

Can a city be a tourist attraction and a nice place to live?

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Evolution of urban tourism



Globalisation along with technological advances and new modes of transportation made it possible that nowadays, tourism can be regarded as a democratised product ^[1] that contributed to the reshaping and transformation of many cities over the past decades. ^[2] Since the end of the 20th century, the European urban tourism boomed and especially in big cities, the number of visitors and overnight stays has continuously increased. ^[3] Not only the numbers but also the way people are traveling has changed over the recent years. Instead of just seeing the main tourist attractions, a growing number of people is interested in **leaving the “tourist bubble”** ^[4] and wants to experience the city in a more authentic way **“off the beaten track”**. ^[2] Following this trend of the so called New Urban Tourism, tourists are more interested in the city itself and try to blend into the urban environment while getting as close to the everyday life of the residents as possible. ^[3] Thus, the boundaries and practices of tourists and locals become more and more transparent. ^[5]

Overtourism - a new word for an old problem?



Recently, terms such as **“overtourism”** and **“tourismphobia”** have emerged that reflect a rather negative image of tourism. ^[1] These terms are neologisms for an already known problem ^[6] and are often criticised for their ambiguous definitions and their inflationary use. ^[7]

Touristification



For a more holistic approach, some scholars started using the term **“touristification”**. ^[8] Touristification stands for the process of urban transformation through tourism and/or tourists. ^[9]

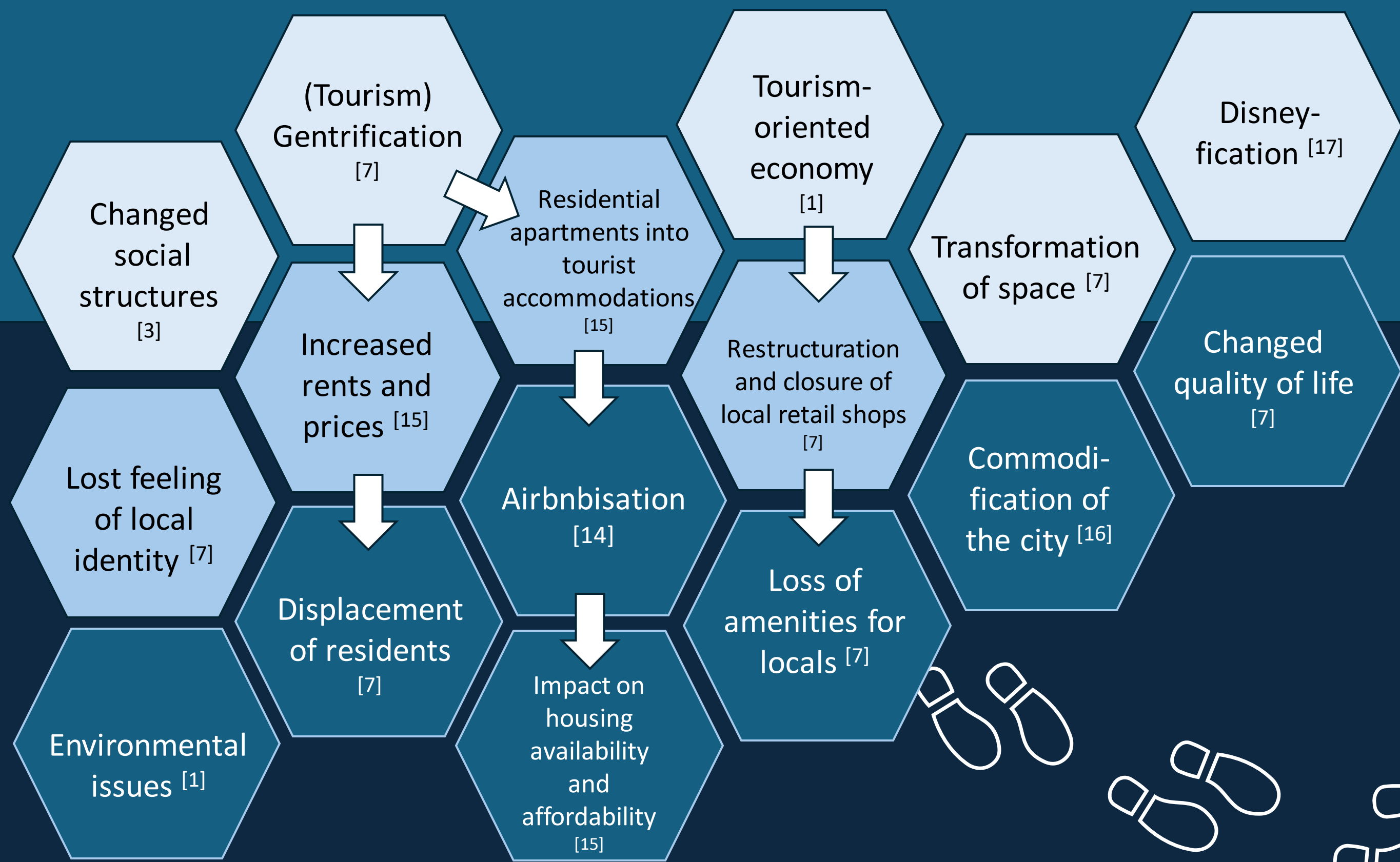
Touristification in the case of Venice

Why Venice?

