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Transport in tourism cities – Beyond the functional and towards an experiential approach

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Introduction

A very close relationship exists between transport and tourism. This is especially the case when the means of travel turns into the tourism product itself; for instance, a scenic seaplane harbour take-off and landing in British Columbia (Yeoman, 2012). Similarly, from a tourism development perspective, transport also plays a key role in the planning and management of infrastructures. For instance, the opening of new air routes in Morocco had an impact on leisure travel to and within this country (Dobruszkes *et al.*, 2012). Transport-related aspects also affect

the overall development of tourism cities as well as the management of associated tourism growth in and around the region.

On a more international level, tourism and transport have also been intimately linked as a result of the strategic positioning of global tourism cities trying to attract overseas tourists, even if attitudes towards long-distance flights have changed considerably over the last decade or so due to the environmental challenges facing our planet, including climate change. Crozet (2017), for instance, shows that this mindset and lifestyle change among new generations of tourists has led to an increasing ‘preference for proximity’ among travellers adopting paradigms such as slow travel with a preference for more local entertainment, echoing existing notions of responsible tourism, sustainability and environmentally-conscious purchasing habits as well as decreasing priorities for fast travel, which dominated earlier tourist preferences to visit exotic destinations in far flung locations.

If transport trends arguably shape tourism ones, wider techno-societal changes may also have an impact on the relationship between transport and tourism itself too. An example of this phenomenon is illustrated by the rapid changes that autonomous vehicles are bringing to tourists’ preferences (e.g. moving hotels), as posited by Cohen and Hopkins (2019). Nevertheless, these apparent virtues inherent to the mobility element of the tourism system may be counterbalanced by some of the more detrimental environmental impacts of transport (e.g. CO₂ emissions), especially in the context of society’s rising levels of awareness related to environmental sustainability imperatives (OECD, 2014; United Nations, 2019).

Crucially, mobility is interpreted differently by local residents and tourists (Albalade and Bel, 2010), whilst one sector of the economy can impact the other. Global urban tourism

destinations such as Barcelona and Venice illustrate this well, as tourism-driven demand for urban public transport has resulted in negative impacts for local residents in the form of general overcrowding and even saturation in some transport routes. On the other hand, this demand can also stimulate investment in urban innovation projects and infrastructure such as the development of eco-friendly walking paths or digital solutions, which often benefit both stakeholder groups.

Another issue worthy of consideration here is that of wellness and authenticity (e.g. Gnoth, 2019), with specific emphasis on the co-creation of wellbeing often involving interaction between tourists and host communities. Yet, the co-creation of wellness should not be restricted solely to tourists, with further research in this field likely to result in new frameworks and models when combined with existing knowledge in urban transport policy design. An early example of this can be found in Manchester's use of community-led design for improving public spaces (Anderson *et al.*, 2017).

All in all, transport has an impact on several different "life satisfaction domains" (Brown, 2017), which affect tourists as much as local residents. This includes their ability to connect with other people, amenities, services and places. As a result of this, the focus of this chapter will be on the analysis of the multi-fold relationships between urban transport, tourism and wellness.

The role of transport in the development of tourism cities

This section starts with an overview of the historical links between transport and tourism. It then homes in on the evolution of the mobility system on tourism cities and its effects on urban

management, often influenced by added demand pressures brought on by overtourism and seasonal fluctuations inherent to the tourism sector.

1.1. Historical links between transport and tourism

Transport has historically played a central role in the design and management of cities (WHO, 2009). However, transport is not merely an enabling factor for urban dwellers in their daily activities, including travel to work, access to health care or leisure (Martens, 2016) or a supply chain element in the provision of food or energy. In tourism cities specifically, transport plays a key role in terms of providing accessibility for visitors to key attractions and activities, linking places, people and services (e.g. conference centres, events, etc.), thus acting as a major attractor for tourism (Page and Ge, 2009). Similarly, transport links help to build and foster community identity (see, for instance, Yildirimoglu and Kim (2018) for a review) and have been found to be a catalyst in forging trust in host-visitor relationships - see Dickinson *et al.* (2018) for an analysis of the use of lift-share apps for instance - as well as making city centres more attractive to businesses (Gibbons *et al.*, 2019).

