

Tourism and New York's ethnic diversity An underutilized resource?

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The observation that 'tourism is caught in a paradox whereby its success can destroy it' has become a commonplace. As the industry grows ever larger, it seeks to make places simultaneously interesting to visitors as well as safe and comfortable. Competition among cities to become destinations for travellers forces them to develop facilities that are increasingly indistinguishable from one another, causing the weary traveller to wake up and wonder if she is in Brussels or New York. Luxury hotels, convention centres, sports venues, concert halls, museums and shopping malls have a sameness not easily overcome by architectural embellishment, winning teams or fancy shop windows.

Many cities are addressing the dilemma of how to convey uniqueness by developing and marketing parts of the urban landscape that were previously considered marginal or dangerous. In Europe these are immigrant quarters; in the United States they are both immigrant enclaves and African American ghettos. This marketing of diversity fits well with the post-Fordist notion of niche marketing and customized production. At the same time, however, US cities are inhibited from investing too heavily in this strategy by the financial power of the establishments that constitute the main tourism interests. Moreover, the very diversity of the neighbourhoods that require marketing limits the extent to which they can effectively be advertised. Since each is different, each calls for a separate effort but lacks sufficient resources to promote itself.

Discussions over a tourism strategy that emphasizes diversity veer between two views. The first criticizes governing regimes for directing their energies toward central business districts and large corporations at the expense of community development and ethnic entrepreneurs. The second reflects fears that promoting tourism to ethnic neighbourhoods will result in commodification and commercial gentrification. We argue in this chapter that New York's efforts toward directing tourists to outlying neighbourhoods are **negligible**, and that the dangers of socially excluding minority groups exceed the dangers of commodification. The continued focus of New York's capital expenditures on convention centres and sports venues, coupled with the weakness of the diversity marketing effort put forth by the city's principal tourism agency, perpetuates the Manhattan-centric policies that have historically guided New York's urban redevelopment programmes (Fainstein and Fainstein 1989). Thus, we view the investment approaches and tourism services proffered by New York's tourism regime as largely contributing to the ongoing exclusion of low-income neighbourhoods from the economic and cultural life of the city.

Social exclusion

The term *social exclusion* has become widely used in European discourse, less so in US policy discussions:

These processes [of new patterns of unemployment, poverty and deprivation within Europe] have been accompanied by a shift in both policy and academic discourse from a dominant conception of poverty to a focus on social exclusion, signifying a significant redirection of emphasis from the material deprivation of the poor towards their inability to fully exercise their social, economic and political rights as citizens.... Social exclusion signifies the combined impact of factors such as lack of adequate education, deteriorating health conditions, homelessness, loss of family support, non-participation in the regular life of society and lack of job opportunities. Each type of deprivation has an impact on the others. The result is seen as a vicious circle.

(Geddes 2000: 782–3)

To a large extent there is a parallel between this European usage and the application of the term ‘social isolation’, as used by William Julius Wilson (1980, 1990) in his analyses of the US ghetto. In both European and North American discussions, the proposed remedy is a better integration of the socially excluded into the urban fabric.

Social exclusion, as a concept, hence refers to spatial segregation but also to detachment from social institutions or consignment to inferior ones. While physical isolation helps to reinforce social exclusion, place-based remedies alone are inadequate to address processes of class and racial/ethnic stratification. Yet place-based programmes can interact with other benefit programmes to forge conditions for a higher quality of life for low-income people, and can take into account more than purely material conditions (Markusen and Fainstein 1993). Improving opportunities in isolated urban neighbourhoods, and destroying the perception of them as ‘no-go’ areas, are needed complements to redistributive programmes, and can help to break down prejudices that inhibit other forms of assistance. It is here that increased tourism can play a role by changing urban imagery, causing places formerly regarded as scary to seem interesting or edgy and daring instead.

It has long been stylish to deride tourists as destroyers of culture (see especially MacCannell 1976) and to regard festivals produced for visitors as inauthentic spectacles (Debord 1994; Harvey 1990; see Judd 2003 for a counter-critique). But it is problematic to condemn visitors for displaying a repugnant orientalism just for regarding the quotidian lives of disparate people as exotic. Doubtless all social groups weave fantasies about ‘the Other’ (as well as myths about themselves); whether or not such fantasies are harmful depends on situations and outcomes that cannot be prejudged. In contrast to the prevailing cynical tone, there has also been a hopeful thread in tourism debates, identifying travel as a source of educational benefits and a means of promoting understanding among culturally different groups. Which tendency prevails – malignant stereotyping or growing tolerance – is largely context-dependent, and even then both processes can operate simultaneously (Fainstein and Gladstone 1999). Also context-dependent is whether commodification that leads to commercial and residential displacement by large corporate interests actually presents a serious threat to ethnic enclaves, particularly in a global city like New York. As we discuss below, this has not been a major problem so far, except in Harlem and in central Brooklyn. Thus, whether diversity tourism demeans or whether its absence excludes, whether it improves

economic opportunity or displaces local businesses, can only be determined empirically and situationally.

