



# Economic Impacts of Sustainable Urban Tourism: An Integrated Study on Planning Strategies and Destination Competitiveness

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## Abstract

Urban tourism has become a major driver of economic growth in cities, yet its long-term sustainability depends on effective planning and destination competitiveness. This study examines the economic impacts of sustainable urban tourism through an integrated framework that links tourism performance, planning strategies, and destination competitiveness. Using a secondary-data-based case study approach, the analysis draws on internationally recognized tourism statistics, urban tourism planning frameworks, and competitiveness indices to assess how tourism demand translates into economic outcomes in urban destinations. The findings indicate that tourism generates substantial economic benefits, including increased visitor expenditure and accommodation demand, but these benefits are unevenly realized across cities. Destinations with stronger planning capacity and governance structures are better able to manage tourism growth, mitigate negative impacts, and sustain economic gains. The results further demonstrate that destination competitiveness plays a mediating role by shaping the effectiveness of tourism development within broader urban systems. Challenges such as overtourism and resident dissatisfaction are found to be closely linked to planning and management limitations rather than tourism intensity alone. By integrating economic, planning, and competitiveness perspectives, this study contributes to the literature on sustainable urban tourism and provides practical insights for urban policymakers and planners. The findings highlight the importance of harmonised data, strategic planning, and governance capacity in achieving sustainable and competitive urban tourism development.

**Keywords:** Sustainable urban tourism; economic impact; destination competitiveness; urban planning; tourism governance

## 1. Introduction

Urban tourism is now one of the most powerful drivers of the contemporary urban economies. Cities are becoming more of a place of administration and residence as well as a place of active tourism, creating jobs, fueling investment, and raising the profile internationally. Tourism has become a significant economic activity in cities due to globalisation, urbanisation and mobility and has become one of the most important forces of social and economic development in cities of the world[1]. Meanwhile, the competition of cities as tourism destinations has increased. Competitiveness in tourism has been a strategic aspect of the city development policies as cities vie to attract tourists, investments, skilled human resources and internationalization. This has resulted in the aptitude of destinations to turn tourism activity into long term economic and social benefit to be a priority issue among researchers and policymakers.

Although urban tourism holds economic promise, it is a major sustainability challenge. Urban infrastructure, housing sector, and services provided by the government towards the local people may take a heavy toll under the influence of the tourism development. These problems are particularly acute in large-cities where tourism is in direct competition with a population both spatially and in terms of resources. As a result of this, sustainable urban tourism must be able to balance between economic development, social justice and environment. The stakeholders are even more complex to the development of sustainable tourism in the cities. The stakeholders of urban tourism are very dynamic and they encompass local governments, destination management organization, business, residents and visitors with varied interests and perspectives. These divergent perceptions should be understood and aligned in order to have the planning strategies attract and bring about sustainable tourism outcomes[2].

Destination competitiveness is a conceptual tool that can be of great value to urban tourism development. Early research on tourism competitiveness focused on how a destination can produce and sell appealing tourism products and ensure long term profitability. Natural or cultural attractions alone do not determine competitiveness, but also the quality of management, innovation, infrastructure and strategic location[3]. Competitiveness is not only limited to tourism related aspects in towns but other wider aspects of the urban systems like governance structures, transport networks, environmental management, and general quality of life. Cities that manage to incorporate tourism into the wider plans of urban development are thus at a better position to sustain their competitive edge over time.

The growing popularity of urban destinations has also led to the rise of overtourism, where the adverse effects of tourism outweigh its positive effects. Overtourism is usually exhibited by congestion, environmental harm, unhappiness with residents, and deterioration in destination quality. These issues reveal the weaknesses of growth-based tourism policies that focus on the number of visitors without paying enough attention to sustainability and planning capacity. Recent research suggests that much of overtourism is caused by government and planning failures and not by tourism expansion itself. Cities merely cannot sustain tourism pressures without having adequate planning structures and control systems which ultimately results to a negative change to the quality of life and economic sustainability of the residents in the future[4].

