



## **Sustainable Urban Tourism from The Perspectives of Overtourism and Smart Tourism: A Systematic Literature Review**

*Aşırı Turizm ve Akıllı Turizm Bakış Açılarından Sürdürülebilir Kent Turizmi: Sistematik Bir Literatür Analizi*

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### **Abstract**

The tourism sector is one of the fundamental determinants of global economic growth. It is one of the global economy's main income and job providers. In this regard, countries have paying increasing attention and investing in high rates on tourism activities since the end of the 20th century. However, the 21st century has witnessed discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of tourism from the perspective of sustainability. Moreover, the recent pandemic has transformed the tourism sector in terms of sustainability. In this respect, this study intends to analyze the impacts of COVID-19 on the sustainable urban tourism literature from the perspectives of overtourism and smart tourism studies. This study tries to make a contribution to the literature through its thematic and period-based classifications of the literature. Main findings indicate that COVID-19 pandemic has affected the route of urban tourism studies. The rate of overtourism and smart tourism studies in urban context have accelerated. Also, it is observed that although the importance of sustainability is on the forefront, the number of emerging sustainable urban tourism studies is quite low.

**Key Words:** Sustainable Urban Tourism, Smart Tourism Cities, Overtourism, COVID-19, Literature Analysis

## Özet

Turizm sektörü küresel ekonomik büyümenin temel itici güçlerinden birisidir. Turizm, küresel ekonomide temel gelir ve iş yaratıcılarındandır. Bu kapsamda, 20. Yüzyılın ikinci yarısından beri ülkeler turizm aktivitelerine artan ilgi göstermekte ve gitgide daha yüksek oranlarda turizme yatırım yapmaktadırlar. Öte yandan 21. Yüzyıl, turizmin artıları ve eksilerine yönelik tartışmalara sahne olmuştur. Üstelik son pandemi turizm sektörünü sürdürülebilirlik açısından dönüştürmüştür. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, COVID-19'un sürdürülebilir kent turizmi literatürüne etkilerini aşırı turizm ve akıllı turizm çalışmaları perspektifinden analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, literatürün tematik ve dönem bazında sınıflandırılması yoluyla literatüre katkı sağlamaya çalışmaktadır. Ana bulgular, COVID-19 salgınının kent turizmi çalışmalarının rotasını etkilediğini göstermektedir. Kentsel bağlamda aşırı turizm ve akıllı turizm çalışmalarının hızı artmıştır. Ayrıca sürdürülebilirliğin önemi ön planda olmasına rağmen ortaya çıkan sürdürülebilir kent turizmi çalışmalarının sayısının oldukça az olduğu görülmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sürdürülebilir Kent Turizmi, Akıllı Turizm Şehirleri, Aşırı Turizm, COVID-19, Literatür Analizi

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism activities have significantly contributed to the global economy in the pre-pandemic era. Tourism created over 300 million jobs and approximately 9 trillion US Dollars income at the end of 2019. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed the tourism industry into a new era. Approximately 200 million jobs and 6 trillion dollars were lost in the tourism industry as of 2020 (WTTC: 2020a:1). International tourist arrivals decreased by 72% in 2020 compared to the previous year. This decline was important since UNWTO (2020) emphasized that the tourism industry has returned to its 30 years ago. Today, the tourism industry is in a recovery (UNWTO, 2022). Recent data show that international tourism volumes on track to return pre-pandemic levels as of 2024. Although international tourist arrivals are not same as the pre-pandemic level yet, 88% come back has been provided (UNWTO, 2024).

