in the centre; few visitors spend much time in the suburbs (although some visitors aim to experience the city in a different way – see our discussion below). Second, these areas are often themed and planned to lure in and impress the visitor. This has a particular resonance with national capitals, one of the purposes of which has always been to impress the visitor, whether domestic or foreign. How this is done varies: there are big differences between an old imperial capital like London and one like Canberra that is modern and purpose-built. However, inevitably the landscapes of capitals are symbolically rich, achieving their effect through spatial layout, pattern of architecture, monumentality and the nomenclature of public space (Therborn, 2002), in a complex representation of power. At the same time, capital status promotes an accumulation of facilities and assets that attract visitors – national museums, galleries, theatres, opera and performance spaces, and sports arenas, for example. While all cities tend to concentrate symbolic and functional attributes in tourist zones, capitals do so with a particular intensity.
Third, rapid economic change and growing inter-city and international competition have meant that city image and city marketing have become dominant concerns. Cities seeking to attract mobile investment or mobile professionals in search of amenity (Florida, 2002) have become increasingly concerned with creating facilities and symbols that signal their aspirations and status. The numerous attempts to capture city status through international rankings and league tables are highly contestable and have been subject to considerable academic critique, so perhaps their real significance is in the continuing concerns of cities to show up well in at least some of the registers – best city for business, most creative city, greenest city, etc. (Maitland and Newman, 2009). Again, national capitals have particular roles to play. Their accumulation of cultural assets, landmarks, celebratory events and ‘zones of prestige’ (Maguire, 2005) gives them advantages in representing themselves and also a specific role in representing and symbolizing the nation. Furthermore, they frequently receive priority for national government investment, building projects and planned development and redevelopment of symbolic importance (Hall, 2000; Kolbe, 2007). Against this, perhaps especially for domestic visitors, they have symbolic disadvantages, as the home of politicians and government bureaucracy and may be seen as ‘dull’, ‘government orientated’, ‘cool’ and ‘stuffy’ (Ritchie and Peirce, 2007).

Preoccupation with city image has meant increasing attention to creating icons and monuments, which can attract attention and symbolize the positive attributes or image the city wishes to convey. This is a process of synecdoche, where a part of something is used to stand for the whole. In the case of cities, the place is recalled or brought to mind by single or a few memorable images (Smith, 2005, p. 414). The Eiffel Tower is perhaps the most famous example of synecdoche, and much city investment in ‘iconic attractions’ can be understood as an attempt to achieve something similar. Cities seeking to assert a new status and changing role try to do so through creating new icons. Smith (2005) sees Barcelona’s development of new cultural monuments as providing synecdochical images as well as meeting ‘political objectives in connoting that Barcelona is a Catalan, Euro city, rather than a provincial Spanish city within Spain’ – that is, connoting Barcelona as the Catalan national capital.

Cities also have to renegotiate and reinterpret their existing landscapes and symbols. This is especially complex in national capitals, since icons and iconic areas frequently represent not simply the city, but also the nation. Changing national power relationships and contested stories can be played out in the representation of cities to visitors and the world – for example in Tshwane/Pretoria in South Africa (Heath and Kruger, Chapter 6). In London, the continuing reimagining of the East End, reinforced by the 2012 Olympic Games, is integral to the rebranding of London from an imperial capital to one that is an ‘open, multi-racial, multi-religious, multicultural city and rather proud of it’ – according to Tony Blair, Britain’s former Prime Minister (Tran, 2005). In addition, the capital’s marketing is itself part of a broader project to build up an image of British multiculturalism, which for some commentators ‘now serves as Britain’s distinctive rationale in the current world order’ (Dench et al., 2006).
All this stress on image, marketing and reconfiguring the city to attract visitors creates debate around commodification of the city and its culture; standardization as cities seek to emulate successful initiatives elsewhere; and a loss of distinctiveness and authenticity. In their attempt to achieve competitive advantage, cities invest in new attractions and facilities that increasingly resemble those of their competitors. Bilbao’s achievements saw more cities bidding for their own Guggenheim museum, while the success of the London Eye since 2000 seems to have prompted – or reflected – renewed interest in big wheels in cities. In Britain alone, Belfast, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Manchester and York installed their own wheels, while worldwide competition for the biggest wheel intensifies, with new installations planned, in building stage or recently completed in, for instance, Berlin, Beijing, Dubai and Singapore (Jeffries, 2009). New ‘icons’ may be inserted in cities with which they have no linkage or association, intended to act as symbols of modernity. Ironically, this ‘serial reproduction’ of attractions and symbols reduces the distinctive qualities of cities, and runs the risk of making them commodity destinations, with reduced competitive advantage (see Richards and Wilson, 2007, for discussions of these issues). Once again, the debate is especially pointed in national capitals, seeking to negotiate changing cultures and relationships, signal their continuing modernity and at the same time emphasize a coherent national narrative amid complex legacies.

Dissolving Boundaries, Multiplying Mobilities

City tourism has been promoted and made easier in a more globalized, and for many, more prosperous world. Boundaries and barriers of many sorts have been dissolving. Higher disposable incomes and changing working patterns have allowed more spending on leisure travel, and encouraged additional short breaks, for which cities are especially suitable, with their ease of access and range of activities. Airline deregulation meant the development of low-cost carriers, offering not only cheaper fares but denser point-to-point services. In Europe, particularly, the fall of communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the expansion of the EU and the Eurozone reduced formalities made travel easier. For western Europeans, a range of cities in central and eastern Europe became newly accessible at comparatively low cost. For central and eastern Europeans, travel to western cities was newly possible. Furthermore, while the flow of people between cities has increased, the flow of images has become a cascade.

