

Insights

Round Table on Sustainable Urban Tourism

Madrid, 10 May 2017

- 2017 was declared by the United Nations as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Urban tourism assumes the collective commitment to sustainability put forward in the five pillars that underpin this initiative: inclusive and sustainable economic growth; social inclusion, employment and poverty reduction; the efficient use of resources, environmental protection and the fight against climate change; the protection of cultural values, diversity and heritage and mutual understanding, peace and security.
- Tourism is a vital aspect of an urban economy and urban development. It creates employment and opportunities. Cities must harness this potential, whilst ensuring the care of and best possible outcome for the local community.
- Urban tourism is an opportunity to enhance the quality of life for the local community, incubators of innovation and technology, availability of harmonized and comparable tourism data at local level for policy making and strategic action.
- Tourists bring diversity to cities and the interaction between local residents and tourists plays a vital role in building cultural awareness and tolerance and mutual understanding.
- Tourism is continuously growing, accounting for 7% of worldwide exports, one in every eleven jobs and 10% of the world's GDP. The current challenge for urban tourism is to make sure that this growth is converted into sustainable tourism and that cities are prepared to absorb and welcome a steady flow of tourists.
- Urban tourism is growing due to increased urbanization rates, global mobility, accessible tourism products, short break destinations, accessible information and diversified attractions.
- To ensure sustainability in urban tourism, cities must create long term policies, planning and good governance for development and integrate tourism in this process.
- Sustainability is key to developing tourism strategies for new city destinations. Urban areas are living eco-systems and urban tourism management must address sustainable practices to ensure the welfare of all parts of that eco-system.



- Sustainability implies responsibility and sustainable tourism is achieved through responsible tourism. Creating more responsible travel packages and educating the public is one way of furthering sustainable tourism. Visitors want to enjoy their travel without feeling guilty about their travel choices and this requires awareness and responsibility of both tourists and tourism stakeholders. Stakeholder platforms have the power to guide tourists to making the right decisions regarding their travels.
- Fostering sustainable urban tourism can be done through a myriad of actions, such as buying and eating local, exploring the city by foot, avoiding wasting water and making an effort to learn about the community, appreciating the local heritage and culture and respecting the local community.
- One of the biggest current challenges for tourism is how to use technology to effectively leverage sustainable tourism. The tourism sector can tackle this challenge by, for example, analyzing credit card data to track changing trends in tourism behaviour and understand how and why people travel.
- Big data is another aspect of technology that can be used in fostering sustainable tourism. Through big data, one can see what motivates tourists and personalized offers can be created for each tourist. An important aspect of moving towards sustainable tourism is to understand what the visitor looks for in a destination, how they are travelling and why.
- The digital tourist has a new behavior and consumption pattern. They look for an experience, a narrative, and see a high value in sustainable products. The digital tourist often makes last minute decisions and is well-connected and well-educated. Using data and technology allows urban destinations to take these tourists into account and benefit from them.
- Security is a key issue in all types of tourism, but it is especially a present concern in urban tourism. However, it is important to minimize the gap between the perception of risk and the actual risk. Indeed, security concerns influence the choice of destination and therefore it is important to manage the perception of risk systematically.
- Security needs to be tackled within a crisis management plan established by the urban destination with the involvement of all stakeholders and the local community.
- Collaboration and communication between local and national government is important in order to develop more inclusiveness in the tourism strategy and to address all issues along the value chain, especially in terms of overutilization of infrastructure.



- Public-private partnerships are essential in creating sustainable urban tourism. When organizing large events in a city, the public entity should collaborate with the private organizer in order to ensure sustainable practices and a commitment to the city.
- Sustainable urban tourism development and management can be achieved by involving a collaborative process among all the public, private and local stakeholders and requires a strong and committed leadership.
- Contribution from the local community in shaping and creating a tourism strategy for an urban destination is essential to how successful and sustainable that strategy is. Tourism authorities can hold workshops or use connection platforms for the local community to discuss branding and strategies together with relevant stakeholders.
- Collaboration between local citizens and tourism stakeholders creates a positive effect and provides equilibrium between the opinions of the tourists and the opinions of the citizens. A place that is not enjoyed by its own citizens will not be enjoyed by visitors.
- There is a strong correlation between urban tourism and cultural heritage. Tourism can be a catalyst for revenue generation for innovative practices in heritage conservation and management. Furthermore, it creates public awareness surrounding culture and cultural heritage.
- A challenge in urban tourism is whether or not it is a tourism experience that tourists repeat. Visitors may not return to explore a city again. Therefore, tourism authorities need to make sure that they can offer a sustainable and authentic experience for tourists visiting their city.
- It is necessary to diversify the tourism products across a variety of attractions through a well-define and unique brand identity. Thus, standardization of destinations must be avoided.