Nonetheless, these virtues of the mobility system need to be balanced against their potential detrimental effects, especially in the context of sustainability (OECD, 2014) with regards to the local economy as well as the wider tourism sector. Inevitably, the apparent improvements brought about by enhanced urban mobility systems will be evaluated differently by local residents and tourists (Albalade and Bel, 2010). For instance, in Venice, the pressures from tourists on local services, including public transport, have led to a decline in the quality of life of local residents, which has manifested itself in saturated transport services, overcrowding and growing air pollution. Over the Easter holiday of 2019, for instance, over 125,000 people

visited Venice (Gowreesunkar and Seraphin, 2019). As a result, phenomena such as overtourism (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Capocchi *et al.*, 2019), tourism-phobia (Milano *et al.*, 2019) and a regular exodus of residents from Venice (Cassagrande, 2016) over the last 15 years led to the phenomenon aptly coined as the “Venice Syndrome” (Martin *et al.*, 2018).

In spite of this, some scholars have argued - perhaps rather optimistically at this early stage - that the use of new technologies could help to alleviate the effects of and even prevent overtourism (see, for instance, Pinke-Sziva *et al.*, 2019; or Skeli and Schmid, 2019), particularly in the context of smart tourism destinations (Gretzel and Scarpino-Johns, 2018; Coca-Stefaniak, 2019) – i.e. a selected group of global urban tourism destinations, to which Venice incidentally belongs (Gorrini and Bertini, 2018). Barcelona is arguably one of the best examples of this, even if, somewhat ironically, recent regional political conflict leading to social unrest and street riots may have done arguably even more damage to the city’s brand and driven tourists away (Burgen, 2017), certainly in the period 2017-2019. In its drive against the abuse of the sharing economy, the city of Barcelona developed a website for residents to report illegal tourist apartments in their buildings (Barcelona City Council, 2019). Parallel to this, other initiatives elsewhere include the use of technologies to disperse visitors beyond the city, create new tourism itineraries and attractions, adopt a more inclusive approach to local communities, and/or improve city infrastructure and facilities, as advocated by a recent United Nations World Tourism Organisation study on this front (UNWTO, 2019).

Tourism can also be a vector of urban innovation in as much as it can prompt the redesign or renewal of infrastructures or zones. Involving various stakeholders in this dynamic can drive this innovation, with symbiotic benefits for tourists and residents alike. For instance, Club Med has started using gamification in their service offer to incentivise guests to familiarise

themselves with the natural environment and visit sites in France in a more sustainable way (Buhalis *et al.*, 2019). This could have a positive influence on residents as well as tourists by encouraging both stakeholder groups to adopt more sustainable habits (see, for instance, Lamsfus *et al.*, 2015).

Furthermore, technological advancements and the increasing use of customisable apps, devices and systems for travellers - e.g. virtual reality apps, interactive and personalised maps enabling to “day dream” and “visit” a city from afar (Bogicevic *et al.*, 2019) - are some examples of what remains an array of tourism-led options that have a positive impact on wellness by allowing would-be-visitors to gain an immersive experience of destinations in the virtual domain before making purchase decisions related to when to go, where to stay and what to do once there.

From a social perspective, there is an emerging trend for “experience-centric management” (Zatori, 2016), which includes the co-creation of leisure activities by tour guides and participants. These opportunities for interaction between tourists and host communities and/or tourist guides are not strictly limited to the tourism sector and could provide valuable research insights for improving the quality of life of residents in tourism cities too. For instance, the European programme “MyNeighbourhood” (Oliveira, 2014) emanates from this idea with the creation of a participatory platform (MyN platform) that connects urban dwellers with one another as well as with local authorities to share knowledge, needs and suggestions related to health, environment and transport with the overall aim of creating more resilient communities with higher levels of wellness.

Yet, as we will see in the next section, transport is a service with a certain significance for tourism cities that stretches beyond its mere function of providing access to amenities and activities.

