



TOURISM: A CRITICAL INGREDIENT TO
CITY REGENERATION

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There is something fascinating about migrations. The great migrations of the world - from butterflies to bats, wildebeest to whales, seals, salmon and sea turtles to crabs and a whole world of other crawling critters, whether to travelling from forest to sea, dryness to damp, hiding spaces to hatching spots, cooling waters to those warmer, seeking safety or something to eat, migrations have always had a profound impact on the landscapes on which our natural world lives.

The migrations may be cyclical or once off, they may reach across thousands of miles, or simply venture out just across the way. Whatever the case, migrations reflect a natural, internal quest for more. And a desire to discover what else is out there, even if it may involve an element of risk.

Literally and figuratively.

Migratory behaviour is not limited to populations of birds, bugs and beasts within the animal kingdom. While less obviously observed, the migratory patterns of the human population are something that has taken place for over 300 years. In search of security, safety, something more, the movement of people across the globe, ultimately from rural land-lifestyle areas to urban developments, has created human hubs – cities - in size and impact never seen before.

As expressed by CNN GPS's Fareed Zakaria, "*cities are about creating opportunities for people from all walks of life.*" Looking back to 1800, statistically only 3% of the world's population lived in urban areas. This grew to 14% by the 1900s, with only 12 cities having a population over 1 million. Fast forward to 2008, and for the first time the split of rural:urban was 50:50. It is projected that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities. (Source: Human Population Reference Bureau)

And not just any cities. We are now talking about 'megacities' – cities with populations of over 10 million people. In 2012, the number of mega-cities worldwide was twenty-six. Twenty-six cities across the globe have a population of over ten million people, these cities each exceeding the national population of over 106 countries!

The top 10 mega-cities worldwide?

#1	Tokyo-Yokohama, Japan	37.1 million
#2	Jakarta, Indonesia	26.0 million
#3	Seoul-Incheon, S Korea	22.5 million
#4	Delhi, India	22.2 million
#5	Manila, Philippines	21.9 million
#6	Shanghai, China	20.8 million
#7	NY City (NY/NJ/CT), USA	20.6 million
#8	Sao Paulo, Brasil	20.1 million
#9	Mexico City, Mexico	19.4 million
#10	Cairo, Egypt	17.8 million

(Source: newgeography.com)

The challenge, however, comes when city developments turn from places offering the promise of possibility and prosperity, to places reflecting problems of economy or society.



The natural movement begins, outwards, creating urban decay and depression, ultimately creating hopelessness where once there was hope. City supporters, those of both work and/or play, look elsewhere, seeking places that are more safe, more secure, more spacious, more sexy, more suitable, more, more, more, elsewhere. Even when infrastructure and industrial investment occurs, still, there is no guarantee of a return of people, positivity and hope. Emotional investment into a place can often be more difficult to secure than financial.

There is, however, one secret ingredient that can move a city at risk into a state of recovery, bringing to life and lives a recipe for city success: tourism.

REGENERATION INSPIRED BY TOURISM

Few sectors of the economy, few forces of nature, have the ability to influence perceptions of a place as tourism.

In addition to providing invaluable jobs, investment, commercial activity and tax earnings, tourism also has within it a powerful ability to excite people into action,:

- Creating interest and urgency to (re)visit amongst visitors, near and far,
- Generating pride, participation and a sense of purpose amongst locals,
- Inspiring a sharing of space, thought, heart, time and personal wealth amongst strangers,

ultimately stimulating an alchemy that mobilises people into action, moves them forward, confidently. This, the incorporation of tourism activity into greater economic (re)development areas, injects and grows invaluable, yet sadly hard to quantify, emotional equity, increasing economic *and social* ROI. As well as increasing competitiveness.

Especially when it comes to city regeneration. With the introduction of tourism to a redevelopment zone, migratory patterns can be reversed, creating a pull inwards.

Case in point: Hamilton, Canada.

Once a metals manufacturing hub for the province, and significant contributor to the national economy (60% of Canada's total steel production), Hamilton experienced a dramatic test to its economic and social mettle when, between the period of 1996 and 2006 alone, closing / relocating of core industry operations resulted in an 11% decline in employment, resulting in massive losses in personal earnings, city GDP, tax revenues and hope. The steel city was losing its innate strength.

Unwilling to accept erosion of what was once one of Canada's largest, most productive, and most prosperous cities, city leadership began exploring a diversification strategy, investing into, inter alia, biotechnology, life sciences, academia, food production and clean technology.

