INQUIRIES INTO URBAN TOURISM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT: *Inquiries into urban tourism especially in developing countries have received little academic attention. The gap requires more exploration. Thus, this paper addresses the issues that highlight the gap in current research as well as the need to examine the phenomenon of urban tourism from other perspectives than that of cities in developed countries. The understanding are relevant to different disciplinary perspectives, which need to be understood in combination involving urban planning, tourism and development in developing countries. Discussion on the need for further enquiry into urban tourism in developing countries then will be concluded that provides an introduction and general background to those interested in urban tourism particularly in developing countries.*

Keywords: *Urban tourism, developing countries, tourism and urban development*

Introduction

Literature on urban tourism

Ashworth (1992) in the early 1990's asserts important points as to where urban tourism studies should be considered. The first is that urban tourism exists and can be distinguished as a distinctive area either apart from other aspects of tourism, or apart from other aspects of the urban environment. The second is that urban tourism must be looked at as a part of a group of tourism activities and in terms of its role within the broader context of cities, which are significant for its economic growth. Thus, as other forms of urban features and tourism functions, urban tourism does not escape from the system within which it co-exists (tourism and urban discipline).

The initial interest in urban tourism was followed by the increasing investigation of what consists the urban tourism system (e.g. Page, 1995; van den Berg *et al.*, 1995; Judd, 1995; Law, 1996, 2002; Murphy, 1997; Mazanez, 1997; Tyler et al., 1998; Pearce,

2001; Page & Hall, 2003; Judd, 2003). One of the significant efforts to establish and integrate a framework research for urban tourism was made by Pearce (2001, 928), when he noted that:

'While special issues of journals and books on urban tourism have provided some structure to this emerging field, there still a considerable way to go in term of developing a coherent corpus of work, pursuing common goals and carrying out comparable studies. The tourism and urban literature scarcely overlap; considerable scope exist for improving the linkages among the work being done … and much effort continues to be expended on fragmented, ideographic research.'

Pearce further notes that the subject of urban tourism research should emphasize two areas and stresses the importance of the relationship between both these aspects. The first is key themes in cities, which is common with tourism elsewhere – demand, supply, development, marketing, planning, organization, operations and impact assessment. The second is in terms of spatial scale, which functions as 'an ordering device' for tourism themes 'in a variety of contexts' – site, district city-wide, regional, national and international. Based on these two subjects, Pearce (2001) has outlined a framework that consists of elements of spatial scale and key themes into an integrative matrix (Figure 1).

This framework is systematically linked horizontally (x) and vertically (y) within the matrix. Horizontally, it integrates all the different themes along the same spatial scale. Meanwhile, vertically it examines themes across different spatial scales. According to Pearce (2001), the function of the framework is to systematically establish and to enhance existing knowledge of urban tourism, so that gaps and the wish to establish what studies in urban tourism are possible to address specific relevant issues.

In addition, the framework provides direction for future efforts in urban tourism studies and, thus, acts as a point of departure that could facilitate these studies. In this case, how the different parties could come together will be clearly identified as the framework highlights the linkages between the need for coordination and cooperation (between scales and themes). In this context, every issue that exists can be seen as one system that shares the same meaning of the urban tourism concept. From this point of view, the framework is not only able to suggest integrative understanding for tourism studies or research but also the complexity of urban tourism as an applied industry.
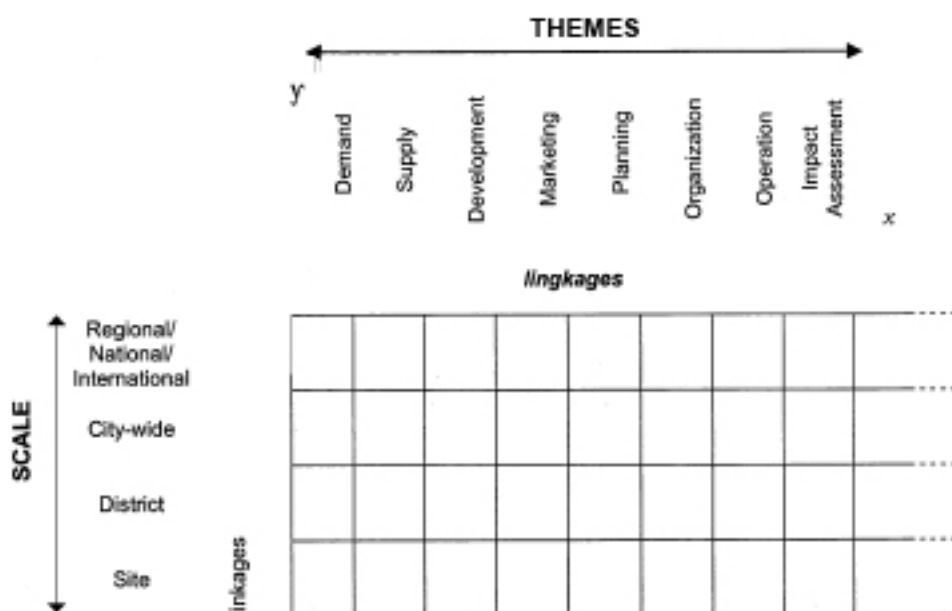
THEMES