Transport as ‘utility’ vs. transport as tourism

Figure 1 below illustrates the (most conventional) “utility” facet of transport services. Yet, transport may also be a desirable (and even desired) option for its own sake. In tourism, this involves cruises, scenic train journeys, mountain trekking and cycle touring, among other options. In fact, transport as a *direct demand*, rather than merely a functional service is a nascent body of knowledge in transport studies with seminal works such as studies by Russell and Mokhtarian (2015), which were the first to explore ‘teleportation’ as a concept. This involved the creation of an experiment named the ‘teleportation test’, where participants were surveyed about their desire to hypothetically teleport themselves to work in the morning. The study showed, somewhat surprisingly, that the majority of commuters favoured travelling to work by bus, train, car, riding a bicycle or walking, instead of a hypothetical direct ‘teleportation’. Reasons given for this revolved around the benefits associated with the journey, such as time to reflect on one’s day, reading, listening to music, chatting with others, etc.

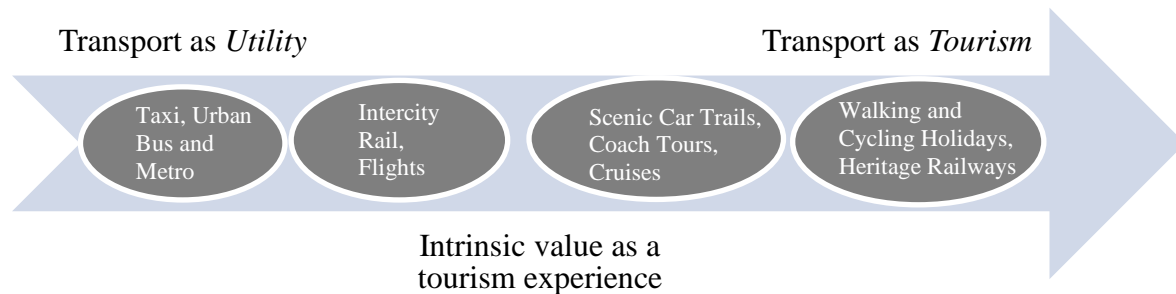


Figure 1. The transport experience spectrum – Transport as utility vs. transport as tourism (adapted from Page and Ge, 2009).

Findings from this seminal piece in transport studies, notably on the observed high “intrinsic value” of transport, apply similarly to tourism, particularly given that transport accounts for a large proportion of tourism activities (Peeters *et al.*, 2019). This is especially the case given that people tend to link geographically distant or “exotic” destinations to happiness (Ram *et al.*, 2013). In a similar vein, research by Cohen and Gössling (2018) found that tourists may in some cases express their needs for peer recognition and social representation through ‘distance, expenditure and culture’ while away on holiday, leading to a glamorisation of long-distance travel. Unfortunately, this yearning for travel to far-flung destinations is linked directly to the tourism industry’s contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, chiefly through long-haul flights, which surpasses the GHG emissions of all other activities at tourism destinations (e.g. visits, accommodation, etc.) as posited by Peeters *et al.* (2019). More specifically, GHG emissions due to long-haul flights have been linked directly to a combination of the so-called

“lure of distance”, annual frequency of visits to far-flung locations and number of tourists making these journeys. Of these, the latter two factors were found by Peeters *et al.* (2019) to be largely related to expendable income, flight prices, and the degree of psychological attraction of remote locations.

On the other hand, transport also plays a central role in alternative approaches to leisure travel, including “slow tourism” (Heitmann *et al.*, 2011; Fullagar *et al.*, 2012; Oh *et al.*, 2016) and its associated concept of *slow travel* (Tomic *et al.*, 2018), which includes push factors such as relaxation, self-reflection, escape and discovery through mindful walking, discovery bike rides and other channels. Using a destination in Serbia as a case study, Tomic *et al.* (2018) found that the push factors outlined above encourage tourists to engage with the slow tourism philosophy, by staying longer at their chosen locations and engaging more actively with local residents. These findings offer valuable insights for further research into the role of transport in tourism in view of developing less socially and environmentally intrusive options and policy interventions in urban settings, whilst achieving transport solutions that remain efficient, profitable, sustainable and attractive to local communities and tourists alike.

