

Tourism in European Cities:

The visitor experience of architecture, urban spaces and city attractions

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Researching urban tourism

The study of tourism is the study of people who are away from their normal environment. It is also the study of the facilities and services that tourists make use of and the impacts that come about from the tourism activity. It involves the motivations and experiences of the tourists, the expectations and adjustments made by the residents of the destination and the roles of agencies that intercede between them.¹ Tourism is an industry that manages and markets a variety of products and experiences to people who have a wide range of motivations, preferences and cultural backgrounds and who are involved in a dialectic engagement with the host community. The outcome of this engagement is a set of consequences for the tourist, the host community and the industry.² Until relatively recently participation in tourism was restricted to those who had the resources and time to travel. Higher incomes and greatly enhanced mobility have enabled more people to engage with tourism. Today the vast majority of people in the developed world are tourists at some point in their lives. Tourism is no longer the prerogative of the few but is now a normalised and expected part of the lifestyle of a large and growing number of people.

Defining urban tourism is not as straightforward as one would expect. Although urban tourism can be defined as tourism in towns and cities, it is apparent that the field is more problematic as urban tourism is a complex phenomenon that encompasses a wide range of activities. Adding the adjective ‘urban’ to the noun ‘tourism’ establishes the spatial context but does not define or delimit that activity.³

Smith⁴ draws a distinction between ‘tourism in cities’ and ‘urban tourism’ arguing that the former is tourism that incidentally occurs in urban environments whereas the latter refers to tourists that specifically visit a city to experience it. He argues that tourism in London is dominated by urban tourism as most people who visit “experience the chaos and diversity of a postmodern metropolis”. People who visit a city for business or some other non-leisure reason will spend at least some time engaging in leisure activities; enjoying the sights and the experiences that the city has to offer. Non-leisure visitors to a city are therefore an integral part of the urban tourism phenomenon.

The environment in town and cities is commonly referred to as being ‘urban’. A simplified description of ‘urban’ would be any area that contains groupings of buildings, roads, paved areas and other forms of human intervention, to the extent that the area is perceived to be a built-up area. Edwards et al⁵ offer a more comprehensive definition. They define urban area as a functional and physical environment with a web of social, cultural, political and economic relationships and interactions between many individuals and groups. Such an environment is characterised by:

- A strong and broad economic base that is serviced from multiple cores for major business and professional activities.
- A significant public transport network that acts as a gateway to other areas.
- A significant population with a workforce that commutes to and from the multiple cores.
- Long term planned development.

As Ashworth and Tunbridge⁶ rightly note: “Cities are important to tourism and tourism is important to cities.” Urban environments in Europe and globally have for many years been among the most significant of most tourism destinations.⁷ Yet, until fairly recently, researchers have dedicated a disproportionately small amount of attention to it. Generally speaking, those studying tourism neglected cities while those studying cities neglected tourism. There were few research works that focused on the linkages between tourism and the built environment. At the time, the most notable and outstanding piece of work about this area of study was Gregory Ashworth’s and John Tunbridge’s ‘Tourist-Historic Cities’,⁸ first published in 1990.

In deriving a definition it is useful to consider certain features of urban tourism that distinguish it from other forms of tourism:⁹

- Tourists visit cities for many purposes. Significant numbers of tourists in urban areas are visiting for a primary purpose other than leisure including business, conferences, shopping, and visiting friends and relatives.
- Larger cities easily absorb large numbers of tourists to the extent that, in most parts of the cities, the tourism activity becomes indistinguishable from the normal daily city life.
- Tourists make an intensive use of many urban facilities and services but little of the city has been created specifically for tourist use.
- Tourism in an urban context is just one of many economic activities and it must compete with a number of other industries for resources such as labour and land. Consequently tourism planning and policy-making processes are made more complex by the necessary engagement between tourism and other policy areas.
- Within cities there is a complex mix of constraints on development including constraints relating to cultural heritage and good neighbourliness for residential areas

It is widely acknowledged that tourism is a force for change and that it creates a wide range of economic, social and environmental impacts - both positive and negative.¹⁰ The difficulty, however, is to differentiate between changes that have been brought about by tourism and those that are attributable to other economic and social forces that are unrelated to tourism. For some tourist developments the impacts are clear. Some obvious examples include a new hotel development changing the rural landscape or a city skyline; the development of a theme park taking up large areas of land; the generation of employment in tourism and leisure and so on. In many cases, however, it is exceedingly difficult to isolate the principal causes of change. It may be difficult to determine whether the changes are directly attributable to tourist development or whether tourism is one of a number of agents of change.¹¹ The argument is applicable to all forms of tourism but it is possibly more directly relevant to urban tourism. The complex interactions of tourism phenomena, coupled with the complexities of the urban environment, makes the measurement of urban tourism's impacts almost impossible.

