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Cities

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Abstract

Today, over half of the world's population lives in cities and the United Nations has forecast this to increase to two thirds by 2050. Yet, despite the key role that global tourism cities play in urban tourism, relatively little research exists on the challenges they are increasingly facing. This entry explores the concept of the tourism city. It also draws from the latest research to provide insights into critical developments affecting tourism cities today, challenges ahead and future research in this rapidly growing field.

Keywords: urban tourism, cities, urban destinations.

Throughout history, cities led the exchange of goods, knowledge and ideas. Although some of the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities are located on the shores of the Mediterranean sea, with Damascus (Syria) credited as the oldest boasting archaeological remains over 11,000 years of age, their dominance on the world stage began in the times of Ancient Greece around 750 B.C. with the rise of the *polis* city-state. Athens and Sparta

became the epicentres of this development, though with radically different approaches to governance, economic development and culture, which appear to have been replicated elsewhere around the world since. Today, over half of the world's population lives in cities and the United Nations has forecast this proportion to rise to two-thirds by 2050 (United Nations, 2021). Although there exists a considerable body of knowledge and scholarly inquiry in urban studies and a myriad of aspects related to urban management, the role that cities play in promoting, developing and managing tourism remains largely under-researched (Maxim, 2019; Morrison and Coca-Stefaniak, 2021). Over the last six years, the *International Journal of Tourism Cities* has emerged as the only scholarly journal focusing specifically on research related to urban tourism and tourism cities. Similarly, the *Routledge Handbook of Tourism Cities* (2021) also provides a timely contribution to knowledge in this field, with particular emphasis on the challenges faced by tourism cities worldwide in the twenty first century and their leading role in delivering innovative solutions in tourism that range from crisis management to the emerging role of smart tourism cities in place marketing and branding processes (Buhalis, 2020; Coca-Stefaniak, 2019).

Although there is no consensus on a specific definition for urban or city tourism, largely speaking it could be argued that it refers to “tourism that occurs in a city or urban area” (Morrison and Coca-Stefaniak, 2021; p. 4). Similarly, and although a variety of quantitative and qualitative criteria exist to determine tourism cities such as Mastercard's *Global Destination Cities Index*, Euromonitor International's *Top 100 City Destinations*, among others, there is no agreed definition of what type of urban centre can be classed as a “tourism city”. However, it could be argued that a tourism city is a place where tourism is a high priority for policy makers and key stakeholders. In line with this, and since the creation of the World Tourism Cities Federation (WTCF) in 2012 - the world's first international tourism organisation focusing on cities - cities that belong to WTCF class themselves as tourism cities. All in all, tourism cities tend to possess qualities and characteristics, which have been summarised by Morrison and Coca-Stefaniak (2021) as follows:

- Having a formal or official priority on tourism (e.g., tourism policy statement).
- Having a dedicated and official organisation with responsibility for city destination and management.
- Having significant numbers of visitors throughout the year (business, holiday, visiting friends and relatives).

- Tourism supports significant levels of employment.
- Having significant levels of tourism capacity (e.g. hotel rooms, convention/conference facilities, transport).
- Having a concerted effort with regards to the marketing, branding and promotion to attract visitors.
- “Bucketability”, i.e., the popularity of a city as expressed by the media, online influencers and other key stakeholders.

All in all, the role of cities in tourism cannot be restricted to a mere ‘stage’ for the visitor economy. Cities often offer levels of global connectivity and transport infrastructure, which are seldom matched by smaller tourism resorts and rural areas. They are major transport hubs for air, rail and road travel (e.g., Beijing, Chicago, Dubai, London, Paris, Singapore, Tokyo) as well as harbours for cruise tourism (e.g., Cozumel, Mexico; Nassau, Bahamas; Miami, USA; Shanghai, China; Barcelona, Spain; Singapore). Consequently, it can be argued that cities in themselves represent entire tourism systems and should be interpreted in that context (Morrison *et al.*, 2018; Romero-García *et al.*, 2019) with four interconnecting parts - destination, marketing, demand and travel - and a wide range of stakeholders that include local residents, local policy making bodies (e.g., city councils), hospitality and retail businesses, destination management organisations (often more than one), heritage management organisations, museums, airport authorities, leisure/events venues and their management, and, of course, visitors, to mention but a few. In line with this paradigm, and building on earlier scholarly work in this field, it is argued that successful tourism cities in the future will develop their resilience and competitiveness by combining dynamically five key elements – innovation, policy making, destination management, sustainable development and a destination product (resources and attractors) that builds on the city’s own ‘personality’ or DNA (Figure 1).

