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**Tourist activities in historic cities:
Opportunities and challenges (reflections on the
book *Attracting visitors to ancient neighbourhoods.
Creation and management of the tourist-historic
city of Plymouth, UK*)**

Title: Attracting visitors to ancient neighbourhoods. Creation and management of the tourist-historic city of Plymouth, UK

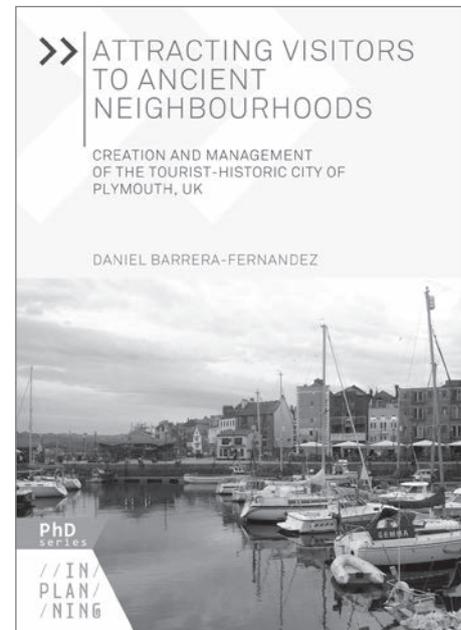
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Publisher: InPlanning

Place and year of publication: Groningen, 2016

Number of pages: 289

[ISBN: 978-94-91937-19-4]



Many cities worldwide have developed strategies to become more attractive for cultural tourists. This trend is particularly relevant in Europe, where many traditional urban activities have been moved to the suburbs or even relocated to regions with lower labour costs. As a result, the historic centres of many cities suffered from decay and neglect until tourism-related activities were seen as an alternative to regenerating them. This is a complex process with positive and negative consequences. On the one hand, tourism brings new life to historic buildings and spaces, and many heritage assets are restored. On the other hand, those buildings that do not fulfil the requirements and expectations of visitors may be subject to demolition or severe transformations that lead to the loss of their heritage value. Social consequences should also be taken into account because when tourism becomes successful enough it can lead to gentrification and replacement of existing activities and land uses.

The book *Attracting visitors to ancient neighbourhoods. Creation and management of the tourist-historic city of Plymouth, UK* (Barrera-Fernández, 2016)

deals with these aspects applied to the city of Plymouth in southwest England. The foreword was written by Kevin Meethan, a renowned expert in the field and in the processes that have transformed Plymouth in recent decades. The research is first developed from a general perspective on the context and progressively moved to an analysis of the city and of particular initiatives. Thus, the first objective is to analyse the specific framework of heritage preservation and management in the United Kingdom. After that, it focuses on Plymouth, with the objective of studying how heritage protection evolved and what the current framework is in relation to legislation and the role of the authorities involved. The next objective is to study the historical evolution of urban tourism and the current relevance of tourism-related activities. Finally, the interaction of various stakeholders and selected initiatives are analysed regarding tourism-related use of the historic city, dividing these into four aspects: heritage and culture, tourism, urban planning and the economy.

The first difficult decision was to select the case study. Plymouth and the

United Kingdom were chosen for several reasons. In that country, visits to cities are growing at a higher rate than to other destinations. Moreover, more than half of the tourists visiting the United Kingdom have history and culture as their main motivation, and most of the visitors to English historic places go to historic cities. Plymouth is a medium-sized multifunctional city with regional relevance, peripheral in relation to London. It is located in the most frequently visited region of the country by British citizens and in one of the regions most often visited by tourists from abroad. The city has a tradition in the tourism industry that has been well documented since the nineteenth century. In recent years, the main interest has been in increasing attractions related to heritage and history, especially focusing on the historical connections of the city with transoceanic voyages of discovery and conquest. Plymouth has also linked tourism strategies with the development of a new image of an open and cosmopolitan city, with the aim of hosting major events with large international coverage.

The work applies a number of research methods. The structure of the research is based on the approach to the concept of the “tourist-historic city” developed by Marcelo Brito (2009). The concept of the tourist-historic city (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000) is central in the research because it defines historic urban areas with intense tourism activity. The research includes an analysis of the historic city as a heritage asset, a study of the urban cultural tourism phenomenon and work on the definition and management of the tourist-historic city. To achieve these goals, the work was divided into the following steps: 1) presentation of the evolution and current framework of heritage preservation, focusing on heritage regulations, urban plans (that include heritage-related policies), statutory lists and local management tools; 2) analysis of the history of tourism and the current model through a selection of historical and current guidebooks, information presented to visitors, tourism strategies, urban plans (that include tourism-related policies) and fieldwork to reflect the physical distribution of tourist attractions and services; and 3) study of actors and initiatives affecting tourist use of the historic city in relation to culture and heritage, tourism, urban planning and economic development. As an innovation, the book introduces an economic dimension to the main policies because it is necessary to ensure the sustainability of the model and it is closely related to other policies.