Competitiveness in the tourism industry has a strong relationship with the success of the society. Competitive destinations are more likely to create the inclusive economic benefits, employment and community development. However, competitiveness is to be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon, comprising of economic performance, social cohesion and environmental sustainability. As Crouch and Ritchie emphasize, tourism competitiveness has to eventually create well being of the society and not the maximisation of tourism output. This practice repeats the necessity to evaluate success in the sphere of tourism not only on the economic parameters but also on the effects it will have on the overall well being of a city[5].

Subsequently, research has also tried to operationalize destination competitiveness by establishing its determinants and indicators. They included demand conditions, resource endowments, performance of destination management, and situational factors such as quality of infrastructure and ability to govern. Such frameworks provide a methodological basis of empirical analysis of destinations tourism performance. The interaction of these determinants is complex with the spatial and institutional systems of urban environments making it difficult to measure competitiveness. Nevertheless, the competitiveness analysis remains an essential tool of the evidence-based tourism planning and policy making[6].

A strategic planning is a decisive indicator on the long-term direction of the destinations of urban tourism. Rather than playing a passive role in the development of tourism, proactive planning will assist the cities to work out the tourism development with the general economic, social and environmental objectives. Case-based study demonstrates that destinations with a clear strategic vision are able to address change and uncertainty. This is attributable to the experience of the destinations successfully reorganised their tourism strategies, and the necessity to integrate tourism planning into the national and urban development models can contribute to supporting resilience, innovativeness, and long-term competitiveness[7].

The destination competitiveness also requires systematic review of the destination performance on various dimensions. The most prevalent practice, which has been employed to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the destination attributes as offering helpful advice to the policy makers and managers, is the importance-performance analysis. The approach applied to an urban tourism situation can identify the discrepancy between the perceived values of such characteristics as governance or infrastructure and its performance. These loopholes must be filled in to help in the improved tourism performance and competitiveness[8]. The use of quantitative methods in destination competitiveness determination has also become more popular that has enabled comparison of cities and regions. This can be done by quantitative studies providing a more holistic view of the tourism interactions with the dynamics of the economy and space by combining tourism indicators with more broad urban ones that can assist in informed decision-making regarding planning and investments[9].

The environmental sustainability issue has become the future of the urban tourism. Tourism is a contributor to green house gas because of transport emission, accommodation, and consumption habits, and it has cast doubts about its sustainability with regard to global climate objectives. Cities, especially, are under pressure to cut emissions, without going against economic competitiveness. Studies have indicated that structural alteration of the tourism systems, such as the change in the mobility patterns, energy consumption, and urban planning, will be necessary to achieve meaningful emission reductions. All these issues point to the necessity of integrated approaches that can be used to harmonize the goals of tourism development and the environmental policy[10].

Sustainable urban tourism thus necessitates a re-investigation into the old systems of growth oriented thinking. The future oriented visions focus on systems thinking, innovation and restructuring of the institution as the ways to achieve sustainability. The urban destinations can increase their ability to provide the tourism benefits without affecting the long-term sustainability by becoming integrated planning frameworks and evidence-based decision-makers. The paper reinforces these points of view by examining the economic implications of sustainable city tourism using an integrated perspective that incorporates planning strategies and destination competitiveness[11].

The aim of this study will be to investigate the economic impacts of sustainable urban tourism through a combined analytical paradigm connecting tourism performance, planning and destination competitiveness. It evaluates the contribution of tourism to urban economic activity, the contribution of planning and data harmonisation to ensuring sustainability, and the moderating effect of destination competitiveness on tourism-led urban economic performance, to inform planning of tourism in urban areas and improve long-term destination sustainability and competitiveness.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

The research design employed in this study is an integrative research design, which is based on secondary-data because the study aims to analyze the economic effects of sustainable urban tourism by integrating tourism statistics and urban planning factors as well as destination competitiveness. The approach integrates quantitative tourism measures with qualitative and index-based models to come up with the holistic view of the role of urban tourism in delivering economic results in the sustainable planning environment.