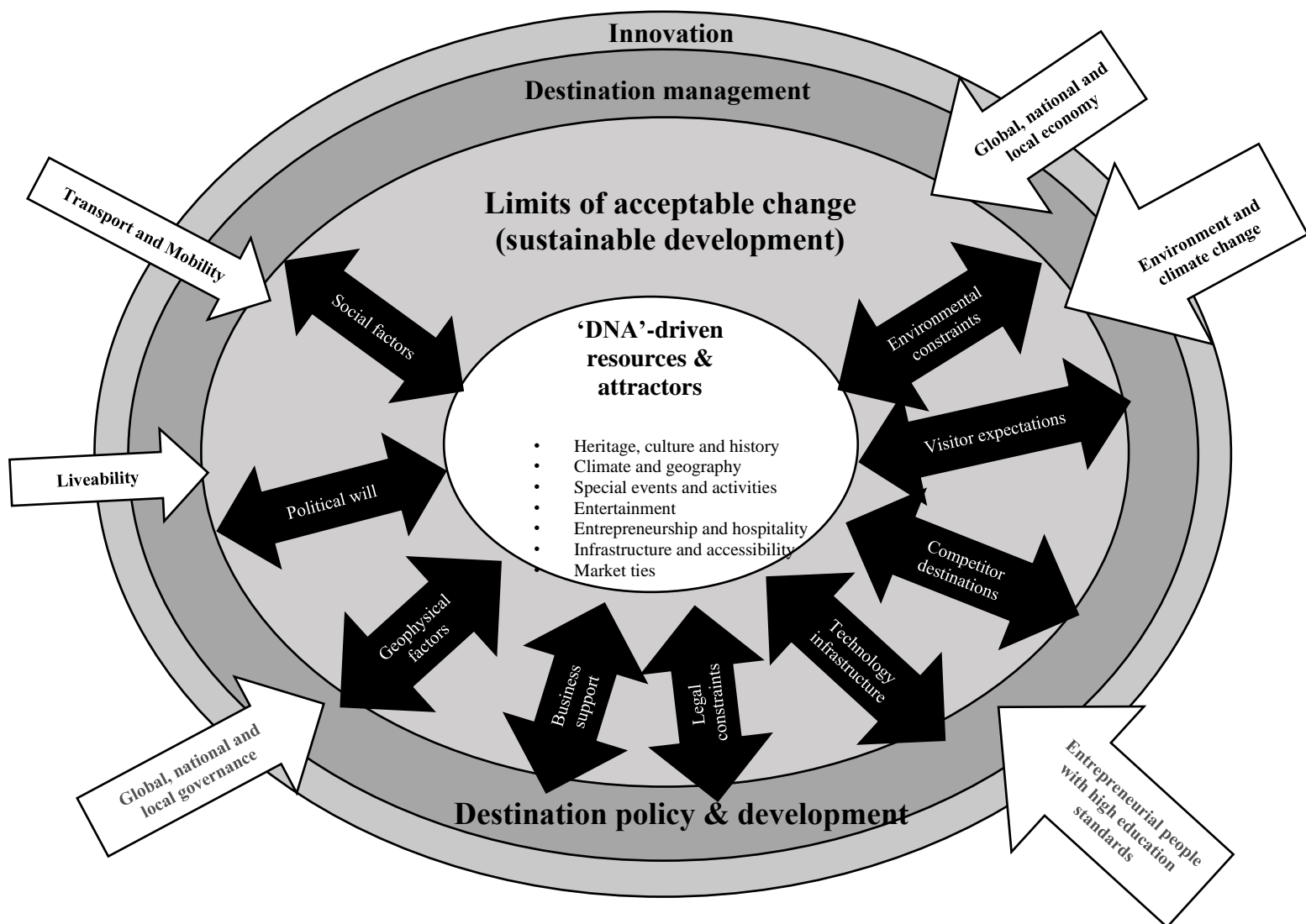


Figure 1. The resilient tourism city system – a multi-dimensional conceptual framework for managing sustainably tourism cities (adapted from Coca-Stefaniak, 2019).