Tourism, like other economic sectors, is governed by a regulatory framework that structures the context in which business transactions occur. This framework encompasses the formal rules imposed by institutions as well as the informal norms and expectations that arise from social and cultural patterns (Amin 1994). Usually applied to the national level, arguments about regulation can be extended to the urban milieu (Hoffman *et al.* 2003; Lauria 1997). The impact of tourism on urban neighbourhoods depends to a great extent on the regulatory system in which the tourism operates. Our Harlem and Brooklyn case examples will show how the distribution of the economic benefits of tourism development can be affected by policy choices within a structured system of regulation that is contested by mobilized local groups. [I'm not sure what you mean by the Harlem example. Is it still in here?]

This chapter first sketches the geographical context of tourism in New York City, and then describes and evaluates the city's limited programmes for tourism promotion outside the Manhattan core. It depicts some of the organizations and schemes that have tried to attract visitors based on the unique characteristics of ethnic neighbourhoods, identifies obstacles to their success, and concludes by discussing the relationship between tourism, diversity and redevelopment.

New York's geography

Efforts to direct visitors to New York's ethnic neighbourhoods run up against a stubborn and intense focus on Manhattan, which itself results from the physical and perceptual geography of the city. Encompassing over 400 neighbourhoods and roughly 180 different languages, New York City exhibits a unique variety of community and cultural assets, all of which could be available to the determined visitor. Consisting of five boroughs – Manhattan, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island – the city is home to just over 8 million people, according to 2000 census figures. Brooklyn and Queens are the two most populous boroughs, respectively numbering about 2.5 million (31 per cent of the population) and 2.2 million (28 per cent). Manhattan is home to some 1.5 million (19 per cent) of the city's residents, followed closely by the Bronx with 1.3 million (17 per cent). Each borough is parsed into subunits called community districts, each containing several neighbourhoods (see figure 1). New York City has 59 community districts, only twelve of which are in Manhattan. The areas posting the largest population gains over the past ten years were mainly in the 'outer boroughs' (i.e. outside Manhattan), namely in the central Bronx, southeastern and southwestern Brooklyn, and virtually all of Queens and Staten Island (New York Department of City Planning 2004).

[FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE]

The overwhelming share of the city's non-white and immigrant population resides outside of what is often called 'Manhattan south of 96th Street'. Owing in large measure to the 1.2 million immigrants that arrived in the city over the 1990–2000 period,

communities in northern Manhattan and the outer boroughs have changed dramatically. For instance, various parts of Queens such as Elmhurst, Flushing, Jackson Heights/North Corona, Sunnyside and Woodhaven/Richmond Hill have all experienced a sizeable influx of Hispanic and Asian residents, altering the ethnic and racial characteristics of the neighbourhoods. In Brooklyn (home to some of the city's highest-quality housing stock), neighbourhoods such as Fort Greene, Canarsie and Sunset Park/Windsor Terrace have experienced influxes of both non-white immigrants and black and white gentrifiers. New construction and rehabilitation is occurring in some of these areas, as well as in other neighbourhoods such as Morrisania/Corona Park East and Hunts Point/Longwood in the Bronx and East Harlem in Manhattan, where many second-generation or more established ethnic Hispanics have begun to settle (New York Department of City Planning 2004). Building stock in these areas varies widely, with mixes of town houses, rows of tenements, houses large and small, privately owned apartment buildings and public housing projects. Generally the street pattern consists of broad avenues lined with storefronts, with narrower, residential streets branching off. A wide array of ethnic small businesses is present. Restaurants, music and dance clubs, clothing stores and jewellery boutiques, as well as travel agencies, money transfer institutions (for sending remittances) and, in some cases, small hotels, are examples of businesses that serve local clientele while also forming important linkages to business suppliers and distributors outside their immediate locales. They are patronized by visitors from both inside and outside the metropolitan area. In some cases, new business expansion has generated a variety of new services and amenities for both recent and long-standing residents. The view from within many of these neighbourhoods is one of a diverse, and sometimes very dynamic, local base.

[FIGURES 2 AND 3 NEAR HERE]

Access to these areas, however, is daunting for the average tourist, who stays in a midtown Manhattan hotel, feels intimidated by the complex subway system, and can expect little information about neighbourhoods outside midtown and downtown Manhattan from hotel concierges or other standard sources.¹ Although the outer boroughs possess cultural resources that would be veritable magnets for visitors in other metropolises, it is extremely difficult for them to compete with Manhattan attractions. Tour buses do serve Harlem (in Manhattan, but north of 96th Street) and recently Brooklyn, but most ethnic and minority communities have not even been put on the maps distributed to tourists at hotels and visitors' centres. While all the boroughs have very large populations (only Staten Island has under a million people), the pull of central Manhattan overwhelms them. Most of the major museums, all the principal hotels, the highest-rated restaurants and the most famous landmarks are all in Manhattan.