Smart transport and smart tourism cities

Regardless of whether transport is seen as a purely functional service or whether it is considered in its more experiential sphere, the architecture and constant evolution of the transport network is a key shaping factor affecting our cities. For instance, research by Anastasi *et al.* (2013) has shown that the provision of real-time information about traffic congestion, regulation, level of social interactions and the resulting planning for more efficient routes (e.g. shorter, less polluting routes) can have a positive impact on the design of intelligent transport systems (ITS),

which is a key contributor to the latest inception of smart cities (Höjer and Wangel, 2015; Ahvenniemi *et al.*, 2017; Yigitcanlar *et al.*, 2019). In addition to more advanced and sustainable transport systems, smart cities have brought about new technologies in the fields of healthcare in the form of monitoring platforms and digital devices providing access to online services to populations with special needs. Similarly, innovative solutions such as tailor-made tours for the elderly and physically impaired are also part of the smart city concept (Arenas *et al.*, 2019). However, smart cities have also been critiqued for neglecting other growing issues in urban living such as social exclusion and the unequal access to technology (Behrendt *et al.*, 2017) among other local conflicts. This is explored further below.

Balancing the interests of tourists vs. residents through sustainable transport solutions

An analysis of the strategic challenges and opportunities related to the design and implementation of modern transport systems in tourism cities would not be complete without discussing the often conflicting stakeholder priorities as well as wider sustainable development considerations; for instance, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2019). Although some scholars (see, for instance, Gossling and Hall, 2019) have posited that the sharing economy (e.g. shared mobility through the use of platforms such as Ofo, Car2Go or Drivy) could be the way to reconcile the needs of tourists and local residents in smart tourism destinations, this remains a contested argument.

Newquay in Cornwall (United Kingdom) offers a good example of how tourist-induced mobility and the arrival of rail infrastructure to the region towards the end of the nineteenth century changed progressively the structure of its visitor economy from a health-oriented offer

(e.g. sea, air and bathing), especially for families and the elderly, to a fashionable surfing destination later in the twentieth century (Newquay Coastal Community, 2016). However, in spite of growing footfall levels in Cornwall's coastal towns combined with higher levels of spending by visitors with more jobs created as a result, residents have sometimes reacted adversely due to some of the negative impacts tourism has also delivered, including noise and littering.

At the other end of the spectrum, Lille (France) has managed to achieve a better balance between investment on transport accessibility for tourists and the mobility needs of impaired residents. A local campaign named "Tourism and disability" was created for this purpose (Visitlilles, 2019). By providing real time information on the accessibility of sites and tourist facilities, each type of disability (motor, visual, hearing and mental impairment) was incorporated into the tourism offer from a transport perspective. In fact, metro and tramway platforms in Lille are now equipped with customer lifts, audio announcements, buses with low-access floors, while the city's tourism information office also offers visitors guided tours of the city using specially adapted vehicles for people with reduced mobility. The same tourism information office also offers accessibility maps to reach specific locations such as local theatres, museums, operas, cinemas, libraries, places of worship, etc.

On that line, it is noteworthy how the Emirates Air Line cable car in London (Urban Transport News, 2019) has delivered a practical alternative to reduce transport congestion locally and provide direct access across the river Thames in Greenwich (London). Although this initiative was developed originally for the London 2012 Olympic Games, it remains a good illustration of how a local transport solution initially developed for local residents can become a tourist attraction afterwards.