The growth of the Internet and of multifunctional mobile phones have made it easier to access and share official and unofficial images and commentary on cities. While destination marketing organizations have new channels through which to develop induced images (Gartner, 1993) and representations of their city, the organic images created by shared pictures and discussions between past, potential and intending visitors (and local people) mean that cities and their possibilities can be explored at a distance as never before. Most obviously, the way in which many people book and arrange their visit has
changed, with increased use of the Internet and emphasis on customizing their own choice of destination, travel, accommodation and itinerary. But perhaps more significantly, it is changing how people learn about and understand places they visit – ‘web-pages play a central role in providing direct and fast information, especially related to countries, cities and places’ (Kolbe, 2007, p. 79). Easy availability of more and more information, images and shared experiences means that some barriers to visiting new places are reduced.

National capitals are especially affected by dissolving boundaries and barriers. In newer destinations, in places such as central and eastern Europe, they are often the best-known city, and the transportation hub for inbound travel. As such they are the focus for early tourist growth, may continue to outpace other cities, and can be seen to conflict with efforts to promote tourism growth elsewhere in the country. At the same time, capitals are the focus of much of the image, symbolism and information about the country as a whole, through news media and other organic sources; coverage of politics, government and events in the country spills over into the city’s image (Hall, 2002). As Puczko et al. (2007) illustrate, re-emerging capitals wrestle with fulfilling multiple roles and creating multiple images: as the quintessence of the nation, as a modern international city, as an attraction in their own right and as a gateway to the rest of the country.

The effects of globalization go beyond leisure tourism. In a globalized economy, cities have important integrating functions, whether as ‘global cities’ (Sassen, 1991), ‘gateway cities’ managing flows of people and relationships between regions (Short et al., 2000), ‘global cultural cities’ (Yeoh, 2005) or through other roles. Business travel and tourism have grown rapidly in response to the changing management requirements of globalized organizations, and are focused on cities in general and national capitals in particular. Capitals are key sites for meetings and lobbying efforts because they are the seat of national (and often international) power and authority, through government and intergovernmental organizations. They are popular locations for international or regional headquarter offices for global business and other organizations, encouraging more business travel and further reinforcing their status. The combination of this concentration of government and business power, cultural institutions, heritage sites and ‘zones of prestige’ inevitably make capitals attractive locations for conferences and exhibitions (Ritchie and Peirce, 2007). This can be a two-way process. Attracting international conferences, meetings and events is an effective way for re-emerging or new capitals (e.g. Tallinn or Cardiff) to assert their status and reinforce their capital qualities.

Dissolving boundaries means more than the reduction of political barriers to travel or institutional barriers to international business. It is less and less clear that tourism can be bounded off as a separate activity, distinguishable from other mobilities or that tourist demands can be clearly separated from those of city residents and other users of cities. Hannam (2009) argues that tourism needs to be understood as part of a wider set of mobilities, while Sheller and Urry (2004) argue that mobilities represent a new paradigm within social science, including the movement of people, information and capital. One consequence is to see ‘tourism’, as conventionally defined (World Tourism...
Organization and United Nations, 1994), as just part of a continuum of mobilities that range from the short term to the permanent. In national capitals, for example, diplomats arrive on postings; business people and professionals come on temporary assignment or short-term contract; academics take up short-term posts or work on research projects; and creatives make films, give artistic performances or devise campaigns. In many ways, their activities and behaviours will overlap those of comparatively well-off business and leisure tourists. At lower levels of the employment hierarchy, temporary migrants take temporary jobs for long hours and low pay. They will share similarities with students, in town to study, from a few weeks to a few years, and with backpacker or drifter tourists, travelling on a low budget and taking temporary jobs (Fainstein et al., 2003; Maitland and Newman, 2009). The presence of migrants generates more tourism, as their friends and relatives have new reasons to visit capital cities.

Clearly, national capitals are particularly affected by this range of mobilities, and the process of globalization. They are diplomatic centres. They are often the focus of national artistic activity – national theatre, opera and so on. They are home to universities, often ones with a particular focus on international links. As previously discussed, they attract business and other headquarters. The more tourism is seen as part of the set mobilities, the more it is clear that capital qualities are crucial, affecting a range of mobilities. At the same time, as Cochrane (2006, p. 5) points out, capitals provide a useful counterpoint to dominant perspectives that seek to understand cities primarily through their place in global networks. Capitals are defined ‘by their role within nations or the construction of nations … and fit uneasily in the dominant model of the entrepreneurial city’, since while they have ‘some competitive strengths, they also exhibit fundamental flaws’ – principally the dominance of government and government institutions, which both make it harder for other employers to compete for labour, and which foster a bureaucratic rather than entrepreneurial culture. Thinking about capitals helps set tourism within and beyond a process of globalization.

Tourists’ and Residents’ Experience of Cities

One aspect of dissolving boundaries is that tourism and touristic behaviour is coming to be seen as an integral part of daily life. For Franklin and Crang (2001, p. 3), touristic behaviours and experiences are less and less separated from daily life by time and space, and indeed tourism has become ‘a significant modality through which transnational modern life is organized’. In part, that means residents consume the city in ways that are similar to tourists: ‘citizens . . . increasingly make quality of life demands treating their own urban locations as if tourists, emphasizing aesthetic concerns’ (Clark, 2003, p. 294). They enjoy the same activities as visitors, and consume ‘the new urban culture’ (Judd, 2003, p. 32). In some cases, in large cities, this may be a straightforward case of internal tourism: residents visit parts of the city that are new to them or which have particular attractions, especially the central areas. But