Furthermore, the economics of hotel investment linked to property development put many neighbourhoods in Harlem and the outer boroughs at a structural disadvantage for attracting tourists. Because hotel owners have no vested interest in encouraging tourism outside of their own vicinity, they provide no impetus for tourism development in ethnic neighbourhoods.² The wide diversity of ethnic restaurants scattered about the city would benefit greatly from more visitors, but most of them are small-scale, 'mom-and-pop' operations, whose proprietors have little spare time or cash to invest even in joint

marketing ventures. They must depend on the paltry municipal efforts to promote tourism outside the Manhattan core.

[FIGURES 4 AND 5 NEAR HERE]

Individual travellers inclined to strike out on their own are inhibited, too, by the chronic dearth of information in guidebooks to the city, which are also extremely Manhattan-centric. In the most popular ones (*Eyewitness Travel Guide*, *Fodor's New York City*, *Time Out New York* and *Frommer's New York City*), only three ethnic or minority neighbourhoods in Manhattan (Chinatown, Little Italy and Harlem) rate serious coverage. While *Time Out* and *Fodor's* do pay some attention to ethnic restaurants in Brooklyn and Queens, *Frommer's* and the *Eyewitness Guide* focus almost solely on Manhattan south of 96th Street. Even the *Lonely Planet Guide*, aimed at the more adventurous traveller, restricts itself largely to the same territory, though it does recommend riding the No. 7 subway train ('the international express') to Queens. For those seeking more information, there are books devoted just to Brooklyn, as well as a book entitled *New York Neighborhoods*, aimed entirely at those wishing to sample ethnic cuisines and shops. These are not widely distributed, however, and they tend to get out of date.

Marketing New York City – NYC & Company

City marketing in the United States is typically carried out by hotel and convention bureaus, funded by subventions from the hotel and restaurant industries. The major players in these industries expect the bureaus to devote the bulk of their resources directly to their interests. In New York City – North America's, and maybe the world's, most diverse metropolis – the city's convention and visitors bureau named NYC & Company receives just \$6.5 million (€4.5 million) in public funding, far less than the city collects from its hotel tax. Its primary funders are its subscribers (\$8 million), who are mostly hotel and restaurant owners.³ As a consequence, its promotional activities centre on attracting large conventions, staffing a midtown Manhattan tourism office, wooing travel agents, and advertising events and tourism packages. Virtually all the leaflets available in its travel centre focus on sites and happenings in Manhattan south of 96th Street, and so does its website. Historically, the urban regime has seldom viewed districts outside the Manhattan core as assets, and much of the attention they did ever receive was in the form of social programmes. Few people envisaged them as tourist attractors.

NYC & Company is a public-private partnership with an independent board of directors that appoints its chief executive.⁴ Even though it is the official tourism promotion body of the city, it does not report to the city government. It does work closely with the city's Economic Development Corporation. Its 2003 operating budget of \$14.5 million was meagre next to those of comparable bodies in other major tourist destination cities in the United States (such as the Las Vegas visitors bureau with its \$140 million annual budget for tourism promotion). NYC & Company has two basic parts to its operations. The first focuses on attracting large conventions and exhibitions and involves the wooing of meetings organizers; the second supports major events and promotions like

the US Tennis Open and the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade. Although the organization perceives itself as oriented toward the city as a whole, its efforts are systematically targeted at high-rate-of-return types of activities concentrated in Manhattan. Its corporate backers expect it to demonstrate a return on any advertising investments it makes in large-circulation magazines or television. This compels a marketing approach highlighting the tourism venues, corporate gatherings and major events that best exploit Manhattan's comparative cultural advantage for attracting visitors.

As the city's official marketing arm, NYC & Company does try to act as a 'gateway' to promotional activities undertaken by organizations in other parts of the city. Recently, as we shall see, numerous attempts have been made to develop tourism in Harlem and outer boroughs, especially Brooklyn and Queens. Efforts have been mounted by borough presidents' offices⁵ and by non-profit organizations concerned with economic development in poor neighbourhoods. These are part of a general move to revitalize commercial areas outside the core business district. It is still too early to judge their success, except impressionistically. Ethnic groups generally seen as socially excluded are territorially peripheralized. As in most European cities, the elite of New York occupy the city centre, pushing immigrants and African Americans into the 'outer boroughs' and northern Manhattan. This results in part from a steep gradient in land values as one moves out from the centre, but it is also a consequence of deliberate policy interventions, in the form of urban renewal, highway and neighbourhood revitalization programmes aimed at removing low-income households from central locations (Fainstein and Fainstein 1989). Since Manhattan is an island surrounded by wide rivers, activities pursued there do not bleed easily into the surrounding territory. Although parts of Queens are just a brief subway trip from midtown Manhattan, and downtown Brooklyn is similarly close to downtown Manhattan, the East River still forms a great psychological barrier. Furthermore, many of the interesting ethnic areas in these boroughs, like Flushing in Queens and Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, require much longer journeys. For those opting to use their car or take a taxi, traversing the river can be a major undertaking due to traffic back-ups at bridges and tunnels. Getting to the Bronx from midtown is a quite long subway ride, and Staten Island involves either a half-hour ferry ride or a circuitous route through Brooklyn and across the Verrazano Narrows Bridge.

