

# Tourist Representations of Urban Spaces and Places: A Study of the Behaviour and Cognitive Maps of Tourists in the City

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Lutz and Ryan (1997) have observed that in the 1980's in the UK, both central and local government turned to tourism as one means of generating economic growth. The decline in the inner cities of the UK stimulated a range of urban regeneration policy initiatives and an increasing importance was attached to tourism as a possible generator of employment, albeit often in association with retail and property development and linked to wider civilisation policies. Along these lines, Murphy (1992) notes that urban tourism cannot be regarded as an 'isolated attraction' of the city but is by definition strongly anchored in the urban morphology and the functional urban system. Furthermore, it is clear that within cities, few facilities could be identified as exclusively intended for 'tourists'. A second difficulty with the study of urban tourism is inherent in the wide variety of motives, spatial origins and patterns of behaviour of visitors to cities. (Ashworth, 1989)

Existing research has tended to concentrate on the profiling of single cities using facility and supply side approaches, or adopting an ecological approach by attempting to map the tourist 'district' within a city. Further to this, policy approaches have been initiated, following a realisation by planners that the growth of urban tourism requires the ongoing provision of a high quality tourist experience. More recently, there has been a need for cities to compete for tourist markets - cities which may display similar touristic attributes. (Page, 1993). Promoters of urban tourism are increasingly conscious of the necessity for a distinctive 'position' within the marketplace. The importance of *destination image* has been noted in various academic studies, and the emergent policy approaches to urban tourism research, as well as involving physical

planning measures, have begun to concentrate on the use of 'images' and 'branding' as a means of positioning the destination.

Other research has provided further clues as to the dynamic of urban tourism and how it should be accounted for. A recent survey by Jansen-Verbeke and Lievois (1998) concludes that there are strong arguments to focus on cultural and heritage resources in the development of urban tourism, a goal which is invariable linked to the planning process. On the demand side, promoters of urban tourism also need to address another approach; the user approach (Ashworth, 1989). An understanding of the expectations and reactions of the actual or potential visitor is essential if any planning or management is to be undertaken by urban authorities.

Ashworth (1989) discusses the user approach to urban tourism research in terms of; a) Who visits cities?, b) What do tourists do in cities?, c) Why do tourists visit cities? and d) How do tourists perceive cities?. Understanding of a tourist's perceptions of an urban destination can be used to explain the who, why and what of city tourism and this holds great relevance for planners, managers and promoters of tourism in cities. Nonetheless, few attempts have been made to adopt a user approach in this context. Ashworth maintains that future work needs more integration of approaches, as there has been too much individualistic study in terms of choice of subject matter, research design and areas of application to permit comparison among them or generalisation for wider application (1989). He also emphasises that a categorisation of tourist motivation, behaviour, facility demands and the like, based upon a distinctive type of urban environment is long overdue.

It would appear that in order to ensure that the efforts of inner city tourist promoters are accurate and efficient, further research is needed. This must integrate the various approaches to urban tourism research, whilst taking methodologies which include the measurement of place-imagery and the space-time behaviour of tourists into consideration. According to Page (1997), the knowledge of how individual tourists interact and acquire information about the urban environment also remains a relatively poorly researched area in tourism studies; particularly in relation to towns and cities. Furthermore, it can be seen as surprising that reviews of the social

psychology of tourism have tended to concentrate on study of motivation. It is also surprising that a neglect has occurred in relation to study of tourist behaviour and adaptations to the new environments that they visit, particularly, as highlighted by Walmsley and Jenkins, as '*tourists are people who temporarily visit areas less familiar to them than their home town*' (1992,269)

Page (1997) maintains that consideration must be given to a number of fundamental questions in this sense, relating to;

- a) how well do tourists know the area they visit?
- b) how well do they find their way around unfamiliar environments?
- c) what features in the urban environment are used to structure their learning process in unfamiliar environments?
- d) what types of images and mental maps do they develop?

Furthermore, perception of space and place in urban environments has become of increasing interest to geographers, particularly in terms of the geographic space perceptions of all types of individuals (Downs, 1970); but however - not necessarily tourist individuals. Understanding of how tourists interact with the environment to create an image of the real world is becoming a focus of research into social psychology and behavioural geography (Walmsley and Lewis, 1993). In fact, behavioural geographers emphasise a need to examine how people store spatial information and '*their choice of different activities and locations within the environment*' (Walmsley and Lewis, 1993).

The thesis will identify and examine the relationships between tourist representations of images of the city and the behaviour that tourists display therein. These relationships will then be examined alongside promotional activities. Tourist representations of the city will be collected with a record of places visited and activities done. Knowledge of how and where visitors spend time within the city is important to tourism planners, particularly in terms of location and type of resources (facilities) for tourists.

The primary literature review has been undertaken in the following areas: a) the creation and acquisition of images of urban environments; b) ways in which 'internal' images of urban

environments can be externally represented - this has been achieved by using sketch maps, descriptions, photography to other mapping techniques. c) techniques of measuring tourist behaviour during part of a visit - time spent at different attractions, patterns of movement in a city and activities done - diary approaches have been extensively used; d) how tourists learn about new environments; e) the need for a 'user' approach in the study of urban tourism; and f) promotion of urban destinations- the importance of destination image. Recent research in tourism cognitive mapping continues to use Lynch's (1960) typology of urban elements, but remains limited in terms of the affective or appraisive aspects of city imagery. In order to improve the focus of tourism management and promotion in cities, better understanding of where and how tourists move is required. Additionally, in capturing all components of an image in measurement, a combination of structured and unstructured methodologies should be used.

Empirical research so far has focused on the city of Exeter, located in Devon, South West England, with a population of 109,238 (1998). The city is in close proximity to the popular coastal resorts of East and South Devon and Dartmoor National Park. A report by Exeter City Council from the West Country Tourist Board (1998) concludes that tourism (direct and indirect income) contributes £54.8 million to the city's economy. This level of tourism expenditure supports 2,400 jobs, 5% of the city's working population. Exeter receives nearly 220,000 overnight trips, nearly 1 million visitor nights and 960,000 day visitors (1996).

Interviews with public sector tourism promoters have confirmed suitability of Exeter as a case study city. A framework has been used to sample tourists in Exeter during August and September 1998, following pilot work completed in 1997. These samples comprise both attraction-based and accommodation-based segments. The framework examines sketch maps, descriptive representations and space-time behaviour of tourists with profile variables and questions regarding awareness of/exposure to promotional activity. Analysis will involve the use of SPSS 8, currently in progress.

My presentation to the workshop at Finse will incorporate a review of work to date and a discussion of the next stages of the research, with details of problems and issues in undertaking

the study. Additionally, the relevance of the research to planning issues will be discussed in more detail.

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