Research on urban tourism is essential because of the complexity of the elements listed above in conjunction with the potential economic, social and environmental effects that may result from visitation to cities. In light of this, there is a need for more strategic and cohesive research and hence the need of a research agenda. In a study on urban tourism Edwards et al¹² present a considered and interrelated approach for the development of a research agenda. In their

study they adopted a range of methodologies to consult with interested stakeholders, including in particular persons who are directly involved in tourism policy and management.

The Edwards et al study identified a very diverse range of micro issues. These were grouped into a series of conceptual sets, the four more important ones being (1) tourist experience and behaviour (2) impacts (3) tourism industry linkages and (4) governance and urban policy. These are shown in Figure 1.1. Tourism activity in urban environment is reliant on certain attributes, features and places within the city collectively referred to as tourism assets or resources. Also shown in Figure 1.1 is a shaded rectangle representing resources, underlying the four conceptual sets listed above.

<Figure 1.1 near here>.

Developing a research agenda must recognise the manifold ways in which these resources are significant namely:

- Experiences are structured around tourism resources.
- Excessive or inappropriate use can impact negatively on the resources themselves and on the environmental, social and economic context. Conversely resources can be used to generate positive outcomes for the community.
- The tourism industry relies upon resources as the basis for generating income.
- Good governance is needed to appropriately enhance, protect and manage the resources in the long term public interest.

Tourism activity in cities is reliant on the infrastructure and the natural and built environments which are available for use by tourists and the industry within the destination. Essentially resources drive tourism within the city destination and represent the basis for generating income for tourism businesses. Edwards et al also consider transport access to and within the urban environment as one of the tourism resources. Different tourists will have their own perceptions of what the resources of an urban destination are. These may be either tangible or intangible. Competence is needed to recognise the resources and their respective values as well as what gives each of them that value. Such competence is required to appropriately develop and manage tourism in urban destinations.¹³

The research agenda being proposed seeks to provide appropriate guidance on the governance of city destinations and the specific resources within them. Governance incorporates urban policy, planning, design, management, place marketing and communication activities. Good governance for tourism necessitates a whole-of-government approach that aims to achieve positive outcomes with respect to:

- a) Enhance experiences for the tourists.
- b) Reduce negative impacts and generate net benefits for the host community.
- c) Improve functioning of the interdependent businesses operating within the city.

The above relationships of ‘governance and urban policy’ are represented by arrows A, B and C respectively in Figure 1.1. Improved governance of urban tourism destinations must be informed by a fundamental understanding of tourist experiences and behaviour, tourist impacts and also industry linkages – represented by arrows D, E and F respectively in Figure 1.1. In essence these various processes should revolve around the long-term maintenance and effective functioning of the resources upon which urban tourism is based. This requires an understanding of what those assets comprise, what gives them value, how that value can be maximized and what threatens to diminish their value.

Research focused on ‘benchmarking and best practice’ can further inform and guide urban planning and governance by pointing to practices that have produced successful outcomes in the past. This is represented by arrow G in Figure 1.1.

Discussion on a research agenda for urban tourism is of interest not only to researchers and educators but also to tourism professional and practitioners. They are the people who derive policies and take decisions that determine the shape and form of urban tourism. Their decisions and actions greatly affect the tourist activity, the tourism industry and the context within which tourism operates. Such a discussion is also relevant to students as potential future operators in the tourism industry. Developing a research agenda provides appropriate guidance to the tourism industry on how to more effectively develop, manage and market urban tourism destinations. This is essential for the long-term sustainability of tourism in cities.

This book is intended for tourism professionals, practitioners and students. It is also intended for tourism operators with a business or geography background but who have never studied tourism. For them too, a basic understanding of the concepts discussed in this book is essential.

One of the purposes of this book is to contribute to the urban tourism research agenda, or at least to part of it. It is useful to consider where this book sits within the research framework described above. The above framework talks about four conceptual sets (experience/behaviour, impacts, linkages and governance) with a fifth set, tourism resources, overlapping with all four. The focus of this book is primarily on tourism resources with chapters 4, 5 and 6 dedicated exclusively to them. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 deal with specific aspects of tourism resources namely urban heritage, contemporary architecture and events respectively. An understanding of the tourist experience/behaviour is developed in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 2 and 3 touch upon issues of governance and urban policy largely by debating cities as the context of urban tourism. Other than marginally in some chapters, the book does not debate tourism impacts largely because impacts would require several chapters to do it justice.

