A review of issues influencing tourism in Belfast in 2013.

Introduction

The political uncertainty and acts of public disorder (Boyd 2013) have been problems that the tourism industry in Northern Ireland and particularly Belfast, have had to overcome and deal with over the years. The consequences of conflict in Northern Ireland can have an effect on long term tourism for Belfast and have implications for the economy of Belfast (Anson 1999). However despite this the government and industry continue to develop strategies to assist the industry and attract visitors to city.

Yeoman (2012) suggests that over the last 5 decades the research field known as futures studies has emerged, which opens up the territory for envisioning and creating 'alternative' or even 'preferred futures'. In essence futures studies is about making more informed decisions and choices when trying to manage change, rather than being an engine for making predictions (Strand 1999). For the Tourism 2050 project Yeoman (2012) describes how using methodological guidelines as narratives helped develop scenario planners upon which to make decisions and drive change in New Zealand. What he focuses on is identifying key drivers for change which will affect the future of tourism. In the context Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) in their Strategic Framework for Action (DETI 2010) has set a number of targets for the Northern Ireland tourism industry which could be argued as being futures based.

The development of the strategy suggests that government will create policies which support the work of its agencies and industry to grow visitor numbers to Northern Ireland. The aim is to increase the number of visitors to 4.5 million, generating spend of £1 billion by 2020. This will be achieved through investment in capital projects, business skills and target marketing.

This paper will discuss how Belfast can contribute to the achievement of these targets. It will look at how far Belfast has come, through making comparisons with two other U.K. cities, Glasgow and Liverpool who have adopted urban tourism strategies, to help them compete as tourism destinations. To develop this research, interviews have been conducted with key stakeholders involved with tourism growth in Belfast. Based on the findings from the interviews recommendation are made for the future of tourism in Belfast.

Cities and Tourism

The term Urban Tourism simply denotes tourism in urban areas (Law 2002). Tourists visit cities for many purposes: this may involve leisure, culture, heritage, entertainment and events (Jansen-Verbeke 2012). The cities that accommodate most tourists are large multifunctional entities into which tourists can be effortlessly absorbed and thus become to a large extent economically and physically invisible (Ashworth and Page 2010). Cities because of their size and population attract visitors because of the facilities they offer such as museums, shops, theatres and sports which have been developed to a high standard for local people (Law 1994). Therefore the multifunctional characteristics of urban spaces and the dynamics of urban communities explain the rapidly changing face of many cities; leisure, culture, heritage, entertainment, and events became the core elements of multiple urban revitalisation projects, and even new cities built on new concepts (Jansen-Verbeke 2012).

The early 1980's saw many of the larger cities in the U.K. suffer problems associated with their inner city areas (Law 1996). Many of these problems were a result of the economic

climate, housing conditions, high unemployment, decline of major industries and the poor management of municipal services. This culminated in periods of civil unrest and rioting seen in areas like Toxteth in Liverpool, Brixton in London, Handsworth in Birmingham, St.Paul's, Bristol, Southall and Moss Side, Manchester (Butcher et al 1990). The subsequent response to this was negotiation between central and local government, to establish methods to combat the problems and more immediately the civil unrest. The result was the introduction of Urban Development Corporations (Imrie 1999), which were set up as part of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980, and were the forerunners for urban regeneration policy for developing areas of decline and attracting private sector investment as a means to revitalise cities. Examples of this would include London Docklands, Liverpool's Albert Dock, Manchester's Castlefield and Salford Quays developments, Glasgow Barrowlands and Birmingham's Brindley Place and International Conference Centre.

Law (1991) suggests that investment in facilities and updating attractions contributed to the development and success of urban areas in terms of tourism numbers, citing as successful examples Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and Bradford. Selby (2004) discusses various aspects that are central in urban tourism development including waterfront developments, urban development initiatives, improved image, marketing and dedicated marketing bureaux, environmental improvements, fostering civic pride, symbolic buildings, regeneration of derelict industrial sites and arts and cultural facilities. He also underlines the importance of cultural tourism to the development of urban tourism, highlighting the important role of museums, galleries, cuisine, events and festivals and he cites Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester as examples of where these strategies have been used successfully in the UK.

Key Drivers in Urban Tourism

Tourism makes a major contribution to the economy of Northern Ireland (DETI 2010). Since the ceasefires in 1994 and relative peace that followed, the tourism industry in Belfast particularly has created employment, developed new facilities and attractions to improve the cities appeal to visitors. The city has hosted high profile events such as the MTV Awards and worked hard to change its image.

Pearce (1992) suggests that the organisation of tourism in cities has four main components. First there is planning, which includes the formulation of strategy, the selection of activities such as attractions, culture and sport for expansion, and the improvement of the environment. Second, there is the development role, the implementation of the strategy and obtaining finance. Third, is the promotion and marketing required to attract visitors and conferences. Finally, there is the provision of visitor services such as tourist information centres and hotel booking services (Law 1994).

