

# PICTURE



**Pro-active management  
of the Impact of Cultural Tourism  
upon Urban Resources and Economies**

Deliverable n° **D12**

Deliverable title

## **A taxonomy of cultural attractors**

### Summary

Task n° **2.2**

Task Leader: **QUB**

Task partners: **LEMA, ITAM-ARCCHIP, QUB**

**Authors:** **Chris Tweed**, School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering (SPACE), Queen's University Belfast

Date : **November 18, 2005**



**SIXTH FRAMEWORK  
PROGRAMME**

The PICTURE project is financed by the European Commission, Sixth Framework Programme of Research

Specific Programme: Integrating and strengthening the European Research Area

Activity: Specific activity covering policy-orientated research under "Policy support and anticipating scientific and technological needs"

Priority 3. Underpinning the economic potential and cohesion of a larger and more integrated European Union

Topic 3.6. The protection of cultural heritage and associated conservation strategies

Task 5: Cultural heritage and tourism.

Contract n° SSP1-CT-2003-502491

## Introduction

Deliverable D8 of the PICTURE project is the principal output from Task 2.2. The aim of this task is to produce a taxonomy or classification scheme for buildings and monuments as attractors for cultural tourists. The central premise is that such a taxonomy can help to identify the specific attractions that will appeal to different types of tourists. This could then, for example, be used to structure a database that would help tourists discover attractions close to their interests, which they might otherwise have missed, and so spread tourist visits more evenly across attractions, by promoting neglected sites.

The report begins with a discussion of the changing character of cultural attractors and attractions. This is followed by a discussion about the increasing diversity (and volume) of cultural tourists and what they seek from cultural tourism. The report then reviews previous approaches to classification and the resulting taxonomies. The final section suggests how new taxonomies might be developed from contributions by cultural tourists rather than relying on expert notions of attraction types. Recent developments on the World Wide Web have created new opportunities for creating social networks of tourists that could lead to exciting new ways of classifying cultural tourism offers.

## Cultural attractors and attractions

The range of objects and events that attract people to specific sites is constantly shifting and expanding, making it difficult to predict what will appeal to different types of tourists. It seems now, however, that almost anything can qualify as a cultural attractor, ranging from the traditional—ruins, galleries and monuments of Italy and Greece—to the ‘Black Spots’—death sites of celebrities—described by Rojek (1997). To complicate the matter further, few cultural tourism sites offer only one type of attractor. Even when there is a dominant attractor at a site, this is often supplemented by secondary attractors, such as multimedia displays, or dramatic re-enactments of important historical events.

To allow a more finely grained discussion, therefore, we reserve the use of “attraction” for a collection of two or more “attractors.” This will allow us to analyse the components of, for example, a cultural tourism site, which may be quite varied in their character and what they offer the tourist. In adopting this atomistic terminology, however, we must be careful not to treat attractors completely independently as it is entirely conceivable that the presence of one particular attractor on the same site as another may result in some synergy, or what might be referred to as ‘emergent attractors.’ It will also be important to remember that the context in which attractors occur is important, such that the presence of a particular attractor in a given context may significantly alter its appeal. For example, a tourist may not have a significant interest in opera or in ancient amphitheatres, which can be classified separately, but would be very interested in attending an operatic performance staged in an ancient amphitheatre.

The nature of cultural tourist attractions has changed considerably over the past decade. Attractions now offer several attractors to draw tourists to the site, and these attractors may take very different forms. The distinction between education and entertainment is now blurred, even within attractions that claim authenticity (MacDonald, 1997). As Shirky (2000) notes, this lack of clear distinctions between types of attractor makes it difficult to define a stable taxonomy.

## The changing profile of cultural tourists and tourism

According to Richards (1996) there has been a marked change in the profile of cultural tourists since the late 1980s. He identifies two broad types of tourist: the *specific* cultural tourist, for whom visiting cultural sites and attractions is the primary reason for the journey; and *general* cultural tourists, who take in cultural tourism as part of their broader interest in holidaying. The distinction is largely a product of the broadening of cultural attractions such that the line between ‘high culture’ attractions and popular culture attractions is blurred.