Most tourism takes place in cities. Of course there are tourism and leisure activities that take place in non-urban areas, such as nature parks and skiing resorts but even here tourists will make use of an urban area to travel to or to support their leisure engagements. This is being said without wanting to diminish the importance of tourism and recreation in natural areas. For many the lure of the natural environment is essential for relaxation and enjoyment.

A common theme that runs through this book is the physicality of cities i.e. the architecture and the urban spaces. Tourism activities take place in buildings and in urban spaces within the city. The physicality of the city is expressed in its architecture. For many people, the word architecture brings to mind buildings that are outstanding because of their design, modernity or their historicity. A broader understanding of architecture is not limited to a few notable buildings but includes all buildings and also all urban spaces. In this book, architecture refers to the built environment of the city. This includes buildings, urban parks, roads, transport infrastructure and any other structures and spaces that are required for cities to function.

Urban design refers to the design and creation of spaces, normally in an urban context, which are amenable to people, including both residents and tourists. It is important to note that urban design is considered to be an integral part of architecture and hence its inclusion in any tertiary education programme for architects.

The following is an outline of the overall structure of the book with a brief description of each chapter.

- This chapter, as you have seen, sets the scene for the rest of the book. It describes the research agenda that is set out in tourism academic literature and notes where this book sits within that agenda. This chapter also discusses what motivates people to travel to cities and hence the reason that makes cities major centres of tourism activity.
- Cities are in constant change due to various social and economic forces. Cities seek to guide these changes in a manner that will enhance their competitiveness in a global context of stiff competition between cities. Chapter 2 discusses these forces including the role place marketing and tourism have on how cities develop and evolve over time.
- Changes in cities are also brought about by tourism. Chapter 3 discusses the way the dynamics of the tourist activity have changed in the last three or four decades. Such a discussion is needed for a better understanding on how tourism changes cities.
- Chapters 4, 5 and 6 give an overview of the various resources that make up the tourism product. Chapter 4 explains tourism product and outlines how tourism district are an important part of that product. Chapters 5 and 6 consider the various facilities made use of by tourists in particular visitor attractions and tourism accommodation.
- Walking is an activity to which the tourist will dedicate significant time during a leisure visit to a city. For this reason it merits a chapter in a book on urban tourism. Chapter 7 discusses the nature of walking and places the discussion within the context of the tourist experience. The chapter also discusses pedestrian areas in cities as these areas often become a focus of tourism activity.
- Chapter 8 develops an understanding of the tourist experience by investigating those elements that are most influential in shaping the experience at a city destination. The main focus is on the role of meaning and a sense of place in this process.
- In many cities the historic core plays a crucial role in tourism. Apart from attractions located within it, the historic core is often an attraction in its own right with many tourists spending time walking and exploring the historic area. Chapter 9 takes a closer look at historic areas and considers the relationship between urban heritage and tourism. This chapter also looks at a number of cities that have been designated World Heritage Sites.

- Many cities provide a diversified architectural structure from different eras of their history including a broad range of contemporary architecture. Chapter 10 debates how new contemporary architecture developments, including iconic architecture, are used by cities to enhance their attractiveness in the context of increased competition between cities. A section is also dedicated to museum architecture.
- Cities are increasingly resorting to events as a tool to deliver a wide range of outcomes and to reposition and differentiate the city from its competitors. Chapter 11 explains how events generate inward investment for the enhancement of public spaces and for infrastructure projects. The city often serves as a backdrop to the urban festival as activities and performances are staged in the city's urban spaces.
- Enter 2020 and with it the beginnings of the global covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has given rise to great uncertainty and brought with it difficult issues of unprecedented complexity. City destinations that previously suffered from overtourism are now faced with an opposite concern; after the effects of the pandemic have subsided there will be insufficient numbers of tourists to sustain their economies. Chapter 12 offers some reflections on the future prospects of tourism in 2022 and beyond.
- Chapter 13 offers some concluding remarks.

1.2 Why do people visit cities?

Many city authorities that promote tourism are sometimes not fully aware why people visit. The links between the various motivations and the deeper reasons for visitation are not sufficiently appreciated.¹⁴ The following gives an overview of the main reasons why visitors are attracted to cities. An awareness of tourists' motivations is a pre-requisite for a better understanding of urban tourism.