The key drivers for this change in Belfast would include the Northern Ireland government through its Minister for Tourism Arlene Foster and supported by its agencies which include the Departments for Enterprise, Trade and Industry (DETI), Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB). At a local level Belfast City Council (BCC) and the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) would be responsible for promoting and developing facilities to make Belfast an attractive proposition to visitors.

This is then delivered through the hospitality and tourism industry which would comprise the accommodation providers (hotel guest houses etc.), the food and beverage providers and the visitor attractions. These businesses would then be supported by the retail and transport industries and further supported by the local population. The tourism industry in Northern

Ireland is represented by a number of organisations who would lobby and then act on behalf of their membership.

Page (1995) contends that individual businesses, through efficient planning and management, will contribute to the long term economic well-being of the city, if the different interest groups involved in tourism liaise and cooperate with each other. In the case of Belfast the key drivers have adopted a policy of including all parties through the NITB's Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 with the intention that all stakeholders will play their part in delivering the strategy (DETI 2010).

Belfast's Journey

This research aims to investigate how far Belfast has travelled. Over the past decade, Belfast has witnessed a dramatic transformation of the cityscape and growth in tourist visitors. The transformation of what was previously a decaying industrial city, blighted by 40 years of political unrest (Boyd 2013) into a vibrant urbane nucleus through urban renewal, which has changed Belfast's image. The Belfast of today is virtually unrecognisable from the vacant decaying red bricked shells, which could only be accessed through heavy security cordons at all access points. The tree lined pedestrianized shopping precincts, bedecked with hanging baskets and street art have transformed Belfast into a modern European city.

Belfast has in recent years developed into a modern-day city that offers a mix of new and diverse experiences for visitors. Today's visitor will experience a mix of culture and entertainment, in lively, yet cosmopolitan surroundings which manage to maintain a strong sense of its past. Belfast like many cities throughout the U.K. has a strong industrial heritage with Belfast's main industries being shipbuilding, manufacturing and engineering (Business Travel World 2007). This is coupled with the cities more recent troubled past, often referred to as 'the lost years' for Northern Ireland Tourism (Boyd, 2000; Baum, 1995). In recent years there have been monumental efforts to overcome them.

Belfast developed its wealth through the linen trade but gradually expanded into tobacco and, more importantly, heavy engineering, principally shipbuilding (Webster 2002). However, like many great manufacturing centres, Belfast's main industries and its shipbuilding declined in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s (Murphy and Boyle 2005). The economic problems of Belfast, unlike other U.K. cities where deindustrialisation was prevalent, were magnified by the outbreak of sectarian violence in 1969 which lasted for nearly 40 years. Since the IRA and loyalist ceasefires Belfast has regenerated itself with a range of industries including banking, financial services, telecoms, health technology, media and architecture. It has been helped by its two main universities; Queen's and Ulster, which both have world-class centres of research (Webster 2002). However, since the ceasefires of 1994 the most significant outcome has been the growth in tourism (O'Neill and Fitz 1996). In light of its troubled past the question is how has Belfast become a competing tourist destination and how does it survive in the tourist market (Todorovic et al 2010)?

"Belfast is undergoing the kind of gentrification that other UK and Irish cities underwent years ago," explains the director of communications at the Belfast Visitor Convention Bureau (BVCB). This research is futurist in perspective and qualitative in nature, in that the interpretation will hopefully offer direction and not necessarily description, as this work "seeks to understand what is likely to continue" (Yeoman, Robertson & Smith, 2011). In the case of Belfast, what is it doing right, what does it need to improve and ultimately what is the 'roadmap' for tourism in the city post 2013 and beyond?

The concept of Northern Ireland and Belfast in particular being recognised as a tourist destination may well have been rejected indeed ridiculed in the past. However, Belfast has undergone a journey of change, rebirth and renewal. City spaces are the origins of modern civilization, the framework of social life, and under the impact of tourism these spaces have experienced significant transformation and metamorphosis (Todorovic et al 2010). This journey may appear unique to the people in the Belfast, however it is a similar route followed by cities throughout the U.K., Europe and indeed the rest of the world (Ashwoth and Voogd, 1990).

Some authors (Butcher et al 1990; Innskeep 1994) have suggested that social and environmental issues are why cities adopt this approach, whereas others (Jansen-Verbecke; Ashworth and Voogd 1990) have seen a growth in leisure time, cultural and heritage interests, plus the multifunctional character of the inner cities as being the primary motive for developing the Urban Tourism.

Law (1993) notes that successful urban renewal programmes have the following features:

a)   An emphasis on economic policies;

b)   An emphasis on obtaining private investment;

c)   Public sector investment in the infrastructure;

d)   Public sector 'anchors' – museums or convention centres;

e)   An emphasis on property development;

f)   A focus on the city centre;

g)   Public-private sector partnerships;

h)   Semi-autonomous public agencies;

i)   Flagship project; and

j)   Image.

Adding to this, Montgomery (1995) discusses how culture can promote revitalisation and an enhanced quality of life by extending economic activity into the evening, animate a place, underpin commercial enterprise, change and build a distinctive image, give a sense of place and provide a critical level and pattern of activities to draw visitors. U.K. cities which have undergone major transformation in the past 30 years and cities that have used the arts and culture are Glasgow and Liverpool.

