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# **Challenges of World Tourism Cities: London, Singapore and Dubai**

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## **Introduction**

The number of people living in cities increases from year to year, with the latest figures produced by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2018) showing that 55% of the world's total population can now be found in urban areas. This percentage is expected to continue to rise and is projected to reach 68% by 2050, meaning that an additional 2.5 billion people will live in towns and cities. The most urbanised regions are North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe, where at least three quarters of the total population lives in cities, while Asia and Africa are the two regions with a relatively lower level of urbanisation. This move from rural to urban environments has contributed, together with other factors, to the increasing importance of the phenomenon of urban tourism.

Urban tourism is considered to be one of the earliest forms of tourism that re-emerged in the '80s as a result of an increasing interest from tourists in heritage and cultural activities found in cities (European Communities 2000, Maxim 2016). Yet, it has started to be recognised as a separate area of study only recently, with a number of authors pointing out the limited research available on the topic (Edwards *et al.* 2008, Maxim 2013). One of the most

influential studies worth noting is the work produced by Ashworth (1989), titled ‘*Urban Tourism: An Imbalance in Attention*’, which ignited the interest in urban tourism. In this paper the author highlighted a double neglect of the topic – tourism studies neglected large cities, while scholars who studied large cities overlooked the important role played by the tourism industry in their economy. Since then, however, more progress has been made in discussing urban tourism and the different aspects related to tourism development in cities (Pearce 2001, Sharpley and Roberts 2005, Edwards *et al.* 2008, Maitland and Newman 2009, Ashworth and Page 2011, Maitland 2012, 2013, Miller *et al.* 2015, Maxim 2016, 2019). Moreover, in 2015 a new multidisciplinary journal has emerged that focuses on tourism within urban areas – the *International Journal of Tourism Cities*.

A selection of studies, together their theoretical and conceptual contribution in the field of urban tourism, and their implications for cities, is included in Table 1 below. This shows how the focus of researchers has changed over time, from understanding the phenomena of urban tourism and its importance, towards the current debates such as sustainability, smart destinations, augmented reality and overtourism.

***Table 1: Theoretical and conceptual contributions to the study of urban tourism (selection)***

Author(s)	Year	Contribution
Jansen-Verbeke	1986	Elements of tourism
Ashworth	1989; 2003	Urban tourism: imbalance in attention
Ashworth & Tunbridge	1990	The tourist-historic city
Burtenshaw <i>et al.</i>	1991	Users of the city
Garreau	1991	Edge city as centres for services consumption
Mullins	1991; 1994	Tourism urbanization
Law	1992; 2002	Urban tourism and economic regeneration; Urban tourism synthesis
Getz	1993	The tourism business district
Page	1995	Urban tourism as a system
Castells	1996	The rise of the network city

Zukin	1996	The culture of cities and post-modern environment
Thrift	1997	Cities without modernity, cities with magic
Mazanec and Wöber	1997; 2009	Management of cities for tourism
Hannigan	1998	Fantasy city
Dear & Flusty	1999	Engaging post-modern urbanism
Beedie	2005	The adventure of urban tourism
Page & Hall	2002	Modelling tourism in the post-modern city
Pearce	2002	Integrated framework for urban tourism research
Mommaas	2004	Cultural clusters and the post-industrial city
Pearce	2007	Capital city tourism
Mordue	2007	Tourism, urban governance and public space
Edwards et al.	2008	Research agenda for Australian urban tourism
McNeill	2008	The hotel and the city
Maitland & Ritchie	2009	National capital tourism (expanding the knowledge)
Maitland & Newman	2009	World tourism cities
Ashworth & Page	2011	Urban tourism research progress and paradoxes
Richards	2014	Creativity and tourism in the city
Maxim	2015; 2016	Sustainable tourism implementation in urban areas
Gretzel et al.	2015	Smart tourism ecosystems, smart cities
Gutiérrez et al.	2017	Airbnb in tourist cities
Su et al.	2018	Urban heritage tourism (expanding the knowledge)
tom Dieck & Jung	2018	Mobile augmented reality in urban tourism
Koens et al.	2018	Overtourism and impact of tourism in cities
Maxim	2019	World tourism cities (expanding the knowledge)
Cohen & Hopkins	2019	Autonomous vehicles and urban tourism