As stated by Michael Marini, Coordinator, Marketing for the City of Hamilton,:



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“We are one of the rare cities in Canada that has all four modes of transportation- road, rail, air, and port- have available land, and offer some of the richest suites of financial incentive programs in the nation.”

Still, creation of 9-to-5-business busyness was not enough. For Hamilton to be a place of pride for living, working, playing, promoting and visiting, economic and social activity was needed throughout the day, throughout the week, year-round.

So, how could Hamilton leverage its strengths – location perfectly positioned just an hour’s drive away from iconic locations Niagara Falls and Toronto, its rich cultural and natural history, its new economic pillars, and its new energy – to shift perceptions, build attractiveness, keep people already in the city in the city, and bring people (back)?

Give people a reason not to leave at the end of the work day/week.

And if they are not there already, invite them to a place to come at the end of their day/week.

How? Build local tourism to build buy-in to city regeneration – inspire around the corner patrons, day visitors, weekend get-away seekers. And do it where it will spark the greatest social and economic knock-on effects.

At present, Statistics Canada estimates that the City of Hamilton welcomes 3,400,000 visitors per year, contributing an annual spend of CAD\$241,000,000. Thankfully Hamilton is a four-season market, offering an array of activities and events throughout the year from Spring/Summer hiking, cycling, canoeing, fishing, boating, skydiving and swimming, to Fall/Winter activities such as outdoor ice skating, waterfall ice climbing, snowshoeing and ice fishing. (Source: Hamilton Tourism) Choice abounds.

Tapping into the growth trend in tourism into and around Hamilton, in the heart of the inner city new, stylish, exciting restaurants, galleries, shops and boutiques have started popping up, taking advantage of the solid bones of the city – just giving the city a face lift.

As explained by Paven Bratch, founder and owner of Radius Café+Dining, what is deemed to be one of Hamilton’s hottest new dining experiences,:

“Hamilton is set to boom. The city is dotted with construction cranes building new hotels, condo buildings, and university buildings. We love food that tastes great, and we really wanted to unleash the great culinary talent that Hamilton has. And we really want to be the hub for local artists (including the art of food), supporting our local farmers and producers.”

The restaurant’s location was a conscious commitment to preserving the past while building the future, explains Bratch:

“We started from a canvas of a building that once housed one of Hamilton’s most prominent citizens in 1874 who really saved the city from bankruptcy. The building was beautiful at one time, but had been covered over and taken for granted.”

In addition to being a link back to the history of the city, uniquely it also acts as a platform for up and coming visual artists and musicians, emphasizes Bratch,:



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“The restaurant is also a venue for local artists to sell their work, and in some cases, actually create it onsite and sell it through a live auction with proceeds for charity including our local community partner, CityKidz. This summer a concert series will begin with a focus on Global Rhythms, Blues and Jazz. As tourism continues to grow, we expect traffic to grow.”

The net result is quantitatively and qualitatively positive, as Bratch states, is evidenced by not just the look of the streets, but the relaxed faces of the patrons. All of this new focus, determination and commitment have the City of Hamilton’s Marini confidently referring to Hamilton as “Canada’s comeback city”.

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Across the map of Canada in Edmonton, Alberta, tourism has similarly been used as a catalyst for city regeneration. Positioned in a less than obvious tourist location in the inner-city and across the street from a correctional facility, an upmarket \$45-million hotel was built as a start to the Quarters redevelopment.

The hotel is the first to be built in central Edmonton in decades, but more importantly, supporters call it a catalyst project for the long-awaited inner-city area east of downtown.

As stated by Clara Ho of the Edmonton Sun,;

“After 30 years of unsuccessful attempts to revitalize the Quarters area east of downtown, a proposed hotel could be the first breath of life into an area long plagued by violence and troublesome businesses, says the city’s housing branch manager.”

Referred to as a cornerstone project by the Mayor of Edmonton, the Honourable Stephen Mandel, the belief was that the hotel development would stimulate development in the area. Time has proven his prediction correct.

Vital to the success of an inner-city regeneration effort of this scale and significance?
Vision. As stated by Mayor Mandel,;

“We’re lucky to have special people in our community like (developer) Prem Singhmar who have a great vision for what things can be, rather than what they aren’t.”

Ultimately what are the critical ingredients to city regeneration?

A hunger for sustainable success, chunky goals, large quantities of confidence, a healthy dose of realism, a dollop of idealism, high-performance PPPs to spice things up, and importantly, a clear vision of what it will all look like when served up.

And don’t forget to add in a full measure of a complementary, tasteful tourism offering – the critical ingredient to make the recipe rise!

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