Case Study - 'Glasgow's miles better'

'Glasgow's miles better' was the marketing slogan used by the city's marketers to attract tourists through promoting its arts and culture industries (Page 1995). Glasgow is recognised as being Scotland's second city, however as mentioned, it has experienced many of the inner city problems that have affected other U.K. cities. Buckley et al (1985) wrote of Glasgow as once having 'a negative image based on violence and deprivation', and like Belfast, Glasgow suffered from the dramatic decline of its shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries. Glasgow has seen transformation from being an industrial city suffering from problems associated with urban decline into a vibrant post-industrial city with an economy based on services, leisure, tourism, culture and the arts (Murphy and Boyle 2005).

In 1970's and 1980's Glasgow there was an escalation of inner city problems, which led to a growing volume of urban assistance, through grants and power to local authorities (Isserman and Lever 1993). Unlike England and Wales, Scotland did not have any Urban Development Corporations. Scotland in some ways like Northern Ireland is practically autonomous as far as local government is concerned. There was instead the Scottish Development Agency (SDA), which had been in existence since 1974, and was responsible for many of the initiatives that followed throughout the 1980's and 1990's.

The main strategy for SDA was to recentralise the city centre, by redeveloping the 'brownfield' (Isserman and Lever 1993) areas of derelict land. To do this Glasgow City Council had to work in partnership with the private sector to bring this programme of renewal and rebuilding to fruition. At this time there was also increasing demand for higher value housing and therefore in partnership with private construction companies, Glasgow began to rebuild the city centre using the derelict land or brownfield sites.

However, much of the success attributed to Glasgow, was its determination to attract large events (Garcia and Reason, 2004). Cultural tourism has been placed at the centre of many urban regeneration strategies, because it can provide the basis to reanimate city centres, rejuvenate existing cultural facilities, create new cultural centres, make the cities stand out from other areas, and change city images (Bianchini 1990; Herrero et al., 2005; Myerscough, 1992). For example the hosting of the 1988 International Garden Festival, followed by the honour of being European City of Culture 1990 secured much needed private investment within the city (Myerscough 1992). Events like these were the catalyst for the city having the confidence to reinvent itself. For many post-industrial cities across the UK, the role of culture has been central in developing a tourism destination and attracting a tourism market in the achievement of an 'experience economy' (Liu and Lin 2011). Nations, regions, cities and corporations have used events to promote a favourable image in the international tourist and business marketplace (Ashworth and Goodall, 1998).

Glasgow has embraced its rich art and cultural heritage and used it to assist in regenerating the city. Glasgow was able to bid for the title of European City of Culture because it had many cultural resources, including Scottish Opera, Scottish Ballet, the Scottish National Orchestra and the Royal academy of Music (Law 1994).

The legacy of these earlier events has allowed the city to persist in chasing large events, whilst regenerating inner-city areas and attracting people to live and work in the city centre. A festival of Visual Arts was held in 1996 and in 1999 Glasgow was Britain's City of Architecture (Law 2002). Glasgow has used these events to reinvent itself and draw tourism to reinvigorate the city's image. It appears the strategy has transformed this once heavily industrialised cities into a top 10 city break in the Lonely Planet Guide.

Events on the horizon include, Glasgow hosting the 2014 Commonwealth Games is bidding with 5 other cities to host the Youth Olympic Games 2018. Glasgow boasts at having long been established as an excellent place to live, work, rest and play (Glasgow City Council 2013). Glasgow can, having been awarded the title call itself a European cultural capital and in doing so continue to draw visitors and events.

Case Study - Liverpool – City of Culture

Liverpool had been one of Britain's and the world's great commercial centres — a vibrant economic hub that was home to major shipping, banking, legal and insurance companies that operated across the globe. The cultural wealth and diversity of 800 years of maritime history gave Liverpool a special identity of international recognition (Parker and Garnell 2006). Liverpool like Belfast is primarily a port, but with port related industries however the recessionary periods in the 1970's and 1980's saw its fortunes decline (Madsen 1992). The city experienced growing inner city problems, high unemployment and in 1994 was ranked amongst the poorest regions in Europe (Law 1996). The high profile 'Dockers strike' between 1995 and 1998 again brought Liverpool into the spotlight for all the wrong reasons. Several observers have remarked that it would be a huge challenge to market Liverpool as a cultural city when it still seems to be labouring under the shadows of the Toxteth riots of 1981, inner-city gang violence, the 'Dockers strike' and a significant level of unemployment (Singh 2003).

What has changed Liverpool's fortunes may stem from its rebirth in the early 1980's. The first major change was the redevelopment of the Albert Dock and bringing the International Garden Festival to the city, by the Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC), which was established in 1981 and operated until 1996 (Law 1996). The Albert Dock and surrounding area was made up of derelict 19th century warehouses, which were transformed into luxury apartments, high quality retail units and visitor attractions such as the Maritime Museum, Tate Gallery and Beatles museum. The Albert Dock became a mecca for visitors because it was also home to Granada TV's popular 'This Morning' show, with its iconic floating weather map. The transformation of the waterfront area and the many landmark buildings of the city began to transform the city's appeal and in 2004 UNESCO awarded Liverpool World Heritage Status.