Umbrella marketing and the targeting of neighbourhoods

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, NYC & Company has shifted some of its attention from the heart of the tourism district in midtown to neighbourhoods in lower Manhattan that suffered a loss of business after the attacks. Making use of federal allocations for the revival of the downtown area, it launched an advertising campaign for Chinatown. Mostly, though, it has sought to increase community participation in the marketing of neighbourhood events, such as by organizing local businesses as sponsors, helping with content and programming, and providing 'umbrella marketing' of surrounding neighbourhoods during cultural activities and festivals. Examples of two such campaigns are 'Christmas in Little Italy' and the 'Chinese Lunar New Year'. NYC & Company has used these time-bound interventions to highlight the cultural uniqueness of the two neighbourhoods (both in lower Manhattan) and to encourage

spillover effects into adjacent communities. It remains to be seen how much success such campaigns can achieve if restricted to infrequent cultural events. Perhaps the strategy could be expanded to market the cultural diversity of specific neighbourhoods more comprehensively.

The assumption that everyone knows about New York anyway, and that the city gets enormous free publicity from the mass media, has been used by city administrations to justify budgetary stinginess in matters of tourism. Because NYC & Company is constrained by its tiny operating budget, it seeks to capitalize on this 'brand recognition'. Yet most portrayals of New York in film and television, with the exception of crime stories, focus once again on the glamour of Manhattan. NYC & Company has made only very minor efforts to work with various business improvement districts (BIDs) or community organizations to expand tourism beyond the core portion of Manhattan. It distributes small seed grants to specific neighbourhoods in the outer boroughs and it designs sample itineraries for city tour operators in unique areas of the city,⁶ but it allocates only \$30 000 annually to each borough for tourism promotion.⁷ Even when major events are held in boroughs, the agency does not work to ensure neighbourhood spin-offs. Thus, in conjunction with the US Tennis Open in Flushing, Queens, NYC & Company **once** promoted an associated restaurant discount scheme in which *all* the dining places were in Manhattan, despite Flushing's plethora of Asian eateries. A *New York Times* article⁸ focused on the plight of that neighbourhood's commercial establishments:

John Guo, who works at Ten Ren Tea House, said he would like to see more people venture from the sports sites to his neighborhood, but few make the trip [from either the tennis venue or from nearby Shea Stadium, home of the New York Mets baseball team]. 'Nobody seems to know we are here,' he said.

NYC & Company perceives tourism expansion within the outer boroughs as the responsibility of the borough presidents, each of whom has a staff member responsible for tourism development. Although this approach avoids any duplication of effort, it effectively limits the resources.

Other organizations

The high concentrations of immigrant and ethnic groups in New York, the variety of their cultural and religious characteristics, and the dense and mixed nature of communities living in close proximity to one another has propelled some organizations and institutions to market their communities and to publicize the cultural assets inherent in these diverse surroundings. Typically, their principal focus is not just tourism. They act more as neighbourhood advocates, working to preserve local culture and define a niche for their areas within the larger metropolitan economy. Their work is presented briefly here.

Offices of the borough presidents

The common perception within most borough presidents' offices is that city government does precious little to promote the diverse, ethnically mixed areas outside Manhattan below 96th Street. In addition to sponsoring projects in their own boroughs, these offices play the lead role in marketing the communities and businesses located there. They have recently launched a joint effort called More NYC. Aware that the cultural and ethnic richness of the boroughs is one of their greatest assets, borough presidents increasingly try to seize on these attributes to realize economic advantages. However, the resources they have available to give shape and meaning to their plans do not necessarily match their commitment. Many of the staff responsible for tourism have to divert time from their other, primary tasks.

Because the motives and backgrounds of borough visitors differ from those of the typical tourist, different forms of marketing are required. Much tourism comes to the boroughs in the form of extended family reunions, weddings and cultural festivals. Family members may arrive from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma), from Central America and the Caribbean (Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Mexico, El Salvador), from Eastern Europe and Russia, and from other corners of the globe. These visitors often come for extended stays (several weeks). Although they generate little hotel business because they reside with family members, they do create considerable demand for local shops and restaurants. In areas like the South Bronx and Jamaica, Queens, the origins of the hip-hop culture also attract substantial inbound tourism from places as far away as Germany and Japan. This has given rise to numerous dynamic market outlets for clothing and music stores.

