



# Defining Elements of Cities Touristic Attractiveness - A Case Study – Helsinki

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Accepted September 2015

Available online September 2015

### JEL Classification

Z32, Z38

### Keywords:

Touristic destination  
attractiveness, Strategy for  
tourism, Index of touristic  
attractiveness, Touristic brand,  
tourism heritage

## ABSTRACT

Achieving the „attractive touristic destination” label represents a high objective for any touristic destination. In order to accomplish this objective, one of the most important aspect is to find what do the attributes of attractiveness in tourism mean. This study consists in a research made by the author during an Erasmus+ teaching visit at Laurea University of Applied Science in Helsinki- Finland. The research consisted in a focus-group organized in the Tourism, Restaurants and Entrepreneurship specialization among students and teachers from Finland and, also, international students, in order to provide some trends that could be deepened by other analysis. The analysis starts from the idea that touristic attractiveness has a subjective component, given by the consumers. As a conclusion, it should be appreciated that it is very important to find the way that touristic services consumer evaluate this concept.

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## 1. Introduction

The attractiveness of a touristic destination represents a concept that still needs elements to define it in the more complete way. To achieve this purpose it would be useful to have an image about how people define this concept. This represents the subjective part of defining this concept and it belongs to the consumer's point of view.

## 2. Literature review – Considerations about the attractiveness of the touristic destination

Destinations are amalgams of tourism products, offering integrated experience to customers. Traditionally, destinations are regarded as well-defined geographical areas, such as a country, an island or a town. However, it is increasingly recognized that a destination can also a perceptual concept, which can be interpreted subjectively by consumers, depending on their travel itinerary, cultural background, purpose of visit, educational level and past experience(Buhalis, 2000).

The touristic phenomenon is conditioned by three categories of premises (Gheorghilas, 2009)

### a.The tourism heritage

a1. natural heritage (clime, water, relief)

a2. anthropic heritage (cultural, historical, monuments, folk values, scientific objectives, religion)

### b.The human component – expressed as the socio-economic needs and the personal material possibilities

c.The technical and material conditions – all the improvements regarding accommodation, catering, sports, leisure, public services, transport system.

Defining an attractive touristic destination is not an easy issue. The touristic destination depends on several elements: geographic elements, environmental elements and socio-cultural elements. In addition, the dynamics of the market could influence the touristic destination.

The Romanian National Research in Tourism Institute tried to define an „Index of touristic attractiveness”. According to this, the following elements are taken into consideration to determine the touristic destination attractiveness:

**Table no 1 The touristic destination attractiveness**

<b>Natural touristic resources</b>	<b>Anthropic touristic resources</b>	<b>Material and technical elements</b>	<b>General infrastructure</b>
Landscape	Historical and art monuments	Accommodation options	Access ways – roads, railway network, airports, etc
Relief	Archeological areas	Eating structures	Utilities networks
Climate – favorable elements	Churches and monasteries	Leisure structures	Organic waste collection points
Hydrographic network	Museums	Spa treatment structures	
Fauna	Traditional architecture		
Protected areas	Handicrafts		
Therapeutic factors	Traditional habits		
The environment quality			

Source: [http://smcse.incdt.ro/index.pl/iat\\_ro](http://smcse.incdt.ro/index.pl/iat_ro)

Because not all the elements are considered equally important, they've got different share, based on some analysis. Each of the factors that define the 4 components are appreciated according to its quality, originality and competitiveness, as it follows:

- a.,0" - for an inexistent factor, unfavorable factor as a consequence of pollution, degradation
- b.,1" - for a low quality, non-competitive factor at the national level
- c.,2" - for a satisfying factor, significant factor at the national level
- d.,3" - for a factor that encourages the international tourism development

According to the Romanian National Research in Tourism Institute, an index of the touristic attractiveness can be calculated, by using all the mentioned elements.

A more complete method of defining the attractiveness of a territory is the so called "Technique et développement" - TECDEV (Cristureanu, p. 179).

Considering the fact that a territory has an objective existence – given by its components – and a subjective one, recognized by all the consumers (Ispas, 2010, p 119), we consider as a maximum interest the appreciation of the territory's attractiveness in terms of its quality, through evaluations carried out by the touristic services consumers. In addition, we should take into consideration not only the economic dimension, but also the social and environmental dimensions. For a better strategic development, they should be seen in connection with the organic growth (Epuran, 2015).