Research in tourism cities and urban tourism, which has been summarised and discussed critically by Maxim (2020), has often adopted a number of frameworks, including stakeholder theory, post-modern urbanism, historical and management perspectives, urbanization processes, adventure tourism, crisis management (e.g., terrorism, pandemics), hospitality perspectives, sustainable development, heritage, artificial intelligence (e.g.,

augmented reality, autonomous transport systems) and, of course, two of the topics that have recently dominated research and practice in urban tourism – overtourism and the rise of the sharing economy. Building on this, the *International Journal of Tourism Cities* asked the members of its editorial board to outline the main issues, trends and challenges faced by tourism cities (Coca-Stefaniak and Morrison, 2016). In this special editorial, and among many other contributors, Deborah Edwards of the University of Technology Sydney highlighted the homogenisation of cities around the world, which are increasingly dominated by the same retail and hospitality brands. Professor Nelson Graburn of the University of California Berkley mentioned the threat of climate change to coastal cities but also offered “contents tourism” as an innovative solution for creating new visitor experiences that build on the historical DNA of tourism cities. Claire Liu of Auckland University of Technology pointed out the opportunities that social media offers for the branding of urban tourism destinations in the digital age, whilst addressing the need for a more sustainable development of tourism. The late Professor Philip Pearce of James Cook University discussed the challenges that cities will face by the growth of tourism from Asian countries, especially China, and the need to satisfy the needs and wants of increasingly more experienced travellers. Professor Can Seng Ooi (University of Tasmania) outlined social media and the sharing economy as key issues changing tourism cities today and likely to remain challenges as well as avenues for opportunities in the future. Professor Greg Richards of Tilburg University discussed the need to involve local residents in the development of tourism in urban environments, which are increasingly beginning to include smaller towns too. Amy So (University of Macau) highlighted the impacts of new generations (e.g. Millennials, Generation Z) on the services that tourism cities should provide, and especially new technology developments favoured by these generations of visitors. Professor Costas Spirou of Georgia & State University outlined the challenges of building new urban infrastructures to address the needs of the twenty first century as well as the likely rise of public private partnerships (PPPs) in delivering these and other services. Professor László Puczkó of Budapest University of Economics focused instead on the challenges presented by the growth of low-cost budget airlines and their focus on secondary or tertiary cities as well as evening and night-time opportunities and challenges associated with these markets. Martin Selby of Coventry University pointed out the need for tourism cities to develop more technology-enabled authentic and creative experiences, as well as nurturing the well-being of their visitors and residents alike. Professor Hong-Bumm Kim of Sejong University posited that tourism cities will need to review and upgrade innovatively their competitive positioning and

destination branding strategies in order to remain competitive against other emerging urban tourism destinations.

All in all, and as the recent Covid-19 global pandemic has brought to the forefront (Li *et al.*, 2021), cities are likely to remain at the forefront of innovation in tourism for decades to come. This innovation will often come through technology (e.g., smart tourism cities), though other channels such as social innovation are likely to grow in due course as well. Inevitably, the support and participation of local residents in these processes will remain a key priority, especially when dealing with major crises (e.g., terrorism, pandemics, freak weather events) that can have lasting damaging effects on the reputation of established tourism city brands. Similarly, as the impacts of global climate change continue to grow in extent and magnitude, and given the coastal location of many urban tourism destinations today, difficult decisions will need to be made with regards to their planning and the need for major new infrastructure developments. Consequently, social marketing related to sustainable development and climate change is likely to grow in priority for cities (see the urban transitions literature in this respect), which will need to develop creative and sustained ways of affecting the everyday behaviours of their visitors as well as their residents in order to reduce current levels of pollution, waste and energy consumption, which remain completely unsustainable.

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