Source: based on the work of Ashworth & Page (2011, p. 12)

Still, not much has so far been written on world tourism cities, environments that attract large number of visitors. Some of the latest works on the subject are Maxim (2019) who identifies a number of challenges faced by policy makers in London; Maitland (2016) who looks at how tourists experience world tourism cities; and Simpson (2016) who discusses ‘tourist utopia’ in three post-world cities – Las Vegas, Dubai and Macau. Worth noting is that half of the top twenty most visited cities in the world are now located in Asia (Mastercard 2019), which has led to an increase in studies that focus on different aspects related to tourism development in Asian and Middle Eastern cities. These include Gong, Detchkhajornjaroensri and Knight (2019) who discuss responsible tourism in Bangkok; Kotsi, Pike and Gottlieb (2018) who

look at travellers' perceptions of Dubai as an international stopover destination; Bhati and Pearce (2017) who link vandalism at tourist attractions in Bangkok and Singapore with the site characteristics; or Tolkach, Pratt and Zeng (2017) who focus on the ethics of the Chinese and Western tourists in Hong Kong.

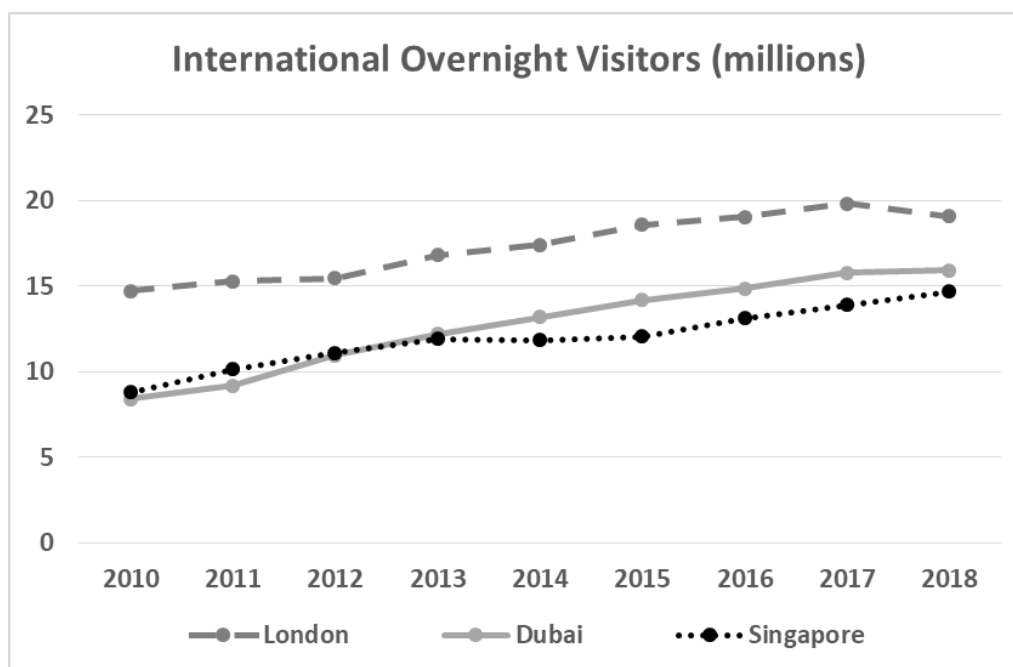
The concept of world tourism cities can be understood to refer either to those cities that depend on tourism for their global profile such as Venice (Ashworth 2010), or to world cities as environments where tourism occurs (Maitland and Newman 2009). The present work adopts the latter meaning and views world tourism cities as “large polycentric cities offering a range of experiences and, as visitors move between and around established centres, they offer apparently seamless opportunities for adding new desirable places to explore to already crowded and diverse tourism possibilities.” (Maitland and Newman 2009, p. 2) These cities therefore perform multiple functions, such as centres for business, as well as cultural excellence, and are home to many world-class tourist attractions (Law 2002). They are also important players in the world economy and offer easy access through better connectivity (Maxim 2019). In addition, these cities play an important role in the visitor economy of a destination, with the success of the tourism industry in a country often reliant on their success.