Specific cultural tourists are drawn mainly from the middle classes and, using Bourdieu’s terminology (1984), have high levels of ‘cultural capital’ and specific forms of ‘symbolic consumption.’ In other words, specific cultural tourists’ tastes are ‘high brow.’ There are signs, however, that even specific cultural tourists’ tastes are changing. Rojek (1997) suggests the most serious cultural tourists are not averse to

the postmodern pleasures of irony and entertainment. These 'post-tourists', however, are yet very much in the minority. A further characteristic of specific cultural tourists is that they themselves are producers as well as consumers of culture. Many specific cultural tourists on holiday are engaged in "research" to boost their understanding of culture in order to make them better at their jobs. A prime example of this is the specialised tour organised by professional bodies—for example, architects—to visit key sites, including contemporary buildings such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao, and the Kunsthaus in Graz.

The percentage of specific cultural tourists is small. A survey conducted as part of the ATLAS project (Richards, 1996) suggests they may represent as little as 9% of the cultural tourism market. However, they are crucially important players in the cultural tourism industry because they are regarded as the "trendsetters." The locations selected by specific cultural tourists today are often the destinations sought out by a much larger segment of the market tomorrow.

In contrast to specific cultural tourists, general cultural tourists tend to see cultural tourism as a secondary activity, subordinate to sporting activities, shopping or general sightseeing. Richards (1996) claims that this secondary cultural tourism is becoming increasingly important and is being developed in regions which already have, for example, strong beach attractions in an effort to diversify their offers and spread the burden of high visitor numbers. He further notes that much of the cultural tourism that appeals to general cultural tourists is 'living culture' rather than 'museum culture.'

The definition of cultural tourism also varies according to geographical location within Europe. The traditional destinations of Southern Europe, such as Italy and Greece, tend to favour a narrower definition of culture, which mostly embraces the relics and ruins of early civilisation. Understandably the focus of those in charge of tourism in these areas is on monument preservation. In Northern Europe, and on the periphery of the high culture zone, there is a much greater emphasis on 'living' culture. So, for example, in Ireland, tourist literature will often highlight the attractions of immersing oneself in the pub culture of Ireland, with its oral and musical traditions, rather than the attractions of specific objects or sites, though these are not ignored. Marketing and promotion of 'living' culture is therefore a useful strategy for those regions without significant physical cultural attractions.

## Existing approaches to classification

The terms *taxonomy*, *typology*, *ontology*, *nomenclature*, and *classification system* defy precise definition. Although there are distinguishing features they are often used interchangeably. There is a considerable body of literature on the theory of classification and taxonomies which lies beyond the scope of the PICTURE project. However, it has become obvious in researching this task that devising a comprehensive taxonomy for the domain of cultural tourism is not trivial. The effort required to create a taxonomy *de novo* is immense. As part of the research we sought to identify a suitable existing taxonomy which could be adapted to meet the requirements of this project. In this section, therefore, we present some of examples and discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

Existing relevant taxonomies fall into three main categories:

- classifications of general tourist attractions, including cultural tourism
- those providing broad headings for grouping cultural tourism attractions;
- detailed classifications of particular types of cultural attraction, e.g. the English Heritage thesauri of monuments

A good example of a general classification for tourist attractions is provided by Middleton (1988), who proposes ten categories of managed attraction:

- |                         |                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Ancient monuments    | 6. Museums                      |
| 2. Historic buildings   | 7. Art galleries                |
| 3. Parks and gardens    | 8. Industrial archaeology sites |
| 4. Theme parks          | 9. Themed retail sites          |
| 5. Wildlife attractions | 10. Amusement and leisure parks |

This list contains items that would not normally be considered as 'cultural,' though as the previous chapter suggests the distinction between cultural and non-cultural attractions is not as clearly defined as it once was. Living culture can conceivably be anything that residents may engage in and may therefore be included in a classification of cultural attraction. In the above list, it is difficult to see how amusement and leisure parks could be treated as cultural, though those with a significant history are arguably so—for example, Coney Island in New York.