Parker and Garnell (2006) suggest that this transformation was driven by the appointment of a new managerial and political structure within Liverpool City Council with a clear vision for Liverpool to become a premier European city with a competitive economy enhanced through the development of healthier, safer and more inclusive communities. In a similar tactic to that followed by other U.K. cities, the emphasis for Liverpool was partnership and an outcome led approach to rebuilding the reputation of the city. The most significant outcome of this approach was, like Glasgow previously, winning the title of European Capital of Culture 2008.

This 'European City of Culture' status and subsequent regeneration of areas within the city have all boosted Liverpool's fortunes. The completion in 2008 of the Arena and Convention Centre at Kings Dock, adjacent to the Albert Dock, which was the centrepiece for 2008, contributed to Liverpool becoming a rising star in the European meetings and events market (Hart 2010). To help drive this forward Liverpool Conference Bureau has established a network of local researchers, academics and professionals who act as ambassadors and help to promote Liverpool as a conference destination.

The rapid economic recovery the City of Liverpool has experienced in recent years, is starting to impact not just on the economic performance of the rest of Merseyside and is also beginning to drive up the prosperity of the North West. The potent mix of culture and regeneration is playing a major part in redefining Liverpool in the 21st century (Parker and Garnell 2006).

Methodology

The experiences of Glasgow and Liverpool were important to include in this paper to help make comparison and draw conclusions in relation to how far Belfast has travelled in recent years. Therefore, the research took the form of qualitative, exploratory in-depth interviews with key experts in the tourism and hospitality sector in Belfast to explore if Belfast is and can continue to be a contender as a tourist destination in the UK and beyond.

This research is qualitative and was identified through the review of literature. Qualitative methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of phenomena and they seek to reduce bias and error and to identify evidence that disconfirms initial or emergent hypotheses (Soafaer 1999). Face to face interviews with key stakeholders were used in this research because the social cues, such as voice, intonation, body language etc. of the interviewee can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee (Opdenakker 2006). The interviewees were sent the list of questions prior to the interview to allow them to prepare their responses. These were then collated to help formulate discussion in this paper.

From the literature review, key themes were identified for the interviews. In trying to better understand this, 10 questions were put to the interviewees reflecting their views on the following themes:

- Government Policy
- Stakeholder contribution
- Key drivers for change
- Legacy or Post Conflict residue

The prepared questions aimed to better understand how stakeholders viewed government's recognition of the contribution tourism makes to the economy. The responses to these questions have been used to help reflect the perception of key stakeholders in relation to what they view are the key drivers for change and if the policies fit for purpose?

There is no doubt that the recent history of Belfast is that of a divided community in post conflict transition (Boyd 2013), still experiencing some flashbacks of the past. This has a direct influence on future potential for tourism growth in the region and in particular Belfast. How can the public and private sector work together to overcome the perceptions created by negative media images which are beamed across the world?

The interviews were conducted with the assistance of representatives from the Belfast City Council, ASM Howarth, Northern Ireland Hotels Federation (NIHF), Federation of Retail and Licensing Trade (FRLT), Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau (BVCB) and Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and their responses collated to form a consensus of opinion. The interviewees were selected because of the important role they have played in driving change within the city. The face to face interviews with participants of this research provide a better understanding of how stakeholders felt about their Belfast and its ability to be a contender for city tourism. The questions provided a basis upon which to formulate a discussion and suggest implications for the future of tourism in Belfast.

Findings and Discussion

Government Policy

The peace process, devolution and political stability in the city would have been the original drivers for developing tourism in the Belfast. Government now appreciate the economic power and benefits of tourism to the city and recognise the potential for significant growth and job creation in the sector (DETI 2010). This has elevated tourism's position within the NI executive in recent years and helped secure significant investment in the city and across the sector.

Those interviewed agree that government need to consider their policy and investment in improved infrastructure, in addition to a clear and well-populated event calendar with on-going promotion (Page and Hall 2003). The proposal to extend the Waterfront Hall to host larger conferences in Belfast was welcomed and seen as an opportunity for the public and industry to take ownership. There is also a clear message from government when NITB changed their policy and dedicated a department devoted to Events.

The challenges tourism faces in Belfast appears to fall under three categories; access, tax and regeneration. Whilst access to Northern Ireland is regular, it has reduced particularly with the departure of airlines with lots of routes such as Ryanair and British Airways. Recent positive moves including the removal of air tax for transatlantic routes are seen as an incentive. However additional passenger duties from other avenues are pushing fares up.

Taxation levels on business seem to be a major concern for the tourism industry in Belfast. The business community have led a high profile campaign to reduce Corporation Tax in a drive to secure further inward investment and strengthen local business. In addition there are calls for the level of VAT particularly for food business to be reduced as it is felt it is very high and therefore makes it difficult to compete.

