

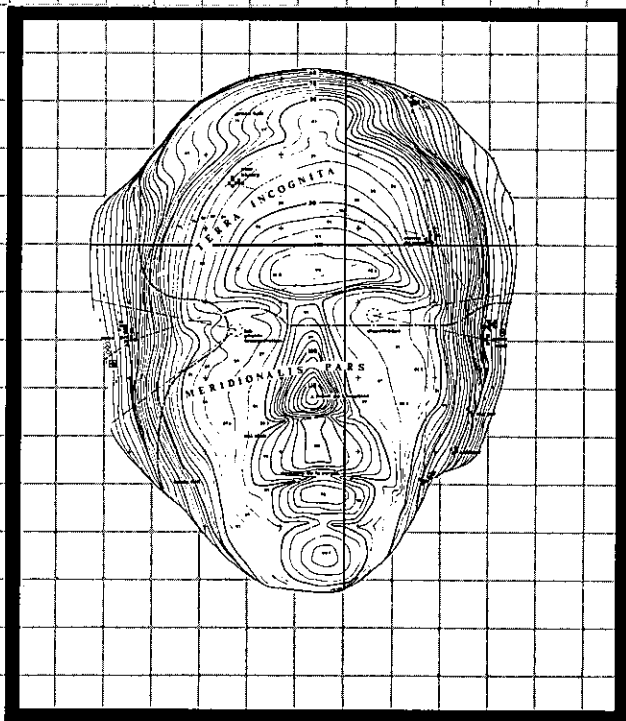
# GÉOGRAPHIE - GEOGRAPHY

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Great Place to Visit ?"

Barry S. Wellar

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Dr. Barry S. Wellar, Professor,  
School of Urban and Regional Planning, and  
Department of Geography  
University of Ottawa

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on the theme  
TOURISM... THE NEW FACE OF CANADA'S CAPITAL

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I wish to begin my remarks by briefly referring to both negative and positive trends, or events, or thoughts, of a general city nature. Then I will focus on the National Capital area in particular.

It is important to bear in mind that I was asked to look ahead 10 years or so by Conference organizers, and with good reason: that is, common sense, and the lessons of history, tell us that if we do not encourage and have respect for the long-range view of the city (and most anything else) then we will likely be the victims of some nasty surprises.

In a nutshell, then, what are some major trends, events, or schools of thought with significant "city" implications and tourism ramifications?

First, in many cities, planners, geographers, architects, politicians, administrators, developers, citizen groups and citizens are literally treading water, and have been doing so for some years, as they try to cope with and adjust to changes and challenges of a profound and large-scale nature: the role of the automobile, location of public transit facilities, uni-versus multi-center development, energy cost and supply, loss of prime agricultural and recreation land to development, and so on.

Second, many cities around the world are being battered during these relatively hard economic times. In particular, both capital and operating budgets of local governments are under duress with the resultant cancellation, postponement or down-grading of such projects and services as road paving and

re-paving, storm sewers, water treatment plants, garbage collection, policing, park maintenance, public housing, day care centres, and support or encouragement of the arts.

Third, stress, in its many dimensions, is increasingly being recognized as a deep-rooted phenomenon that is widely experienced, and having serious negative effects on city dwellers. Indeed, a recent conference organized by the City of Toronto focused on problems of recognizing and coping with such stress-inducing factors as job loss, housing shortages or non-affordability, and red tape and bureaucratic inertia, all of which appear to be more acutely experienced in urban as opposed to non-urban environments.

It would be most unwise to assume that cities (and residents) in this Region are immune to those general afflictions. Indeed, by way of illustration, The Citizen of January 24 reported that the City of Ottawa has joined the crowd with an \$8 million cut in its 5 year capital budget. And, it would be equally unwise to assume that the manifestations of those afflictions - crime, rudeness, bitterness, family breakdowns, dirt, build-anything-to-make-a-buck developmentalism, etc. - do not have clear and serious implications for the quality of life in general in cities, including those in this Region, and on tourism in particular: in past years, this coming year, and 10 years hence!

If there is a positive side to any of the preceding, for Canada as a whole, then it may be this: that after decades of urban drift up through the 1960s when things just more or less "happened", to the 1970s decade of panic button-pushing when there was great doing with little real thinking about problems and prospects in and of urban places, we may now be becoming slightly more reflective, and consequence-aware, of matters, forces and actions associated with the process of urbanization. It is neither widely known, nor

widely appreciated, for example, that Canada is one of the most highly urbanized countries in the world, and a "leader" in terms of proportion of population in urban areas with more than 500,000 residents.