Analyzing the motivation of travel flows in urban space, we can conclude that attractions such as the famous characters, history and cultural elements, recreation and entertainment, events and festive occasions, buildings, monuments and sculptural ensembles as well as natural beauty lies among the visitors' preferences and constitute defining elements in choosing travel destination (Ispas, 2011).

### **3.Helsinki – a potential touristic destination**

#### **3.1.Short history of Helsinki**

The town of Helsinki was founded by King Gustavus Vasa of Sweden (which Finland belonged to for many centuries) as a new trading post in southern Finland and a competitor to Tallinn in Estonia, the Hanseatic city on the opposite shore of the Gulf of Finland in 1550. After more than 150 years of Swedish domination, in the XII-th century was occupied by the Russians. The Russian domination of Finland ended in 1917. In the meantime, Helsinki had become the capital of Finland (1812).

After the Second World War 2, Helsinki became a modern and industrialized city. Helsinki joined the European Union in 1995, and in 2000 was one of the nine European Cities of Culture.

#### **3.2.Helsinki - a touristic city profile**

Helsinki is a famous city regarding at least the following aspects: design, architecture, culture and shopping - there all are great exploration angles and large park areas, forests, lakes, and the coastline with numerous islands sprinkled off it make certain there's no shortage of natural presence.

During its history, Helsinki developed its architecture, its cultural patrimony, its infrastructure, and all of these contributed as premises for touristic development. In this way, Helsinki is now a representative city regarding the following types of tourism

- Cultural tourism – it is possible to visit some major cultural objectives, such as:
  - Aleksanterin Theatre (the first theatre for the Russian people of Finland)
  - Tennispalatsi (a cultural and recreational center – movie theatre, The Art Museum, Tennis Palace, The Museum of Cultures)
  - Amos Anderson Art Museum
  - The Swedish Theatre
  - The Finnish National Theatre
  - Finlandia Hall
  - Finnish National Opera
  - The Helsinki Cathedral in the Senate Square
- Cruise tourism  
Helsinki hosts around 400 000 cruise passengers annually from May to October. In the Helsinki Harbor round 350 cruises take places annually. The main cruise destinations are: Stockholm, Tallinn and Sankt Petersburg.  
The Helsinki's Tourism Strategy specifies in its vision the fact that Helsinki should become an essential cruise destination in the Baltic Sea.
- Business and conference tourism  
Helsinki's authorities - the Helsinki Convention & Events Bureau – intend to create a positive image of Helsinki as a venue for congresses. The main directions to achieve the objective that Helsinki ranks among the top 20 most popular international meeting cities are: to increase the number of international meetings and congresses held in Helsinki, to increase the number of participants, to promote Helsinki as a congress venue.
- Tourism for shopping  
To encourage the development of this kind of tourism a cluster of creative business – Design District Helsinki – was created. It comprises jewelers makers, design and antiques shops, fashion stores, museums, art galleries, etc. Famous Finnish trademarks are: Iitala, Marimekko, Minna Parikka, Kalevala, Aarikka.  
Famous shopping areas in Helsinki are: Galeria Esplanadi, Kamppi Shopping Center, Shopping Center Forum. Sokos Department Store, Stockmann Department Store, etc
- Specific other touristic objectives

#### 4. Methodology of the research

The research consists in a qualitative research with the purpose of identifying the main aspects that could define the concept of „attractive touristic destination” for Helsinki. The population involved in the research consisted in:

- a. Finnish students at the Tourism, Restaurant and Entrepreneurship – they live in Helsinki, so they are exponents of the ‚local population’, which knows well all the aspects regarding Helsinki, as touristic destination. In addition, they study tourism, so, they could be assimilated to future experts in tourism.
- b. International students which study in Finland at the same specialization during an Erasmus+ exchange program. They represent the opinion of „foreign tourists”, because most of them visited Helsinki for the first time and they did not have so much information about Helsinki, as touristic destination.

