

TOURISM AND CHANGING REPRESENTATION IN EUROPE'S HISTORIC CAPITALS

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ABSTRACT

Preserving places in historic national capitals requires an understanding of the roles they play in the changing representation of capitals to citizens and tourists. The meaning and resonances ascribed to historic places reflect and reinforce national identity, and as conceptions of national identities change, there are implications for approaches to preserving places. The paper considers the importance of capitals in national identity and systematically examines how their roles are changing, focusing on the importance of tourism representation. Finally, it considers some of the issues that arise for preserving their historic places.

1. INTRODUCTION

The particular features of tourism in national capitals have in the past been disregarded by tourism scholars and urbanists alike. Hall (2005): 219 points out that:

Capital cities represent a special case of urban tourism. Yet, in much of the literature on capital cities the planning and policy significance of tourism is seemingly ignored, while similarly, little is made of the significance of capital status in the tourism literature.

Kolbe (2007: 81) echoes this view: «until recently, comparative urban research on capital cities has been a fairly neglected subject matter, nor

have capital cities received much special attention in general urban histories». Recent work has gone some way to remedy this neglect (see for example Maitland and Ritchie 2007; Maitland and Ritchie 2009) and perhaps reflects a growing awareness that for a number of reasons tourism in national capitals is growing in significance. First, and most obviously, many national capitals have long been leading tourism destinations in their own right, and also act as gateways to their country. Second, the era of the growth in mass tourism has coincided with growth in the number of national capitals: three-quarter of today's national capital cities were not capitals 100 years ago (Capitals Alliance 2003) whilst pressures for devolution and democracy mean that new capitals continue to arise. Third, national capitals have long displayed the rivalry, search for advantage and distinctiveness, and emulation of competitors that now characterises almost all cities in a globalised and competitive era. Finally, capitals have a key role in representing a nation to the rest of the world and to itself: they «play such a vital role in establishing national identity» (Capitals Alliance 2003: 9). As Gilbert and Driver (2000: 23) show, European capitals in the 19th and 20th centuries were at the heart of national and imperial competition, and this was played out in their architecture, planning, and geography, as well as their museums, galleries and other attractions: «the form, use and representation of modern European cities have been shaped by the global history of imperialism in ways that continue to matter even in an apparently post-Imperial age». Capitals have, therefore, long used their history, heritage and symbols to represent the nation – internally and to the outside world.

The very different national cultures from which they arise and their varied age, size, history and functions means that even within Europe, national capitals are highly varied. Nonetheless, they have key features in common. Pearce (2007) draws on the work of Claval (2001) and Rapoport (1993) to argue that despite their individuality, capitals have important similarities. These include their economic and political centrality in national life (as centres of business and seat of government); their controlling function in administration and organisation of territory; and providing the site for national political, economic and cultural facilities and heritage. As a result they are home to buildings and spaces

that symbolise national identity and power and historical narratives, and attract the interest of both citizens and visitors. As Gordon (2006: vii) says «there is always something special about a capital city».

This paper argues that consideration of preserving places in historic national capitals requires a better understanding of the roles such places play in the changing representation of national capitals to citizens and tourists. The meaning and resonances ascribed to historic places reflect and reinforce national identity, and as conceptions of national identities change, there are implications for approaches to preserving places. The paper considers the roles capitals play in representing national identity and image, systematically examines how those roles alter in the face of changes in statehood and greater national assertion and focuses on the importance of tourism representation. Finally, it considers some of the issues that arise for preserving their historic places.

2. THE HISTORIC CAPITALS OF STATES AND NATIONS

The term «national capital» is a common one – used in everyday discussion, in describing the status of some of the world's most important tourism destinations and in discussion of international affairs and politics. References to London as the capital of the UK, or to Rome as the Italian capital, may seem to be unproblematic. But underlying this common usage are sets of assumptions about states and nations that must be explored in order to understand the significance of national capitals in representing the nation, establishing national identity (Capitals Alliance 2003) and acting as the «symbolic head of the territory and nation» (Logan 2005: 560), and the role that built heritage and its representation plays in the processes. The default expectation when a «national capital» is referred to is now that it is the capital of a nation state – that is, an entity in which the boundaries of a nation and of a state are the same. Nation states are the predominant political unit within Europe but have nonetheless been subject to considerable pressures and change in recent times. The concept of the nation state is a comparatively modern historical invention and to explore the symbolic importance of capitals in

establishing and maintaining national identity, the ideas of state and of nation must be disentangled.

