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New cultures of urban tourism

The end of tourism?

In 2017, the Copenhagen Tourism Bureau declared the “End of Tourism!”, adding “as we know it[1]”. If, after more than two centuries of steady development, the “end of Tourism as we know it” is finally upon us, the main stage where its demise is being acted out is in our cities. Our cities were the backdrop to the first organized mass anti-tourism demonstrations (Colomb and Novy, 2017). They have been the primary victims of “overtourism”, a subject extensively discussed in the tourism literature in recent years (Popp, 2012; Seraphin *et al.*, 2018). City tourism has also been used as a lever for opening the debate on more global urban problems, such as insufficient affordable housing, galloping gentrification in central neighbourhoods (Gravari-Barbas and Guinand, 2017) and changes in the urban fabric of local communities brought about by corporate development (Sdino and Magoni, 2018; Sonntag *et al.*, 2018).

However, research has recently begun to look at cities not just as the main setting for the “end of tourism” but also as laboratories for “new tourism cultures” associated with novel practices and places (Delaplace and Gravari-Barbas, 2016). These new cultures have emerged as a result of the visitor’s desire to go beyond the urban tourist enclave zones to experience the city “as a local”, to interact more with local communities, to experience off-the-beaten-track neighbourhoods, to be thrilled by “urban exploration” activities and to be amazed by ordinary, everyday life (Maitland, 2013; Frisch *et al.*, 2019; Condevaux *et al.*, 2019).

While the classic models of mass tourism still prevail in most tourism cities, bringing increasing numbers of tourists into urban hotspots, the tourism literature has observed a paradigmatic change in terms both of tourism practices and provision and of local populations’ attitudes towards tourism (Quinn, 2007).

This collection of five papers in the Special Issue (SI) on “new urban tourism cultures” sheds light on the changing patterns in urban tourism, focusing in particular on the multiple, complex transformations of tourism practices, stakeholders and places in our contemporary cities.

Most of the papers build on the existing literature examining the blurring of the boundaries between tourism and everyday life (Urry, 1995), which challenges our traditional understanding of tourism. They examine, as a starting point, the former binary distinctions between home and away (Hui, 2008), the ordinary and the extraordinary and the “hosts” and the “guests” (Sherlock, 2001; Novy, 2018). Building on the existing research on “post-tourism” (Feifer, 1985; Urry, 1995), “hyper tourism” (Viard, 2000, 2006), “trans-tourism” (Ateljevic, 2009; Bourdeau, 2018) and “new tourism” (Poon, 1989, 1994), tourism is highlighted as a multifaceted and pervasive phenomenon that lost its specificity over the last decades of the twentieth century. Based on original case studies from a wide range of cities (Athens, Belgrade, Detroit, London, Los Angeles, Marseille and Paris), the authors offer a spherical analysis of the new urban tourism cultures and contribute to extending discussions both on the transformations in tourism in contemporary cities and on the changing patterns of cities due to contemporary forms of tourism.

From tourism’s “velvet revolution” to urban tourism disruptions

A “velvet revolution” in tourism began to emerge at the end of the twentieth century. This was due, on the one hand, to the desires and expectations of “mature” tourists and, on the other, to the responsiveness of local tourism systems. These “mature” tourists, whose tourism

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This paper forms part of a special section “New cultures of urban tourism”.

consumption patterns could be explained by their habitus (Ahmad, 2014), had accumulated significant tourism capital through their numerous travels and their capacity to adapt and to feel “at home” in the different contexts they visited (Maitland, 2010). Local tourism systems adapted to the demand from this new tourist group. This led to the development of a plethora of new tourism offers over the last few decades, inviting visitors to experience the city in much more segmented, differentiated and plural ways than just the usual tour of the main tourist sights (Maitland and Newman, 2004; Gravari-Barbas and Delaplace, 2015). The conjunction of the evolutions in both supply and demand (Ionnides and Debbage, 1998) contributed to opening up, expanding and diversifying the urban tourist ecumene. While it may have been the tourists who pioneered the expansion of the urban tourism frontiers, the tourism sector demonstrated an unprecedented responsiveness and adapted accordingly, rapidly transforming tourists’ romantic expectations of local life and authentic neighbourhoods into exclusive tourism products.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, tourism visits to places formerly considered inhospitable, dirty or dangerous (such as favelas and slums, metropolitan suburbs, former industrial sites, urban ruins and urban undergrounds) or simply “ordinary” and everyday became commonplace (Maitland, 2010). The tourist gaze (Urry, 1990) has figured in the aestheticization (Featherstone, 1991/1997) or heritagization of ordinary places (Condevaux *et al.*, 2019). It has even contributed to overcoming the associated “geographical stigma” (Goffman, 1963) of sites with a difficult or traumatic heritage and to transforming them into destinations offering fun, excitement, aesthetic pleasure or affective attachment.

