

URBAN TOURISM BETWEEN CONTENT AND ASPIRATION FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract:

With excessive urbanization that the society knows today, the city became the place of origin and at the same time a destination for an increasingly number of tourists. Cities have a higher fitting territory, diversity and quality of tourism products coming to fill a reach touristic ground, especially anthropogenic. Urban tourism has seen a significant, but uneven increase, whit the big European cities detaching themselves through cultural richness and tourist valorization of urban space and may be role models for other cities. The article proposes the approach on the concept of urban tourism and how this form of tourism is in full process of affirmation, given that, in recent years many cities search to find a new identity for themselves, to gain international recognition through tourism.

Keywords: urban tourism, European tourist cities, tourism potential, touristic offer.

1. Introduction

In the increasing global tourism phenomenon, cities become more attractive but also face a double challenge. On one hand the cities must be able to meet the expectations and needs of a growing number of tourists, attracted by the richness and variety of cultural objectives, sports, business, and so on, and must continuously renew and improve such facilities, so that they maintain on the tourist market. On the other hand, they must ensure that tourism is developed and managed in such a manner that will benefit the resident population and do not contribute to the deterioration of the urban environment.

For a city to act as a key tourist attraction in first place it should have a heritage value to be accompanied by a complex infrastructure to meet the wishes of tourists. Thus, concerns that aim to develop specific infrastructure, services, preservation of historical centers, lies increasingly in attention of municipalities, which contributes on the

one hand to the affirmation of cities as travel destinations, but also to outline the need to ensure a balance between these concerns and the domestic needs to achieve a suitable living environment. The extent to which tourism is properly planned, developed and managed will help create a positive image that will summarize the characteristics of a particular space and will produce a considerable influence on the tourists.

Statistics show that urban environment draws visitors mainly with urban origin, generally from similar sized cities with those visited, wishing to compare the new visited places with their residence (Simon, Tătaru et al, 2009). High interest of tourists for a city is caused by information and publicity of tourism that allows visitors to know and integrate into its surroundings. Although difficult to estimate, international tourist flows destined for city are massive, only at European Union level being estimated at about 75-80 million tourists, according to more than 550 million overnight stays (Muntele and Iașu, 2006).

Urban tourism addresses visitors from everywhere and towns that aim to develop tourism function can be metropolitan centers or historic, small, cultural towns, although in the opinion of specialists (Cazes and Potier, 1996) urban tourism takes place in cities or urban agglomerations of at least 20,000 inhabitants.

The article proposes a brief conceptual analysis of urban tourism, focusing on the evolution of development stage research of this form of tourism, of the elements that make up the touristic offer, in order to identify the cities that are representative and may serve as true role models for other urban centers. In many cases, the lack of research on urban tourism can also generate a lack of perception that block development and expansion of this activity. Therefore, investigation of this aspect becomes a fundamental issue.

The methodology used includes bibliographic documentation for deepening the concept of urban tourism, and of the way it developed in urban centers internationally recognized for their performances. The information presented mainly come from international literature, especially the French and English.

2. Genesis and evolution of urban tourism research stage

Although the term is relatively new, in terms of historical evolution, urban tourism has its origins since ancient times, when we record numerous trips between the Greek cities on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (Pădurean, 2006). Later, during the Middle Ages, there are recorded long journeys made by young aristocrats, in which they visited several European cities. Major interest was triggered almost exclusively by cultural objectives that were to be found mainly in cities.

Until the development of mass tourism in the second half of the nineteenth century, cities distinguished

themselves as special travel destinations. Difficult economic conditions after 1970 helped develop tourist function within cities. The economic decline of the industrial cities of northern England emphasized the role of tourism as a catalyst for increasing urban economy.

While other forms of tourism have increased spectacularly in the 60s - 70s of the last century, during which tourism was associated with residents moving from urban areas to rural areas and tourist resorts, urban tourism emerges during the 80s, when it became clear that many cities have turned into major tourist destinations.

The study of tourism in cities did not result in an abundant literary production even if the subject is undeniably fashionable. Unlike other destinations where tourism is easier to see, within the urban system, identification of tourism functions is more complicated. Because a city brings together several functions (commercial, administrative, industrial, etc.), in this context tourism analysis is more complex compared to other destinations that have an economic structure based on tourism (Pearce, 1993). Thus, the more studies are made on urban tourism, it is found how complex this phenomenon really is and the implications it has in society, culture, economy and environment. Completion of a study complicates researchers work because they have to study areas outside their training.