Many governments and policy makers encourage tourism growth in large cities as it contributes to their economic development (Simpson 2016). Yet, there are a number of studies that highlight the negative impacts associated with tourism development in cities, such as overcrowding, conflicts between visitors and locals, property conflicts created by peer-to-peer platforms such as Airbnb, or the worsening of existing congestion in busy areas, to name but a few (Law 2002, Gutiérrez *et al.* 2017). All these factors add to the challenges faced by policy makers in world tourism cities when trying to balance the benefits of tourism for the

local economy with negative consequences such as these. On top of this, the mission of policy makers is made even more difficult by the complex economic, social and political functions of such cities, and the diversity of people they attract (Maitland 2012, Maxim 2019).

According to Mastercard's (2019) Global Destination Cities Index, the top ten cities that attract the most international overnight visitors are Bangkok, Paris, London, Dubai, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, New York, Istanbul, Tokyo, and Antalya. Of these, the current chapter focuses on London, Singapore and Dubai, briefly discussing their particularities and the challenges they face. These three cities also rank among the top five most visited in the world, with each belonging to a different region, i.e. Europe, Asia and the Middle East (see Figure 1 for the change in visitor numbers in the three cities, over the past decade).

Figure 1. International Overnight Visitor Numbers for London, Dubai and Singapore



*Source: Author's own work, based on data from the Mastercard index (2014, 2017, 2019)*

## **London**

London, the capital of the United Kingdom, has been one of the world tourism cities for many years, and is ranked third after Bangkok and Paris in terms of the number of international overnight visitors, which for 2018 stands at 19.09 million (Mastercard 2019). The total number of visitors is however significantly higher when including domestic visitors – estimated at 12 million per year, and day visitors – estimated at 274 million per year (London & Partners 2015). The city is also one of the largest in Europe, with a total population of 8.53 million (Office for National Statistics 2016), and an important gateway for the UK, as three quarters of the country's overseas visitors arrive through one of its six airports (DCMS 2016). These figures illustrate the vital importance of the tourism industry for the economy of the city, as the second most important sector after financial services (Maitland and Newman 2009), with a contribution of 11.6% to its GDP (London & Partners 2017).

The popularity of the city among international visitors is due to its diverse offer and the variety of its attractions, such as historic buildings (e.g. the Tower of London, the Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey), museums (e.g. the British Museum, Tate Modern, the National Gallery), theatres and other cultural establishments (e.g. the Royal Opera House, Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Albert Hall), beautiful parks and promenade areas (e.g. Hyde Park, Regent's Park, the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), as well as numerous restaurants, pubs and clubs. In addition, London is one of the most diverse cities in the world, being home to more than fifty ethnic groups, with over 200 different languages spoken on its streets.

The organisation responsible with the governance of tourism in the capital is the Greater London Authority (GLA), the strategic administrative body for Greater London. This is an elected body, consisting of the Mayor of London and the London Assembly, and represents

all 32 London boroughs and the City of London. The GLA produces the London Plan, the spatial development strategy for the city that provides the policy context for the local planning policies of the London boroughs. Its latest version (GLA 2016, p. 155), presents the Mayor's vision for tourism development in the capital, which focuses on three key aspects:

- to develop the quality of accommodation facilities;
- to enhance visitor perception of value for money;
- to improve the inclusivity and accessibility of the visitor experience.

Another important organisation involved in the development of tourism is London & Partners, which is the official agency that focuses on promoting London internationally (London & Partners 2019).

As with many other large city destinations, policy makers in London face a number of challenges when planning and managing tourism in the UK capital. These were identified and discussed in a recent study by Maxim (2019), and are summarised below.