A state can be defined objectively, in terms of its ability to assert and to exercise force over and within a particular territory. From this stems the ability of a state to govern and to deploy state institutions. The sociologist Max Weber in the nineteenth century defined the state as «a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory» (Weber, Gerth *et al.* 1991: 78). Whilst developments in international law have meant that there have been some challenges to the idea that a state enjoys a monopoly of legitimate force within its territory (see for example James 1986), Weber's definition still captures the essence of the concept of the state. The idea of a nation, on the other hand, is a subjective one. Guibernau (1996: 47) summarises the idea: a nation is

a human group conscious of forming a community, sharing a common culture, attached to a clearly demarcated territory, having a common past and a common project for the future and claiming the right to rule itself.

The territorial element of this definition might be seen as objective, and aligned to the way a state is defined. But all the other elements are subjective and depend upon a group of people sharing some sufficiently common views. A common culture cannot be objectively defined. The collection of buildings, artefacts and cultural practices to be found in a given area do not themselves amount to a common culture unless they are subscribed to by most of those living there. Equally, a common history or past is more than a series of events that have taken place in or are related to a particular piece of territory; it is a shared narrative, a shared interpretation of those events and the symbols associated with them – including buildings and monuments. A common project for the future requires some shared sense of what is desirable and the group that will seek to bring it about. The idea of nation thus requires the sense of being part of a group, a consciousness of sharing ones culture, history and future fate with a particular set of people. This sense is the «national identity» referred to by the Capitals Alliance (*op. cit.*). Such an identity rests on shared attributes – for example religion or language, shared views of history, common cultural tastes and practices, or heroes and heroines. Since

it is subjective, depending on consciousness and awareness, national symbols are essential in maintaining, establishing or reinforcing it.

The modern nation-state is an entity that seeks to combine attributes of both state and nation. It not only exercises the power of a state over its territory, but actively seeks to foster and develop a sense of national identity. This may be particularly true in new world countries such as Australia, where some commentators have argued that national identity is an invention, constantly to be redefined (White 1981), but the same processes are at work in Europe – in newer nation states and in the longer established. There are a variety of means to invent, consolidate or further a sense of national identity. Some relate to governance and administration, and have both practical and symbolic significance – legal systems, forms of government and public institutions are means of providing services but can also be national symbols. Others are important mainly for their symbolic value – particular places, monuments, buildings, ceremonies and events which resonate with a shared sense of belonging. National capitals are especially important here, as the location of such symbols.

A system of nation states may be altered by territorial rearrangement that that can result from war or from other events. In Europe a radical territorial rearrangement in 1945 produced a settlement that remained stable for almost 50 years. However, it was disturbed by the end of the Cold War, and the wider effects of growing globalisation and more widespread democracy. These forces promoted the dismantling of some federal states, the creation of new states and the growth of sub-national movements in established states. The end of the USSR as a federal state meant, amongst other things, the re-establishing of the Baltic States as independent nation state entities. Subsequently the federal state of Czechoslovakia split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia, whilst the former Yugoslavia separated more violently into several new countries. At the same time, apparently stable nation states such as the UK and Spain experienced pressures from sub-state nationalisms, with minority cultures asserting their identity as nations – for example, Scots, Welsh and Catalan peoples. Meanwhile, the development of the European Union as a pan national organisation led some commentators to speculate about a general decline in the importance of the nation

state. These are highly complex processes. Whilst there is agreement they are related to the effects of and reactions against globalisation and homogenisation and to a desire for greater democratic control, they are highly contested (see for example Gieben and Lewis 2005).

Fortunately, there is no need to enter this difficult ground here. The key point is that we have seen considerable fluidity in the arrangement of nation states and nations in Europe. New nation states have been established; existing nation states have felt themselves under threat; nationalist movements have sought self determination, and aspired to create either their own new nation states or quasi-independent sub-states. That in turn has meant that more cities have become or aspire to be national capitals and that their symbolic importance has grown, as they play a key role in representing national identities which are contested, developing or under threat. Concern with representing national identity or creating national brands has been on the rise (Morgan, Pritchard *et al.* 2002; Olins 2002). It is perhaps been most notable in central and Eastern Europe where «many of the new, often small, independent states ... were eager to establish and articulate individual national identity» (Hall 2004: 39). However, as Skinner (2009: 27) points out, it is also important to «post devolution capital cities of nations such as Wales, as the concept of «Britishness» becomes of increasingly less relevance to the identities of the UK's devolved nations».

