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The Future of Nighttime Tourism: More Than Challenges

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According to the latest data from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), an estimated 975 million tourists travelled internationally between January and September 2023, being on track to recover almost 90% of pre-pandemic levels. In a growing number of tourism destinations (especially cities, and coastal and insular destinations), nightlife, including music, cultural or light festivals, is an increasingly important element in the selection process of destinations by tourists. For a not inconsiderable number of tourists, evening and nighttime leisure and cultural activities are the central element in the selection of their vacation destination. In this sense, the current boom of nighttime tourism as key strategy for urban branding and destination marketing is growing all over the world, as already pointed out in the introduction to this book as well as throughout the chapter. Thus, it would not be risky to affirm that this boom would seem to indicate the emergence of a golden age of nighttime tourism. However, there are different challenges of greater or lesser magnitude that place the development of nightlife tourism in an uncertain situation amidst an increasingly turbulent world. Thus, such a golden age might not be as golden as it seems. This epilogue aims to shortly present some reflective notes on each of these challenges, especially but not only affecting Europe's urban areas and coastal tourism destinations. On the other hand, although this epilogue focuses mainly on the interaction between the nightlife industry and the tourism industry, the set of reflections presented below are also valid for other activities that are important for the development of nighttime tourism – such as light festivals and/or other outdoor cultural activities carried out by tourists and visitors at night. Furthermore, what we intend to do in this epilogue is to present these challenges as potential key points for a future interdisciplinary research agenda on nighttime tourism.

The first challenge has to do with one of the problems that has persisted since the first years of expansion of the nighttime leisure economy in central urban areas. In this sense,

the expansion of tourism-oriented nighttime leisure in urban areas and coastal tourism destinations (including insular towns) often exacerbates the still-unresolved-conflict between the right to rest of residents, the rights acquired by nightlife establishments through licensing, and the subjective right to party (which would somehow derive from the right to leisure time as set forth in Article 24 of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights). This situation of collision of rights of different nature is even more critical in those countries whose legislation indicates that the right to rest and the right to health are constitutional rights, as is the case of Spain – among many other countries. Precisely, the Spanish Ombudsman, Ángel Gabilondo, has recently underlined that “the measures that protect the rights of citizens can only be effective if the administration carries out controls and sanctions unlawful conduct” (Kassam, 2023). What this statement by the Spanish Ombudsman demonstrates is that the existence of constitutional rights that clash with the interests of the nightlife industry and the tourism industry place these same constitutional rights on a dead letter awaiting the slow, tenebrous and often ineffective ordinary judicial-administrative process: capital is always more powerful than any constitutional right.

The second challenge has some connection with the previous one. The expansion of tourism-oriented nighttime leisure in central urban areas often results in high levels of atmospheric, acoustic and light, impacting not only on urban and metropolitan ecological systems (e.g., Gaston, 2019; Bará & Falchi, 2023; Eklöf, 2024) but also on the physical and mental health of the residents of areas characterized by the presence of very crowded public spaces at nighttime hours and/or the presence of poorly soundproofed nightlife venues (Evandt et al., 2017; Iannace et al., 2021; Zielinska-Dabkowska et al., 2023). In particular, we must mention the use of night lighting in public spaces, which generates a very lively debate among different actors of the urban night. On the one hand, the different businesses related especially to nightlife, tourism and hospitality industry often use lighting elements on their venues’ façades as an element of attraction of potential customers. However, the (excessive) use of these light elements, together with the important demand of feminist groups for better lighting in public spaces at night (e.g., Sandberg & Coe, 2020; Shaikly & Mella Lira, 2023; Roberts, 2024), clashes with the need to reduce light pollution to reduce its negative impact on the health of residents. This does indeed represent one of the great debates we should be facing up to within the process of current and future processes of urban design of not only nighttime tourism destinations but also the urban world at night.

The third challenge has to do with the current climate emergency scenario. Recent authors have claimed the need to reinforce climate just mobility by fostering proximity and subsidiarity in tourism and travel circuits (e.g., Cavagliato et al., 2023; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2023). However, this option seems to be more utopian than realistic, since transnational mobility for leisure purposes is the main pillar of the global tourism industry and its main financial, economic and logistic operators. In turn, speaking of proximity inevitably leads us to reflect on the need to promote the debate at the academic, governmental, industry and local community levels about the organization and structure of urban nighttime tourism destinations in the face of the prominent emergence of the 15-minute city as a new (and apparently unique) paradigm for urban design and planning especially in European cities as main strategy to achieve a climate-neutral continent by 2050 (European Commission, 2019). In fact, the absence of “the night” in the academic and governmental debate on the 15-minute city produces a gap in knowledge about the potential positive, neutral or negative role of nighttime tourism in (i) reducing carbon footprint of the night-time leisure economy, (ii) promoting sustainable mobility patterns

at the neighborhood, city and metropolitan levels, (iii) achieving safe public and private nighttime spaces free of any type of violence, especially in relation to women, minorities of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin or religious background, (iv) ensuring and supporting local cultural circuits, including clubbing, live music and performing arts, (v) promoting nightlife spaces (formal and informal; institutional and non-institutional) as a common good and source of socio-emotional well-being; and (vi) ensuring the right to rest of its residents and, consequently, the right to their own physical and mental health.