International and out-of-town travellers to ethnic neighbourhoods often intermingle there with native New Yorkers and suburbanites who come back to 'the old neighbourhood' for shopping and dining.⁹ Queens and Brooklyn offer a rich variety of cultural assets, including museums (the Brooklyn Museum of Art, home of a major collection of European and Asian fine art, and the Museum of African Art, among many others);¹⁰ major television studios in Astoria, Queens; and some of America's first planned communities, such as Forest Hills Gardens and Sunnyside Gardens in Queens. Visitors to these sites may also be attracted to the large concentrations of ethnic specialty stores and restaurants nearby. In Brooklyn, neighbourhood gentrification in places like Prospect Park, Fort Greene, Greenpoint and Williamsburg is remaking the image of these old residential areas. This attracts new investment in nightclubs and restaurants and brings in sizeable numbers of new visitors, particularly from Manhattan. Though the trendy clubgoing set has many here-today-gone-tomorrow attributes, its recent arrival in Brooklyn is nevertheless a sign of neighbourhood change linked to a new market dynamics – one created by customers from other parts of the city and with a potential to attract visitors even from outside the metropolitan area.

The borough presidents' offices have acknowledged the need for coordinated efforts among a wide range of actors. Many different initiatives are being attempted, especially along the lines of informal tourism coalitions that bring together community and cultural associations, local hotels, travel agencies, local development groups and BIDs. The Queens office is working toward formal coordination among different stakeholders and has held a borough-wide conference on tourism development. The Bronx Tourism Council has set more targeted objectives, particularly involving hotel development,

which is severely lacking in the borough. In Brooklyn, the emphasis is on getting people to explore different neighbourhoods. The borough president has just opened a 1300 square foot (120 m²) tourism centre in Borough Hall, the first such facility in any of the outer boroughs.¹¹ This endeavour is highly significant, given the current fragmentation of the information provision about sites to visit, transport options and other key issues for visitors like expense, safety and accommodations. While the centre in itself will not entice visitors from Manhattan to Brooklyn, it will at least guide them once they get there, as well as assisting outsiders visiting friends and relatives. One problem is how to make potential clients aware of the facility, which is not located in a part of Brooklyn where visitors are likely to arrive.

It is important to stress that the boroughs discussed here – Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx – encounter different obstacles to the expansion of tourism and the marketing of their unique community and cultural assets. For instance, Queens, home to the two New York airports, has **the largest** hotel stock outside of Manhattan, while the Bronx has the smallest. Nonetheless, all borough presidents face certain common obstacles, too, which impede their efforts to expand tourism. The lack of signage is often cited as a major factor restricting both informational and logistical access to places of interest. Borough staff members have stressed how the poor signposting contributes to a lack of a sense of place and creates psychological barriers to exploring particular neighbourhoods, especially as a pedestrian. This is a key factor limiting the commercial viability of the hop-on hop-off bus tours that have been extended to Brooklyn and Harlem (but that still do not visit the remainder of the city outside central Manhattan).

Inadequate transportation is a complex issue, but one that is universally cited as a fundamental constraint on the accessibility of various neighbourhoods, and indeed of whole boroughs. Although the airports are in Queens, most connections from them go to Manhattan, and both railroad stations are in Manhattan. Since the subway system was mainly designed to carry workers from outlying areas to Manhattan, there is little interconnectedness within the boroughs themselves. Water-based transit is also poorly developed. The popular Circle Line cruises carry passengers around Manhattan, and new ferry links bring commuters to the two main Manhattan business districts. Private car transport is hampered by the scarcity of parking space, yellow cabs do not cruise the streets of outer boroughs¹² and visitors to New York are less likely to rent cars than their counterparts in other, less centralized US cities.

Consciousness-raising within neighbourhoods with regard to tourism remains an issue at multiple levels in the outer boroughs. Borough staff concede that many local businesses, not to mention certain branches of local government, do not display the types of attitudes and basic behaviours that tourists find welcoming. To improve the marketing of the boroughs, one also needs to instil a general understanding of what it *means* for a community to be open to visitors. The attempt by the Queens borough president to convene major stakeholders to discuss tourism strategy can perhaps be best understood in this light.

Borough-level governments increasingly take the lead in devising strategies of economic development that assign key roles to tourism. But because the borough offices depend on the central city budget for their existence, they are starved for the resources

they need to support tourism development. Moreover, many of the problems they face can be resolved only at higher levels of the planning, transportation and economic development apparatus of New York City government. Nevertheless, the manner in which boroughs are forging new public–private relationships with community and cultural associations is testimony to their creative attempts to capitalize on the wealth of cultural and historical assets they have to offer. Other **local** actors are giving voice and meaning to what these assets are, how to preserve them and how to bring them to the attention of a wider range of interested people.