As I had occasion to document in a recent article, "Urban Impact Assessment in Public Policy Processes: The Canadian Record, 1968-1982", we are only grudgingly coming to understand the role and significance of urban places, and the urbanization process, *vis-à-vis* public and private sector initiatives related to housing, transportation, industrial development and jobs, immigration, regional development, and so on. We are, in addition, gradually recognizing that the quality of life of our cities is wanting in many respects - the bloom is clearly off the rose of the boom of the '70s - and maybe, just maybe, we are more inclined to look further down the road, to do more thoughtful forward-planning, than has been our wont.

Now, with the preceding as context, what about the connection between tourism in the Capital Region at present and 10 years from now? Will this still be a great place to visit? In other words, why have tourists been coming here, and will the same or different reasons and outcomes prevail in the 1990s?

To help you get your minds into the participatory spirit of the Conference, we want to know what you think about the questions at hand. Therefore, please take a minute to reply to the questions on the sheet provided. The results will be presented at the wrap-up session.

So, putting ourselves in the tourists' shoes, shorts or what have you, consider the questions that are posed and, from the perspective of a tourist, give us your thoughts:

"What are the three most attractive, appealing or interesting things or activities that bring tourists to the Capital?" And,

"What are the three things or activities in place or talked about that are most likely to discourage or disenchant tourists who might visit or re-visit the Capital 10 years from now?"

Thank you for your cooperation, we will report on the findings later in the day.

Other speakers, and the Workshops, will provide a wealth of detail about the Capital's offerings to supplement your views. Let me pick out several "biggies", which I am confident you have identified on behalf of tourists, and try to run them out over a 10 year horizon.

The tourist attractions may be regarded as two basic types, with some obvious links between most of them:

1. Those of the physical environment type, natural or built, such as the Gatineau Hills, the rivers, the Canal, the Green Belt, the arboreta, the Parliament Buildings, the Chateau Laurier, the Museums, the National Art Centre, and the Market area.
2. Those which are event-oriented, passive or active, from looking to involvement, such as Changing of the Guard, the Tulip Festival, Winterlude, the Marathon, Canada Day/Dominion Day, *la fête de St. Jean de Baptiste*, and the House of Commons carryings-on.

There are, then, many observable reasons for tourists to come to the Capital.

But, to more fully explain why tourists visit and re-visit, and hopefully pass on the good word about the Capital, it is appropriate and necessary to get a handle on what they have to say about their visit so that we can preserve the good, enhance the not-so-good, and clean up or remove the bad.

What do they say, and write? My conversations and readings suggest the following as being the most common, positive-feeling views of the Capital as expressed by tourists:

- Safe
- Clean
- Very walkable
- Lots of vitality and variety, and appeal to people of all ages
- Excellent range of accommodations and eating places
- Has a sense of openness and freedom
- Many beautiful views in all seasons of the year
- Some fascinating architecture, especially the Parliament Buildings
- Sense that this is Canada's Capital, the seat of the federal government.

The challenge of the next decade for tourism, then, is to build on and maintain those strengths by being forward-looking and forward acting.

At one and the same time, however, we must be cognizant of other challenges: that is, from other areas and cities which are also actively pursuing tourist-related prospects in both the near-future and the far-future; and from the tourist, *per se*, as a consequence of changing demographics, life styles and family structures.

In short, it is not just a matter of looking at both the supply and demand sides of the tourism coin; rather, we must look at both sides over time, and at the changing face value of that coin.

Given those various contexts and cautions, let me pose some developments of recent years, as well as some which appear to be more in the talking rather than action stage, which bear directly on Capital Region and Capital City prospects in the \$300 million-plus tourism industry.

First, on the matter of openness, as far as the core area is concerned, there are precious few grounds for optimism. That is, while you can look out from many vantage points in both Ottawa and Hull and see trees, water and open space, there is actually very little secured-for-eternity (or even 10 years!) open space for sitting, relaxing or "getting-away-from-it-all" in either city (Ottawa or Hull) core. Indeed, there is talk, loose or trial-balloonish as it may be, but talk nevertheless, to plunk a structure of some sort on or near the historic Nepean Point site. And, to top it off, word is going around that the National Gallery is slotted to go there. Only in Ottawa, they'll be saying, would you put up a building that is based on looking in, on a site that is ideal for looking out! I suggest that if Nepean Point is vulnerable to development, then maybe even the Parliament Hill lawn is not sacrosanct.

