

# Tourism management in the historic city. The impact of urban planning policies

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## Abstract

The introduction of tourist activities in the historic city implies major challenges for urban policy. It has to deal with conflicts such as congestion, pollution, replacement of urban activities and overuse of heritage assets. In addition, specific problems of each city must be considered, which are related to their own administrative culture, topography, history or socio-economic features. This paper analyzes the solutions provided by cities located in three different contexts: the English-speaking area, the Mediterranean and Latin America, in particular Plymouth, Malaga and Guanajuato. The methodology is based on a qualitative analysis of urban plans, master plans, regulations or other urban planning related tools. The research highlights the different problems faced by each city and the solutions adopted, which can serve as an example for other cases facing similar challenges.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, urban tourism, heritage, public policies, urban regeneration

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## **1. CURRENT TRENDS IN URBAN CULTURAL TOURISM**

Urban cultural tourism is a growing phenomenon worldwide, calling attention from different disciplines such as tourism management, urbanism and anthropology. Harvey (1989), Richards (2005) and Urry (1990) frame the growth of cultural tourism in the transition from modernity to postmodernity, which marks the end of the separation between culture, economy and tourism, as well as the tension between globalization vs local specificity. Pine and Gilmore (1999) explain this transition as the shift from an economy based on production of goods and services to another model based on the generation of profitable experiences.

Wiley (1998) emphasizes the replacement of the division between leisure and work for a society dominated by information and communication, where the exchange of symbols prevail. The city is seen as a place for playing or leisure instead of a place for working and living (Urry, 1990). The city becomes a place of consumption which takes advantage of entertainment opportunities and tourism, where the urban environment itself becomes a commodity for sale to both investors and individual consumers (Meethan, 1996). This view means that every place is likely to be converted into a tourist destination.

According to MacCannell (1976) and Rifkin (2010), cultural experiences are the basis of leisure and constitute the deposit of modern society's values, including economic ones. That is why the creation of cultural experiences and especially of attractions has become a fundamental part of the global society. In this context, museums play an important role as "factories of meaning" for the cultural experiences of visitors (Rooijakkers, 1999).

Cultural motivation in tourism is parallel to the increasing interest in culture in general. However, Richards (2001) believes that rather than an increase in cultural motivation, there are simply more people making short visits, thereby increasing the number of visitors to all kinds of attractions.

As indicated by the World Tourism Organization (2002), the creation of a cultural tourism destination is not limited to cities or regions offering a great cultural background or a rich heritage. Thanks to its adaptability, cultural tourism is seen as a solution to a variety of problems, such as obsolescence of industrial areas or decay of coastal resorts (Richards, 2005). In the case of industrial areas, if conceived as archaeological contexts, reutilization becomes an ethnoarchaeological process as supported by David and Cramer (2001). The growing appeal of urban centres is in turn related to operations carried out to transform them into symbolic and leisure spaces, in response to the urban crisis caused by deindustrialization and loss of traditional urban roles. In addition, urban cultural tourism is not as seasonal as other segments, although it presents strong differences between weekdays, weekends, holidays and long weekends (Burtenshaw, Bateman & Ashworth, 1991).

Other causes of the boom of urban cultural tourism are due to changes in the ways of organizing trips. In some contexts, as the European case, the growing trend is to make several short journeys rather than enjoying an extended holiday (Junta de Andalucía, 2012). Cities are especially interested in short-term travel because they take place principally in weekends, thus complementing business trips that take place on weekdays (Law, 1996). In addition, Internet and low cost companies facilitate the organization of trips without intermediaries. Similarly, the increase in the educational level

of the population is also linked to the growing interest in heritage and culture (Eurostat, 2007). Exchange programs have contributed to the growth of language tourism. Moreover, the current demographic trend is very favorable to cultural tourism, as the group of potential travelers older than 55 is increasing (World Tourism Organization & European Tourism Commission, 2005).

The explained factors join other social changes in recent decades, such as the diversification of lifestyles, the power of media and fashion, the loss of functionality of the household as a unit of consumption and the reaction against mainstream forms of behavior and consumption. Mass consumption has evolved to more individual patterns, new aspects of life have begun to be treated as commercial goods, the differences between consumption patterns of different market segments have increased and goods and services have a shorter life. This increases the importance of product differentiation and specialization towards emerging market segments.