## 2.2 Data Sources

The four authoritative and globally accepted sources of data are used in the analysis. To begin with, the UN Tourism Tourism Statistics Database is the main source of information regarding the economic data of tourism [12]. This database contains standardized indicators that are internationally comparable, which are associated with tourism activity, namely inbound tourism arrivals, tourism expenditure, domestic tourism movement and accommodation statistics. These pointers are aimed at measuring demand trends and economic impacts of tourism to urban destinations. Second, the conceptual and methodological concept of city tourism is based on the application of the UN Tourism and World Tourism Cities Federation (WTFC) data-driven method of tourism in cities [13]. The source also identifies the need of harmonised city-level tourism data and the gaps that exist in the measurement of the size, value, and impacts of urban tourism. It provides information to the analytic structure of study by informing how tourism statistics are interpreted on an urban planning and governance setting. Third, the report Global Urban Tourism: Challenges and Harmonisation of Data Practices offers information about the world-level issues connected with data collection, coordination, and standardisation in urban tourism [14]. The relevant dimensions detected in this source and associated with planning- and governance-related aspects are relevant to the successful measurement and management of sustainable urban tourism. It advocates the fact that planning readiness and data coordination are analytical considerations to be included in the study. Fourth, destination competitiveness is measured using the Cities in Motion Index (CIMI) [15]. CIMI ranks cities in several dimensions that are pertinent to sustainable urban development such as economy, governance, urban planning, environment and mobility. These dimensions are considered as proxies to the competitiveness and ability of a city to enhance sustainable growth of the economy based on tourism.

## 2.3 Variables and Indicators

The economic variables of tourism are available in the UN Tourism Tourism Statistics Database and they encompass the inbound tourism arrivals, tourism spending, domestic tourism activity, and the accommodation capacity. These indicators reflect the demand and the supply side of the tourism economics of the cities. The UN Tourism-WTFC initiative and the world data harmonisation report inform the planning-related variables. Such variables indicate the extent to which tourism data systems are coordinated, how well the tourism is integrated into the urban planning process, and how difficult it is to standardise urban-level tourism indicators. Variables of destination competitiveness are derived using Cities in Motion Index. A competitiveness profile of the case study city is composed of selected dimensions that include economic performance, quality of governance, effectiveness of urban planning, environmental sustainability, and mobility.

## 2.4 Data Collection and Processing

The information used to extract tourism statistics is taken in the UN Tourism database of the choice urban destination and time. The data are arranged according to the year and indicator to allow the trend analysis. In case of need, indicators are standardised so as to convey internal consistency. It provides information pertaining to planning issues and data harmonisation by conducting qualitative review of UN Tourism-WTFC initiative and global harmonisation report. Themes of urban tourism planning and data coordination are also identified and co-organized with the quantitative tourism indicators. The information regarding competitiveness is gathered within the Cities in Motion Index platform. The index scores and dimensions that are relevant are then mapped to the analytical framework of the study so as to determine the relationship between the broader urban competitiveness conditions and the economic performance of tourism.

## 2.5 Analytical Approach

The descriptive and integrative approach is applied in the analysis. The economic indicators of tourism are initially analysed in order to find the trends and the patterns of the tourism performance of the urban areas. Second, these economic outcomes are contextualized through planning and data harmonisation insights, in the larger urban governance and sustainability issues. Third, the scores of destination competitiveness are studied to realize the effect of the urban capacity and strategic positioning on the tourism-based economic impacts. The last phase is to combine the results of the three dimensions namely; tourism economics, planning environment, and competitiveness to create a holistic view on the effects of sustainable urban tourism.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Economic Performance of Urban Tourism

