

GOAL 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

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ABSTRACT: *About half of the world’s population lives in urban agglomerations. Tourism may well have positive effects in urban areas and contribute to the achievement of SDG 11. For example, revenues from tourism and the motivation to attract more tourists can trigger the willingness of local authorities to invest in urban infrastructure. On the other hand, there are various risks. As cities become attractive destinations, they run the risk of suffering from “overtourism” in urban centres which aggravates many of the challenges they are facing.*

INTRODUCTION

“We should recognize that a destination is not designed to make tourists comfortable. First and foremost, it is there for its own people”. (Jafari, 2012)

About half of the world’s population lives in urban agglomerations. Cities thus play a major role in terms of both problems and solutions for the future of our planet. SDG 11 focuses on key urban challenges, almost all of which are directly or indirectly linked to the tourism sector, from housing and basic services (11.1), sustainable transport (11.2) and participatory planning (11.3) to cultural and natural heritage (11.4), resilience against disasters (11.5), environmental impacts (11.6) and access to public space (11.7).

Cities have been fuelling tourism growth in different ways. Urban living conditions may drive inhabitants to seek recreation in natural surroundings. At the same time, many cities are attractive tourism destinations of their own, thanks to a high concentration of architectural and cultural sights, historical sites and museums, cultural, sporting events, entertainment and shopping facilities, and events like festivals, concerts, sports events,

trade fairs, etc. Large populations also attract large numbers of tourists who visit friends and relatives. In addition, cities serve as major transport hubs and gateways to other destinations. City tourism currently represents 20 percent of international tourism and has been recording significant growth (+58 percent between 2010 and 2014) (Bellini and Pasquinelli, 2017).

The rural-urban nexus

Growth in urban tourism, mostly unplanned, also has effects on rural areas. Cities consume the vast majority of natural resources and are responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions. City tourism adds to the ecological footprint of cities. The influx of tourists increases the demand for basic services, land and resources. Tourism may trigger or accelerate urbanisation, as in Siem Riep near Angkor Wat in Cambodia, or in Arusha in Tanzania.

In rural areas, however, tourism may also help to slow down urbanisation processes by providing jobs and income opportunities, thus reducing people's need to migrate and seek employment in the cities.

Opportunities

Tourism may well have positive effects in urban areas and contribute to the achievement of SDG 11. Revenues from tourism and the motivation to attract more tourists can trigger the willingness of local authorities to invest in urban infrastructure, e.g. in sustainable transport and safe and accessible public spaces, benefitting both tourists and residents. It may play a role in promoting green urban planning, urban conservation and the protection of local heritage. Investments in entertainment, recreation and leisure facilities may become viable once they cater to a combination of local and tourist demand.

Tourism may contribute to building more resilient communities if it helps to activate social and cultural capital, e.g. by empowering women (>> Goal 5) or by promoting local crafts, if it helps protect local environments and commons and if it provides economic gains for local communities, e.g. by supporting local entrepreneurship. Cities are locations of creativity, innovation and change which can benefit from the dynamics that tourism may bring through meaningful host-guest interaction, including opportunities to foster tolerance of cultural diversity.

UNESCO Creative Cities Network

While creative tourism is pretty much developed in the North, there are not as many examples from developing countries. Nevertheless, more and more cities from the Global South join the UNESCO Network of Creative Cities. This network encourages cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development. The network is currently formed by 116 members from 54 countries, covering seven creative fields: crafts and folk art, design, film, gastronomy, literature, music and media arts.

Katarzyna Janusz, Further information: <http://en.unesco.org/creative-cities/home>

The Flipside of the Urban Tourism Coin

However, there is a flipside to the urban tourism coin. The proliferation of low-frills flight connections has been a major driver of city tourism. At the same time, aircraft are a major source of carbon emissions, contributing significantly to climate change (>> Goal 13). The aviation trap and the carbon footprint of travel to and from a destination cannot be excluded from the sustainability considerations of urban tourism. Failure to address tourism-related climate change will undermine the achievement of many other SDGs.

As cities become attractive destinations, they run the risk of suffering from “overtourism” in urban centres which aggravates many of the challenges they are facing. The touristification of residential areas often plays a role in gentrification processes, leading to the displacement and exclusion of weaker and vulnerable sections of society. Tourism increases the burden on local infrastructure and transport systems, contributes to traffic congestion and causes significant levels of air and noise pollution. It puts strains on urban sights, increases the demand for energy and water and adds to the volume of waste and sewage generated in a locality (>> Goal 9). The jobs provided in the tourism sector, though potentially numerous, are often precarious (>> Goal 8).

“Overtourism” in urban areas has led to discontent among local people, and to various forms of resistance. Growing fears for personal safety from crime and intrusion have led to a proliferation of security and defence measures, including gated communities.

Planning approaches that might help in effectively addressing conflicts have often been top-down and fragmented, with urban planners lacking capacities, resources and skills to ensure people’s participation. Participation, if it happens, always runs the risk of remaining selective, as it is very difficult to reach a point at which all groups are equally represented or willing to contribute (Schreiber and Fischer, n.d).

MAJOR CHALLENGES

Adequate Housing, Gentrification and Displacement

Increasing numbers of tourists may fuel a boom in the construction sector and play a role in pushing up real estate prices and rents, contributing to gentrification. The economic and social consequences particularly affect vulnerable lower income groups, with the youth, women, elderly people, ethnic minorities and migrants facing additional disadvantages.