The rise of heritage tourism in particular is also related to the feeling of nostalgia associated with disorientation produced by modernity, which has led to an increase in the number of members belonging to organizations dedicated to heritage conservation and a renovated interest in visiting heritage assets (Richards, 2001). As Lowenthal suggests, nostalgia is also an economic resource: "If the past is a foreign country, nostalgia makes it a profitable business" (Miranda Ontiveros, 2001). A fact of this profitability is that for every million pounds invested by the Heritage Lottery Fund in rehabilitation of heritage in the UK, there has been an increase of 4.2 million pounds in tourism revenue in the last 10 years, being investments profitable after the second year (Positively Plymouth, 2010). A Norwegian study states that every crown of public money invested in rehabilitation and maintenance of

assets reports 10 krona to society and every job related to heritage creates 26,7 associated jobs (Bowitz and Ibenholt, 2009). A similar study in Pennsylvania, USA, concluded that the investment of 88 million dollars in 13 heritage assets resulted in a profit of 289 million dollars (Ibid). In the case of Spain, the ratio between total cultural tourism consumption and effort in heritage conservation is 26, sufficiently illustrative of the return that cultural heritage brings (Government of Spain, 2009).

## **2. URBAN IMPACT OF TOURISM**

A repeated argument when trying to attract visitors to cities is that they spend about twice more than other tourists (Burtenshaw, Bateman & Ashworth, 1991). In addition, urban tourism has got a huge multiplier effect on the local economy (World Tourism Organization, 2002). Moreover, it is a sector that creates jobs easily, it is estimated that the relationship between the cost of creating a job in the industry compared to the cost of creating a job in tourism is eight to one (Williams, 1998). As a result of this, tourism tends to establish itself as a major economic activity and a source of income and employment in most cities (Exceltur, 2013).

ICOMOS recognizes that tourism can help fund heritage conservation, stimulate commercial activity and promote the maintenance of urban services (Barrera-Fernandez, Arista Salomao Castillo & Azevedo, 2014). In addition, tourism can help generate awareness regarding heritage conservation, as it revitalizes the people's interest for its culture (Toselli, 2006). Casariego Jimenez Ramirez and Guerra (1995), Ayala Castro (2010) and Law (1996) refer to the value of tourism to improve the image of the city and to generate a greater sense of identity and well-being within the

local community. The marketing effort will affect citizens pride and attract all kinds of investments. Furthermore, new cultural infrastructures are created and there is an increase in cultural events, of which all citizens can be benefited.

The economic benefits of tourism are widely known, the problem lies in the balanced between the costs and profits (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). Cities with a strong and diverse economic base can better attract the benefits of tourism. Instead, as the degree of economic dependence of a city towards this sector increases, tourism impacts become more negative (Ashworth & Page, 2011). In relation to jobs generated by tourism, they are largely part-time, low-skilled and poorly paid (Diaz Alvarez, 1999). In rich countries immigrants are often hired, who earn less than natives, which in turn contributes to favor ethnic conflict (Burtenshaw, Bateman & Ashworth, 1991).

One of the criticisms issued to the urban tourism sector from an economic point of view is the need for continued public investment in infrastructure and attractions just to maintain the competitive position, so that the benefits are finally reinvested and profits can never be used to solve other needs (Fainstein & Judd, 1999). In many cases the creation of tourist infrastructure ahead of the needs of the local population is prioritized (Urry, 1990). We also have to add the cost of public administration in areas such as tourism promotion, planning and research. Another negative aspect is the environmental impact of tourism operations, both in resources and in the urban landscape. These can be decisive in provoking opposition from the local community, which will be greater the lower its economic dependence on tourism is (Schofield, 2011).

Urban tourists are concentrated on specific days and there are significant seasonal variations, so there is pressure to

maximize the number of visitors, resulting in congestion, intensive use of services and spaces, noise and social unrest (Williams, 2010). The World Tourism Organization recognizes that the disproportion between the number of tourists and residents can deteriorate hospitality, which impacts negatively on the visitor experience. Visits might also cause massive pollution, overcrowding and feeling of inauthenticity, which will lower the degree of satisfaction of tourists (World Tourism Organization & European Tourism Commission, 2005).