The new urban tourism cultures that have emerged from this evolution can be summarized in the following triptych: new “post-tourists” attitudes (stakeholders, ironic and conscious) (Bourdeau, 2018), “new urban tourism territories” (Gravari-Barbas and Delaplace, 2015, p. 2, translated from French) and new stakeholders (associations and civil society) (Loisy, 2019). While the “velvet revolution” in tourism has brought new tourism cultures, it also paved the way for the tourism disruptions experienced, mainly in the 2010s, in tourist cities. “Disruption” (defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as a “disturbance or problems which interrupt an event, activity or process”) has become a keyword in the interpretations of urban tourism transformations in recent years.

This disruption has been due to a number of different innovations, including the development of e-tourism and the spread of internet use in the travel sector (Buhalis and O’Connor, 2005; Cousin *et al.*, 2017) and the development of new types of intermediaries such as collaborative platforms (Dredge and Gyimóthy, 2015; O’Regan and Choe, 2017). These innovations have often resulted in conflict. In a number of tourism cities, the onslaught of new actors (such as tourism rental platforms) and the related disintermediation between tourists and the product they wish to consume (which, to a large extent, they are increasingly producing themselves) has exacerbated tourism conflicts and tensions (Gurran and Phibbs, 2017). The blurring of the boundaries between touristic and everyday places has exposed particularly vulnerable places and neighbourhoods to tourism (Mermet, 2015). Not all contemporary tourist cities can draw on the experience of established tourism metropolises such as Paris or London, which manage to successfully integrate tourism (and tourism disruptions) into local governance tools and regulations. Hence, in cities new to tourism, “post-tourist” or “hyper-tourist” practices have had unforeseen consequences.

New urban tourism practices

“New urban tourism cultures” are often fed by tourists’ aspirations for more distinctive practices. New social media and the aestheticization of self (Gretzel *et al.*, 2011; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014; Lyu, 2016) have contributed to the “heroic” depiction of the tourist-explorer who goes beyond the mass tourism sites. The “trophy” from their visits to these highly original and inaccessible places is a picture, instantly disseminated through the likes of Instagram or Facebook. A double-value relationship is thus produced. The off-the-beaten-track visit (Gravari-Barbas and Delaplace, 2015) endorses the visitor’s “connoisseur” status, while the visitor contributes to elevating the visited place from its ordinary or marginal status to inclusion in the list of exclusive places that should be seen by their peers.

Pieroni and Naef coin the term “neo-slumming” in their examination of the touristification of gentrified sites and neighbourhoods. “Slumming” here refers to the social practice of visiting low-income, immigrant, deprived neighbourhoods, generally referred to as “slums”.

New urban tourism stakeholders

It would be unfair, however, to interpret the “new urban tourism cultures” as being solely down to voyeurism or to a game of distinction. There can also be altruistic or ethical values at play. Tourists may seek to experience a meaningful visit that has a positive effect on local urban societies, and local stakeholders may be encouraged to use these visits to convey socially or politically engaged messages. Visits proposed by local associations may also have an educational aim, as shown by Vergopoulos (2019) for tours led by local associations in Athens. These tours, which were introduced during the economic crisis that shook Greece to its core, emerged from an alternative conception of tourism. Practices such as urban walking, offered as a collective and shared urban experience (Kanellopoulou, 2018), represent a shift from passive contemplation to social exchange and to tourism as an act of citizenship.

The “new urban tourism cultures” are often linked to non-mainstream or non-traditional stakeholders, such as local citizen associations, NGOs, student or neighbourhood organizations and immigrant groups. While these actors may not necessarily have a specific urban tourist agenda and may be using tourism for other means, usually to convey a political or social message, they do produce “niche” tourism products that offer an alternative and renewed tourism provision in cities. Hence, to a certain extent, change has come from “outsiders” (Nici and Igunan, 2019).