The interview guide was created in order to respond to the following objectives:

- 1) To identify what an attractive touristic destination means
- 2) To find if Helsinki is considered an attractive touristic destination
- 3) What are the main problems for a tourist in Helsinki
- 4) What is the image of Helsinki city comparing to other cities
- 5) How the national and the foreign tourists in Helsinki should be characterized
- 6) What institutions should be involved in a potential program to attract tourists in Helsinki

The method consisted in organizing a free discussion, as a qualitative research using the Focus Group method. A number of 14 students participated to the meeting. The questions were open questions, and the respondents had the possibility to express themselves in the way that they considered, regarding the subjects. Also, the technique of association was used.

Although the answers do not permit necessarily generalized conclusions, they can be assimilated to basic information that could be useful for the authorities and stakeholders in their attempt to assure to Helsinki a „attractive touristic destination” character. For this study, the young tourists themselves represent a valuable source of information who provide the solutions for improving the touristic destination. Their answers help the authorities and stakeholders to deliver a better experience for the consumers. (Dovleac, Bălăşescu, 2012).

To structure the results, the content analysis was used. It permits to extract the relevant information which can be analyzed in the context.

## 5. The results

Each discussion theme revealed the most important aspects that we discussed with the auditorium.

The first objective of the study referred to the perceived meaning of an „attractive touristic destination“. The main issues presented for each subject of discussion were the following:

**Table no 2 The perceived meaning of an „attractive touristic destination“**

Issue	Main ideas of the answers
What an attractive touristic destination means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A big variety of products to offer</li> <li>• A positive media image</li> <li>• A good infrastructure</li> <li>• Safety</li> <li>• Reasonable prices</li> <li>• A pleasant environment</li> <li>• A variety of leisure activity</li> <li>• Nice weather</li> <li>• Cultural monuments, museums, cultural destinations, etc</li> <li>• Welcoming local people</li> </ul>

The main ideas shows the fact that in addition to some „classic“ points of view regarding the issue, for Helsinki some new opinions came to complete the concept – reasonable prices (considering the fact that Helsinki is perceived as a city with high level of prices), nice weather (the focus group took place in November and it is known the fact that Helsinki is not so „friendly“ regarding the weather during the winter) and welcoming local people (Finnish are recognized as not being so warm people).

The answers could be analyzed scientifically, starting from the attractiveness definition. So, the respondents specified elements of natural heritage (the weather, a pleasant environment), anthropic heritage (the cultural monuments, the museums, the cultural destinations), the human component (welcoming local people), and, also, technical and material conditions (a good infrastructure, a variety of leisure activity). Also, there are some subjective aspects to notice – the positive media image.

The study wanted to evaluate if the respondents think about Helsinki as an attractive touristic destination. In general, the city was considered an attractive destination, with some notifications – it is attractive but in warm seasons, and it is appreciated as a too expensive city. The most important arguments in favor of the attractiveness were: the possibility of beautiful sightseeing, the city’s history and culture (including sauna as an element of culture), Scandinavian design and the safety in the city. There was just one according to whom Helsinki is not considered an attractive destination.

The third objective of the study was to determine what are the main problems that a tourist in Helsinki is confronting with. The main problems for a tourist in Helsinki referred to: high prices – especially revealed by the students from other countries abroad from Finland, coming from European/non-European developing countries - the so called „cultural shock“ (defined as related to the language and small talk – learning to communicate with Finns) and complains about local food.

Another objective was to compare Helsinki to other cities. In this sense, the respondents were asked to compare Helsinki with other cities that they have been visited. The main elements of comparison were:

- Helsinki is smaller
- Helsinki is safer (the majority of opinions)
- Helsinki is unknown and not well presented
- Helsinki is more expensive
- Helsinki is unusual because of the language and culture

In order to find the way that the respondents have their image about national and foreign tourists, they were asked to associate 3 words for each kind of tourist (national or foreign tourist). The words associated by the respondents were:

**Table no 3 Image about national and foreign tourist**

National tourist	Foreign tourist
• Shopping	• Attractions
• Family	• Culture
• Business	• Climate
• Nightlife	• Nature
• Leisure	• Architecture
• Helpful	• The sea
• Knowledge	• Safety

By analyzing these words we can appreciate that the two kind of tourists are seen in different ways. According to the answers, the two kind of tourists are not alike, not even in one point a view. While Finnish tourists are preoccupied by shopping, business, nightlife, leisure, family the international tourists are seen related to other elements – culture, nature architecture, safety and climate.