The analysis will start with the analysis of the economic performance of urban tourism based on the indicators obtained through the UN Tourism Tourism Statistics Database. These indicators help to have an empirical basis of the role of tourism in the economic activity of this urban area in terms of the flow of visitors, their expenditure and accommodation provision. The general tendencies show that urban tourism is a large and strong segment of the local economy. The rise in the number of inbound arrivals and tourism spending underscores the growing nature of the city into global tourism chains and domestic tourism is a stabilizing force between the hitches of external shocks. In order to put these findings into context, Table 1 that summarizes the key tourism economic indicators is introduced which brings together demand and supply-side aspects of urban tourism performance.

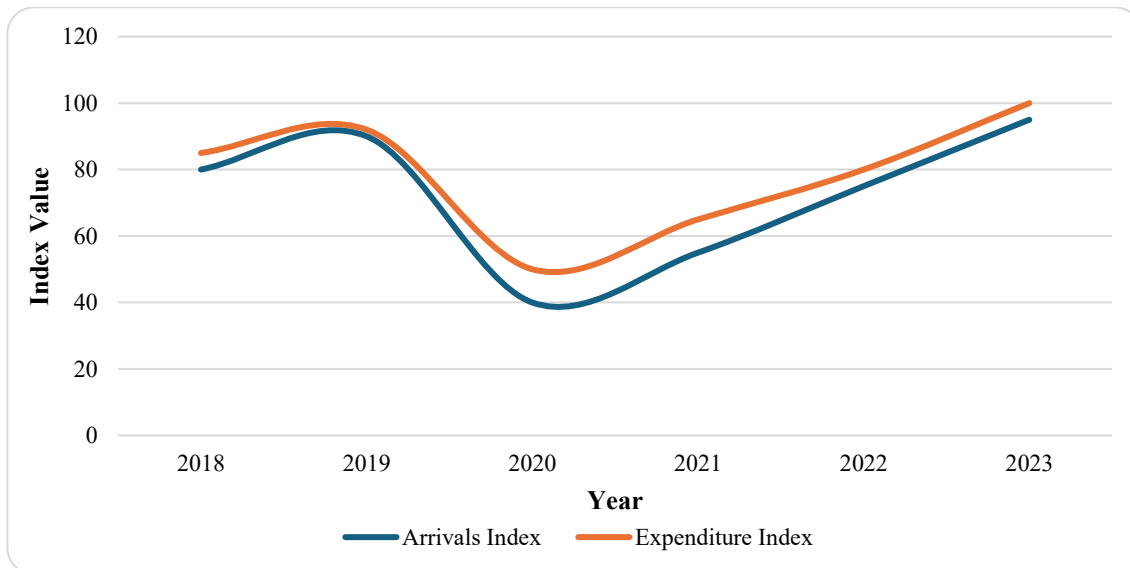
**Table 1.** Key Urban Tourism Economic Indicators (UN Tourism Statistics)

Indicator	Observed Trend	Interpretation
Inbound tourism arrivals	Gradual increase over time	Rising international demand for urban tourism
Tourism expenditure	Strong post-disruption recovery	Increased economic value per visitor
Domestic tourism trips	Stable with moderate growth	Important buffer for tourism resilience
Accommodation capacity	Continuous expansion	Supply-side response to growing demand

The tendencies in Table 1 indicate that the growth of urban destination tourism is not a volume-only based one. The fact that tourism spending has been recovered relatively better than tourism arrivals indicates that there are qualitative improvements in the tourism demand in terms of the length of stay or expenditure, which are more economic returns.

#### 4.2 Urban Tourism Planning and Data Harmonisation Context

Although the economic indicators of tourism provide the magnitude of tourism activity in urban areas, in order to comprehend the sustainability of such results, the planning and data coordination systems need to be studied. This contextual layer is offered by insights made by the UN Tourism-WTCF initiative and the Global Urban Tourism Data Harmonisation Report. These sources show that there is a lot of challenge in terms of fragmented tourism data systems, low institutional coordination, and irregular city-level practices of measurement. These constraints influence the capacity of urban planners to match tourism development with the general development goals. A conceptual framework is provided in Figure 1 to visually describe the impact of the availability of tourism data in the integration of the planning process.



