



Research Paper

Selecting a destination image for a capital city rather than for a nation: A segmentation study

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates whether when authorities use different types of places to build a destination image of a capital city, the general public considers that the places represent the city itself rather than a nation. Taipei City, the capital city of Taiwan, was used as an experimental case study. The survey results suggest that people tend to perceive that places associated with localities or natural landscapes represent a city. Meanwhile, places associated with state power, multi-ethnicity, or economic globalization may give rise to different interpretations of their representations. The results also reveal that in comparison to citizens, non-citizens may have stronger opinions on whether certain places represent a city or a nation. Overall, the present research provides a possible typology of places and a decision-making approach for selecting suitable places for building a destination image of a capital city.

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1. Introduction

The academic debates on destination image emerged in the 1970s (e.g., Gunn, 1972). It has become a multi-disciplinary topic exploring how people perceive an image of a destination and how it can have an effect on people's behavior in choice of destinations (Gallarza, Saura, & García, 2002). Earlier tourism literature focused on examining tourists' or residents' perceptions of a destination image (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Goodrich, 1978; Schroeder, 1996; Sternquist Witter, 1985; Tasci & Gartner, 2007). The concurrent literature has begun to investigate how authorities shape a destination image for their own interests (e.g., Choi, Lehto, & Morrison, 2007; Fürsich & Robins, 2004; Hashim, Murphy, & Hashim, 2007; Patil, 2011).

When considering delivering a destination image of a city, Smith (2007) argues that places with specific functions or meanings in a city can become its efficient marketing channels. In terms of a capital city, it is usually the political, cultural, or economic center of a nation. Therefore, a place as well as a tourist attraction in a capital city may be related to features of a nation, such as state power, multiculturalism, or economic development. Given this nature, some studies point out that issues concerned with nationalism (e.g., Aiello & Thurlow, 2006), ethnicity representation (e.g., Tunbridge, 1998), or negative associations about globalization (e.g., Gospodini, 2004) may emerge when using these places to build a destination image of a capital city.

Since the existing literature does not empirically examine the argument as above from an overall consideration, the present research uses Taipei City, the capital city of Taiwan, as an experimental case study to investigate how people may have different destination images of a capital city. In doing so, the present research generates a possible approach to selecting suitable places of a capital city to build its destination image to possibly avoid it from being associated with negative nation-related issues.

2. Literature review

Through having access to visual or textual information of places with specific functions or meanings of a destination appearing in the mass media or on different kinds of souvenir items, an individual can eventually form her/his image of the destination (Day, Skidmore, & Koller, 2002; Mackay & Fesenmaier, 2000). Advanced technology, such as satellite television and the internet, has further given people easier access to destination images generated by public or private tourism agencies. Meanwhile, people also can actively share their images of certain destinations through new media such as online social networking sites (e.g., Dwivedi, 2009; Fürsich & Robins, 2004; Hashim et al., 2007; Huang & Lee, 2009; Patil, 2011; Stepchenkova & Morrison, 2006). In this light, featured places of a destination can be useful marketing tools for public and private tourism sectors.

From an urban destination management point of view, similarly, a city may have certain places with specific functions and meanings related to the city itself, such as historic buildings, monumental spaces, or public markets; these places can play not

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only the role of tourist attractions but also of tools projecting destination images of a city in different dimensions (Smith, 2007). The urban literature also has argued that certain places can be symbols representing locality of a city. For example, a square in a city center can be associated with the history, culture, or glory of a city, since it is usually the venue of specific local events (Boyer, 1996; Carr, Francis, Rivlin, & Stone, 1992). Besides obvious human-built structures, Aiello and Thurlow (2006) remind destination managers that natural landscapes of a city also can be regarded as local features as well as tools for representing an aspect of a multidimensional image of a city.

Meanwhile, apart from human-built structures and natural landscapes representing the identity a city mentioned in the urban and tourism literatures, in his study concerned with how national identity can be forged in an everyday context, Edensor (2002) reminds us that a city can have some places initially built by the state to play the role of symbols of national identity. For instance, a memorial square can be associated with the history of a nation. Moreover, a public sports stadium can be related to the popular culture of a nation. Furthermore, a skyscraper can symbolize the economic achievement of a nation. Clearly, as Edensor suggests, these places are usually tourist attractions and frequently appear in the mass media.

The tourism literature has investigated how a state can use tourism alongside a destination image to highlight national identity by sending the relevant messages through paper or digital materials (e.g., Fürsich & Robins, 2004; Hashim et al., 2007; Patil, 2011). Meanwhile, by reviewing the urban literature concerned with the establishment of a capital city, more evidence can be found to show how a state can use urban destination factors to represent national identity. In many case studies, it can be indicated that relevant places, such as official buildings, monuments, and landmarks, have been vital for planning and designing a given capital city to represent state power (e.g., Hall, 1998, 2002; King, 1976; Tinniswood, 1998), cultural characteristics (e.g., Kolbe, 2007), or economic success (e.g., Hall, 1998; Kolbe, 2007; Olsen, 1986) of a nation. After all, a capital city is usually the political, cultural, or economic center of a nation.