Internationally, there are many published studies and prestigious magazines which publish a significant number of articles in this domain. The French and British School are leading in terms of debates on this issue by producing a large number of studies published in journals such as *Revue-Espaces*, *Cahier Espaces*, *Science Direct*. Anglophone vision on urban tourism is dominated by the economic impact of this activity (Jan van der Borg et al 1991; Law, 2002) while the French

side remains faithful on tourist planning problems in urban areas, its contribution to urban regeneration (Cazes and Potier, 1996). Journal *Cahier Espaces* dedicates the first number from 1994 to urban tourism, thus answering to a gap in French literature on the subject.

At national level urban tourism theme is far from being met, although, quite shy in recent years started to find its place in specialized literature from Romania. Initially urban tourism was given a small space within some papers about geography of tourism (Muntele and Iașu, 2006), tourism economy (Minciu, 2005) or tourist planning (Erdeli and Gheorghilaș, 2006). Among the authors who have paid special attention to urban tourism bringing important contributions in this field stands out: Gabriela Stănculescu (2009), Aurel Gheorghilaș (2004) and Gabriela Ilieș (2008).

3. What is urban tourism?

What is urban tourism? Although at first glance may seem like a simple question, defining urban tourism is something extremely complex. In the same way we might ask: is there really urban tourism or this is just an accumulation of other forms of tourism that coincide in a given context? Is urban tourism a new form of tourism? These questions, among others, have been cataloged by Cazes (1996) as disturbing.

Urban tourism is an ambiguous concept, blending various activities vaguely formulated. Defining urban tourism is essential to any attempt to deepen the mechanisms governing this activity. Adding the adjective urban to the notion of tourism we localized a activity in space but this does not define the context and limit the activity itself.

G. Ashwoth (1989), one of the first researchers in the field of urban tourism, said that this is not only the amount of tourist activities in cities, but is a

particular case of tourism that is part of the specific urban life.

According to the National Conference on Urban Tourism (Rennes, 1988), urban tourism is a set of resources or activities located in the city and made available to visitors outside having the purpose of entertainment, business or other reasons.

If at first urban tourism was considered a result of population mobility, for which the city was only a short break, now because of the transformations and behavioral changes that took part, the city became a cultural center, a place of relaxation, where people are shopping, meet with friends and spend their free time. Therefore we can say that urban tourism is not just a form of tourism, but also an integral, traditional and characteristic part of urban life (Howie, 2003).

Other authors, when defining urban tourism, are considering a clear demarcation of characteristic urban tourism activities. Thus Minciu Rodica (2005) characterizes urban tourism from the perspective of an extremely wide coverage - leisure time (vacations) in cities, visiting them and to conduct a variety of activities, such as visiting relatives, meetings with friends, watching shows, exhibitions, shopping etc.

Law (1996) insists on the complexity of urban tourism which can't be reduced to a definition because the cities are too different in terms of size and existing features to meet a similar pattern of interpretation. Ashworth (2011) believes that urban tourism is defined in a vague and inaccurate manner without a systematic structure for understanding the phenomenon. Potier (1996) considers that the difficulties in identifying urban tourism is due to disparity practices and motivations, tourist flows complexity and insufficient statistical data. Urban tourism is the result of changes in the behavior of people who managed to transform cities into cultural centers,

places of relaxation, where you can go shopping or to participate in various events.

Combining the definitions presented, we can conclude that urban tourism represents all attractive tourist resources of a city aimed for attracting visitors and residents, in which various types of tourism are interfering and contributes to the development and regeneration of urban areas.

4. Elements and components of urban tourism

In a city one can distinguish a series of primary and secondary elements which plays an important role in increasing tourism attractiveness, increasing the curiosity of tourists to visit cities.

Primary elements belong mainly to the public domain and consist from a mixture of attraction considered unique, the underlying motivation of tourists travel in urban areas. In this regard can be mentioned cultural and artistic facilities, sports facilities, cultural events intended for entertainment and leisure.

Secondary elements include a range of urban facilities that support and complement the tourist experience (for example: hotels, restaurants, transport facilities, and so on). This elements are absolutely necessary and contribute to the smooth running of the entire tourism product.

The relationship between tourism and urban areas has been analyzed by many authors who distinguish several elements of city resources. The best known classification expressing the

relationship between tourism and urban space belongs to Christopher Law (Figure 1). He makes a distinction between primary, secondary and additional elements of urban tourism. Primary elements such as cultural and historical facilities, places of amusement, physical, social and cultural characteristics, are the main reasons for visiting tourists. Secondary elements are considering comfort related tourism accommodation services, restaurants, shops, and so on. The last group is represented by additional elements that are designed to facilitate access to primary and secondary elements through accessibility, arranging parking places, existence of tourist information offices, leaflets, maps, etc.

A wide variety of key elements situated on a relatively small area, plus a wide range of accommodation, food, transport and tourist information support the development of tourism experience in the urban space. These components give tourism offer a complex and heterogeneous character.