Other lists of attraction types cater for the peculiarities of a locality. The National Trust for Scotland, for example, uses nine categories to categorise its attractions and includes within its list of top-level categories “Famous Scots” alongside “Islands.” Without a more detailed explanation, it is difficult to see why such different types should exist at the same level in a taxonomy. These anomalies serve to remind us that organisations will include categories as dictated by their particular circumstances.

The typology proposed by Prentice (1993) features 23 main types. The main development in this list over the previous examples is that it includes events as possible attractors, and yet the logic of the chosen categories or types is still difficult to understand. Why, for example, are galleries lumped together with festivals?

The examples mentioned above vary greatly in their scope and approach and it is clear that each has been developed to fulfil particular classificatory needs. There is one final example worth considering before we consider how the PICTURE project might arrive at a useful taxonomy.

### **The English Heritage monument type thesauri**

The English Heritage Thesauri of Monuments collectively provide what is undoubtedly the most comprehensive taxonomy of cultural tourism attractions, and these are available in print and on the Web (English Heritage, 1998). The thesauri contain nearly 6000 concepts in a hierarchical structure that indicates the different types of relations between particular monument types. This represents a huge effort over many years and it would be difficult to match this in a single research project. However, again, it is obvious that English Heritage have a particular goal in mind in developing this resource. This is summarised as:

*English Heritage takes a leading role in setting standards for recording the built and buried heritage. By setting standards that can be adopted by everyone, we can make sure that all records are consistent. In other words, if everyone uses the same words to describe the same monument, archaeological object, building material, etc, then anyone using this common language can easily index, retrieve and understand these records.*

In other words the purpose of these thesauri is to standardise the way in which monuments are labelled to promote consistency in recording details. The resource is of great value to historians, archaeologists and others involved in the identification, conservation and study of historical artefacts. However, it is unlikely to be of great benefit to cultural tourists, perhaps except for a few amateurs.

There are many examples of taxonomies developed previously to classify cultural attractions that fall within the scope of the PICTURE project. None of these is convincing as the basis for a taxonomy that can link tourists to destinations, since they have been developed for other purposes. In the final part of this report we consider an alternative approach to the conventional method of devising taxonomies, one that will allow end-users, e.g. tourists, to play an important role in determining classifications.

## **Developing a ‘folksonomy’ of cultural attractors**

The difficulties in designing appropriate taxonomies and the problems that occur as the result of unsuitable systems are well documented in other domains (Bowker and Star, 2000). In some areas these are critical, such as in medical practice, and in others the taxonomies are so deeply embedded, as in most library cataloguing systems, it is infeasible to make radical changes. Previous approaches to developing taxonomies of cultural attractions have tended to be driven by the concerns of those managing the industry. Classifications, therefore, have been designed to help assist with the

management of attractions and sites rather than suggest links with specific types of tourist. None of the schemes reviewed in this task appear to offer a definitive scheme, including our own fledgling scheme described in Deliverable D7 (Drdacky et al, 2004).

However, to develop a useful taxonomy linking tourists' perceptions and preferences to multiple cultural tourism destinations would require a long term, comprehensive survey requiring a large sample of tourists and destinations. This would be a major piece of research in its own right, well beyond the scope of PICTURE. The compromise would be to conduct a pilot survey to test the methodology and this could be feasible within the resources and timescale of the project. Another possible mechanism has emerged from researching taxonomies as structuring devices for Web-based information.

The developments of so-called Web 2.0 support social networking through sharing of information and suggest possible mechanisms for building a shared classification and evaluation of cultural attractors based on contributions from the general public. Web 2.0 is providing tools that operate on the information provided by multiple users, including the development of bottom-up taxonomies constructed from the unconstrained use of 'tags' (or keywords) by many Web users. One of the most celebrated examples of this is the *del.icio.us* web site developed by Joshua Schachter in 2003 (Schacter, 2003). *Del.icio.us* is a social bookmarking site that allows registered users to save URLs in much the same way as they would in a web browser, except that *del.icio.us* allows users to enter extended descriptions of the URL and any single words that will act as 'tags.' These tags can then be used in subsequent searches to retrieve bookmarks. The resulting collection of tagged URLs is now referred to as a 'folksonomy'.