To start with, there are limited planning provisions to guide the 33 local authorities in London in their efforts to promote policies for tourism development in the capital. In addition, even though most London boroughs consider tourism as a strategic industry, there is a lack of tourism specific policies and strategies to help manage this activity at the local (borough) level. This may be linked to the lack of resources allocated by the national and local government for tourism development in the capital, especially after the 2007 - 2008 financial crisis. Considering that local authorities are seen as key players in managing tourism development in a destination (Ruhanen 2013, Maxim 2016), the current situation may impact on the city's competitiveness and its ability to sustainably accommodate increasing numbers of visitors.



Another important challenge faced by policy makers in London is to ensure the sustainable development of tourism. Aspects such as the need to improve public transport and alleviate existing traffic congestion have been highlighted by planners and researchers (Maxim 2016), while conflicts between hosts and visitors have been noted in the busiest parts of the city. At the same time, the protection and conservation of the natural environment and the built heritage remains an important concern expressed by policy makers, and is also recognised in the latest planning document for the city (GLA 2016).

In their efforts to attract additional funds to help manage tourism in the capital, many local authorities also face a challenge in working in partnership with other public and private organizations (Maxim 2019). Yet, this can be an important driver that contributes to the implementation of sustainable tourism practices in destinations, helping to maximise the availability of human and financial resources (Devine and Devine 2011, Maxim 2015, 2016).

Researchers have also highlighted the growing popularity of the sharing economy in large cities, in particular of platforms such as Airbnb, which threatens the traditional accommodation sector (Guttentag 2015, Zervas *et al.* 2016). To address this challenge, in 2015 a 90-day rule was introduced in London requiring specific planning permission when renting a property for more than three months in a year (Hickey and Cookney 2016). Even so, the Residential Landlords Association points out that over half (61%) of all Airbnb listings in the capital do not observe this rule, and are in fact available for more than 90 days per year (Simcock and Smith 2016).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that in large cities such as London, not every borough (local authority district) faces the same challenges. While inner boroughs, such as Westminster and Camden, suffer from overcrowding and high crime levels, outer boroughs struggle to attract more visitors and to develop their accommodation facilities. To address this aspect, a number of policies were promoted by the Greater London Authority (2016), aimed at easing the pressure on central London and spreading visitor numbers across the city.

London therefore endeavours to keep its status as one of ‘the best cities in the world to visit’ (GLA and CTC 2015, p. 4) by encouraging new visitor attractions and developing new accommodation facilities, while protecting the built and natural heritage it offers. Yet, the local authorities in London (i.e. at borough level) have to deal with limited resources, as well as limited planning provisions to help them manage tourism in a sustainable manner.

Moreover, the long-term implications of Brexit for the travel and tourism industry in the capital are still unclear and should not be overlooked, with some organisations fearing that the industry will suffer if the strong connections that currently exist between the economy of the UK and that of the EU are affected (ABTA and Deloitte 2016). The EU is currently the main market for overseas travel in the UK, and potential changes in the free movement of people, goods and services between the two could have significant implications for the travel and tourism industry in London.

## **Singapore**

Singapore is one of the top five world tourism cities, attracting 14.67 million international overnight visitors (Mastercard 2019). This makes tourism one of the most important service sectors in the city (Meng *et al.* 2013), with a total contribution of 10.2% to its GDP and accounting for 8.8% of the total employment (WTTC 2018). Even though over the years the

city experienced periods of negative growth following events such as the 9/11 terrorist attack in the US, the 2003 outbreak of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome disease in Asia, and the 2007 - 2008 global financial crisis (Meng 2014), tourism ranks among the fastest growing industries in Singapore, recording an average growth rate of 15% over the last few decades (Al-Shboul and Anwar 2017).

Due to its geographical location and well-developed infrastructure, Singapore is the main gateway to Southeast Asia, playing an important role as a regional aviation and sea hub (Saunders 2004). The city has also positioned itself as a regional, as well as global financial hub (Henderson 2007a), a leading destination for business and leisure tourism, as well as an important player in the health tourism economy (Lohmann *et al.* 2009). Most of the visitors attracted by the city are from other Asian countries (e.g. China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and South Korea) who are enticed by its shopping facilities, food diversity, and high quality medical services, while for the other international visitors Singapore represents an attractive transit stop (Al-Shboul and Anwar 2017). Among the most popular attractions are the Singapore Flyer, Universal Studios Singapore, Singapore Zoo, Art Science Museum, Gardens by the Bay, and the Esplanade.

