Better understanding on tourism sustainability is needed

Tourism is a major economic sector with negative externalities

Tourism in European cities represents an average of more than 10% of the GDP. It contributes to the economic growth, it creates jobs and employment, it promotes local development and it finances new infrastructures. However, tourism also consumes urban and natural limited resources, it generates costly waste, it requires expensive facilities, it produces air and water pollution and it alters the life of the residents. Moreover, hospitality sector is currently being contested because of housekeeping conditions and general low salaries comparing to other urban economies. In a scenario of globalization, digitalization and chronic instability, cities and local authorities have a major role to play in order to mitigate current tourism negative externalities and implement sustainability strategies and policies towards shared progress among all stakeholders and citizens.

The study aims to:
- Identify main actors related to sustainable tourism policies
- Review innovative strategies and policy instruments promoting sustainable tourism
- Analyse tourism stakeholders perceptions in major European urban destinations
- Propose a set of recommendations for policy makers to improve urban tourism

Target Content Analysis Criteria:
- Strategic vision
- Planning period
- Strategic objectives
- Prioritization
- Coordination with other policy areas
- Sustainability keywords
- Measures/Actions
- Plans diagnosis
Growing number of tourists can lead to over-tourism effects

The state of urban tourism varies greatly between major European cities. Some are consolidated and well-recognized destinations with a low growth rate or none (Brussels and Paris), while others are relatively “newer” destinations with high increase rate (Copenhagen, Lisbon, Reykjavik, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, and Vienna).

The increasing number of tourists and its seasonality leads to a growing number of social and environmental pressures in cities. It can reach the state of over-tourism when the fragile balance between residents and visitors is altered. **Looking at the ratio between tourists and residents**, a high level of tourism intensity is a clear sign of over-tourism. Amsterdam, Barcelona, Reykjavik and Lisbon have between six and eight times more tourists than residents, greatly impacting lifestyle of local inhabitants.

**Tourism density**, or the density of tourists per square kilometre, is also a good indicator of over-tourism. Cities like Dublin, Vienna and Amsterdam are suffering from the highest density of tourists together with all major European cities.
Most cities are only focusing on attracting more tourists

Despite the growing awareness of local authorities and increasing mobilizations of citizens, very few cities have integrated sustainability issues within their tourism strategic plans. When analysing the quality of those tourism plans, cities can be distributed into two groups:

**Marketing-oriented cities**: Those cities focused mainly on marketing and communication instruments to attract more and/or better tourism, in terms of expenses. They are also trying to improve tourism facilities in order to increase the attractiveness of the destinations. They do not have, however, effective coordination with other municipal departments, plans or policies to tackle social or environmental issues related to tourism. This first cluster includes Copenhagen, Brussels, Lisbon, London, Reykjavik, Vienna and Dublin.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Sustainability issues identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barcelona</td>
<td>Use of infrastructure, overcrowding, gentrification and rising prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>Population density, alternative tourist accommodation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>Increase in tourism may be at the expense of locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brussels</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reykjavik</td>
<td>Tourism creates pressure on local infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin</td>
<td>Overcrowdedness, gentrification and rising issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vienna</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>Need for balance between residents and visitors, Increasing urbanization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Management-oriented cities**: Those cities have developed rather transversal destination management plans covering urban, economic and supply-oriented policies. It includes, to some extent, formal coordination with other departments such as urban planning, mobility and environment. Paris, Barcelona and Amsterdam have this kind of policy instruments dealing with (some) negative impacts of tourism, such as the regulation of private rooms and illegal accommodation from online rental platforms. Barcelona is the only city introducing sustainability transversally and without specific tourist growth objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of instrument</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Example of cities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory: Land-use planning (Accommodation spatial planning)</td>
<td>Reorganize the urban space by identifying areas with specific needs</td>
<td>Hotel Plan Amsterdam, PEUAT, Paris Hotel Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulatory: Tourism Accommodation Supply Laws</td>
<td>Laws and regulation that impose binding limits to tourism practices</td>
<td>Berlin, Barcelona (National Law of Urban Leases), Amsterdam (Short Stay Policy), Paris (ALUR Law)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge instruments</td>
<td>Foster knowledge and increase the capacity of governments to design efficient policies</td>
<td>Barcelona (Reviewing deconcentration strategy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentives and subsidies</td>
<td>Non-binding instruments to influence the behaviour of different actors</td>
<td>Barcelona (Biosphere certification), Bruxelles (Eco-dynamique label)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving Relations with Stakeholders</td>
<td>Instruments that improve collaboration between city departments and external stakeholders</td>
<td>Barcelona (tourism city council)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications and awareness</td>
<td>Communicating sustainability issues for the industry or the visitors</td>
<td>Bruxelles (Greeners, Sustainable Meetings), Copenhagen (Shareability is King and People-Based Growth initiatives) Barcelona (Airbnb Illegal Accommodation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A weak governance does not integrate other municipal departments and civil society

Few evidences have been found regarding effective, transparent and participative consultations processes where all relevant stakeholders, both from private and public sectors, are really identified, involved and engaged. Barcelona has recently created the City and tourism council, a multi stakeholder committee to debate and monitor the city’s tourism plan, where societal groups (environmental and social NGO’s, trade unions and residents) are predominant over the industry representatives.