Second, and in a related vein, what about the ever-diminishing views and vistas of The Hill, roughly defined as the Chateau Laurier to National Library panorama. Will existing vistas prevail, or be expanded, or will we nibble away at them with a structure here and a structure there? By way of illustration, what about the vacant land west of downtown and north of Scott Street? Will structures go up there, which means another site out of the view of The Hill and the blotting out of another chunk of the Gatineau Hills, as has happened as a consequence of the large complexes put up along the Western Parkway?

Let us move now from views and land-use decisions to consider what we have been doing, and may well continue to do, regarding the structures which are built on some of the Nation's Capital's primest real estate.

I ask you to ponder the words creative, imaginative, daring, innovative and interesting, and to then picture the following buildings: first, the Teachers College, the Parliament Buildings, the Chateau Laurier, the Museum of



Man: and now, picture if you will, the Bank of Canada Building, Place du Portage, Department of National Defence, Place de Ville A, B & C, and the Bell Canada Building. What I am leading to is that Capital Region architecture might best be referred to as "mixed-bag eclectic", and with good reason: insistence upon or preference for the coherency of facade and form of the Hill heritage has simply melted away in the face of functionalism and practical utility, of immediate bottom-lineism, in spite of the fact that tourists and residents alike are highly enthusiastic about our most famous architectural accomplishment, that is, the Gothic style of the Parliament Buildings (which we owe to our predecessors of a number of generations!)

I note in this regard that when the Hilton chain wanted to build a hotel in the Fisherman's Bastion area of Budapest, Hilton was obliged, Hungary's urgent need of foreign currency in the 1970's notwithstanding, to put the hotel within a shell that matched the historic environs of churches and structures, or to forego construction. The shell was built. Would that we would go as far or, not to overlook humble beginnings, at least think about such possibilities.

And, to complete this commentary on structures, many of which are of unforgiving, intimidating bulk, I suggest that bulking or blobbing extends beyond individual buildings such as the Department of National Defence, Place du Portage, Place de Ville and Place Bell Canada.

Consider, by way of illustration, the four or five rows and columns of blocks south of Parliament Hill.

For reasons of profit to developers and tax-roll benefits, there has been a widespread tendency in many cities towards high-density development - wider, longer, higher. And, the City of Ottawa is no exception to that rule. However, when wider, longer and higher structures are combined with narrow

streets, no free space, and no sense of openness, of relaxation, of leisure, then surely we have to question the various prices to be paid as a consequence. One might be outright discouragement of tourists, to the shifting of tourists (and locals) to other parts of the area, and the subsequent loss of attraction there due to overcrowding.

Those are several "big ticket" items that in my view are both challenges and opportunities insofar as the face of the Capital in the 1990's is concerned, and how well we deal with them will significantly affect the area's tourism prospects.

There are, however, several other developments or situations that will also affect the face of the Capital, and they warrant a mention here.

No doubt by the 1990's the transitway will be in place. The Western Parkway will once again be a Parkway as opposed to its present status as a congested busway/autoway, there will be fewer local cars in the downtown area, and tourists will be grateful on both counts. Indeed, the NCC report, Tomorrow's Capital, published in 1974, and in need of review, as well as continuing exposure to public scrutiny, will be up-dated, and some very imaginative things will be set in place to provide better transportation facilities and levels of service on both sides, as well as across the Ottawa river.

No doubt by the 1990's there will be a people-friendly commercial/recreation complex on the Hull riverfront, and particularly between the Chaudière and Alexandre bridges.

No doubt by the 1990's at least three of the Capital's beaches will be regularly open on summer days, which is one, two or three more than at present, a feature which locals and tourists alike will enjoy.

No doubt by the 1990's the sign system for roads leading to the Capital will improve, with intensive lobbying of course, so that tourists can be kept better apprised of how close they are to the Nation's Capital. I also expect that signs such as "Parliament Buildings, Follow Kent St. Exit" or "Parliament Buildings Follow Nicholas Street Exit" will have added to them "10 kilometres", etc, so that visitors don't suffer needless eyestrain peering for exit signs.

And, as a final forecast topic, what about our weather a decade from now? According to tourists, among whom I count one A. Fortheringham of Rainforest, British Columbia, the general view is that the Capital now has the world's most nearly perfect 4 - season weather. Indeed, the area recently outdid itself by going through the full four seasons of weather in less than a month. That sort of phenomenon will continue.

Thank you for your attention to my remarks, for your participation in the survey, and for creating a good session dynamic. It is apparent that "Tourism... The New Face of Canada's Capital", is a timely and provocative theme for this the Third CCVCB Annual Conference.