City Lore and the Place Matters project

City Lore is a non-profit organization initiated in 1986 by a folklorist, originally from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, who was dedicated to preserving the living cultural heritage of New York City. In recent years, City Lore has teamed up with the Municipal Arts Society of New York to launch a project called Place Matters. The project is more than just an attempt to save historical and cultural landmarks from the claws of property development. **It seeks to establish an ongoing recognition of how current natural and built city environments are linked to rich layers of history, community and memory. Such knowledge is seen as an enhancement to urban living.** City Lore and Place Matters work pro-actively to protect many physical landmarks, as well as the cultural practices that have grown up around such landmarks in past and present. In this way, their advocacy work distinguishes itself from many other preservation campaigns, which often merely react to specific crises and focus solely on buildings rather than on social history and culture.¹³

Expanding tourism is therefore not City Lore’s primary objective, though the organization does perceive tourism development as helping people to think about place in new ways. It sees itself as an advocate for the culture that pervades physical landmarks. Place Matters has conducted a Census of Places That Matter – sites in New York that embody the richness and diversity of its history. Although the project believes that tourism can add value to the cultural assets of a particular site, the knowledge bank resulting from the census is primarily meant to heighten awareness of the importance of locale. Place Matters has teamed up with various community development corporations (CDCs), particularly in the Bronx, to stimulate neighbourhood tourism as a means of empowering communities and preserving expressive cultures. Such tourism efforts, however, **is seen to be** as much about the *unique character of place* as about the architecture associated with unique landmarks.

Neighbourhood tourism and walking tour organizations

Quite apart from the sights at which most New Yorkers and city visitors marvel on a daily basis, such as the city’s architecture, museums, monuments and showplaces, New York’s extraordinary diversity is perhaps best understood in interactions at a neighbourhood level. Several organizations are actively introducing New Yorkers and visitors to a broad array of neighbourhoods whose historical and cultural roots are still shaping neighbourhood change. These groups are particularly sensitive to issues of

authenticity, and they try to provide an accurate picture of the neighbourhood. Precisely for this reason, however, they may do little to stimulate economic activity and may themselves be economically shaky.

Walking tour organizations include community and historical associations in the cases of Fort Greene in Brooklyn and Richmond Town in Staten Island; in various parts of Queens and Brooklyn they include BIDs; and in the South Bronx they include CDCs. One recent significant effort was funded by the Conference Board, an elite business group, but it foundered when its executive director took another job. Even before that, it had serious difficulties attracting participants. It lacked visibility because of an inadequate advertising budget. The types of difficulties faced by such organizations are exemplified by one such walking tour, which chronicled the musical history of the South Bronx from the mambo era of the 1950s through the rise of hip-hop in the 1970s. An arts-based CDC called The Point sponsored the tour, in which the cultural origins of the Dominican, Puerto Rican, Cuban and African American populations were interwoven in an understanding of the neighbourhood's musical history. The CDC could not allocate dedicated staff to the project, but relied instead on the Conference Board to pay a tour leader on an ad hoc basis. When the board failed, the CDC's backing also evaporated.

In Fort Greene, a predominately African American and African Caribbean neighbourhood in Brooklyn, businesses have not focused on tourists per se, but have tried to attract outsiders drawn to the neighbourhood by walking tours and by events at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The walking tours are sponsored by the Historic Fort Greene Association and they bring in both New Yorkers and visitors from farther afield. Though the tours focus on architecture and ethnography, the organization also distributes lists of all businesses in the area to people on the tours. In response, businesses are trying to capitalize on the presence of outsiders; for example, restaurants are opening for brunch on tour days.¹⁴

Many of the visitors to this black neighbourhood, like those travelling to immigrant neighbourhoods, are of the same ethnicity as the residents. According to one observer,

In a locally owned shop that sells body care goods, I overheard customers appreciate the establishment because they perceive that the products were designed for a predominately black customer base.... When I spoke with Michelle, the shop owner, she stated: 'Some of my customers come all the way from Atlanta. They come to shop and hang out in the area.... They tell me they can't get "this" in the South' – referring to the products but also the neighbourhood's cultural capital associated with the fusion of people, foods and products inspired by black peoples from the Caribbean, West Africa and America. The 'authenticity' of the neighbourhood hinges on its black Diaspora representation, its class differences and its integration of artists and business enterprises.

(Sutton 2002)

These case examples lead us to conclude that the marketing of diverse neighbourhoods does not necessarily constitute a commodification of Otherness or a presentation of

exoticism for the benefit of the white bourgeois consumer. Yet precisely this fact makes it difficult to locate and advertise to the potential customer base.

The core set of obstacles to a more viable tourism economy includes both contingent and more structural factors. Marketing efforts are intermittent and are not linked to larger tourism promotion structures, such as those offered by NYC & Company. Tour guides carry out tours on an informal basis, as demand is unreliable. Demand could be stabilized by appealing to larger numbers of foreign visitors arriving every year to seek the cultural roots of popular music (at present especially those of the hip-hop scene). But these visitors are constrained by the lack of accommodation options outside central Manhattan.