In summary the European landscape now includes new capitals of new nation states, old capitals adapting to new roles and aspiring capitals of sub nations. National identity is important, contested and changing as a result of changes within Europe and broader global forces. Since national identity is subjective and in some sense imagined (Anderson 1983), symbols of nationhood and their interpretation are fundamental to it. National capitals are a rich source of national heritage and symbolism, and so have a pivotal role to play. Tourism representation is at the heart of these processes, for two reasons. First, the way in which a nation images and brands itself to visitors and the outside world distinguishes it from other nations and seeks to reinforce its own identity. Second, because tourists are drawn to the national symbols found in the capital – historic places, monuments, buildings and cultural institutions – whose representation and meaning is contested.

3. CHANGING ROLES FOR HISTORIC CAPITALS

Logan (2005) points out that national capitals are essential in nation forming, underlying efforts by national governments to form and reinforce a national sense of identity and to use it to tie the citizenry together in a more comprehensive and cooperative entity. These are roles that national capitals will always play, but they are more significant at times of turbulence and rapid change. Nation forming is most important for new states. Reinforcing a sense of national identity is especially important when things alter – for example loss of empire or adapting to a diminished role. New and changing states will be more concerned in ensuring that their citizens feel themselves part of a comprehensive and cooperative entity. Yet in recent decades, most European states have undergone important changes that are reflected in changing national capital roles. We can summarise these changes in five processes:

Acquisition of national capital status, through the creation of a new state. In Europe this has occurred as new states have emerged from former federations. Zagreb, for example, is now the national capital of the state of Croatia which emerged from the former Yugoslavian state.

(Re-)Assertion of national capital status, following territorial rearrangement. The demise of the former USSR precipitated a series of changes of statehood which allowed formerly established national capitals to recover and reassert their status. For example, the Baltic states regained their independence as sovereign countries and Vilnius, Riga and Tallin once more became national capitals – a reversion to their position prior to the Second World War. Similarly, the reunification of Germany meant that Berlin recovered its previous status as the national capital. In some other instances, the reassertion was of national independence rather than of formal capital status. Cities like Prague or Budapest had retained capital status, but of states that had limited independence of action – as the interventions by the USSR in 1968 and 1956 had illustrated. From the 1990s, they were able reassert their position at the head of states and nations that were newly independent.

Adaptation to changing capital status. Some European cities have consistently enjoyed national capital status but have had to cope with

changes resulting from a loss of some of their traditional roles, or from the addition of new roles. Former imperial capitals have had to adapt to loss of Empire and a changed role, simply as head of a nation state. Vienna, Paris, London, Madrid and Lisbon are obvious examples. Amongst the challenges of such adaptation is the revalorising of the imperial architecture and spaces in the cities, designed to represent values and circumstances that have now changed radically. Continuing pressure for devolution within some nation states means that their capitals must continue to adapt – for example, London and Madrid. Less common is the adaptation that comes as a capital acquires new roles and status. Brussels has lost its role as an imperial capital but as the *de facto* «capital» of the European Union, it has gained new roles and status (Jansen-Verbeke and Govers 2009). The complexity of representing these reflects the complex and ambiguous views of the European Union held by member states and citizens.

Aspiration to national capital status results from peoples who may feel themselves a nation but do not enjoy statehood. Catalan, Scottish and Welsh nationalism, for example, has given rise to influential political movements, to parties that play an important role in the nation states of which they are traditionally a part, and to the devolution of significant political power. This has been accompanied by the construction of symbolically important buildings and spaces, intended to illustrate and reinforce national autonomy – the Scottish Parliament building or the Welsh assembly building, for example. In such cases, cities claim the status of national capitals, although they are not currently capital of independent nation *states*.