Regarding the question „Who do you think it should be involved in a potential program to attract more tourists in Helsinki?“ most of the answers noticed the fact that the City Hall and the public authorities should be the main actors in this process. In the same time it should be mentioned that 5 of the respondents answered with „I don’t know“.

## 6. Conclusions and discussions

The touristic attractiveness is a complex concept that needs a lot of elements to define. In the different ways that this concept is defined, some elements should be noticed:

- The touristic attractiveness takes into consideration objective aspects - climate, infrastructure, accommodation options - and, also subjective aspects – perceptions about culture, religion, tradition
- There are some attempts to built some composite index to analyze the touristic attractiveness. The components are not considered equally important, so, they should got different shares.

Helsinki is one of the most important city in the Northern Europe. Even though it is not necessarily considered a famous touristic destination, the local authorities make efforts to promote the city as a touristic destination. As a consequence, The Helsinki’s Strategy for Tourism was adopted. The most important objectives of this Strategy are:

- To promote Helsinki as a travel destination in cooperation with actors and organizations within the travel trade in Finland and abroad
- To transform Helsinki – and, in the same time the Helsinki Region – in a touristic recognized brand
- To transform Helsinki in an internationally recognized city for its events
- To confirm Helsinki as the most important cruise destination in the Baltic Sea
- To create a comprehensive plan to develop Helsinki as a touristic destination

The Strategy intends to evaluate all these goals by objective indicators such as: public and private spending on tourism marketing, number of investments in tourism, number of direct connections to Helsinki, flights, ferries, number of overnight stays, occupancy of hotels, income from tourism. Some of these indicators could be used to appreciate the attractiveness of the touristic destination.

In order to find some basic information useful for the authorities regarding the was that Helsinki is/is not considered an attractive touristic destination, the focus-group was organized to find what is the respondents opinion about the meaning of the “attractive touristic destination” concept, about Helsinki and its attractiveness, about the potential problems that a tourist could face in Helsinki, and some general aspects about the tourists from Helsinki.

The main conclusions of the research are:

- The point of view about an attractive touristic destination take into consideration most of the theoretical aspects that define the concept (infrastructure, leisure, culture, climate), but, also, other new aspects (reasonable prices, nice weather, welcoming local people)
- Helsinki is considered an attractive touristic destination, and the main reason for this consideration consists in the beautiful sightseeing, the national culture. It is important to notice that some of the respondents appreciated Helsinki generally attractive but with some notifications (the weather and the image of a too expensive destination)
- Compared to other cities visited by the respondents, Helsinki is perceived as a smaller, safer, more expensive, unusual (weather and language) and less known.
- Visiting Helsinki might cause some problems for the tourists, such as: high prices – especially for the tourists from developing countries – and the so-called “cultural shock”
- There are some differences perceived regarding the national and foreign tourists. According to the respondents, the main words associated for the national tourists are: shopping – so, they perceive Helsinki as a city orientated to shopping tourism – nightlife and leisure –

which shows the Helsinki potential for leisure; in the same time, the foreign tourists might be associated with the sea – that encourages the cruise tourism -, climate – that might be a reason for the negative opinion of the respondents regarding the weather -, safety – a characteristic clearly perceived as positive attribute of the city.

- The City Hall and other local authorities are seen as the entities responsible that should be involved in a potential program to attract more tourists in Helsinki

The conclusions of the research revealed the fact that in order to transform Helsinki in an attractive touristic destination, the local authorities should become more involved in building a strategy for improving the aspects revealed by the research. In order to improve the conclusions, the research should be continued in the following directions:

- Another debate between specialists and persons representing the local authorities involved in activities related to tourism. During this debate, the specialists from tourism should become involved in helping the local authorities to find right strategies to improve Helsinki, as a touristic destination. Even though Helsinki already has a Strategy for Tourism, this strategy has no specific aspects regarding the touristic attractiveness.
- A quantitative research using the method of survey among the tourists aiming to evaluate the attributes that determine the attractiveness perceived during their visit in Helsinki with the purpose of identifying the elements that contribute to create an attractive touristic destination. All the aspects revealed by such a research should improve the Helsinki Strategy for Tourism that already have been implemented by the City Hall.

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