Overcrowding cultural assets endangers heritage conservation. In addition, the conversion of certain cultural elements into tourism products can lead to loss of meaning, simplification and trivialization (André, Cortés & López, 2003). At the urban level a museification effect of the historic city takes place, resulting in monofunctional spaces where new activities and high prices drive out the local population as well as other urban activities (García Hernández, 2003). Depletion of meaning at the symbolic level might be seen as cultural loss. In an exercise of confidence in its benefits, many cities have committed to the development of urban cultural tourism as a solution to the decay caused by loss of economic activity and competitiveness, which has led to the obsolescence of large central urban parts.

Law (1996), Ashworth and Larkham (1994) agree that since the 80s there has been a change of attitude towards tourism in cities. Among the reasons is the loss of traditional activities and the need to introduce new ones to reduce high unemployment. In addition, investment in improving the old neighborhoods is seen as a stimulus for the regeneration of other rundown neighborhoods. Monclús and Watchkeeping (2006) added that interest in tourism development in the historic city emerges in a neoliberal context in which cultural policies fail to meet social objectives and become at

the service of economic development goals, giving priority to issues such as urban image and iconic cultural projects like major events and iconic buildings.

Although there are many cities that have chosen to reconvert their historic centres in tourist areas, only a few have achieved the pursued economic objectives, thus reversing the declining trend. European examples that are generally considered successful in this regard are Bradford, Liverpool, Glasgow and Bilbao. In Latin American contexts Oaxaca is another well known example. Williams (2004), among others, assumed as the beginning of this trend the model promoted by the developer James Rouse in Baltimore and Boston, then spread to Europe. In this model the conversion of industrial and port areas is combined with the creation of an area with a historic shopping and festive atmosphere, the so called "festival market place".

The cities thus transformed seek to offer tourists and investors an image that expresses their historical as well as cosmopolitan character. This requires a strategy that combines a set of representative historical buildings with new pieces of singular architecture. According to Delgado (2002), cities are presented with a past and an art that give them reverence, as well as with innovative urban elements that associate them with the media imaginary through which a message of friendly city, attractive, inviting and open to the world is transmitted. In the words of Negussie (2006), it is a combination of old geographies and projected spaces where the local mingles with the global.

As Fernandez Agudo and Peace (2001) and Gunay (2008) state, the presentation of heritage can serve to strengthen one's identity by projecting outwards. However, when the interest is purely economic, such policies may undermine the purpose of heritage protection, since cultural assets lose their meaning as a

manifestation and testimony of collective cultural features. The focus is solely on the protection of the most attractive elements for potential visitors, in order to achieve maximum profitability.

The tourist experience in cities is measured in days and hours, even minutes in the case of cultural attractions or seconds in particular locations. Tourists have always a partial and incomplete knowledge about the local culture and lack sensitivity to the heritage that is visited, so the complexity is reduced to a simplistic past, lacking depth and context. The urban cultural tourist is of the "Michelin" or "collector Baedeker" type. They do not tend to repeat visits and are continually looking for new destinations. Moreover, the more unique is the heritage experience, it is least likely to provoke a repeat. Tourists approach is based on socially constructed, and therefore changing, images. As a result, one of the primary objectives of the trip consists of seeing "what visitors must see", what previously appeared as significant in tourist guides, brochures, travel magazines, movies, television reports and Internet. The selection of a few attractions and the necessary continuous adaptation of heritage assets to create profitable tourism products involve the abandonment of elements that are not sufficiently unique or can not be adapted to market demands.

A common feature in many historic cities with tourist activity is the feeling of being in a set. According to Hall (2002), the model is Main Street America in Disneyland, a theatre that looks like real life, but it is not urban life as it once was. Or as stated by Zukin (1996), it is inhabited dioramas that reduce the multiple dimensions and conflicts to a consistent visual representation. In these streets the fake is presented as true and vernacular. According to Delgado (2002), there is nothing more similar to a museified historic centre than another museified historic centre. Although the buildings and main

monuments are different, the streets are filled with the same facilities for tourists and even the same tourists themselves. As Toselli (2006) reflects, this trend leads to a process of "culturalization", including trivialization or "staged authenticity", in which architecture, crafts or local celebrations are only a staging for tourists. The interest in showing some authenticity is reinforced by the study of Ramkissoon and Uysal (2011), which reflects the positive relationship between the perception of authenticity and tourist behavior in relation to the heritage assets presented.

In the historic districts with greater visitors numbers there is a proliferation of certain uses while others are moved to other neighborhoods, thus breaking the balance of the urban system functions. Attractions and visitor services are concentrated, standardized and similar in all cities. As this occurs, the most necessary services for residents and basic equipment activities are expelled. Fragmentation of urban space increases as well as the polarization of different urban activities.