Abandonment of national capital status may be the outcome for some cities of the other changes discussed above. Berlin's recovery of its role as the national capital of a reunited Germany inevitably meant that Bonn lost its role as capital of West Germany. The end of federal arrangements means that former federal capitals lose status – Belgrade for example. Less dramatically, moves toward devolution have long term implications for cities which have enjoyed the position of capitals of unitary states. Should Wales or Scotland become independent states, for example, London's national capital status is inevitably affected.

It is clear that Europe's historic capitals have experienced a period of profound change, with new capitals or aspirant capitals emerging, and considerable changes in the roles and status of those that have been long established. Five different processes are distinguished above, yet this cannot but simplify what are a series of complex stories, rooted in particular histories. Some cities may experience more than one of these processes: London for example, has lost its role as an imperial capital, and in future may lose that of capital of a unified nation state. At the same time, cities are changing in ways that are outwith their formal role as national capitals but relate to their status and how they seek to represent themselves to the world. London, to continue the example, now sees itself in a new role as a diverse world city.

4. NATIONAL CAPITALS: PRESERVING WHOSE PLACES?

As capitals experience change, they represent themselves differently to their citizens and to outsiders. Capitals can be seen as centres of power, and nodes in global political, economic and cultural networks. They can also be seen as clusters of cultural, architectural, aesthetic and symbolic assets, frequently grouped together in particular areas which themselves have national and symbolic importance as zones of prestige (Maguire 2005). These elements interact in place representation. As Duncan (1993: 53) points out representation «is always highly complex and is mediated through historically changing institutions, class structures, taken for granted historical accounts. Representation operates in the service of power». Changing power relationships and roles thus intersect with place and its cultural and historical attributes to form a site of representation which signifies both «the site to be represented (a geographical place), and the site (geographical, cultural, political, theoretical viewpoint) from which that representation emanates». Tourism provides an interesting lens through which to focus on such sites. Whilst tourism is becoming more pervasive and less differentiated from other urban activities and city users (for example Franklin and Crang 2001; Urry 1990; Maitland 2008), it is still true that tourists are

frequently outsiders and look at and experience the city in a particular way – bringing to bear Urry’s famous «tourist gaze» (Urry 1990; Urry 1995). The practices of tourism tend to concentrate particularly on seeking and enjoying the aesthetics of the built environment (Maitland and Smith 2009), so visitors pay particular attention to historic buildings and spaces. At the same time, there is a strong link between tourism and process of national branding, rebranding and representation (Hall 2004). Tourism thus has a central role in how heritage is represented in historic capitals.

Anderson (1983) argues that nations are imagined communities, in the sense that they are united by shared beliefs – not necessarily historically accurate – which are represented and reinforced by myths, and symbols. If we see representation as stemming from power and prevailing sets of institutions, it seems clear that as they change so must representation. In consequence, the meanings of national heritage are changeable in a pluralist and contest world. As national capital status and roles change, as discussed in the previous section, so will their tourism representations, as different versions of «the national story» are presented. Contested versions can play out in different ways, as London illustrates. The city’s retreat from being an imperial capital and attempts to reimagine itself as something else has involved trying out a variety of new national stories, including «Swinging London» in the 1960s, and «Cool Britannia» in the 1990s. More recently the focus has been on representing Britain and London as diverse and tolerant. On winning the contest to host the 2012 Olympic Games, the then Prime Minister said «London is an open, multi-racial, multi-religious, multicultural city and rather proud of it. People of all races and nationalities mix in with each other and mix in with each other well» (Newman 2007). London’s diversity has become an important part of its marketing, but needs government at all scales to maintain the image of multiculturalism that «now serves as Britain’s distinctive rationale in the current world order, and in many respects can be considered a success» (Dench, Gavron *et al.* 2006: 226). Changing national myths have been illustrated by changes in sites of tourism representation.

A key site and zone of prestige within London is Trafalgar Square. It is located at the end of Whitehall, a formal street that runs up from the

Houses of Parliament and encompasses the Prime Minister's residence, the major ministries and the Cenotaph – the national war memorial. Trafalgar Square itself is laid out in formal style commemorating the country's most famous naval commander's victory over the French navy at Cape Trafalgar in 1805. It is dominated by Nelson's Column, but also contains equestrian statues of kings, and statues of other military men. The National Gallery occupies one side of the Square. Alongside the Square and nearby are buildings that house or housed the High Commissions of some of the Dominions in the days of Empire (for example, Canada, India, South Africa). The area was thus «a kind of home space for colonial citizens in the imperial city ... fostering a peculiarly imperial kind of cosmopolitanism» (Gilbert and Driver 2000: 28). Running westward from Trafalgar Square is The Mall, a highly formal avenue leading to Buckingham Palace, which can be glimpsed through the neo-classical Admiralty Arch which closes the vista at the Trafalgar Square end. This set piece is the most self-consciously «imperial» replanning that London has experienced.