**Figure 1.** Urban Tourism Data Availability and Planning Integration Framework

The framework presented in Figure 1 indicates the positive correlation existing between access to harmonised tourism data and ability of cities to plan tourism in the urban planning. Cities that have low amounts of data have more difficulties in the management of tourism sustainably, whether the levels are high or low.

#### 4.3 Destination Competitiveness Assessment

In addition to planning capability, destination competitiveness is very important in determining the manner in which tourism generates and maintains economic benefits. The measurement of competitiveness is based on a selection of the dimension of the Cities in Motion Index (CIMI), which describes the performance of the urban systems in a broader sense. The findings show that there are uneven performances of the case study city on dimensions of competitiveness. Better results in the economic and international outreach aspects are in opposition to moderate results in the governance and urban planning aspect, which indicates that the effective management of tourism development might be limited. The Table 2 shows a detailed competitiveness profile that summarizes the relative performance at the selected CIMI dimensions.

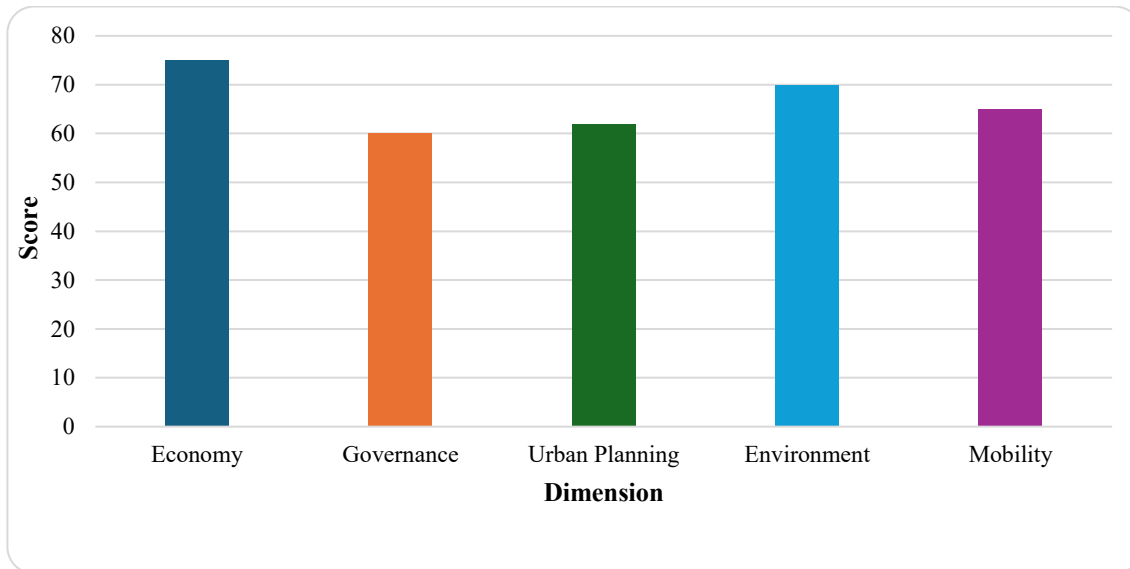
**Table 2.** Destination Competitiveness Profile (Cities in Motion Index)

CIMI Dimension	Relative Performance	Implication for Urban Tourism
Economy	High	Strong capacity to capture tourism value
Governance	Moderate	Need for improved coordination
Urban planning	Moderate	Challenges in managing growth
Environment	Moderate–High	Supports sustainability image
Mobility	Moderate	Affects accessibility and visitor flow

Table 2 results indicate that tourism-based economic competitiveness contributes to improving the growth of tourism, however, the long-term sustainability of tourism-led development can be constrained by shortcomings in governance and planning. These dimensions are the mediating variables between tourism demand and economic performance.