The organisation responsible with tourism development in the city is the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), which was established in 1964. Even though Singapore has limited natural tourism attractions and historic sites (Al-Shboul and Anwar 2017), through the active policies promoted by the STB, the city managed to increase the number of visitor from 91,000 in 1964 (Meng *et al.* 2013), to nearly 14.7 million international visitors at present (Mastercard 2019). Some examples of the tourism strategies implemented by the STB along the years are the “garden attractions” and modern hotels in the 1970s; appreciating the local heritage and

revitalising former ethnic enclaves such as Chinatown, Little India, and Kampong Glam in the 1980s; master planning and focusing on tourism growth in the 1990s; and investing in infrastructure, product development (e.g. integrated resorts) and attracting major events such as the Singapore Grand Prix after 2000. Other factors that contributed to this extraordinary performance are the city's strategic geographical position, its stability, good connectivity, stable tropical weather, a diverse tourism product, the public-private sector partnership, innovative management in developing natural and cultural resources, cultural diversity, well-trained workforce, as well as world class venues and facilities (Meng *et al.* 2013, Ganguli and Ebrahim 2017, Lim and Zhu 2018).

Even though Singapore is one of the most visited cities in the world and the number of international visitors is forecasted to continue to rise over the next years, the city is facing a number of challenges related to the development of tourism. First of all, its small size means there is limited space for expansion, with policy makers struggling to reconcile different demands such as more houses, better infrastructure, or water supply systems (Henderson 2005). This makes long-term planning a necessity, an aspect also recognised by the Centre for Liveable Cities (2015) in the latest tourism plan for the city.

Competition is another important challenge that policy makers in Singapore need to consider (Lim and Zhu 2018). There are a number of other important world tourism cities in Asia, such as Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur or Macau, that are looking to attract business and leisure travellers (Henderson 2007a) and are stepping up their marketing campaigns. To stay competitive in this challenging environment, Singapore will require renewed efforts to “better capitalise on fast-changing trends and realise opportunities”, as pointed out by the Singapore Tourism Board (2016, p. 4) in their latest tourism marketing strategy for the city.

Some authors argue that in their efforts to turn the city into one of the most modern and successful in Asia, Singapore's authentic heritage, and its indigenous cultures have suffered (Saunders 2004, Henderson 2007a). Saunders (2004) for example, notes that many of the traditional arts and local crafts which were common in the late 1970s and 1980s have disappeared by the 1990s. According to the latest Singapore tourism plan, however, efforts were made by the Government to find a balance between maximising the economic potential of the land (by allowing new developments) and protecting the local heritage (Centre for Liveable Cities 2015). Yet, the document notes that starting with the 1980s the Government promoted an adaptive use of conserved buildings, allowing many of them to be given new uses instead of being preserved.

Another two challenges worth noting are that Singapore is usually perceived as an expensive destination when compared to some other cities in the region (Henderson 2007b), and many international visitors will see it only as a stopover location to spend a few days instead of their final destination. For Singapore to remain a popular destination among international visitors and to encourage longer stays, Al-Shboul and Anwar (2017) argue that the city needs to continue to improve its existing infrastructure and attractions. This however, needs to be done very carefully to avoid destroying what is left of its local heritage and community identity, and thus gather the support of the locals. Ultimately, this would contribute to a sustainable development of the tourism industry in the city.