This is an area whose buildings, spaces and monuments play a key role in national identity, and which are «must-see» sites for tourists. However, the Square quickly became contradictory in its symbolism. Whilst retaining its role as «the heart of the Empire» and as a place of imperial display, from the later nineteenth century onward it took on another role as a place for political protest and popular demonstrations, a place where crowds gathered, marches began or ended and speeches were made (Gilbert and Driver 2000). Both these roles can be seen as reflecting dominant though contesting ideologies – of imperial power and of popular resistance and working class politics. More recent changes have reflected a shift away from both these ideologies, and towards the values of diversity and multiculturalism mentioned above. In the early twenty first century, the space was reorganised and a road closed so that for the first time the National Gallery entrance led directly to the Square. The Square itself was remodelled to include a café and extensive seating areas, becoming a place more for relaxing and playing the role of flaneur than of imperial display or political protest. The Fourth Plinth – a statue plinth at one corner of the Square, intended for an equestrian statue, but which had remained unoccupied – was turned over for changing tem-

porary occupation by popular contemporary sculptures that challenged the dominant story of the site. For example, «Alison Lapper Pregnant» (2005) represents a pregnant disabled woman «confronting and challenging a deeply established statue discourse of military men and their battles» (Tribe 2008: 938). The Square has also come to be used for popular celebrations – like the England cricket team’s Ashes victory in 2005, and music and sport shown on a giant screen. In 2007 VisitLondon, the city’s tourism organisation, covered the Square with artificial grass for two days to promote their «London villages» marketing campaign. During 2009 the Fourth Plinth was turned over to a project overseen by the sculptor Anthony Gormley, in which was made a «living monument», occupied for an hour at a time by a succession of 2400 «ordinary people» chosen by ballot – with the intention that «a space normally reserved for statues of kings and generals» could be occupied by the people of the UK, «in an image of themselves, and a representation of the whole of humanity» (Mayor of London 2009). Trafalgar Square remains an important tourist site and for citizens is still prominent in the national story, but the story it tells has changed, become increasingly multi-layered, and in some respects dissonant from the architecture and spaces. Imperial celebration has contested with popular protest, and more recently both these grand narratives have been overtaken by celebration of popular culture and diversity.

This is a London story, but similar processes of changing representation take place in other capitals – although limited research means that we are largely reliant on anecdotal evidence. In some places, contested representations are highly charged. In Riga for example, an annual march to the Freedom Monument by Latvian veterans of Hitler’s Waffen SS «divides the country. Latvians of Russian descent regard it as an insult, but many others honor the fighters for resisting Soviet occupation» (Der Spiegel 2009) The meaning and national stories surrounding the Freedom Monument are contested, difficult to resolve and illustrate different national identities. In South East Europe, Bucharest struggles with how to represent a changing national identity. A rich and complex national story was reflected in a variety of buildings and spaces, with a strong French influence in the nineteenth century, but the actions of post war regimes meant that visitors are told:

Very little of the old Bucharest – dubbed Little Paris in the 1920s and 1930s by the procession of famous travellers who came here – remains; the vast majority of the city's buildings date from the communist period, when the need to build hundreds of thousands of apartments at great speed means aesthetics lost out. Within the socialist realism, however, gems remain (Turp 2009: 8).