In addition the participants were unanimous that government had to do more in handling issues around public order. The recent 'flags protest' and difficulties that arise from the 'marching season' are seen as issues where government need to take more responsibility. The negative images sent out by media had a detrimental effect on the industry.

Finally the respondents propose that wider recognition is needed that the tourism industry has made a greater contribution to the economy recently in the aftermath of the 'Troubles' than it has done in the past 40 years. This needs to be supported through government developing wider engagement with the financial institutions and better support for micro business. The ASM Howarth interviewee suggests 'The financial institutions are nervous and need reassurance from government and the industry to 'kick start' recovery'.

Stakeholder Contribution

The NI executive, Belfast City Council, Northern Ireland Tourism Board (NITB), Tourism Ireland and Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau (BVCB) have all played a significant part in driving these changes. Tourism Minister Arlene Foster has led the charge, raising the profile of tourism within Government and secured investment to drive the sector forward in Belfast and across NI.

When interviewed for this paper, the director of business tourism at BVCB said: "More than £1billion has been spent during the past decade to build and develop Belfast's tourism

infrastructure. We have seen new hotels; innovative venues and exciting attractions open in recent times, as well as new flight routes and sea crossings to make it even easier for business visitors to get to Belfast."

The main issue facing tourism in Belfast is the industry's fragmented approach in terms of leadership; who is responsible for what areas and lack of 'joined up' thinking between government departments. If we consider Belfast specific issues, then Belfast City Council and BVCB have major roles to play. BCC clearly supports the work of the BVCB and there are many examples of their support for tourism growth in Belfast. An example of this is the investment for refurbishment of the Waterfront Hall by BCC. However, the contributors suggest NITB, Tourism Ireland, DETI, DCAL, Invest NI and other government departments have a role to play.

However it is the business leaders who have endured and persevered that have made the greatest contribution. The participants encouraged the private sector to continue investing and working to attract inward investment thus urging more development of capital projects to accommodate tourism. This supports the views of some authors (Roche 1992,1994; Hall, 1994) that investment attracts tourist expenditure.

Drivers for change

The public and private sectors need to 'chase' large international events that attract worldwide, media coverage of Belfast for the right reasons. It was suggested that this can only be achieved through a process of new product development with 'game changing' capabilities. The MTV Awards, the Titanic celebrations and hosting the Irish Open were all lauded and the support given by political leaders was seen as a positive message.

Access to Northern Ireland by sea and particularly by air was a theme participants felt was having an effect on attracting large events and visitors. The loss of companies like British Airways and Ryanair who have a presence throughout Europe and the rest of the world was a concern. If Northern Ireland and Belfast in particular are to remain competitive, more work needs to be done in securing hub airports to the existing available flight networks. The ports also have experienced difficulty with the loss of the HSS and SEACAT express ferries between Belfast and Scottish ports further contributing to access issue.

Emphasis needs to be placed on conference product development. This is compounded with a product gap in terms of a dedicated conference centre. This was expressed as having restricted Belfast's potential to compete for conference business.

The interviewees contend that for Belfast to compete government, their agencies, the city council and private sector need to work together which concurs with research conducted by Hall (2000), which suggests they should proceed with one voice and one vision rather than take a multi-agency approach. One hotelier suggests 'NITB should take the lead by informing local Government and the private sector of the positive activities they undertake. More should be said of the good work done in relation to Press trips, overseas sales missions, Strategic management etc.'

Legacy

Political unrest and violence, too, can have disastrous effects, as hoteliers in India, Pakistan, Israel and the Occupied Territories can undoubtedly now testify. These events are often turbulent, and can be enough reason for tourists to keep away, if only for a time (Webster

2002). The legacy of the 'Troubles' is challenging for the tourism industry (Boyd, 2000; Baum, 1995). The media's rush to highlight any form of disturbance in Belfast and subsequently beam it across the world is not helpful. The message from those interviewed was that periodic violence should not be tolerated under any circumstances in a democratic society. The agencies and stakeholders promoting Belfast suggest that the on-going negative media coverage makes Northern Ireland a very difficult sell – it is very challenging to get good news in the mainstream media after 40 days of bad news.

Undoubtedly, the recent negative publicity around street protests has created challenges for the Belfast brand. This requires a collaborative approach from government and its agencies (NITB 2010). As an example, BVCB recently delivered the Backin' Belfast campaign with Government and industry to help restore confidence and footfall within the city (Hospitality Ireland 2013). BVCB is also active on a number of multi-agency taskforce and recovery groups which have been established to restore confidence in key tourism markets. BVCB suggest that some tourism segments are more resilient than others (e.g. restaurants and budget hotels) and despite the on-going challenges faced by the sporadic upsurges in violence conference and cruise visitors are significantly up year on year. However it was agreed that the area civil unrest needs to be addressed by government.

It was suggested that embracing the past in the way South Africa have done in regards to Robben Island is an opportunity that Belfast may have missed. The concept of turning the negative into a positive and celebrating diversity in an inclusive way would be more appropriate. This may come to fruition with the decision to grant planning permission for a Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre at the former Maze prison. In addition to Belfast City Council trying to achieve this through the St. Patrick's Day celebrations by hosting a community based - 'Mardi Gras' themed parade.