- One of the most-visited places in the world ^[13]
- Demonstrates the influence of touristification on a historic city ^[5]
- World Heritage by UNESCO → became a candidate for Heritage in Danger in 2016 ^[1]
→ reason: several problems like the negative impacts of tourism ^[13]
- Public attention due to protests against tourism ^[5]
- Depends on an economy that heavily focuses on the tourism sector ^[5]

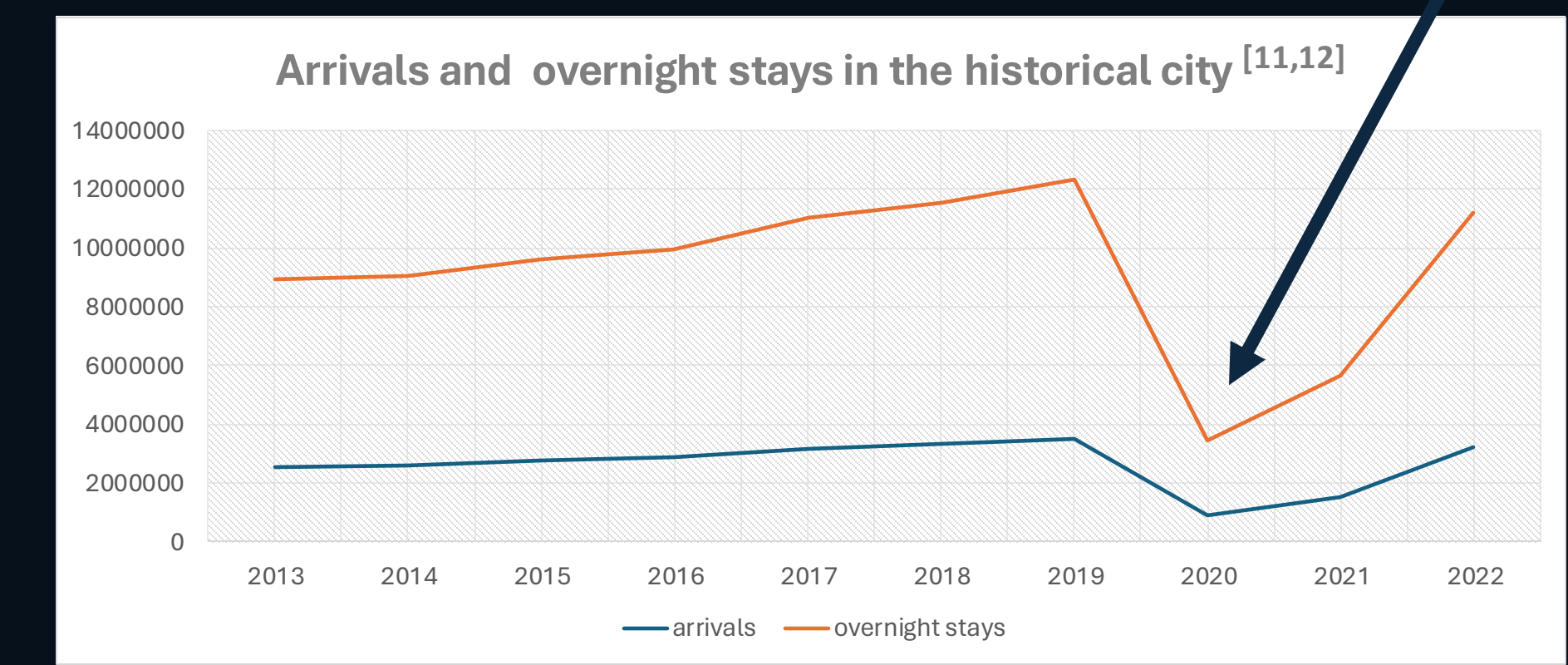
The effects of touristification

The touristification of historic cities and districts can have social, spatial, economic and cultural impacts ^[14] since tourists and residents share the same urban spaces, places and facilities. ^[5] This **urban transformation** can be visible, non- and hardly visible or can take place through the practices and actions of tourists. ^[9]



During the pandemic, videos of dolphins swimming through the canals of Venice went viral and were used as a symbol to show how the city could finally “breathe” after the tourism came to a halt. In the end, they turned out to be fake. ^[10]

„Dolphins spotted in Venice’s Grand Canal“



Rising number of visitors vs. depopulation

Population in the historical city of Venice: ^[12]

174.800 (1951) → - 69,7% 52.988 (2017)

How Venice “manages” the tourism

- Spring 2024: entry fee of 5€ for day trippers (during the peak tourism periods) → to manage the number of visitors ^[18]
- Awareness campaigns for detourism and sustainable tourism ^[19]
- Cruise ships were banned from entering the centre of Venice in 2021 ^[20]

Other measures limiting the access and the use of the city were unsuccessful ^[5], didn’t address the root problem ^[15] and were criticised for their contribution to a museumification of the city. ^[21]

Conclusion and outlook

For many cities, the tourism industry is the main driver of urban development and at the same time, the process of touristification is also the most difficult and complex to deal with. ^[5] The example of Venice shows how thoroughly popular destinations can be influenced by touristification, how the urban environment can change and that a multi-faceted approach (where public and private sectors work together) is necessary to tackle the issues that arise. With the rising popularity of sharing-economy activities like Airbnb, urban tourism will continue to grow even more and it’s important to mitigate the negative effects while meeting the needs of the destination. ^[13] In the end, the challenge is to find a good balance between a city that is suitable to tourism while taking care of its residents as well. ^[22]

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