## **Dubai**

With 4,114 square kilometres, including land reclaimed from the sea, and a population of 3.19 million, which has doubled over the past decade (Dubai Statistics Center 2018), Dubai is the

second largest of the seven sheikhdoms that make up the United Arab Emirates (Henderson 2007a). The city proved to be ‘one of the fastest growing tourism destinations of the early twenty-first century’ (Ryan and Stewart 2009, p. 288), evolving rapidly from a small fishing village and open desert, as it was in the 1900s, to become the first global city in the region in the early 2000s (Akhavan 2017). This is in spite of its hot and dry climate that lasts nearly all year round, with temperatures in the high 30 degrees Celsius, and high level of humidity in late summer (Ryan and Stewart 2009).

In the 1990s, when its oil production started to decline, Dubai decided to diversify its economy and turned its attention to the service sector (Sutton 2016). Tourism was therefore recognised as an important industry and the city started to invest heavily in its infrastructure, including air and maritime transport, to help attract and accommodate more visitors. This strategy led to the number of international tourists arriving in Dubai to increase considerably in the 1990s, and by 2002 the city became one of the world’s fastest growing destinations (Sharpley 2008). That year the tourism industry also overtook the oil and gas industry (in terms of its contribution to the GDP), which used to be the main source of revenue for the Emirate (Henderson 2007a). Over the past two decades, the expansion of the tourism industry in Dubai has continued, with the city currently ranking as one of the top five global destination cities and attracting a total of 15.93 million international overnight visitors (Mastercard 2019).

The Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) established in 1989, and which is under the supervision of the Crown Prince, is the main organisation responsible with managing tourism in the city. They recognise the important role that tourism plays for the city’s economy and aim to make Dubai the first choice as a leading global destination for

travel, tourism and events – their goal is to attract 20 million visitors a year by the end of the decade (Visit Dubai 2019). This ambitious figure represents almost twice the number of visitors accommodated in 2012, when the city attracted a total of 10.95 million international visitors (Mastercard 2017). To achieve this considerable growth, the organisation recognises that the city needs to continue to invest in its transport infrastructure and accommodation facilities, as well as to broaden its offering when it comes to events and attractions.

Having a short history and few historic sites, Dubai has tried to differentiate itself from other global cities ‘by a sustained focus on grandeur’ (Nadkarni and Heyes 2016, p. 214) and by offering a variety of iconic attractions to its visitors. Among these are the Burj al Arab Jumeirah considered the world’s most luxurious hotel; the Burj Khalifa which is the world’s tallest building; the Palm Island which is the largest offshore artificial island; high-end shopping malls such as the Dubai Mall, which is the second largest mall in the world, and the Mall of the Emirates, which accommodates a 400 metre long indoor ski slope; as well as high-tech trade and convention centres. Currently, Dubai is also on track to develop the world’s largest airport – Al Maktoum International Airport at Dubai World Centre, which is expected to accommodate over 200 million passengers a year. Furthermore, to expand its offer and attract visitors from emerging markets (e.g. China, India, and the Asia-Pacific region), in particular during the low season, a number of festivals and events were organised, such as the Dubai Shopping Festival in February / March and the Dubai Summer Surprises in July / August. Tourism perception has therefore changed, from the initial sun and sand destination, to a leading destination for luxury, shopping, leisure, global meetings, conventions and events. In addition, Dubai will soon host the 2020 World Expo Trade Convention that is expected to have a huge economic and social impact, and to attract a record 25 million visitors (Sutton 2016).

The city, however, faces a number of challenges that were highlighted by researchers, among them being the loss of its heritage and authenticity as a result of the excessive modernisation (Henderson 2007a, Nadkarni and Heyes 2016). Steiner (2009) describes Dubai as a ‘hyper-real destination’ characterised by ‘cultural fluidity’ (Stephenson 2014, p. 728), where the past history and culture tend to be forgotten. As Stephenson notes, only 10% of Dubai’s historic buildings have survived its rapid expansion and modernisation. However, Nadkarni and Heyes (2016) point out that visitors are now looking for authentic experiences even when choosing luxury vacations. As such, a focus should be placed on the indigenous-based activities, in particular those which are historically linked to the desert life of the Bedouins (Stephenson 2014), and thus on promoting what is left of the local cultural heritage.