The book has six chapters. The first one introduces the research, objectives, main questions and methodology. The second chapter presents recent research on the conceptualisation of the historic city in Europe, the evolution of the heritage values that are considered in these areas and current trends in their tourist use. The third chapter introduces the city of Plymouth for those not familiar with it; it includes the relevance of the sea in Plymouth’s urban history and

present, the role of military forces and their current relevance, local government and socio-economic information, a short history of the city from its origins to the present and a presentation of the study area. The fourth chapter focuses on the evolution and current framework of heritage protection in Plymouth. The evolution covers six stages; namely, the situation before the second world war, the impact of the war, plans for reconstruction, the application of those plans, regeneration initiatives and the new role of communities. Two sections are dedicated to relevant topics: selected post-war interventions in the main monuments and the achievements of the Plymouth Barbican trust. The current framework of heritage preservation analyses in detail conservation areas, listed buildings, buildings at risk and evolution of listing criteria. The cases of the Barbican and the city centre are given special attention due to their relevance as the first designated conservation area in the first case and as a current debate in the second case. The fifth chapter is devoted to the history and present relevance of tourism activities in Plymouth’s historic city. It covers four stages; namely, the pre-war model, the impact of the war, the search for new markets and recent changes in the authorities involved. A special section is dedicated to the achievements of the Plymouth marketing bureau and another section includes a study of the evolution of tourist sites referred to in guidebooks. The current model of tourism management is presented through an analysis of visitors’ profiles and economic impact, mobility and the main tourism resources and services. The sixth chapter covers the actors and initiatives involved in managing the tourist-historic city. They are divided into the four groups of policies mentioned above; namely, culture and heritage, tourism, urban planning and economic development.

One of the most interesting contributions of the research is the evaluation of the reconstruction of the city after the second world war by the Plan for Plymouth, designed by Sir Patrick Abercrombie and James Paton Watson. It contributed to the demolition of relevant historic buildings that survived the bombings in the city’s central area, but it also helped create a new architectural heritage, which has only recently begun to be listed. The central urban area and all buildings interfering with the new layout were replaced, and the emotional references of citizens were lost. Implementation of the plan was not as effective as expected, and the post-war city centre is physically isolated from the rest of the city, lacking vitality when shops close. Nevertheless, the city centre is the most complete and least transformed post-war planning example in Britain, with relevant examples of buildings from the 1950s, where leading architects, artists and sculptors collaborated to make it an exceptional example of urban planning of the time.

Another relevant contribution of the book is the presentation of the achievements of the Plymouth marketing bureau, the first public-private tourism promotion agency in the UK. It succeeded in developing business tourism and creating new attractions and events. Thus, between the 1970s and early 1990s, some of the main current attractions were opened. Apart from that, the study of the sites referred to in guidebooks is a useful tool for understanding the evolution of places of interest and attractions. It is relevant how the trends and fashions of each moment contributed to modifying the tourist profiles.

In relation to management of the tourist-historic city, the role of non-profit organisations in public policy is particularly relevant, especially if one compares this model with the lack of citizens’ involvement in other countries.

The so-called third sector has an advisory role when applying for permission to intervene in a heritage asset. It also participates in plans related to heritage preservation and enhancement, and it has the ability to lobby against projects negatively affecting built heritage or the local character of historic areas.

One of the strongest points of this book is the presentation of the impact of various policies that are apparently isolated in the management of the tourist-historic city. Urban planning policies such as traffic and waste management influence visitors' experience in the destination. Tourism strategies risk remaining undeveloped if economic plans do not include funding for promoting or creating new attractions. In fact, the lack of coordination between stakeholders can cause various damage, such as heritage loss, neglect of urban areas and lack of tourism competitiveness. Should society preserve a neighbourhood and restore historic buildings, or should it give way to tourism-related initiatives regardless of their impact on heritage? The case of Plymouth shows a history of success and difficulties, and thus it may be of interest to cities involved in the same discussions.

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Biography

Daniel Barrera-Fernández has a degree in architecture from the University of Seville and a doctorate from the University of Malaga, where he received the university's Extraordinary award for his dissertation. He is currently a professor and researcher at the Faculty of architecture of Benito Juárez, Autonomous university of Oaxaca, where he teaches urban planning and heritage preservation. His research interests focus on the preservation and integration of built heritage, cultural policy, urban tourism, city marketing, theming, the impact of cultural events, regeneration of run-down neighbourhoods and gentrification.

Information

The book's internet site:

http://www.inplanning.eu/categories/1/articles/116?menu_id=27§ion_title_for_article=Newest+PhD+publications