The growth in 'Dark tourism' (Boyd 2013) also has its place with numerous visitors coming to the city to experience Belfast and the legacy of its troubled past. However government need to be sensitive to the needs of the local communities

Implications for the Future of Tourism in Belfast

Hall (1991) suggest that planning for tourism occurs in a number of forms (development, infrastructure, promotion and marketing), a number of structures (different government organisations) and a number of scales (international, national, regional, local and sectorial). The stakeholders interviewed believe that government and the industry need a 'joined up approach to taking tourism in Belfast forward. A holistic view of place-marketing is needed so that it is not broken down into small elements which are applied ad hoc depending on the views of those managing the process (Page 1995). Belfast has a number of organisations who work to promote the city and Northern Ireland such as Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), Tourism Ireland Limited (TIL), Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau (BVCB) and Belfast City Council (BCC). Pearce's (1992) review of tourist organisations suggests there is no suitable model to fit the requirements of every city in its pursuit of place marketing. However the message from the stakeholders in Belfast suggests they know they need one voice, and are taking slow steps to ensure this happens (DETI 2010).

The case studies in this paper have shown that Liverpool is concentrating in developing itself as a Conference and Exhibition city, whereas Glasgow are promoting mega events based on culture, arts and heritage (Law 1993). Tourism leaders in Northern Ireland need to decide on what Belfast as a destination will become? Belfast has set its sights high as a tourist destination following significant tourism development and marketing investment. Within

business tourism, the city is competing and often winning business against Dublin and UK cities. During 2013/14, the business tourism team at Belfast Visitor & Convention Bureau has targets to achieve the same number of conference wins as the Dublin Convention Bureau despite having 14k less bedrooms and 90 less air routes (BVCB).

Law (2002) contends that to be competitive cities have to offer a high all-round quality environment, involving not just the traditional economic factors such as infrastructure, land and property, skilled labour etc., but also a good quality environment and lifestyle for executives. The continued development by Belfast City Council of the street scape for more public and green spaces will benefit in creating a more welcoming appearance.

The refurbishment and £30m extension to the Belfast Waterfront Hall due to open in 2016, was welcomed and will bring added exhibition space and build on the current facilities offered by the centre. It was believed that this will enhance Belfast in terms of conferencing capabilities and help to attract larger European, International and British events to the city which will generate the maximum economic impact.

The creation of new attractions in Belfast: Titanic Belfast, the Metropolitan Arts Centre, the refurbishment of the Ulster Museum, Crumlin Road Gaol tours and restoration and opening to the public of the SS Nomadic, are all welcomed as attractions that will help complement the existing offering.   As an emerging destination competing globally for conference business, Belfast is still not an 'easy' to sell (Boyd 2013). Therefore sustained sales and marketing intervention is required to promote the city in key markets and secure lucrative conferences which by their nature generate high spend, mid-week, year round business.

A major sports stadium with the ancillary facilities to support its use is a major requirement for the city. At present, sport has been split up into the three stadia (Ravenhill – Rugby, Casement Park – GAA and Windsor Park – Soccer) so this will be difficult to create a cohesive approach to getting regular sporting experiences in the near future. If we consider other cities in the U.K. sports tourism comes from having success on the pitch (Liverpool FC and Everton FC, Glasgow Celtic and Glasgow Rangers).   Therefore investment in skills training and facilities at lower leagues may act as a catalyst. The government and agencies such as the Sports Council need to work harder with the three main sports bodies in Soccer, Rugby and GAA to attract big sporting events. The decision by the GAA to open their grounds to support a bid to host the Rugby World Cup has been welcomed. In addition there is a bid to host the Ladies UEFA Soccer Championship.

Conferences and exhibitions are activities that are often regarded as one of the staples of city tourism.   In some cities up to 40 per cent of those staying overnight in serviced accommodation have come for this type of tourism (Law 2002). If Belfast is to compete in the international marketplace it will require a dedicated sales and marketing team to promote Belfast as a conference destination. BVCB in partnership with Tourism Ireland and NITB, lead on business tourism on behalf of the city and has made significant investments in its sales and marketing team to achieve its ambitious growth targets. Rachael Downing, BVCB revealed that: 'In 2012/13, the business tourism team within BVCB will have secured conferences for Belfast bringing 21,000 delegates, 63,000 bed nights and generating £27.3m in economic impact. This is up 70% on the previous financial year. In 2013/14, BVCB plan to increase visitor numbers and secure conference business worth £37.7m and 31,000 delegates.'

Therefore government at all levels need to review and rationalise licensing and retail opening hours to be in line with our neighbours in the rest of the U.K. and Republic of Ireland. At

present Belfast has a major difficulty providing visitors with options for activities to do on a Sunday morning, because of the restrictions imposed by 'Sunday Opening' hours. Incentives – subvention, in-kind support, civic hospitality and sponsorship funding from host cities for large sporting events and conferences remain an important part of the bidding process and is expected by organisers.