Some leading cities have a cross-cutting management of tourism integrating different municipal areas to design more integrated policy instruments dealing with negative externalities, such as over-tourism, public services and space congestion, illegal accommodation, and gentrification. This is the case of Amsterdam, Barcelona and Paris.

Larger cities have managed to extend the scope of their plans to reach neighbouring regions or the entirety of the metropolitan region. Cities like Paris, Lisbon, Barcelona and Amsterdam have integrated metropolitan measures or/and plans at some level, which allow them to tackle critical issues to encourage tourism and land use planning at metropolitan level. Relevant examples like the case of Amsterdam Hotel Policy to control accommodation supply and quality introducing sustainability criteria or the case of Barcelona to develop a Metropolitan Tourism Observatory.

Over-tourism is characterised by high concentration of tourists in specific urban areas, like historical or commercial centres, iconic attractions, etc. This overconcentration of visitors saturates public urban spaces, creates mobility difficulties, transforms local shops and services towards tourism services and alters the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Gentrification occurs when local residents are expelled from their original neighbourhoods due to a rapid increase in the price of houses, services and shops. This is usually caused by new actors investing massively in attractive urban areas such as hotel chains, office promotors, “vulture funds”, private accommodation platforms, among others.

Focus on Barcelona, Lisbon and Paris

According to a survey in which some relevant tourism stakeholders from major European cities such as Barcelona, Lisbon and Paris have participated, tourism is stated to provide valuable economic benefits for destinations, but also highlight the negative environmental and social impacts, in particular on the quality of life of local residents.

Sustainability is incorporated on different degrees to tourism policies, but not enough, according to participants. In Paris, most of participants think sustainability is well or very well considered; in Barcelona, most of them are more cautious; in Lisbon, the majority consider slightly or not at all.
**Recommendations**

1) **Manage over-tourism areas and tackle gentrification**
Reducing over-tourism and fighting gentrification require a diverse and complementary set of regulations and policies that goes beyond tourism field, including other horizontal and vertical actions.

- Consider the whole metropolitan area to spread out tourists in wider geographical areas (through marketing or mobility policies) while reducing local saturations.
- Leverage land-use planning to define and implement territorial strategies related to accommodation supply and gentrification prevention in critical areas.
- Regulate short room letting to control and limit illegal or informal short-room rental, through licensing, inspection and enforcement actions.
- Promote social housing to protect low and middle wages residents in gentrified districts, with accessible rentals and protection from speculative real-estate and industry actors.

2) **Increase data analysis, research projects and capacity building**
Sustainability strategy requires to identify, assess and monitor current issues and tourism impacts constantly and structurally to develop comprehensive policies based on shared data and scientific evidence.

- Implement tourism observatories to identify, collect and share relevant data related to tourism impacts at municipal and metropolitan level, covering major economic, social and environmental issues.
- Conduct research about visitor behavior and negative externalities in collaboration with knowledge sector to inform policy makers and design policies based on scientific evidence.

3) **Integrate sustainability in the whole value chain**
Tourism must contribute to the sustainable development of cities with a better social return in terms of fair working conditions, increase opportunities for people at risk of social exclusion, reduce energy and water use, promote green supplies, etc.

- Support Sustainable Public Procurement (SPP) practices by introducing green and social criteria when accessing to public procurements or getting tourism-related licenses for industry actors.
- Implement and use tourist tax to improve the quality of life of residents, maintain public spaces, finance new infrastructures, offer better services and support local socio-economic initiatives.
- Encourage responsible business practices by the whole industry through green or social certifications or labeling of tourism facilities, services or products, such as EMAS, Biosphere, Green keys, etc.
- Raise awareness of visitors and tourism industry on the need to implement better environmental and social behaviors to reduce over-consumption of natural resources (food, water, energy, etc.) and take into account marginalized populations in the value chain.
- Develop comprehensive policies and strategies that cover all issues related to the sustainability of tourism, including clean mobility, food waste, energy efficiency, water use, waste recycling, social inclusion, fair wages, civic behaviors, etc.

4) **Promote open, inclusive and participative governance**
Tourism is affecting a large number of local stakeholders that should be consulted and informed regularly by local authorities. This should be done in an open, participative and transparent way, insuring that all points of views are taken into account before approving new policies, strategies or regulations.

- Launch tourism council where relevant residents, environmental and social NGOs are well represented, beyond tourism stakeholders, to follow-up policy implementation and identify current issues.
- Engage with local residents through physical meetings and/or on-line platforms where the inhabitants can report directly any tourism-related complains to local authorities that should be committed to give an individual answer.
- Create internal coordination committee within the city council where all relevant departments with an impact on tourism are involved, such as mobility, energy, water, urban planning, housing, health, business, economy, finance, etc.
References


Tourism Strategic Plans