### **3. TOURIST STRATEGIES IN THE THREE SELECTED CITIES**

To give a correct balance between the positive and negative aspects of tourism in the historic city, there must be adequate interplay of economic, tourist, urban, economic and social policies (Barrera-Fernandez, 2013). Among them, this research focuses on the qualitative analysis of plans and planning tools that affect the tourist use of the historic city. The results have been limited to urban policies that have an impact on tourism in the area recognized as a historic city. The case studies are three medium cities that have made a clear commitment to urban cultural tourism in different regional contexts, one of the Mediterranean area, Malaga, one of the English-speaking world, Plymouth, and one from Latin America, Guanajuato. The

methodology is based on the study of documentary sources and interviews with civil servants from the local planning administration. Comparing the case studies shows differences in the weight of the strategic vision, the role of stakeholders, the regulation of activities and the existing controls on interventions in buildings and public spaces. The cases analyzed show the close relationship between urban planning, tourism strategy and heritage protection. They also show different local intervention tools adapted to the administrative, cultural, economic and legislative reality in each country. In the three cities, urban plans, master plans, ordinances or other urban management tools were analyzed. References are given at the end of the article. Below, a summary of the results is presented. It has been organized into the following sections:

- The role urban planning in facing major challenges
- Urban policy strategies in boosting tourism
- Promotion of sustainable alternatives
- Dealing with tourism in cultural heritage assets

#### **3.1 The role urban planning in facing major challenges**

In Malaga, especially since the Agenda 21 was issued, the significant destruction of cultural assets carried out in recent years has been highlighted, as well as the consequent loss of identity that it entails. Urban planning policies have focused excessively on creating a stage instead of encouraging conservation and restoration.

The most extended problem in the historic centre of Plymouth are night bars, cafes, restaurants and associated problems such as excessive noise, litter and hooliganism. A redistribution of these

activities in a larger area has been proposed repeatedly, but satisfactory results have not been achieved so far in this regard. On the other hand, the waterfront is one of the most representative areas of the city but it has suffered a very deep deterioration in some sections, so the need for intervention is evident. The third major problem of Plymouth from the tourist point of view is the need of modern services and infrastructure both in the city in general as well as in particular neighborhoods. Improvement proposals in this regard have been presented but a final solution is still pending, among other factors due the large sum of money that would entail.

In Guanajuato there is a serious problem regarding the service provided by tourist companies, which have almost no relationship with the Department of Tourism. This situation means low training of guides and a lack of coordination of the collective and private transport, with old fleet and unprepared staff. These deficiencies join the pollution of the public water supply network, lack of innovative tourist services and high prices in relation to quality.

### **3.2 Urban policy strategies in boosting tourism**

In Malaga it is recognized the importance of becoming a specialized destination in the context of the Costa del Sol, specifically for the urban cultural tourism segment. A priority is to enhance the role of the city in hosting exhibitions, conferences, corporate events and major international museum firms. As for transport infrastructures, all of them they have undergone a major improvement and expansion. On a smaller scale, the two major city projects affecting tourism impact that remain undeveloped are the integration of the Guadalmedina river and the incorporation into the city of Mount Gibralfaro, which could be an important addition in terms of recreation in the heart from the city. On the other hand,

European urban regeneration programs have focused on improving the image of the consolidated and surrounding tourist areas, this has led to the loss of opportunity to intervene in degraded neighborhoods in favor of creating a new tourist scenario around the Plaza de la Merced, Picasso Museum, Calle Larios and Alcazaba. As for mobility, pedestrianization of the main tourist streets has been developed, favoring the especialization of the city centre as an area mainly for hotels and bars.

**Figure 1.** Larios Street in Malaga after its pedestrianization.



Source: the authors.

Plymouth urban development plans have focused their efforts in recent years to renew the waterfront, in order to make it the great attraction of the city. This strategy involves the creation of new shipping routes, rides, attractions, restaurants and shops. In another area of the historic city, The Barbican, the strategy has been to maintain the mix of uses and especially housing. Another ambitious project is the renovation of the port of Millbay to attract more cruise ships, which is taking place more slowly than expected. Similarly, its connection to the city centre is needed. Finally, some entrances to the city offer a very negative image. Specifically for North Cross the creation of a new railway station and shopping area and offices has been suggested, but the project has been halted waiting for investors.