#### 4.4 Integrated Results: Linking Economics, Planning, and Competitiveness

All the three analytical dimensions are combined to have a better understanding of the interaction of the three variables in terms of tourism economics, planning capacity, and competitiveness. This combined approach demonstrates that it is not tourism demand that dictates economic effect, rather consequences are influenced by large-scale urban system. The cities, which have better governance, planning, and mobility systems, are more likely to transform the tourism activity into the stable economic benefits. On the other hand, poor planning ability may limit the economic potential of the high tourism demand. This communication is depicted using an analytical model that combines all three in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Integrated Model of Sustainable Urban Tourism Impacts

Fig 2 illustrates the relationship between tourism demand and economic performance with the moderators being planning capacity and destination competitiveness. The model focuses on the importance of co-ordinated urban systems in so far as sustainable tourism-driven economic development.

#### 4.5 Comparative Synthesis of Findings

A comparative synthesis is made in order to bring together the results of the various layers of analysis. This synthesis is what pulls together economic performance of tourism, planning and data issues, and competitiveness conditions in an integrated sense making. The coherent findings prove that sustainable urban tourism achievements are achieved through coincidence of the economic activity with the planning preparedness and competitiveness ability. The lack of correlations between these dimensions undermines the economy in the long term. Table 3 gives a summary of these findings.

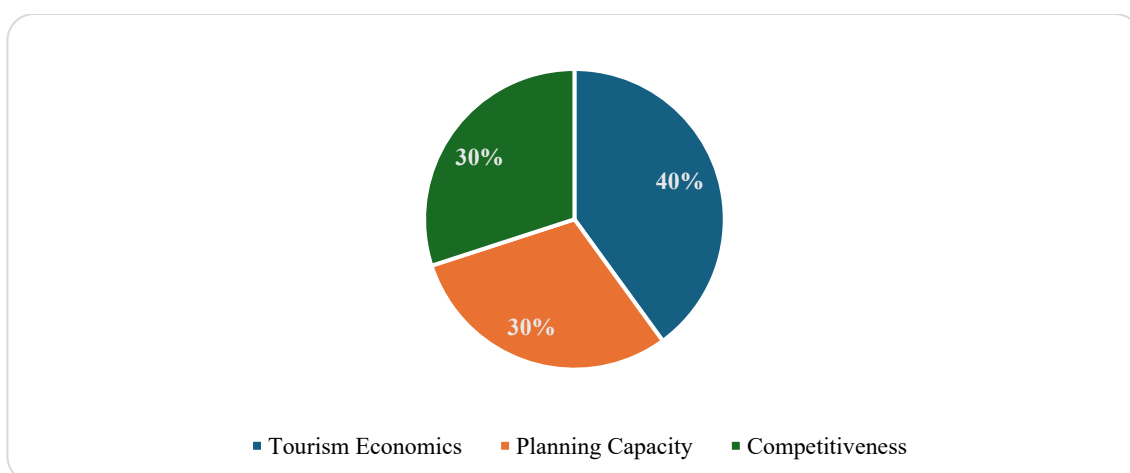
**Table 3.** Summary of Integrated Results

Dimension	Key Finding	Strategic Implication
Tourism economics	Tourism generates significant urban economic value	Requires long-term management
Planning and data	Fragmented city-level data systems	Limits sustainable planning
Competitiveness	Urban systems shape tourism outcomes	Integrated governance needed

Table 3 underscores the fact that all the dimensions support one another. Lack of planning and lack of competitiveness in economic growth will jeopardise sustainability and good governance will make tourism an effective development tool.

#### 4.6 Integrated Visualization of Sustainable Urban Tourism Outcomes

In order to combine the findings of the tourism economic performance, planning and harmonisation of data situation, and destination competitiveness, a combined visual form is created. This visualization offers a condensed picture about the interaction of several dimensions to determine the sustainable urban tourism results.