Discretionary free time is the time that is left over after taking into account work-related activities, daily chores and sleep. Many people dedicate significant amounts of their free time to leisure activities out of the home and this very often includes travel. Progressively over the last half-century work-practices have changed with a reduced working week and greater possibility to take early retirement. This has increased the amount of time available to people for travel, thus facilitating the growth of tourism.¹⁵

There are many reasons why tourists are drawn to cities but one of the most important ones is its selection of visitor attractions. As illustrated in Chapter 4, there is a great variety of attractions. Most leisure tourists do not visit a city for one attraction only but for a bundle or mix of attractions which meet their requirements and expectations.¹⁶ In many medium-sized cities the main attractions are clustered within one area of the city, normally the city centre, and are therefore within walking distance of each other. In larger cities the selection of attractions stretch across different parts of the city. Prideaux¹⁷ refers to cities as ‘fun places’. They offer visitors the opportunity to participate in a multitude of activities and pleasures. Apart from visitor attractions, the activities and attractions offered by cities include dining, shopping, casinos, entertainment and nightlife districts and cultural districts.

The variety on offer has increased in recent decades as travel has become easier and cheaper and consequently more commonplace for a wider range of people. Overall there has been a move towards shorter, more frequent and more tightly-scheduled holidays spread throughout the year. The increase in short breaks is perhaps the factor which is most directly relevant to tourism in cities. Most visits to cities take the form of a short break of two or three nights rather than a long holiday.

There are several key attributes of cities that make them well suited to be tourism destinations.¹⁸ Cities draw tourists to their attractions because these are often much better developed than in other types of destinations. They are easily accessible by means of rail or air travel. Most medium-sized and large cities have a large stock of accommodation built to serve the business traveler. Cities offer all the essential services that tourists normally expect such as communications and transport infrastructure.

Prideaux¹⁹ eloquently captures the essence of what makes cities important in the economic and cultural life of nations. The description below is mostly relevant to capital cities and also to large and medium-sized cities. It is these same elements that makes the city attractive to outsiders and hence are more reasons to visit:

“Cities are attractive spaces for visitors, the repository of commercial and national wealth and power, the creators and leaders of culture and fashion and the incubators of intellectual ferment. Cities also embody national spirit exhibited through the tapestry of public and private buildings that testify to the national origins and contemporary political and business power. They act as the custodians of national history and culture

through institutions such as the church or other religious organisations, museums, art galleries and theatres. Popular culture is fermented in the creative precincts of city life and radiated out via the electronic media to the world.”

Business travellers are an important component of travellers to cities. Depending on the city the share of total visitors may be anything between ten and thirty per cent. They make, however, a significant contribution to a city’s income as they are high spenders.²⁰ Included in the business traveller category are delegates to conferences and exhibitions. The concentration of commercial, financial, industrial services in urban areas acts as a focus for different people to visit cities for employment-related purposes such as conferences, exhibitions and business meetings. Business people travel to meet with other business people for a variety of reasons including to promote goods and services, to discuss sales deals, to attend company management meetings, to provide consultancy services, to meet with professional consultants, to deliver short training courses and so on. Despite improvements in online communications there still is the need for business people to travel and meet in person, although the 2020 pandemic might lessen that.

Another reason for people to travel to a city is to visit friends and relatives (VFR visitors). Cities are places with large populations and hence there is a high propensity for travel motivated by visits to friends and relatives. Many of the visits have a secondary motivation of enjoying a holiday and spending some leisure time away from home. The number of VFR visitors to a city is also influenced by the attractiveness of the place as some visitors will combine visiting friends with sightseeing.²¹ Most VFR visitors do not involve the use of serviced accommodation and hence the overall expenditure may be less than other forms of tourism. On the other hand, the friend’s familiarity with the city enables that VFR tourist to engage in activities that other tourists might not normally engage in such as going to the theatre or having a drink at the local pub. In the last two or three decades there have been significant increases in VFR travel largely because of the increased number of people across Europe who relocate to other cities for reasons of work or study. Civic pride of city residents is a means for promoting VFR tourism as they invite friends and family to visit and are proud to show them around their city.

Tourism in cities is characterised by the variety of activities, experiences and facilities that is offered to visitors. This sets it apart from other forms of tourism such as resort-based travel in coastal or alpine contexts.²² Kolb²³ argues that increasingly tourists wish to visit sites that

reflect the daily cultural life of the local community. Even if tourists visit the well-known landmarks, more and more visitors are eager to experience and explore the daily life. Tourist looking for authentic experiences would wish to see, for example, local community members engaging in arts and crafts tied to a different time or culture. Examples include lace making and weaving.

For contemporary urban tourism researchers have abandoned the idea of a unitary role type of the tourist. Current tourism discourse reflects a greater sensitivity towards traveller's differences in terms of demographic and lifestyle characteristics as well as interests, preferences and behaviour.²⁴

Some travellers are familiar with a city's conventional attractions and so they deliberately seek places, amenities and experiences in other areas of the city. As a result, tourists have become a common presence away from the more popular tourism areas, prompting new opportunities and challenges for the city and its residents.²⁵ This also brings about significant changes in the leisure and tourism landscape of the city.

Notes and References: Chapter 1

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