Folksonomies are attractive because once they achieve a certain critical mass they become useful objects for research in themselves. Sites such as *del.icio.us* provide comprehensive APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) that allow third parties to access the data stored within in them. It becomes possible to carry out statistical analyses of the bookmarking behaviour of service users, including the the frequency of specific tags applied to specific web sites.

It is easy to see how this approach could be applied to develop a folksonomy of cultural heritage. It requires that each attractor be given a representation on the web, such as a web page, and that visitors to these attractions are encouraged to add tags to the description. It is proposed therefore that the remaining effort on this task will be directed towards specifying in detail how a folksonomy might be constructed and used to provide a comprehensive resource for tourists and managers alike.

## Conclusion

Taxonomies are developed for a specific purpose. There can be no general taxonomy to serve all purposes. Designations of cultural attractor are unstable and contested within the domain of cultural tourism. "Cultural tourism attraction" can be used as an honorific term and widespread acceptance of such a designation can have a large influence on the 'performance' of a site, as the UNESCO recognition suggests.

The domain of cultural tourism is growing rapidly, and is in a state of flux. The characteristics and behaviour of cultural tourists is also changing, which undermines efforts to create a stable classification system.

Traditionally, taxonomies have been developed by experts in a particular domain who decide how that domain is to be structured independently of the concerns of eventual users. Existing classification has been carried out in a top-down manner, driven by the concerns of those managing cultural assets rather than by those visiting sites. Hence, existing taxonomies of cultural tourism show considerable variation, depending on who has created the taxonomy, its purpose and cultural location. These are unlikely to help identify relations between tourists and destinations. Instead we propose methods for developing a folksonomy to which end-users (tourists) can make a direct contribution through their description and assessments of destinations.

The development of new models of social networking, using tagging systems developed as part of Web 2.0, creates opportunities for engaging uses of cultural heritage in the classification of cultural attractors.

This has the potential to create Web-based resources which anyone can access. The remaining time available for this task will address how this can best be achieved.

## References

- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Routledge, London.
- Bowker, G.C. and Star, S.L. (2000). *Sorting things out: classification and its consequences*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Drdacky, T., Drdacky, M., Teller, J. and Ruelle, C. (2004) "First draft of CTIA procedure," draft report on PICTURE Task 3.1, Deliverable D7, PICTURE project. Available from <http://www.picture-project.org/>
- English Heritage (1998) Thesauri of Monuments. Available at <http://thesaurus.english-heritage.org.uk/>.
- MacDonald, S. (1997). "A People's Story: Heritage, identity and authenticity" in C. Rojek and J. Urry (eds.) *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, Routledge, London, pp.155-175.
- Prentice, R. (1993). *Tourism and Heritage Attractions*. Thomson Learning. ISBN: 041508525X
- Richards, G. (1996). "European cultural tourism: trends and future prospects" in G. Richards (ed.) *Cultural Tourism in Europe*, CAB International, Oxon, pp.311-333.
- Richards, G. (2001). "Development of cultural tourism and cultural attractions" in G. Richards (ed.) *Cultural Attractions and European Tourism*, CABI Publishing.
- Rojek, C. (1997). "Indexing, dragging and the social construction of tourist sights" in C. Rojek and J. Urry (eds.) *Touring Cultures: Transformations of Travel and Theory*, Routledge, London, pp.52-74.
- Schacter, J. (2003). About del.icio.us. Available at <http://del.icio.us/about/>
- Shirky (2005). *Ontology is Overrated: Categories, Links, and Tags*. Available at [http://shirky.com/writings/ontology\\_overrated.html](http://shirky.com/writings/ontology_overrated.html)
- Walsh-Heron, J and Stevens, T (1990). *The management of visitor attractions and events*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.