Residential properties are seen as commodities to maximise profits, rather than as homes for people in their social and cultural context. Tourist accommodation is usually more profitable than renting out flats to local residents. Residential flats increasingly get converted into hotels, hostels and holiday flats. Tourism can significantly change the character of urban neighbourhoods, turning residential areas into ‘party zones’ and ‘hip’ tourism hotspots – which may lead to problems for local residents.

Displacement and Evictions

The International Tribunal on Evictions is a tribunal established by civil society organisations for the World Zero Evictions Days during each month of October. At the East Asia Regional Tribunal on Evictions in July 2016 in Taipei, we heard the case of the 25 year-long struggles of the Pom Mahakan community in Bangkok, Thailand, where the area around an ancient fortress is to be “beautified”, evicting the community of 300 people. We launched a call for solidarity. There is also a threat of eviction of the Shinjuku Kasumigaoka-cho public housing complex under a stadium project for the Olympic Games 2020 in Tokyo, Japan. And we heard from the Anti-Eviction Alliance against the Taoyuan Aerotropolis mega-project in Taiwan, which does not only include airport expansion, but also entertainment and hotel facilities. The challenge is to not only denounce these cases, but especially to implement the Tribunals’ recommendations, thanks to the solidarity at the local and global levels.

Cesare Ottolini, International Alliance of Inhabitants

<http://www.habitants.org/>

Privatisation of Public Space

Public spaces that are safe and accessible to all support formal and informal cultural, social and economic activities and disproportionately benefit the poor and disadvantaged groups. They may serve as settings for livelihoods, e.g. for people engaged in the informal sector. However, across the world, parks, plazas and promenades which were once in the hands of communities or public authorities are coming under the control of private corporations (Smith, 2016). The tourism industry often plays a major role in the de-facto privatisation of commons and public spaces, e.g. by fencing off beaches or by encroaching on public spaces such as side walks or green areas to expand their business operations. The privatisation of public spaces undermines their important role to enhance community cohesion and promote health, happiness, and well-being for all.

The Sharing Economy and other Alternative Models

The tourism industry as a profit-oriented venture is being challenged by alternative models such as cooperatives based on solidarity and collaboration, and in particular by the sharing economy with internet platforms that enable individuals to offer accommodation, guide services, etc. Many of these systems may help enhance sustainability and should be promoted; some may entail conflict potential or risks of infringement of human rights and laws, e.g. with regard to decent work and tax evasion.

TANGIBLE WAYS FORWARD

To ensure that the benefits of tourism in urban and rural settings outweigh the challenges, the problems indicated above need to be addressed in each individual context, depending on the local situation. Overarching starting points lie in the fields of urban and rural governance, integrated planning, inclusiveness through the redistribution of wealth and meaningful participation in order to be responsible toward the present and future generations.

Autonomy of Local Self-Government and Integrated Planning

The scale and speed of tourism development requires good urban and rural governance which is alert and responsive to the needs and concerns of the people and communities, and which makes use of its scope for flexibility, creativity and innovation while respecting all human and environmental rights. Local autonomy per se may not guarantee positive changes, but it is – along with transparency and accountability – a prerequisite for strong city level ownership of urban transformation processes towards sustainability that incorporate tourism-related strategies.

To contribute to sustainable and inclusive cities, tourism must be made an integral part of urban sustainability planning across disciplines. Better training, capacity building, financial resources and suitable collaboration mechanisms are needed to enable planners to adopt integrated, participatory approaches. Local authorities committed to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable need to assess suitable traditional and new practices, e.g. sharing economy mechanisms, solidarity systems, sharing of common land and goods, non-monetary exchange systems, and ecological and resource-conserving practices. Some of these may require new forms of regulation and a redistribution of wealth to produce equitable outcomes.

Inclusiveness and the “Right to the City”

Inclusiveness in an urban context means to ensure the “Right to the City” for all, which refers to the capacity of urban citizens to influence processes of urban development and to make a city they want to live in (Castán Broto, 2016). The imperative of leaving no-one behind, as stipulated in the 2030 Agenda, places emphasis on improving the lives of the most disadvantaged, most vulnerable sections of society. It is an imperative which, at destination level, needs to be seen as a key criterion reflecting success for the tourism in contributing to SDG 11.

Meaningful Informed Participation

Incorporating tourism into urban and regional planning must include targeted efforts to build genuine consensus among various stakeholders at all levels. In particular, communities affected by tourism must have a say in planning, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring processes. For participation to be successful, communities need to be informed, empowered and, enabled to contribute, and they need to obtain concrete advantages.

Local self-government may need to proactively offer attractive independent platforms and formats, such as creativity workshops, focus groups or surveys that also reach and involve disadvantaged members of the community. Communication needs to be via different channels for all citizens to know that they have a right and possibilities to participate. Eventually, local authorities also need to have the means to ensure that the results of such processes will be implemented.

Monitoring Sustainability

There is still a dire lack of research and frameworks to analyse, measure and monitor city tourism and its impacts on urban and regional development from a sustainability perspective. Approaches that can be used and developed, however, include existing systems of indicators and criteria that have been introduced to measure the sustainability of tourist destinations in general. Adapted to specific contexts and addressing the key challenges

that individual cities and human settlements are facing, such systems can serve as helpful tools to monitor the contribution of tourism to SDG 11. Much of the data and research needed may not be available yet, and may need to be collected, generated, or recombined in new ways.

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