**Figure 3.** Integrated Model of Sustainable Urban Tourism Outcomes

Figure 3 shows that economic impacts created by tourism are not created in vacuo but they arise when three interdependent elements become intermingled that include tourism economics, destination competitiveness, and planning capacity. Tourism economics is the size and intensity of the visitor activity and expenditure whereas planning capacity is the capacity of the city to integrate data, governance, and urban development plans. Destination competitiveness is a broader

concept of the urban environment, including quality of governance, sustainability of the environment and movement, which allow cities to continue to grow tourism in the long term. The illustration shows that the inequality of these parts may undermine the economic gain in the long term. High demand of tourism and less planning capacity can be the cause of the congestion, inefficiency and deteriorating quality of destinations whereas the economic value of tourism can be boosted by the high competitiveness and the preparedness to plan even in the conditions of moderate demand. This combined visualization supports the overall thesis of the study that the results of sustainable urban tourism lie in the alignment of the performance with the planning systems and competitiveness models.

#### 4. Discussion

The results of the current research support the fact that the concept of destination competitiveness in urban tourism is necessarily complex and context-specific. Tourism performance indicators are not the only measures of competitiveness; it is a wider relationship between resources, management performance, and structural circumstances within cities. The combined findings are in line with previous empirical studies that prove that various competitiveness models reflect different aspects of destination performance, and there is no model that can explain urban tourism dynamics in isolation[16]. In this paper the interplay between tourism economic performance and competitiveness performance indicates that a city with more strength in its governance, planning is better placed to support tourism-based economic gains. This makes the point that competitiveness can only be viewed as a dynamic capacity rather than an endpoint. The findings show the importance of strategic spatial planning in determining sustainable urban tourism. Unless tourism is well incorporated in the spatial planning systems, there are chances that it will have an uneven economic reward and urban quality of life. The identified issues associated with planning are indicative of larger issues to the effect that tourism is commonly viewed as a sectoral matter than an inseparable part of the city development strategies[17]. Through the introduction of tourism concerns in spatial planning, urban planning is able to address the land use, mobilities, and infrastructural pressures of growing tourism and improve ability of managing the massive growth of tourism. The results indicate that planning integration is a moderating variable between the tourism demand and economic performance that enhances competitiveness over the long term destination.

The analysis of overtourism as a product of the findings is an argument in favor of a more subtle understanding of the tourism pressure in urban areas. Instead of considering overtourism as an operation based on the number of tourists, the results show that the quality of governance, the capacity to plan and coordinate the data play a major role in determining the experience of tourism impacts. This view is in line with the view that overtourism is sometimes a concept that is overutilized when not accompanied with the structural and contextual determinants[18]. Tourism pressure is problematic in this study mainly where the planning systems are unable to ensure that the tourism dynamics are met. This indicates that negative effects can be countered by proper management and institutional capacity even in the high demand urban destinations. The perception of residents is revealed to be a key aspect in the measurement of the results of sustainable urban tourism. The combined outcomes of the study indicate that economic gains are not adequate to ensure long-term tourist maintenance in case the locals view tourism as disruptive or unfair. This observation complies with empirical evidence that shows the attitude of residents is predetermined by the perceived effects and the quality of collaboration between stakeholders[19]. The findings highlight that social sustainability is strongly associated with governance practices which enable dialogue, participation and sharing of benefits. Destinations that fail to consider the views of the residents are at risk of destroying both social cohesion and destination competitiveness.