The biggest challenge for Belfast is convincing the media to highlight the good news stories that come out of Belfast rather than sensationalise the negative images. One suggestion was that an international media event be hosted in the city to give journalists a more grounded experience and understanding of Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

"Visitors to Belfast are guaranteed a unique experience, an unrivalled attitude and blend of traditions alongside a strong sense of the past, even as Northern Ireland strides into the future" says Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau chief executive.

Belfast is smaller and friendlier than most other UK cities. The city is slowly developing a more cosmopolitan feel as experienced in Dublin but needs to use its history as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. The city is compact and easy to transverse, therefore making it an ideal short break destination. In addition Belfast has lots to see with some great bars and restaurants with enough interesting things to do for a weekend away. Therefore Belfast is laying the foundations to transform itself and break free from the past by using it as a vehicle to drive it forward.

Large cities have always attracted visitors but in recent years tourism in cities has increased and the visitor economy has become more important to them (Law 2002). The principal aims of urban imaging strategies are to attract tourism expenditure, to generate employment in the tourist industry, to foster positive images for potential investors in the region, often by 'reimaging' previous negative perceptions, and to provide an urban environment which will attract and retain the interest of professionals and white-collar workers (Roche 1992,1994; Hall, 1994).

 In order to compete with other cities the private sector in Belfast need to consider a partnership approach. Using the experiences of Glasgow and Liverpool, more support from government, their agencies and the private sector by way of intervention such as in-kind support, civic hospitality and sponsorship funding for large sporting events and conferences, will help further enhance Belfast's ability to compete with other UK and European cities. Conferencing in Belfast has taken steps to increase its the capability of hosting larger international conferences which will come via the improvements to the Waterfront Hall and similar developments.

Belfast has changed dramatically since the ceasefires of 1994, and tourism has clearly been seen as a catalyst for this change. Tourism does appear to have changed the image of a city. Tourism has raised the cities profile and in turn it appears to be attracting various types of investment from the manufacturing and service industries to office based activities. There is no doubt that the activities associated with tourism have the ability to transform and raise the profile of the city (Law 2002).

References

Anon (2013) City fights back against trade blows. Hospitality Ireland. 81, 10

Anon (2007) Doing business in Belfast. Business Travel World, May 37-37,

Anson, C. (1999) Planning for peace: The role of tourism in the aftermath of violence. Journal of Travel Research. 38: 57

Ashworth, G., and Goodall, B. (1988) Tourist images: marketing considerations. In: Ashworth, G., and Goodall, B. ed. Marketing in the tourism industry: the promotion of destination regions. London: Routledge. 213-238

Ashworth, G., Page. (2010) Urban tourism research: Recent progress and current paradoxes. Tourism Management. 32 (1), 1-15

Ashworth, G., Voogd, H. (1990) Selling the city. London: Belhaven Press

Baum, T. (1995) Ireland – The Peace Dividend. Insights (English Tourism Council). 7 (1) 9-14.

Bianchini, F., Fisher, M., Walpole, K. (1991) City centres, city cultures; the role of arts in the revitalisation of towns and cities. Manchester: Centre For Local Economic Strategies.

Boyd, S.W. (2000) 'Heritage' Tourism in Northern Ireland: Opportunities Under Peace. Current Issues in Tourism. 3 (2), 150-174.

Boyd, S.W. (2013) Tourism in Northern Ireland: before violence, during and post violence. In: Butler and Sunitikul (2013) Tourism and War. Routledge: London

Buckley, P.J., Witt, S.F. (1985) Tourism in difficult areas; Case studies of Bradford, Bristol and Glasgow. Tourism Management. 6 (3), 205-213.

Butcher, H., Law, I.G., Leach, R., Mullard, M. (1990) Local government and Thatcherism. London: Routledge

Devine, A. Boyd, S. Boyle, E. (2011) Towards a Theory of Collaborative advantage for the sports tourism policy arena. International Journal of Public Sector Management. 24 (1), 23-41.

Devine, A., Leckey, B. (2012) Assistance please! What can a national tourism organisation do to help event organisers promote tourism? Paper presented at the: 8th Annual Tourism and Hospitality Research in Ireland Conference: Tourism and Events: Opportunities, Impacts and Change. June 2012, Europa Hotel, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Garcia, B. and Reason, M. (2004) The cities and culture project, phase one: The long term legacies of Glasgow 1990 European City of Culture, Research Description. Centre for Cultural Policy Research, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, available from: http://www.culturalpolicy.arts. gla.ac.uk, (accessed 22 Feb, 2013).

Gelan, A. (2003) Local economic impacts: The British Open. Annals of Tourism Research. 30 (2), 406-425.

Getz, D. (2008) Event tourism: Definition, evolution, and research. Tourism Management, 29 (3), 403-428.

Hall, C.M. (1994) Tourism and politics: Policy, power and place. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd

Hall, M. (2000) Tourism planning: Policies, processes and relationships. Essex: Prentice Hall.

Hart, J. (2010) Liverpool liaisons. Buying Business Travel. 47, 60-62.

