

Learning Cities: a need for learning to develop mutually beneficial tourist-resident relations

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This article concerned with **Learning Cities** is from PIMA Bulletin 18, the whole of which can be found at this [link](#) ^[1].

Tourism is among the fastest-growing industries in all corners of the world. It brings substantial economic benefit but at the same time could become an issue of political and civic concern to many world-famous cities, heritage sites and even to whole nations. In the recent PASCAL seminar “[Making Learning Happen](#) ^[2],” held at UCL, London on the 4th of May 2018, I raised a discussion topic pertaining to the scope of mutual learning among tourists and residents of cities, which connected for some in the room. I thought I should write a bit more to get the discussion going beyond this PASCAL event.

Before indulging myself on the subject of learning and tourism, I would like to extend my gratitude to the organisers of PASCAL seminar. It was very well organised with some enlightening presentations and thought-provoking discussions. Over the past decade, the technological enabled “smart cities” concept is fashionable and very high on the agenda of many city administrators and researchers. It was an honour to be invited and very refreshing to be in a room with experts and researchers who are concerned with the human dimension of smart and learning cities.

The dynamic of tourists and the residents of cities has attracted some attention. Over past decades, we have witnessed rapid development in tourism and the rise in tourist arrivals across many cities, as well as in smaller town and rural settings. Without counting the domestic tourism sector, the United Nations World Tourist Organisation reported another year of record growth in international tourist arrivals in 2017, at 1,323 million, which is 84 million more than 2016. The year of 2017 is the eighth consecutive year of uninterrupted growth unseen since the 1960s. The growth is a worldwide phenomenon. It needs no further deliberation on the usual benefits tourism bring to a city, i.e. economy and employment (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Ko & Stewart, 2002; Chan et al., 2016). Tourism has also helped in developing many supporting industries and cultural activities such as in creative sector, tangible and intangible heritage preservation, and local gastronomy.

Even though an individual tourist usually does not stay long in a city, the coming and going of tourists is a transient phenomenon that could give an impression, to long-term residents, of an ever-present group of people, in their neighbourhood or city. This can raise concerns and may disrupt the life of local residents. The resentment of city residents toward tourists has gained more media attention recently, for instance, Coldwell (2017) reported on outcries of residents in Barcelona and Venice, and Barron (2017) wrote about the similar in George Town, a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage town in Malaysia.

For the past half a century, tourism scholars have investigated residents’ perception and attitudes towards tourism (Gursoy et al., 2010; Nunkoo & So, 2015), and advocated that residents of all

kinds ought to be the main consideration in tourism development planning (Sharpley, 2014). Nonetheless, city planners are also in a dilemma as the residents have the political vote, but the tourists have a financial vote, which is not easy to reconcile. Despite a substantial volume of research in this respect (Vargas-Sánchez & Porrás-Bueno, 2011), there is neither a clear consensus on the theoretical foundations nor the variables affecting residents' perceptions and attitudes (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).

Learning is another perspective which is not well discussed in the current body of literature. Even though tourist learning is relatively well-researched (Gössling, 2018), residents' learning is largely under-studied (Saxena, 2005). There are some articles investigating organisational levels of learning (Schianetz et al., 2007) and some isolated cases of learning by individuals and indigenous entrepreneurs (Chan et al., 2016) as well as communities (Chen et al., 2018), who aim to improve their knowledge, skills, ideas, networks and socio-economic status in general, a process of self- gentrification. Nonetheless, learning between tourists and residents, at an individual and community or city level, requires further conceptualisation and understanding. I believe that the knowledge and experience of our community in PASCAL could make substantial contributions in this respect.

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