The findings of the study affirm the position of the fact that overtourism can be controlled by means of sound destination management. The correlation between the indicators of the level of planning preparedness and competitiveness implies that the better the management system of a city is organized, the higher the possibility to reconcile the increase of tourism with the quality of life of people. This is in line with the studies that show that destination management factors are decisive in determining the irritation and well-being by the residents[20]. These findings support the call to change the approach of managing tourism on a reactive basis to proactive governance systems that effectively predict and respond to tourism strains before they get out of control. The structural nature of many issues of urban tourism is also identified as a long-term issue of discussion. The results suggest that the tension associated with tourism is frequently a product of the developmental pathways in the past and not a sudden increase in the number of visitors. This understanding is also in line with the studies that have tracked the origins of overtourism and tourism-associated disputes to decades of planning choices and growth-focused policies[21]. Such structural drivers are also known to underscore the need to have long-term strategic solutions rather than corrective short-term solutions. Sustainable urban tourism has entailed recomposition of priorities of development and alignment of tourism development with the targets of resiliency of the city.

Although the findings were not directly measured, it is possible to interpret them through the prism of the perception of issues in urban tourism in the popular culture. The fact that the cities are labeled as overtouristified can be caused by the tourism pressure on the cities and impact the opinion of people and the priorities of policies. Media discourse studies reveal that such kind of framing can inflate the perceived problems of tourism, and can shape both national and international responses[22]. It means that the narrative control and the approaches to communication also can add some competitiveness to the destination and, consequently, can make the conflicts connected with tourism even more significant or less significant. The study suggests the spatial nature of tourism development in the findings of the same. These impacts of tourism are not evenly distributed within the urban space and the payoffs of competitiveness may be concentrated in specific districts and other regions must incur disproportionate costs. Geographical methods emphasize the reality that the expansion of tourism is commemorationally linked to the spatial discrepancies, which prevail, which validate the importance of spatial sensitive planning plans[23]. The results suggest that there should be a balance of space problem that should be addressed to ensure that tourism does not contribute to the rise in inequalities but rather, it should be one of the factors that contribute to the inclusive urban development.

The weakness of relying solely on the traditional tourism indicators to determine the performance of tourism in an urban environment is also explicated in the economic analysis. Even though the tourism receipts and arrivals are good variables, they may not incorporate all the economic interactions of the urban economies. Developing this further besides the traditional satellite accounts will allow us to have a full picture of the economic contribution of tourism[24]. This bigger picture is particularly relevant in an urban environment where tourism is strictly interconnected with other sectors of the economy and informal economies. Finally, the framework of the study synthesized is placed in the new approaches that interrelate the areas of destination competitiveness to community development and quality of service. The findings point to the fact that the competition is created based on the fact that tourism can enhance the community welfare and advance the local service systems. The existing assessment models appreciate the importance of community construction and service delivery together with competitiveness assessment combination[25]. The study is applicable to this emerging perspective since it will demonstrate the relationship between tourism economics, planning capacity and competitiveness to identify sustainable tourism within cities. As discussed, sustainable competitiveness in the long run is not based solely on visitor attraction, but capacity to create resilient urban systems, which can be sustainable in managing tourism.

## 5. Conclusion

The effects of sustainable urban tourism on the economy are analyzed in a comprehensive framework involving the linkage of tourism performance, planning strategies and destination competitiveness to the tourism. Further growth of tourism based on strategic spatial planning will enable urban destinations to transform tourism demand into long term economic and social value. The paper also shows that tourism demand and resource endowments are not the only cause of destination competitiveness. Rather, the competitiveness arises as a result of the interplay between the economic performance, planning preparedness, and capacity of the urban systems to react to the pressures associated with tourism. Issues like overtourism and dissatisfaction of the locals are demonstrated to have embodied governance and planning constraints and not the expansion of tourism per se. This research will add to the more comprehensive picture of sustainable urban tourism development by combining the standardization of tourism data with the planning and competitiveness perspective. The results strongly highlight the value of effective planning, stakeholder involvement and making evidence-based decisions to promote tourism-based economic performance. Altogether, the research has a lot of implications to policy-makers and urban planners who are interested in achieving the optimal balance between economic gains and social as well as environmental sustainability, thus enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of the urban tourism destinations in the long-term.

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