**Figure 2.** Plymouth's waterfront.



Source: the authors.

Meanwhile, Guanajuato is committed to extend the tourist season beyond the International Cervantino Festival and Summer, as well as to activate tourism resources that are not in the central area, already quite saturated. A resource that is not sufficiently exploited is the extraordinary heritage of the University of Guanajuato. Underused assets also include the satellital locations of mining sites such as Mineral de la Luz and others. Other actions carried out by urban policy but impacting on tourism are the promotion of conferences and exhibitions, new tourism signage and training of tour operators.

**Figure 3.** Main tourist area in central Guanajuato.



Source: the authors.

### 3.3 Promotion of sustainable alternatives

A recent strategy of urban policies relating to tourism has been the promotion of a closer connection with natural and the ecological tourism segment. Malaga has materialized this objective in the project of integrating the Mount Gibralfaro in the city, which unfortunately has been abandoned. Instead, Plymouth and Guanajuato have themselves taken initiatives in this regard.

In the English city the maritime border is again the most interesting and at the same time the more delicate space to develop new initiatives. Specific regulations have been deployed to preserve its ecological values, so that it is compatible with the incorporation of new attractions.

Meanwhile, Guanajuato has focused its efforts on developing the protected areas of Cuenca de la Esperanza, Cuenca de la Soledad and Presa de La Purisima. This has been tried to overcome the large deficit of environmental quality in the municipality as a whole, including tourist services, recreational areas and projects of new attractions for the local population and investors, all taking into account the priority of preserving the area and promoting economic development. However, the biodiversity present in the surrounding semideserts has not been exploited.

### 3.4 Tourism and cultural heritage

Finally, the promotion of cultural and especially heritage tourism is a key strategy in the urban policies of the three cities. In the Andalusian there is an initiative funded by European funds underway to convert Trinidad and Perchel into something resembling a popular “museum neighborhood” with initiatives such as the beautification of patios, creation of craft workshops and events of various kinds. But undoubtedly the main strategy in this regard has been the deployment of brand-museums such as Picasso, Thyssen, Russian Museum and Pompidou, with the consequent urban renewal



of their immediate environment, including the loss of areas of great heritage value not directly linked to these attractions.

Plymouth has introduced a bill to divide the city centre into architectural areas from south to north, each representing an era of urban development of the city. This is intended to address the commercial obsolescence of this important built heritage. However, this is one of the many projects that have been left out. An interesting initiative has been the conversion of former military and port area of Royal William Yard in a tourist and commercial area, including the conversion of old infrastructure and a careful design of the urban landscape.

In Guanajuato there is the problem of tourist saturation of a very small area in the historic centre and the lack of exploitation of other resources of great interest in the periphery. An interesting initiative is the redevelopment of the historic road to Marfil, which is the local vestige of El Camino Real de Tierra Adentro, the silver route in the colonial era. Improvement initiatives have also been undertaken in historic mining towns like Valenciana and Mineral de la Luz, which also have served to improve the quality of life of residents, still need a more determined push to become tourism products.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Urban policies have a decisive impact on the management of tourism activities within the historic city. The multiplicity of initiatives and tools varies as much as the problems to be faced by each city. Thus, it is necessary to assess the situation case by case instead of bringing standardized models or recommendations. Still, the comparative method yields results in terms of highlighting such diversity.

The problems that each city faces are very different from one another. In Malaga

there has been a focus on investment in a handful of goods and in a very small space, while Plymouth faces the concentration of nightlife in a fragile sector and Guanajuato lacks of coordination of tourism services. It is not surprising that the main proposals related to increase sustainability are also diverse. Malaga has focused on pedestrianization and improvement of infrastructure, Plymouth searches a balance of uses and Guanajuato focuses on extending their season and tourist area. In relation to the promotion of heritage tourism, Malaga has put the focus in a few assets and neglected the rest of buildings with heritage values, Plymouth has succeeded in interesting initiatives to recover port heritage and Guanajuato has made an effort to activate heritage resources on its periphery.

Of the three cities analyzed it can be concluded as a recommendation for themselves and for others that efficient urban management of the historic city is not possible without maintaining functional diversity and inhabitants. Tourism development can not ignore heritage conservation in the broadest sense, including natural and landscape values. Otherwise there is a risk of creating themed areas while the rest of the historic city falls into disrepair.

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