The potential for diversity tourism

The efforts documented above are sporadic and highly dependent on individual initiatives, rather than being based in an established institutional structure. New York City's peculiar geography, the concentration of entertainment and retail activity in a strikingly small area, the traditional bias of city government toward Manhattan, and its long-time, rather anomalous underfunding of tourism promotion all inhibit the development of tourism in minority and ethnic neighbourhoods. Unlike many cities (such as Miami, Toronto or London) where ethnic neighbourhoods border directly on the central business district, those in New York are further flung and not easily accessible, with the exception of Manhattan's Chinatown and Little Italy. In many European cities, by comparison, where principal sights like churches and museums are similarly scattered about the city, public transportation is more readily available and hotels are much less concentrated in city centres.

Despite all this, the potential does exist in New York to increase the numbers of visitors to lower-income neighbourhoods. Harlem, once considered a no-go area, has recently been attracting 800 000 tourists a year. Whereas not long ago it offered few sights beyond the Sunday morning gospel services at its many churches, it has since spawned a number of restaurants and jazz clubs to meet the new demand. Another attraction there is the revived Apollo Theater, a historic incubator of talented African American performers (Hoffman 2003). Brooklyn, home to nearly 2.5 million people, did not have a single first-class hotel until recently. When a developer tried to build one, banks initially refused financing, considering Brooklyn too risky. Once he finally succeeded in building the hotel, now operated by the Marriott chain, he achieved almost 100 per cent occupancy and is currently launching an expansion. Construction of another new hotel in Brooklyn is now also underway. Growing membership of Harlem businesses in NYC & Company has drawn more attention to that area, too, and a hotel is also under construction. These successes illustrate the possibilities that exist if entrepreneurs come along to exploit them.

Yet progress is slow. Many of the obstacles summed up here still impede efforts at business development. In sharp contrast to the weak governmental support for efforts to improve the prospects of local small businesses, both the city and state governments direct massive resources at mega-developments to get out-of-towners to visit New York.

And even when the city proposes projects for outlying boroughs, they do not represent real changes in the direction of public policy. Furthermore, it is doubtful in many cases whether adjacent immigrant or African American communities would actually stand to benefit.

An example is the Brooklyn Atlantic Yards project, a vast scheme whose centrepiece is to be a new basketball arena for the New Jersey Nets franchise. The project would transfer this professional team from its current home in northern New Jersey to Brooklyn, in the wake of its purchase by Brooklyn-based property developer Bruce Ratner. The project, to be built by his Forest City Ratner Companies above existing railroad yards, also extends into neighbouring areas, causing both residential and commercial displacement. From the developer's point of view, the basketball arena will be ancillary to the more profitable parts of the project, which include a 21-acre (8.5 ha) mixed-income residential and commercial development, some 1.9 million square feet (176 500 m²) of class A office space, and associated commercial development. City government sees the project as the resurrection of downtown Brooklyn.

Our intention in discussing this scheme is not to undertake a cost-benefit analysis, but to show how this public-private marshalling of resources and investment capital exemplifies the city's current economic development efforts and their likely effects on the diversity of place-bound economic and cultural assets. In other words, we are concerned that this type of investment strategy, even when directed at areas outside Manhattan, merely pre-empts other approaches to the economic and sociocultural enhancement of the more diverse urban communities and neighbourhoods in a global city like New York. To assert that the city will greatly benefit from new revenue sources generated by mega-developments is not the same as saying that Brooklyn residents and business owners will reap either direct or derived benefits from increased commercial activity and foot traffic in the area. The generous subsidies and wide-reaching political influence available to major developers, and in particular the excessive government support given to sports teams, contrast starkly with the neglect of small-scale efforts by local ethnic entrepreneurs. Any discussion of the Atlantic Yards project's relative merits should take full account of the particular *brand* of cultural consumption and production being pursued, and of the trade-offs forced by the project within the urban economy. Ultimately this project, if consummated, will bring in chain stores and raise rent levels in its environs. While it may indeed provide some housing and employment for Brooklynites, that will be at the expense of diversity and will hamper the promotion of Brooklyn's unique attractions. The enthusiasm for vast investments in sports facilities contrasts with the feeble efforts to invigorate ethnic businesses. Their economic status is fragile, and their potential for further development is forever being threatened by the appeal that mega-projects enjoy within New York city government.

Be careful what you wish for

The distinctiveness of many ethnic communities means they offer the tourist something qualitatively different from the standard Broadway- and Manhattan-based experience. It is yet unclear how big the market could be for large-scale tourism in neighbourhoods like Jamaica and Jackson Heights in Queens, Fort Greene in Brooklyn, the South Bronx,

and many others, and what threats such tourism might pose to the authenticity of specific neighbourhood experiences. The problem of defining the market for this place-based tourism – and of predicting what it might mean in terms of loss of authenticity, displacement of small-scale businesses, and residential gentrification – raises the issue of what the gains from tourism actually are and how they can be translated into community well-being. Must place-based tourism exist at a low-level equilibrium to be sustainable for the community that plays host to the visitors? Or does tourism promise improved amenities for any marginal neighbourhood and an expanded customer base for its local businesses?