The dual geographies of the new urban tourism cultures

The game of distinction, which in this case is based on the traveller–tourist opposition (Urbain, 2002), tends to create a dual tourism geography. On the one hand, there are the usual tourist sightseeing spots that are visited by large numbers of tourists and, on the other, the niche sites and neighbourhoods visited by a “select” club of urban travellers. Although a new, alternative urban tourism map is being drawn up in most tourism cities, it has not superseded the more dominant, mainstream urban tourism geography. The emergence of alternative tourism hotspots has not quantitatively challenged visitor numbers to the usual sites. The number of “travellers” engaging with the social housing in Marseille (Hascoët, 2019), urban walks in Athens (Kanellopoulou, 2018; Vergopoulos, 2019) and neo-slumming in Brixton (Pieroni and Naef, 2019) cannot compete with the number of “tourists” visiting the Vieux Port (Marseille), Plaka (Athens) or the Tower of London, respectively. As shown by Lucas (2019) for Los Angeles, central urban tourism districts, which are often limited to just a few blocks, still see the higher concentration of visitors as they capitalize on the delimitations set by tourism stakeholders, guides and practices.

However, while off-the-beaten-track tourism may be limited in quantitative terms, it both generates and is attracted by urban transformations. Pieroni and Naef (2019) show that the material and social-class transformation of an urban area tends to become itself the focus of tourism. However, in turn, tourism phenomena in touristically emerging areas bring social transformations, including in particular residential and commercial gentrification. Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot (2019) confirm for the case of Saint-Ouen flea market the dual relationship between gentrification and urban tourism. Commercial gentrification is a tourism resource, and tourism generates commercial gentrification.

SI authors' contributions

The five papers in the SI on “New cultures of urban tourism” analyse the multiple changes underway in tourism in contemporary European and US cities and examine the main questions that these new tourism cultures raise. Based on extensive fieldwork in different European and non-European cities, the contributions identify the emergence of new actors in tourism – including

some from civil society – as well as the interactions between visitors and inhabitants. From this perspective, Marine Loisy's (2019) contribution examines Paris's experience, highlighting issues related to cohabitation and hospitality in the French capital and the strategies and practices developed by residents, who in some cases adopt the role of tourists themselves. While the top-down policies of urban regeneration through tourism can make the citizens feel as if they are becoming a spectacle in an "urban safari", bottom-up projects, although they produce more minor results and take longer, establish deep roots, develop new capabilities and ensure the benefits are more evenly distributed.

Any study of the interaction between visitors, tourism actors and inhabitants will be complemented by an analysis of how tourism deals with public space, especially in cities and places not necessarily originally designed for tourism and touristic activities. Within the context of the post-socialist transformations of Belgrade, Milos Nicic and Sanja Iguman (2019) examine the emergence of the "tourism of the ordinary" and the slow transformation of the "ordinary" places of New Belgrade by the tourism gaze and tourism practices. For these authors, "ordinary" is subjective and its interpretation depends on the attitudes of the people interacting with the space. The new tourism cultures also concern spaces traditionally excluded from tourism phenomena and often associated with "geographical stigma". Urban exploration practices (urbex) expand the frontiers of tourism. Based on case studies of urbex in Berlin and Detroit, Aude Le Gallou (2018) shows that the touristic appropriation of underground and alternative places can become a commodified tourism activity.

While new tourism cultures and practices can lead to the commodification of places and activities previously excluded from the tourism market system, their dynamic can also contribute to improving the quality of life in these neighbourhoods and cities. Pieroni and Naef (2019) study various cities from a multisite perspective to identify the relationship between neo-slumming, gentrification and new urban tourism resources.

Finally, the contributions of Yannick Hascoët (2019) seeks to define new theoretical frameworks for examining these transformations. Through an analysis of contemporary tourism practices in Marseille's reputedly inhospitable and "difficult" northern district, Yannick Hascoët expands our conception of post-tourism and further develops the framework proposed by Bourdeau (2018).

Overall, a cross-analysis of the five papers in the SI "New cultures of urban tourism" shows that we have reached a threshold in terms of our scientific understanding of urban tourism in contemporary western metropolises. While the "classic" patterns of urban tourism continue to characterize the bulk of tourists heading for the "urban sights", these new urban practices and emerging civil society actors and this enthusiasm for "ordinary" spaces all dramatically challenge the contemporary urban tourism system and call for new theoretical frameworks. We hope that the SI "New cultures of urban tourism" will significantly contribute to an exploration of these new tourism offers in contemporary cities.

Note

1. As presented on their website (2019): <http://localhood.wonderfulcopenhagen.dk/>

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