Depending on the variety of existing tourism resources in urban centers and tourist options, may be distinguished more attractive areas: the cultural area, business area, shopping area, entertainment area, and so on. Differentiation of many attractive areas provides the guarantee of a city to attract many tourists who have various goals and motivations. Tourists are seeking diversity in a wide range of opportunities likely to be merged during the stay of a few days.

PRIMARY ELEMENTS	
Facilities for activities	Factors of leisure and relaxation
<p>Cultural facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theatres - Concert halls - Museums and art galleries - Exhibitions - Cinemas 	<p>Physical characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Historic streets - Structures of interest - Religious buildings - Parks and green areas - Rivers, channels - Ports
<p>Sports facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stadiums - Multipurpose halls 	
<p>Leisure facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Casinos - Night clubs - Organized parties 	<p>Socio-cultural characteristics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language - Customs and traditions - Security
SECONDARY ELEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hotels and restaurants - Commercial facilities - Markets 	
ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accessibility and parking facilities - Presence of facilities created for tourism purposes - Information offices, tourist guides, etc. 	

Figure 1. Elements of urban tourism

Adapted from Law, 2002, 43 p

Development of competitive urban tourism product should consider the continuous improvement of its elements that must work together in an efficient manner. During the last period the increasing competitiveness between cities to earn a place on the tourist market has led to the differentiation of original tourism products with impact among both tourists and residents.

5. European experience in urban tourism

Cultural importance and experience in tourist capitalization of urban environment have made from major European cities examples worthy to appreciate and follow. Under these conditions urban tourism managed to establish itself as a sector with an

important role in supporting economy, society and culture, constituting itself as one of the most dynamic forms of tourism.

In the global tourist flows, the European continent stands out through 10 cities from Top tourist destinations in the world. Cities of London and Paris represent one of the most spectacular illustrations of urban tourism, being destinations with the highest tourism density worldwide.

London is a thriving business center, European Capital of theatre, a fantastic shopping center, an architectural spectacle, an open history book and home to millions of people who love cultural richness (Țigu, G., 2005, pag.151).

In case of Paris, trumps which confer the status of the second most visited urban center in the world are related to a rich cultural heritage which overlaps an exceptional tourist infrastructure, wide and impressive in size. Both cities offer a typical polynuclear and multipolar organization bringing together the suburban tourist poles (Versailles, Fontainebleau, Buckingham, Soho) or outermost (Beauvais, Reims, Oxford, Cambridge). For a city to act as a key tourist attraction must have primarily a valuable cultural potential to be accompanied by a complex infrastructure to meet the wishes of tourists. If the first component can be regarded as fixed, the second has a dynamic character in terms of an evolution or involution depending on applied tourism policies and strategies.

For this purpose we used the establishment of a logical diagram to highlight the positions that most important tourist cities in Europe hold according to the main components that can ensure the success of an urban destination: high cultural potential and / or the presence of complementary offerings which ensures positioning in innovation, modernity and creativity (Figure 2). To get a more complete imagine we used dates from MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index 2011 to see tourist flows corresponding to these urban centers.

Many of Europe's major urban centers are distinguished by important architectural or cultural-artistic values, drawing millions of tourists annually. In this aspect cities like Paris, Rome, Istanbul distinguish themselves managing to attract millions of tourists every year thanks to exceptional heritage which overlaps a complex tourism infrastructure. Economic cities, to boost their tourist attraction, conducted actions of extensive rehabilitation and valuing their cultural heritage. Some historic buildings,

religious or modern buildings led to strengthening the image of the city, managing to impose themselves as symbol buildings, true emblems of big cities. It is enough to see a picture of the Eiffel Tower and the mind almost immediately makes us think of Paris. As a result of overloading major cities recognized for outstanding heritage, it had been supported the idea of sustaining small cultural towns to reduce the tourist flow from big cities.

Cities such as London, Madrid, Barcelona are known for their cultural heritage but the picture is more labeled by major investments and modernity. These are important business centers that have developed structures of with high comfort, conference centers and so on. Centers for conventions and business meetings are often seen as the main motivations of urban tourism. Increasing tourist flows in this sector is due to the fact that these events can be organized and supported throughout the year, with no seasonality.

An important category is represented by smaller tourist towns which are recognized for their valuable historical heritage: Florence, Venice. The tourism phenomenon is related whit visiting touristic objectives which are near the center of the city where accommodation units are located, thus tourism area being clearly delimited. In many cases this space is also the main shopping area of the city, thus enhancing tourism attractiveness. These cities are otherwise known as the museum-cities, as their tourism offer is based mainly on existing heritage without developing other complementary offerings.

Almost all European cities possess a heritage that could be exploited in terms of tourism. For example, European capitals such as Bucharest, Sofia are experiencing modest tourist attendance compared to their true potential and complementary offerings.