Local resident v. tourism-induced mobility – the environmental perspective

An initiative instigated by the Chronicle Digital Walking Trails app (EADT, 2017), which currently includes trails in Ipswich, Felixstowe, Eye Town and Eye Airfield in Suffolk (Chronicle Digital Storytelling, 2016; Heritageopendays, 2019), currently enables tourists to engage in self-guided tours using their smartphones. These tours explore local points of interest by unlocking local stories and historical anecdotes. This technology-driven solution effectively blends heritage themes with tourism and provides a good example of how a tourism-led initiative can benefit local residents by encouraging them to participate in more sustainable leisure activities by learning and engaging with their local heritage. Another interesting example can be found in Madrid (Spain), where a recently introduced local transport policy (currently under review) has limited the use of cars in parts the city centre. This initiative has been arguably beneficial for tourists by offering a cleaner environment with lower levels of air pollution (New Scientist, 2018). Similarly, a ban on city centre street parking in Oslo (Norway) to make room for pedestrians and cyclists has also been greeted with the approval of tourists and residents alike as have been car-free days in Paris (France), Brussels (Belgium) and London. Other more stringent initiatives are also being piloted elsewhere, including a ban on diesel vehicles in Mexico city's downtown, Athens (Greece) and Rome (Italy), which appear to be part of a wider trend to curb emissions of NO_x and particulates, which have been linked to respiratory diseases, asthma, cancer and early death, particularly among local residents within close proximity to busy city roads.

Local resident v. tourism-induced mobility – the wellbeing perspective

Combining wellness with authentic experiences is one of the goals of the “Love Your Commute” campaign currently piloted by Thames Clippers in London (UK). This initiative is now being combined with related wellbeing programmes and on-board events that include refreshments, outdoor back deck, climate-controlled cabins, reliable mobile signal throughout, freebies and other stress-busting activities. Although this marketing campaign is aimed primarily at regular local commuters choosing the city’s river Thames over other transport options, early signs suggest that it has been popular with tourists too. Specific activities trialled as part of this initiative by the Thames Clippers ferry operator - in partnership with Happy Heads - have included free mindfulness sessions. The first of these was piloted on 18th September 2018 on the 07:35 hrs westbound service from Woolwich to central London, where busy commuters could take part in interactive sessions aimed at build confidence, reducing anxiety and increasing focus at work and in everyday life. All this whilst inspiring passengers to make the most of their time on board this urban ferry service.

Linked to this, recent research carried out by the University of Greenwich (Thames Clippers, 2018) on the links between commuting and wellbeing revealed that commuters who travel by river ferry were generally happier than those using other alternatives such as the city’s Docklands Light Railway (DLR) or the train. This was particularly so when evaluating perceived safety, travelling and work-friendly environment, on-board services and travel-related wellbeing factors such as a sense of fulfilment, commuting time and travel cost. A follow-up study from Thames Clippers (2018) corroborated these findings highlighting the fact that British travellers tend to be slow to recover from a stressful commute, with various negative effects impacting their working day, leading to higher levels of irritability in the

workplace, difficulties with tasks that require concentration and decreased productivity. If such entertaining initiatives were specifically designed for commuters, they could also benefit tourists, as designing enriched on board activities has been found to distract people from their tendency to dwell on work-related worries (27 per cent of the surveyed travellers), personal finances (19 per cent) and health issues (11 per cent). Furthermore, the use of transport services with a wellness angle is also prevalent among global tourism cities with strong brands, such as Copenhagen, New York, Dubai or London (Dinnie, 2015). In Paris, a co-design approach has been adopted for urban activities and solutions for happier citizens, which can also inspire and attract tourists too. Increasingly, tourists in the French capital are turning to discovering this city by living like a “local” – as indicated by the innovative and entertaining insider initiatives of “La Ville Expérientielle” in Paris (Medium.com, 2017) echoing earlier related research by Paulauskaite *et al.* (2017). In Porto (Portugal), a similar approach has also been adopted (Nouvel Obs., 2015).

Conclusions

This chapter has explored the links between urban transport provision, tourism and wellness. It is concluded that transport services can be interpreted as an active contributor to every domain affecting the quality of life (Rojas, 2006) of local residents and tourists alike. This effect can be direct – for instance, when transport is used as a purposeful choice (e.g. leisure cruise or recreational ride). However, transport can also have an indirect effect on the wellness of its users as a convenient and efficient means of access to workplaces, shopping, health care, tourism or leisure attractions or simply by connecting people to each other.

This chapter has also posited that local economies and the tourism sector can benefit symbiotically from innovative transport solutions. In fact, planning decisions and policy interventions, notably those related to commuting would benefit from integrating tourism values, including elements of wellness, a focus on cultural identities, and a more experiential approach to the delivery of transport solutions.

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