Herrero, L. C., Sanz, J. A., Devesa, M., Bedate, A. and Del Barrio, M. J. (2006) The economic impact of cultural events: a case study of Salamanca 2002, European Capital of Culture. European Urban and Regional Studies, 13, (1), 41-57.

Hospitality Ireland. (2012) Titanic visitor centre 500,000th barrier. Hospitality Ireland. 79 (10).

Innskeep, E. (1994) National and regional tourism; Methodologies and case studies. London: Routledge.

Imrie, R., Thomas, H. (1999) British urban policy : an evaluation of the Urban Development Corporations. 2nd ed. London : SAGE.

Isserman, A.M., Lever, W.F. (1993) A tale of two centres: Case studies in the institutional evolution and survival of urban and regional centres. Urban Studies. 30 (2), 232-236.

Janesen-Verbeke, M. (1988) Leisure recreation and tourism in inner cities. Amsterdam. National Geographical Studies, 58

Jansen-Verbeke, M., Sun Ye-Hong. (2012) New Scripts for Urban Tourism: A Sustainable Way of Revalorising Cultural Resources. Tourism Tribune / Lvyou Xuekan. 27 (6), 10-19.

Kincade, R. (2011) Belfast must take a stand. Business Month (Belfast Telegraph), 3 October, 42-43

Law, C.M. (1993) Urban tourism: Attracting visitors to large cities. London: Mansell

Law, C.M. (1994) Manchester's bid for the Millenium Olympic Games. Geography, 79, 221-231

Law, C.M. (1996) Tourism in major cities. London: International Thomson Business Press

Law, C.M. (2002) Urban tourism: The visitor economy and the growth of large cities. 2nd Ed. London: Continuum.

Liu, Yi-De., Lin., Chi-Fan. (2011) The Development of Cultural Tourism: A Review of UK Experience. Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism. 6 (2), 363-376.

Madsen, H. (1992) Place marketing in Liverpool: a review. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research. 16 (4). 6, 33-40.

Montgomery, J. (1995) The story of Temple Bar: Creating Dublin's cultural quarter. Planning Practice and Research, 10, 135-142

Mowat, B. (2012) Visiting Northern Ireland, a 'Titanic' experience. Canadian Travel Press, 44 (27), 3-23

Murphy, C., & Boyle, E. (2005). Testing a conceptual model of cultural tourism development in the post-industrial city: a case study of Glasgow. Tourism and Hospitality Research. 6 (2), 111–128.

Myerscough, E. (1992) The economic impact of Glasgow's European City of Culture. London: Myesrcough Consultants.

Northern Ireland, Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment. (2010) A Draft Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020. Tourism Policy Branch, DETI.

O'Neill, M., Fitz, F. (1996) Northern Ireland tourism: What chance now? Tourism Management. 17 (3), 161-163,

Opdenakker, R. (2006) Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research Forum: Qualitative Social Research. 7 (4), 11

Page, S.J. (1995) Urban Tourism. London: Routledge.

Page, S.J., Hall, C.M. (2003) Managing Urban Tourism. London: Pearce Education Limited.

Parker, C., Garnell, C. (2006) Regeneration and retail in Liverpool: A new approach. Journal of Retail & Leisure Property. 5 (4), 292-304.

Pearce, D.G. (1992) Tourist Organisations. Harlow: Longman.

Roche, M. (1992) Mega-events and micro-modernisation: On the sociology of the new urban tourism. British Journal of Sociology, 43(4), 563-600.

Roche, M. (1994) Mega events and urban policy. Annals of Tourism Research. 21 (1), 1-9.

Selby, M. (2004). Understanding urban tourism: Image, culture and experience. London: I B Tauris.

Singh, S. (2003) Can Liverpool set the record straight? Marketing Week, 26 (24), 19

Smith, A. (2012) Events and urban regeneration. The strategic use of events to revitalise cities. London: Routledge

Sofaer, S. (1999) Qualitative Methods: What Are They band Why Use Them? Health Services Research 34(5:2),1101–1118.

Strand, S. (1999) Forecasting the future: pitfalls in controlling for uncertainty. Futures. 31, 333-350.

Todorovic, M., Stetic, S. (2010) City Centres as a challenge in the tourist offer. Tourism & Hospitality Management. (May), 646-657

Webster, J. (2002) Belfast gets in with a shout. Caterer & Hotelkeeper, 191, 4226.

Wright, T. (2007) Games will help Scotland meet tourism target. Caterer and Hotelkeeper, 197, 4502.

Wynne-Jones, S. (2008) Belfast: Hip or hype? Hospitality Ireland. 45, 44-49.

Yeoman, I., Davies, J., Wheatley, C., Mars, M., Schanzel, H., Butterfeield, S. (2012) Tourism 2050: Scenarios for New Zealand. Wellington. University of New Zealand

Yeoman, I., Robertson, M., & Smith, K. (2011) The future of events and festivals. In: Page, S & Connell, J., Ed. Handbook of Events. Routledge: Oxford.

www.glasgow.com A Games Legacy for Glasgow, Glasgow City Council (accessed 28 Feb 2013)