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Handbook on Sustainable Urban Tourism

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Introduction to the Handbook of Sustainable Urban Tourism

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1. Introduction

The Handbook of Sustainable Urban Tourism focuses on an important topic, sustainability in urban tourism destinations, which is an under-researched area of study (Maxim, 2016; Morrison & Maxim, 2022). Cities, in particular large cities, are important destinations that attract many types of visitors due to their complex characteristics and the variety of attractions they offer. However, they are also confronted with many challenges, with sustainability being a key challenge that many large cities are currently facing. At the same time, cities are expected to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with one of the goals specifically designed for urban destinations – Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. This Handbook therefore covers topics related to the importance of sustainability debates for tourism cities, as well as challenges and issues associated with the implementation of sustainable development in urban destinations, as reflected in research or seen in practice.

Cities have been, and will continue to be important destinations that attract many visitors (Morrison & Coca-Stefaniak, 2021; Morrison & Maxim, 2022). Urban tourism is considered to be one of the earliest forms of tourism, and can be traced back to the 14th century pilgrimages to Canterbury in the UK, or to the Grand Tours during the 17th and 18th centuries (Karski, 1990). Cities continued to be popular destinations over the years due to the many attractions they offer and their diverse characteristics (Bouchon, 2022). Although during the latest COVID-19 pandemic many visitors were inclined to avoid large cities, as they are usually crowded places and recorded high rates of infection, cities remain important multicultural centres that appeal to various types of visitors.

The rapid growth of urban tourism over the years has been driven by a number of factors, some of which are listed further on: the increased levels of urbanisation; the gradual airline liberalisation and the birth of the low cost airlines in the late 20th century, which contributed to the popularity of short city breaks; the development of new technologies and the proliferation of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) that changed the way visitors are experiencing cities (Morrison & Maxim, 2022). Besides these, we can add several more general factors such as changes in working patterns and higher disposable incomes that allowed more people to take holidays; a very diverse offer presented by city destinations; infrastructure improvements; and the relaxation of visa regulations for some parts of the world. As a result, the past few decades have seen cities around the world competing with each other in a quest to attract more visitors (Bouchon, 2022; Maxim, 2021).

This increase in the number of visitors to cities, particularly for popular city destinations such as Venice, London, Paris, Barcelona, New York, Bangkok, and Amsterdam, has put pressure on the limited resources available and on the local populations (Mendes, 2022). We have all seen in the news how local people have protested on the streets of Barcelona, Venice and Amsterdam, asking the local authorities to take action and limit the number of visitors. Scholars also started looking into the phenomenon of “overtourism”, understood as “the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding and the consequential suffering of

residents, due to temporary and often seasonal tourism peaks, that lead to permanent changes in lifestyles, amenities and well-being” (Milano et al., 2019, p. 1). This reignited the debate about the benefits and negative impacts of tourism development in destinations, particularly in city destinations, and the need for a balanced approach. Sustainable development and sustainable tourism practices have thus become an even more important topic in cities nowadays, and efforts are being made by governments, local authorities, and scholars to address these challenges.

The main aims of the Handbook of Sustainable Urban Tourism are therefore to:

- Review contemporary issues, challenges and trends in sustainable urban tourism.
- Present practical approaches and solutions for the implementation of sustainable tourism development in urban destinations.
- Discuss the contribution of urban destinations towards advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Examine important aspects related to sustainable urban tourism, such as overtourism, social justice, environmental protection, and local community participation.
- Explore the sustainable urban tourism practices and challenges in different parts of the world.

The Handbook thus covers key challenges and issues in sustainable urban tourism, as well as contemporary debates related to research and practice in this field. Topics discussed include contemporary trends and issues in sustainable urban tourism, aspects related to the planning and managing of sustainable urban destinations, and views on sustainable urban tourism development from different parts of the world.

The Handbook combines the latest academic research, with insights drawn from practice in sustainable urban destinations internationally, to provide recommendations for tourism management professionals and researchers. The Handbook of Sustainable Urban Tourism adopts a multidisciplinary approach to tourism, drawing from fields such as sociology, psychology, urban management, business, and critical management perspectives.