The fourth challenge that global nighttime tourism faces today is that scenario made up of the sum of macroeconomic, geopolitical, and global public health uncertainties (e.g., Kang et al., 2020; Abdelfattah et al., 2022; Allam et al., 2022). For example, Papagianni et al. (2023) have found that geopolitical tensions have a persistent negative effect on tourism demand in most emerging market and developing economies. Kumar (2023) also reveals a strong negative relationship between geopolitical uncertainty and the European travel and leisure sector, while Raheem and le Roux (2023) sheds light on the very negative relationship that global geopolitical uncertainty has in the tourism industry of countries such as India, China, Malaysia and Israel. This panorama highlights the existence of strong uncertainty about the development of nighttime tourism globally in a medium-term scenario, especially given the current and worrying escalation of the war dialectic between the Western bloc governments (US and EU) and Vladimir Putin's regime. Amidst this Antonio Gramsci's *interregnum* where the old is dying and the new cannot be born, and where all sorts of "morbid symptoms" are experienced, "future (...) international political arrangements will have to be combined with a green new deal not just for Europe but world-wide" (Kaldor, 2023). Taking into account what has been exposed up to this point throughout this chapter, it is indeed in this European-led green colonialism (Blanc, 2022; Dorn, 2022; Mañé-Estrada, 2023) in which underlies a future division of the global map of nighttime tourism between those regions still free of Euro-centric green colonialism (Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and East and West Africa), with a high dynamism between outbound and inbound markets, and those regions subject to the hard geopolitics of both the European Green Deal and the UN Sustainable Development Agenda. Therefore, it would not be risky to affirm that the forecasts on the expansion and/or consolidation of nighttime tourism at a global level are concentrated in the first mentioned regions, while the future scenario of nightlife tourism in the Global North (with the exception of the unknown of the United States of America) might be marked by contraction and decrease in revenues volume in case of consolidation of the most extremist positions of the green politics in conjunction with the recent establishment of a war economy against Russia and its allies (Gray, 2024).

The fifth challenge is related to the potential occurrence of a new pandemic whose potential consequences are still unknown. A growing number of authors have noted how transnational tourism has contributed to the global proliferation of infectious diseases (e.g., Sönmez et al., 2019; Hussain et al., 2021; Kulshreshtha, 2021). In the face of this, both United Nations World Health Organization and World Tourism Organization have emphasized the importance of cross-sectoral coordination for preparedness and resilience in case of new emerging health threats at regional and global level (WHO, 2024). In fact, there is no doubt that during the last decade and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period, new technologies have been developed to improve biosecurity in the global travel sector, indicating the growing concern of governments along with the tourism, hospitality and nightlife industries about the need to adapt the various governance tools to manage potential future biosecurity risks especially in tourism

destinations (Sacramento, 2023; Melly & Hanrahan, 2023). However, the return of desires for the biosecuritization of tourism destinations could again incite the emergence of the voices of stigmatization and punitivist criminalization that the so-called institutional-civic-media front (at the local, national and global levels) deployed against “the night” during the COVID-19 pandemic (Garcia et al., 2021; Nofre et al., 2023b, 2023c).

To conclude, the sixth challenge has to do with the potential volatility of the nighttime tourism life cycle as such. In general terms, it is commonly accepted that the tourism product life cycle includes six stages, namely exploration, investment, development, consolidation, stagnation and, finally, decline or revitalization of the product. The rise and fall in popularity of nighttime tourism destinations is influenced not only by some of factors explained in this epilogue but also (and especially) by a constant redefinition of values, tastes, and leisure consumption patterns of the different generations (especially young people) from the main tourist-sending countries. The strong specialization in a particular type of nightlife in certain areas of cities or even coastal and/or island tourist destinations - such as Magaluf on the island of Mallorca (Spain), Bairro Alto in Lisbon (Portugal), Paceville in Malta or Copacabana in Rio do Janeiro (Brazil) - led any critical observer to ask the following question: What will become of these areas when the nightlife tourism that currently sustains the respective local economies of these territories collapses?

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