In this light, a capital city appears to be able to use these national-identity-related places to form its unique destination image as compared to other ordinary cities. However, few studies raise issues regarding possible impacts of using these places for building a destination image of a capital city. For instance, places associated with state power can be related to nationalism or to an unpleasant historical period of a nation, such as being colonized, thereby making tourists or even locals feel offended (Aiello & Thurlow, 2006; Poria, Biran, & Reichel, 2007).

Places associated with ethnicity also can be problematic for destination managers. Apparently, city authorities can demonstrate their pursuit of ethnic harmony by constructing museums or memorials in the interests of ethnic minority groups. These places also can be tourist spots of a city (Hayden, 1995). Similarly, for the authorities of a multi-ethnic nation, it is reasonable to build these places in the capital city to show support for multiculturalism. Nevertheless, by studying the case of Ottawa, the capital city of Canada, Tunbridge (1998) indicates that these places can give rise to controversial public debates with regard to selective representation, commercialization, or even exploitation of specific ethnic groups.

Places associated with economic globalization also may concern destination image planning of a capital city. Since the early twentieth century, many cities have launched projects of large-scale business districts with commercial and entertainment functions. Clearly, apart from attracting tourists, these places are created to boost consumption, encourage investment, and increase employment opportunities. What is more, they symbolize the capability of

a city to become involved in a global economy system (Mordue, 2007; Puczko, Ratz, & Smith, 2007; Silk, 2007; Smith, 2007). However, these places are often packed with structures with innovative designs and styles, thereby being criticized as being unable to represent locality (Boyer, 1996; Günay, 2005; Hannigan, 1998; Harvey, 1993; Hough, 1990; McCarthy, 2004; McNeill & Tewdwr-Jones, 2003; Silk, 2007; Sklair, 2006).

Despite the criticism, constructing such economic-globalization-related places in its capital city can be a power legitimacy strategy for a state. Under these circumstances, the places may be seen as a state's ignorance of locality and make relevant criticism more unmanageable. However, some scholars suggest that these places in fact can be useful for forming an image of a city because their appearances are disconnected from sensitive issues such as nationalism or ethnic inequality (Gospodini, 2004; Rätz, Smith, & Michalkó, 2008). In this light, it remains questionable as to whether these places are suitable for building a destination image of a capital city.

It indicated in the above literature review that destination managers can use places associated with local features or nature sightseeing spots to deliver a destination image connected to the identity of a city. Meanwhile, in terms of a capital city, due to its nature of being the political, cultural, or economic center of a nation, it can have places related to state power, multi-ethnicity, and economic globalization. Although these three types of places are supposed to be unique features of a capital city, they may not be suitable for forming a destination image of the capital city due to their lack of a strong connection with the city itself.

Considering the theory above and recalling the previously reviewed literature investigating how authorities shape destination images and how people have their images of a destination (e.g., Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Choi et al., 2007; Echtner & Ritchie, 2003; Fürsich & Robins, 2004; Goodrich, 1978; Hashim et al., 2007; Patil, 2011; Schroeder, 1996; Sternquist Witter, 1985; Tasci & Gartner, 2007), a worth-thinking issue is that when capital city authorities use certain places to build a destination image of the city, whether the public, including locals and non-locals, perceives the places as the representations of the city rather than the nation. Some studies that have examined similar issues mainly use qualitative approaches (e.g., Peirce & Ritchie, 2007; Poria et al., 2007; Puczko et al., 2007; Rätz et al., 2008; Smith, 2007). In general, however, research focusing on examining the destination image of a capital city seems to be in its early stage. Seen in this light, this paper presents an experimental empirical study that integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to generate an empirical framework for selecting suitable places for building a destination image of a capital city.

3. Methodology

Taipei City, the capital city of Taiwan, was chosen as the experimental case study. Taiwan was a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945. The Japanese colonizers set up the basic infrastructure of the capital Taipei. Many of these Japanese legacies, such as public spaces and official buildings, are still in use and seen as tourist attractions of present-day Taipei City. After the end of the Second World War, the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party/KMT), which represented the state of the Chinese mainland at the time, took over Taiwan from the defeated Japanese Empire. To secure their legitimacy, the newly established Chinese rulers implemented martial law to maintain control over the Taiwanese society. Meanwhile, some new sites were established in the capital Taipei to commemorate the important figures of the KMT. Many new constructions were even designed to present traditional Chinese architectural features. Although these places were initially built by the state in the capital Taipei to forge the Chinese national identity, they also have become tourist spots (Tay, 1995).

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