Figure 1: An integrative framework of urban tourism research (Pearce, 2001)

The Existence of Urban Tourism in Developing Countries

Maybe the first question ought to address relates to the main features of urban tourism development in developing countries. This may be difficult to answer because reference to a wide range of studies is impossible as urban tourism or even overall systems of tourism in developing countries still receives limited attention (Oppermann *et al.*, 1996; Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Moreover, Oppermann and Chon (1997:62) note that, in developing countries, 'compared to seaside resorts, city tourism and urban models have attracted less attention'. This lack of attention can not only be seen in urban tourism studies but also in overall systems of tourism in developing countries that are still in their infancy (Oppermann *et al.*, 1996; Oppermann & Chon, 1997). Nonetheless, several attempts by tourism and urban or geographical researchers to describe urban tourism in developing countries can be identified. The focus is on examining the contribution of tourism in the city with specific reference to case studies.

In relation to this, examples of the urban tourism literature or research in developing countries can be traced back to work that focuses on how the urban tourism concept should be applied in cities such as Lucknow in India (Singh, 1992). According to Singh

(1992), tourism should exist in the city as part of a concern to secure its heritage assets. In addition, increasing population size and migration to the city have forced those responsible to consider tourism as a means to:

i.   Secure open spaces from illegal construction through the creation of greenbelts or buffer zones for leisure activities.

ii.   Battle against pollution by reinforcing the effort to increase the quality of the urban landscape especially in highly populated downtown areas.

Weaver (1993) introduces models of urban tourism space in a number of Caribbean islands that reflect examples of cases in developing countries. He focuses on the evolution of small islands in providing tourism activities. One can determine from this that tourism has a strong influence in the process of urbanisation compared to larger cities with different geographic or spatial structures, and sizes of population. In this case, it can be concluded that the effect of tourism has placed the port or dock area as a node of development that changes and influences the urbanization of the whole island especially in creating tourist sites, which consist of individual attraction features and tourist business district (TBD). In addition, this area plays a role at a regional level as a gateway or hub that allows tourism activities to exist and then distributes tourists to the whole of the region.

Further studies followed, notably through the examination of several tourism aspects based on activities and development in cities such as Simla in Northern India (Jutla, 2000) and Xianmen in China (Begin, 2000). The aspect of visual image from the perception of tourists and residents in the city of Simla has determined the distinct image of city from the perspective of tourists and local residents (Jutla, 2000). Local residents perceive an image of the city with problems such as congestion, over development and increasing costs of living. On the other hand, for tourists, there are concerns in terms of the natural and cultural landscape of the city in relation to conservation and preservation, and therefore the need to deal with aesthetic and environmental issues. In the city of Xianmen in China, the attention is on the geography of tourist business that has led to hotel distribution planning (Begin, 2000). In this case, the growth of tourism has influenced urban morphology and the pattern of the city that attempts to serve and respond to the needs of accommodation. As a result of urban development and the evolution of hotel locations, the area known as the tourist historic city has emerged as well as a transition zone with easy pedestrian access that provides links between old and new development. This also increases the importance of hotel locations as a central area in the urban environment.

More direct debate on urban tourism in developing countries is also addressed by Rogerson (2002) in promoting tourism in the city of Johannesburg in South Africa. The discussion links to urban economic regeneration and development that at least highlights growing policy initiatives, interventions and development planning to the potential of tourism. This is an example where tourism in developing countries has been used to achieve the broader objective of urban economic development. Firstly this is achieved by encouraging business tourism, casinos and cultural tourism. Secondly, this is assisted by using the position of Johannesburg as a regional destination in Africa for activities such as shopping, health and MICE. It also influences a distinct geographical cluster dedicated to tourism. Despite this, challenges such as the image of crime and security, especially in the inner city, overshadow their efforts. There is also evidence about the role of the private sector as a leader in promoting local tourism due to the weakness of public policy interventions. One important point that can be concluded from Rogerson (2002) is the interest of the city in developing countries to be visited and consumed through tourism activities.

Further Inquiries into Urban Tourism in Developing Countries

The complexity of urban and tourism relationships has been discussed from various perspectives and backgrounds such as geography, urban planning and tourism (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986, 1992; Ashworth, 1989, 1992; Law, 1991; Page, 1995; van den Berg *et al.*, 1995; Judd, 1995). This was part of an attempt to clarify the meaning and existence of urban tourism and led to a more comprehensive review in the late 1990's and early 2000's (Murphy, 1997; Tyler *et al.*, 1998; Judd & Fainstein, 1999; Pearce, 2001a; Law, 2002; Shaw & William, 2002; Hall & Page, 2002; Page & Hall, 2003). Discussion in this literature also addresses and points out the relevance of competition in tourism and how the sector has been adapted to important urban function. These discussions involve various perspectives, points of view and approaches, which can be similar or different depending on the places to which they refer.