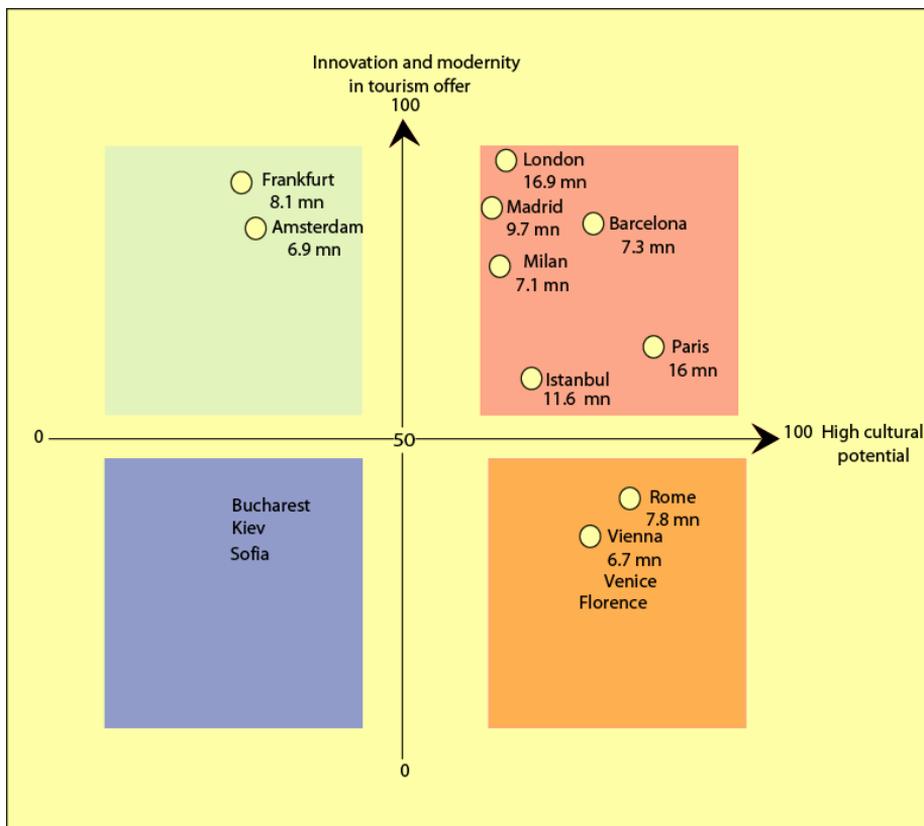


Figure 2. Categories of cities depending on cultural potential and innovation in tourism offer

Source: Personal approach

Although statistically speaking for urban environment we observe significant increases in key tourism indicators, basically we can say that the existing urban tourism is still at an early stage if we refer to the most visited cities in Europe.

Other major cities such as Frankfurt, Berlin, Amsterdam, although they are not world famous attractions, developed travel packages centered on animation, entertainment, nightlife, etc. The quality and diversity of these offerings determines the size, strength and diversity of tourist trips.

Variety of cultural resources, groups of buildings, historical load, animation and modern elements of attractiveness represents real challenges for urban tourists. Thus, depending on the nature of the journey

reasons varies, tourists are attracted to cities because there is a large concentration of facilities and attractions, in many cases diversity is directly proportional to city size, the effectiveness of tourism policies and strategies.

Urban areas are heterogeneous, different in size, functions, image, cultural heritage, but having the common feature of the possibility of developing tourist function. Over time appeared and developed specialized tourist areas, where tourism is the main economic activity, but also versatile tourist areas, where tourism activities are carried out at the same time with other activities between which there is complementary.

Conclusions

In recent years many European cities seek to find themselves a new identity, to assert through originality, to gain national and international recognition in the field of tourism. Any urban destination that wants to develop tourism as the main branch of the economy, should carefully evaluate their development potential, and after this assessment should establish how best to capitalize it. Given the many advantages that tourism development can bring to a city, competition to attract tourists has become increasingly fierce.

Therefore, if the city will offer a greater variety of attractions and complementary capabilities, it will be able to become more competitive in this dynamic market.

Following the dynamism that urban tourism registered, major European cities, benefiting from an exceptional cultural potential and a complex

complementary offer, turned into major tourism destinations representing real models for other cities that are in full development.

Future urban tourism will benefit from a favorable context due to advances in the transport sector (which will lead to lower prices and lower schedules distances), improving living standards and integration of new destinations on the international circuit. European Union enlargement and the functioning of the euro area will be a space of security and freedom of movement with positive impact on the tourism market as a whole. The most dynamic will be short term flows aimed for visiting one or more urban centers. For urban tourism development, it is necessary to identify weak points and draw some strategic directions in order to compete effectively with traditional European market.

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