However, for most visitors the best known building is now the Palace of Parliament, constructed by the former ruler Nicolae Ceaușescu as a symbol of communist power: a gigantic building of 1100 rooms with which, according to Le Bas (2008) few buildings can compete for sheer insanity. After the fall of communism, the initial intention was to destroy the building by blowing it up, but its size and scale meant that turned out to be impractical. Plans to convert it into a museum of communism were defeated by popular opposition (*ibid.*). Its future remains uncertain and the problems of how Romania's emerging national identity should be reflected and represented through the most prominent example of its built heritage remains unresolved. In tourism promotion, the country currently sidesteps the difficulty by emphasising identity stemming from its rural heritage (Light 2001). These dilemmas emphasise the strong links between national identity and authenticity, one of the long-standing debates in the tourism literature (see for example Wang 1999 for a review). As Richardson and Fluker (2004: 82) say «authenticity can be interpreted in terms of national identity» because it represents the «true» identity of the destination. As national identities are contested and changing, this can be problematic.

Tourism brings questions of how national identities and built heritages are represented to the fore, since it requires conscious decisions about what to represent and how. As Morgan, Pritchard *et al.* (2002: 3) point out, destination representations have broad cultural meanings – they reflect national identities and ideologies and tourism marketers «through their marketing images create identities which represent certain ways of seeing reality, images which both reflect and reinforce particular relationships in societies». That is especially true of national capitals, and in countries undergoing change. Palmer (2007: 647) suggests that «the identities projected for tourism promotion purposes are a potentially powerful means by which outsiders comprehend the way

in which a nation wishes to be seen». Tourism representation has been intertwined with efforts to rebuild and reframe national identities in post-communist states (see for example Light 2000; Hall 2004; Hall, Smith *et al.* 2006; Palmer 2007) Although as Hall (2003) says, the built environment is but one element in the complex process of national representation, it has a central role because cityscapes reflect the ideologies of past and present regimes that are able to deploy enough power to influence the built environment – power that is concentrated in the national capital (Light 2001; Czepczynski 2008). As Suvantola (2002: 169, 170) puts it, «the determination of what the attractions are representations of, is an essential component of the tourist discourse». A tourist attraction as a representation «is more than a physical object or visible phenomenon» ... it symbolises something ... «like an ideal or national identity».

5. CONCLUSIONS

Europe's national capitals contain some of its most important historic places, which are amongst its more important and popular tourism destinations. As tourism destinations they experience problems common to all historic cities – overcrowding, damage to historic environments, commercialisation and commodification amongst them. However this paper has argued that they are also subject to particular tensions and dilemmas in the way they represent their heritage and historic environments. Europe has experienced a period of rapid political change over the past two decades and one consequence has been the emergence of new states and continuing pressure to create others. As a result the number of capitals of nation states has increased, whilst capitals of sub-state nations have emphasised their capital status more strongly. New, existing and former capitals have experienced changes in their roles and functions, and the national identity or identities that they reflect and represent have become more contested. The historic built environment is a focus for this contestation. Well known monuments and structures represent the nation to itself and the outside world, and in changing times these representations change too. Changing representa-

tions are important influences in what is preserved, how and for whom. The importance of tourism in representation is well established in the literature, and links to familiar debates about authenticity.

This paper has illustrated the point with some examples but these are brief snapshots rather than detailed depictions of the process. Despite the importance of tourism representation and despite the significant role of national capitals and their historic environment in national identity and in tourism, research is all too limited. There have been few studies on tourism in national capitals, or on the changing representations of historic buildings and environments to tourists. As Palmer (2007: 647) says «the processes by which the projected identities are selected for tourism promotion have received little academic attention to date». The typology of changing roles for national capitals set out in this paper provides a framework within which changing representation of historic places in national capitals can be systematically considered. More research, conducted more systematically, rather than as isolated case studies, is needed to understand these complex processes. As processes of post-socialist national development and rising sub-state nationalisms play out alongside longer standing processes of adaptation to post imperial roles, now is an opportune to improve our understanding.

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RIASSUNTO

La tutela dei luoghi storici nelle capitali europee presuppone la conoscenza dei ruoli che queste svolgono nella loro mutevole rappresentazione nei confronti dei cittadini e dei turisti. Il significato e la risonanza attribuita ai luoghi storici riflette e rinforza l'identità nazionale, e dal momento che siamo in una fase di cambiamento del concetto di identità nazionale vi sono implicazioni anche per come si affronta il tema della tutela. Il saggio considera l'importanza delle città capitali nella identità nazionale ed esamina in modo sistematico come il loro ruolo sta cambiando, focalizzando l'importanza della rappresentazione turistica. Infine prende in esame alcuni dei temi che si presentano nella tutela del loro patrimonio storico.