At the same time, these studies were followed by others which addressed urban tourism themes, contributing to further specific exploration of the tourism nature of the city. The discussion exists in many ways, either in the broad context of tourism, or specific to elements in urban tourism development, thereby constructing the concept of urban tourism and enabling it to receive recognition as a distinctive discipline (Pearce, 2001a;

Law, 2002; Page & Hall, 2003). While there is clear evidence that tourism has been accepted as an important urban activity, much of the literature and research refers to and examines the phenomenon from examples of developed countries in Western Europe and North America, while there is limited knowledge of how tourism has been placed in the cities of developing countries.

In this context, Law (1996:1), in examining tourism in major cities, notes five fundamental questions:

i.   To what extent are there common processes operating across the world?
ii.   To what extent are there differences between the industry in different countries reflecting political, cultural and social factors?
iii.   To what extent does the varying resource-base of cities determine the character of the industry?
iv.   How do the leadership of the public and private sectors and the institutional structure of a city effect the development of the industry?
v.   How do problems caused by the industry vary across the world?

If this agenda has been intensively and constantly considered in the cities of developed countries, the same attention is also required to address them in relation to cities of developing countries. Understanding of the urban tourism phenomenon outside the United Kingdom, Western Europe and Northern America has received less attention and requires more exploration. As a relatively new subject for the political economy of cities in developing countries, the emphasis on urban development in developing countries might reveal different directions and perspectives about urban tourism. Thus, understanding of the presence of urban tourism in developing countries is still immature and receives limited attention (Oppermann *et al.*, 1996; Oppermann & Chon, 1997), despite some initial attempts (Singh, 1992; Weaver, 1993; Jutla, 2000; Begin, 2000; Rogerson, 2002).

Oppermann and Chon (1997:78) suggest that urban tourism development may be subject to different factors in developing countries compared to developed countries and therefore 'the transfer of urban tourism concepts from developed to developing countries may be inappropriate'. On the other hand, Mullins (1999) points out that despite rapid economic development in Southeast Asian cities, the same impacts of international tourism in cities of developed countries may also apply to cities of developing countries. Cities in developing countries are generally in an expansion

phase and tourism is used as a catalyst for its development. At the same time, there is a need to invest in tourism resources such as heritage/historical attractions and infrastructure in order to enhance tourism activities. In developed countries, generally urban centres are in a declining phase including population size and face employment opportunity shortages. Therefore, tourism is seen as a regeneration strategy and forces tactics such as preservation of heritage/historical resources in order to support tourism activities for the benefit of the cities.

The uniqueness of developing countries that still seeking for economic expansion of the city has given an initial insight in relation to the character of urban-based tourism in developing countries. Regarding this, it is important to see different points of view in more depth as to how urban tourism actually emerges in developing countries compared to developed countries (Ismail *et al.*, 2003; Ismail & Baum, 2004). The different forms of urban development in developing countries such as Malaysia may locate tourism in a different place in the urban hierarchy compared to developed countries. Furthermore, there is need to understand how this has been viewed from the perspective of city governments and other related public agencies in planning and monitoring for tourism (Ismail & Baum, 2004). The notion of economic benefit from tourism might still be the same but different approaches and aims may underpin expectations of how tourism is accepted within urban development in developing countries.

Thus, the discussion reflects the essential idea of this paper in order to examine phenomena on how tourism competes and places itself as one of the more important urban functions in the cities of Malaysia, as an example of developing countries. This allows us to gain a better picture and understanding of urban tourism in developing countries. In conclusion, it is clear that there is a gap in current research and there is a need to examine this phenomenon from other perspectives than that which has been seen in the UK, Western Europe and North America.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the existence of urban tourism in developing countries. The literature indicates that tourism has emerged and is accepted as one of the most important industries in the world including in developing countries. This reflects serious response and interest from leadership and government to introduce

tourism development through intensive promotion. The literature also indicates early insights on similarities and differences between cities in developed and developing countries. In many ways, tourism has been used to justify development on the basis of potential economic benefits. While tourism indicates similarities as a catalyst to promote economic benefits, some cases in developing countries may show that tourism could cause a process of urbanization for peripheral areas.

The literature also indicates advantages in terms of cultural uniqueness or 'differentness' that exists in cities of developing countries, acting as a significant element to attract tourism activities. In this case, the services sector has been used as a way to expand the city development using tourism, which is not only based on cultural heritage but also on various modern services such as MICE tourism. As a result, more exploration and further inquiries need to address approaches and aims that may underpin expectations of tourism (e.g. Law, 1996). Therefore, the questions and perspectives that have arisen will be used as a preliminary assessment in understanding the nature of urban tourism in the cities of developing countries.

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