Tourism is a double-edged sword, and the likely answer to the questions above is that both outcomes are possible. Some of New York's ethnic enclaves have already turned into artificial efflorescences, embodying a nostalgic image with little connection to contemporary reality. Thus, Little Italy in southern Manhattan and the Bronx's Arthur Avenue (another Italian restaurant and shopping enclave) both continue purveying images of their Italian origins long after the Italian residents have departed. Little Italy restaurants feature promoters who stand in front of the restaurants exhorting passers-by to sample their indifferent cuisine. Arthur Avenue, which has maintained higher culinary standards, caters mainly to suburbanites retracing their New York roots; it is surrounded by a Hispanic residential population. Manhattan's Chinatown, in contrast, despite its long history of serving outsiders in its countless restaurants, is still the first stop for new immigrants and still boasts many shops and eateries catering to Chinese-speaking residents and visitors. Its average income remains very low, and its diverse economy includes garment factories, a variety of retail, wholesale and service establishments, banking institutions and a flourishing informal sector. Harlem, though threatened by both residential and commercial gentrification, has strengthened its commitment to black culture and, after witnessing a decline of its music and food scene, has generated a variety of black-owned jazz and eating places (Hoffman 2003).

Tourism thus has the potential to liven up many New York neighbourhoods and to strengthen their appeal to residents and visitors alike. Tourism is synergistic with the creation of amenities that also benefit residents. It can boost the demand for local culture, refurbished architecture, attractive parks and distinctive businesses. Achieving development based on diversity rather than on the exploitation of difference, stimulating cultural interchange while avoiding putting local people on exhibit, nurturing small business while keeping chain stores at bay – all these are possible benefits of opening up neighbourhoods to tourists. The trick is to secure the benefits while minimizing the obvious pitfalls.

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Notes

- 1 It is alleged that hotel concierges are rewarded financially for directing guests to expensive Manhattan restaurants. Small proprietors in the boroughs cannot match this kind of initiative.

- 2 A new hotel now being built in Harlem, and recent plans for another, may slightly
alter this situation.
- 3 Information supplied by NYC & Company.
- 4 The discussion of NYC & Company is based on interviews with NYC &
Company staff and with knowledgeable informants.
- 5 The elected presidents of New York's five boroughs have limited executive
powers over services and capital expenditures in their jurisdictions. Most activities
are funded through the mayor's office, but the borough presidents do have a
limited discretionary budget. There are no borough legislative bodies.
- 6 The chief executive of NYC & Company, in response to an article implying
criticism of the organization's meagre efforts at tourism promotion in the
boroughs, responded that 'promoting and increasing tourism for each borough is a
cornerstone of NYC & Company's mission.' She cited its sponsorship of Culture
Fest, a meeting to market arts and cultural organizations from all five boroughs.
(Cristyne L. Nicholas, letter to the editor, *Crain's New York Business*, 13
September 2004). Significantly, the meeting itself took place in the downtown
Manhattan business district.
- 7 'Boroughs act for attention', *Crain's New York Business*, 6 September 2004.
- 8 Lydia Polgreen, 'Ethnic food, anyone? After tennis matches and baseball games,
Flushing beckons', *New York Times*, 2 September 2004.
- 9 For instance, at 74th Street in Jackson Heights in Queens, Indian merchants sell a
highly sought-after type of gold that is used in Indian weddings and is difficult to
source elsewhere in the metropolitan area (personal communication, Director of
Economic Development, Office of the Queens Borough President, 10 October
2003). Many ethnic cooking ingredients unavailable outside New York can be
bought in such neighbourhoods too.
- 10 During the remodelling of the Museum of Modern Art's landmark building on
53rd Street in Manhattan, it displayed much of its regular collection and mounted
several major exhibits in a converted factory in Long Island City, Queens, just
across the river from Manhattan. Traffic to the museum provided business to local
restaurants and galleries. When the museum returned to its permanent Manhattan
home in November 2004, however, it closed its Queens facility to the public.
- 11 In contrast to European cities (and even most American resort communities), most
US cities have not set up visitors' information centres. New York did not establish
its first centre (in Times Square) until the 1980s. Harlem now also has an
information centre run by NYC & Company and funded by the federal
Empowerment Zone.
- 12 Only yellow cabs may pick up passengers that hail them on the street. Radio or
'gypsy' cabs must be ordered by telephone.
- 13 Interview with the director of the Place Matters project for City Lore, 7 October
2003.
- 14 Information on Fort Greene was provided by Stacey Sutton.