The rapid expansion of the city and its tourist infrastructure means that Dubai also faces a challenge in sourcing the large numbers of qualified workforce that are needed to cater for the much anticipated growth of its tourism industry. The city is already dependent on foreign workers to fill the increasing number of job vacancies available in the travel and tourism sector (Stephenson 2014). With the city soon to host the 2020 World Expo Trade Convention, and with the number of hotels expected to increase considerably in the near future, there is a huge demand for qualified employees. This puts pressure on the hotel industry to attract, train and retain talented individuals able to deliver excellent services and maintain Dubai’s reputation as a luxury destination (Brien *et al.* 2019).

According to Stephenson (2014), another challenge noted by the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing is to convince visitors to stay longer in the city. With an average length of stay of 3.7 days (Pike and Kotsi 2018) and occupancy rates slightly decreasing, building



more hotels may result in an imbalance in supply and demand that could impact the profitability of the hotel industry. Moreover, Nadkarni and Heyes (2016, p. 216) argue that increasing the luxury accommodation capacity risks ‘diluting the rarity and exclusivity elements from the consumer experience’. This may lead to visitors becoming unwilling to pay premium prices during their Dubai stay due to over-exposure and ease of access to such luxury experiences. Considering these aspects, and in the face of increasing competition from its neighbouring emirates such as Abu Dhabi and Sharjah (Zaidan 2016), Dubai needs to think its strategy carefully if it is to remain the top destination in the region.

A number of authors also point out the environmental concerns and socio-cultural consequences linked to the development of tourism infrastructure in the city (Sharpley 2008, Stephenson and Ali-Knight 2010, Stephenson 2014). Even though Dubai, and indeed the entire United Arab Emirates, face a significant water shortage, they have one of the highest per capita water consumption rates worldwide. On top of that, the continuous focus on infrastructure development, and particularly large scale projects, is likely to further impact the city’s natural environment (or what is left of it). At the same time, a continuous increase in the number of international tourist arrivals will likely lead to increased tensions between visitors and the local community, and may for example give rise to cultural conflicts, or cause low income families to be displaced from certain areas due to the increasing price of land and accommodation (e.g. the Garden City Project).

All these challenges represent in fact different aspects that should be considered for the sustainable development of tourism in a destination, and would need to be addressed by the policy makers in Dubai sooner rather than later. This is reinforced by the findings of a recent study conducted by Martens and Reiser (2019), which notes that prospective visitors are

perceiving the city as not environmentally conscious and unsustainable, although the Government tries to promote the image of a sustainable destination.

## **Conclusion**

World tourism cities are among the most visited destinations in the world due to their distinctive characteristics, the world-class attractions they accommodate, and the accessibility offered by their better connectivity (Maxim 2019). Yet, research published on this topic to date is relatively limited. This chapter therefore advances the current body of knowledge by discussing the particularities and challenges faced by three top world tourism cities from three different regions – London, Singapore and Dubai.

In a very competitive world, where many new as well as traditional destinations try to attract ever more visitors, policy makers in large cities need to better understand the challenges they face so they can implement sustainable measures when planning and managing tourism in such destinations. This chapter showed that while some of the challenges faced by world cities may be specific to each destination due to their particular political situation or geographical location (e.g. the impact of Brexit on the future of tourism development in London, or the limited space available for expansion in Singapore), others are likely to be relevant to many such destinations (e.g. protecting and conserving the built and natural environment, or the increasing competition from other world cities). Without understanding and addressing the challenges they face, world tourism cities could experience numerous negative consequences that may impact on both the residents' quality of life, and the quality of the visitor experience. It may also lead to overtourism (Milano *et al.* 2019), nowadays a term often used in connection with popular city destinations such as Barcelona, Amsterdam or Venice, which are struggling to manage the growth of tourism sustainably.

Further research is needed to understand how well are world tourism cities prepared to respond to the challenges they face, and whether governments are promoting measures to address such challenges. In addition, creating a common framework to facilitate the exchange of existing knowledge from academics and practitioners, and sharing best practices found in large cities around the world may help policy makers and destination managers in their efforts to manage tourism sustainably in these complex environments.

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