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) reports that the pandemic has transformed the tourism industry. Both demand and supply conditions have changed significantly. WTTC underlines four main tourism trends in the wake of COVID-19. They

are demand evolution, health & hygiene, innovation & digitization, and sustainability (WTTC, 2020b). Recently, travelers preferred domestic vacations, outdoor activities, less crowded rural areas, short-haul traveling, closer destinations to home and well-defined health and hygiene protocols (WTTC, 2020b: 9 – 10). Following this, tourism supply has transformed with new protocols and wider use of emerging technologies and smart applications. These transformations rely on innovation and digitization with the understanding of sustainability. Moreover, the circularity for the sustainability is a key element in the contemporary world. Since resources are limited and the Globe is about to reach its limits, effective use and recirculation of natural resources are pivotal for economies (Corona et al., 2019:1). In this context, the circular economy (CE) view has also been emerging in the tourism industry. With a comprehensive understanding, CE aims to achieve a balance between economy and environment, with low-carbon, resource-efficient and competitive economic conditions (Kristensen and Mosgaard, 2020; European Commission, 2020). In this manner, mass tourism seems to be declining with the pandemic.

For many years, overtourism and touristification have been critical areas of discussion, especially in popular cities like Venice, Paris, and Lisbon (see Freytag and Bauder, 2018; Sequera and Nofre, 2020). The rise of mass tourism has brought about the fast growth of city tourism. Especially developed and emerging economies have experienced the fastest growth in urban tourism rates (Postma et al., 2017: 95). However, the popularity of overcrowded areas has declined after pandemic from the lens of travelers and this result seems to enhance the environmental and social well-being of these cities (Monteiro et al., 2021). What is more is that anti-tourism activism has increasing. 2024 summer season has witnessed lots of protests of residents in Europe's most popular travel destinations (BBC, 27.09.2024). In this sense, it seems that a sustainable urban tourism approach will be in the frame of the post-COVID era. Digitization and smart applications seem to be helping to overcome negative impacts of touristification. Artificial tours and touchless technologies seem to be the first attempts for the emerging era and similar attempts seem to be emerging due to the rise of smart cities framework.

Following all aforementioned global developments about the tourism industry, the main purpose of this study is to enhance a comprehensive discussion about sustainable urban tourism in the post-COVID era by indicating the nexus between overtourism and

smart tourism city approaches. It is expected to make a contribution to the related literature with a policy discussion that synthesizes transformations in studies in the related literature. This paper uses a Mixed Method which includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches to make a deduction about smart cities and sustainable urban tourism in the post-COVID era. Analysis findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a transformation in the related literature. Consequently, the originality of this paper is that it enhances a comprehensive policy discussion with the help of a systematic literature review. In this sense, this study sheds light on the uncertainties of the post-COVID era with the help of related literature. In this manner, main research questions of this study can be listed as follows: (1) Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the route of urban tourism studies? (2) If it has affected the route, what are the main directions of emerging studies? (3) Which research areas should be enhanced following the recent pandemic? (4) What kind of tourism policy should be adopted to provide sustainable urban tourism in the post-COVID era? In the context of these research interests, the study starts with a detailed introduction and then continues with a conceptual section examining the transformations in the tourism industry. Followingly, a systematic literature review analysis is provided in the methodology section. Lastly, the conclusions discuss the findings and offer policy recommendations.

## **TRANSFORMATIONS IN TOURISM WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### **Fall of Overtourism**

Overtourism, or so called tourism-phobia, has been one of the main topics of tourism after the rise of mass tourism (Pasquinelli and Trunfio, 2020: 2). The first forms of mass tourism were experienced in England in the late 19th century. The transformation of British society (from agrarian to post-industrial) has caused the emergence of a new leisure tourism development. Mass-tourism is defined by the participation of high volumes of tourists and standardized, rigidly packaged holidays. Consequently, mass tourism is a rather quantitative notion based on the volume of tourism activity (Vanhove, 1997: 50-51; Poon, 1993: 32). In this sense, pros and cons of mass tourism have always been critical discussion areas.

In historical manner, as more and more countries have adopted mass tourism to obtain direct economic benefits in terms of income and employment, they have actually made trade-offs between short- and long-run outcomes. Mass tourism has caused a fact called overtourism that is characterized by over-crowded tourism destinations, more environmental pollution and less satisfaction of local residents. Numerous negative externalities of mass tourism are counted as high crime rates, heavy traffic, high volume of noise, loss of locals' identities, high inflation and financial leakages (Choi and Murray, 2010; Meyer, 2013). Hence, famous mass-tourism destinations have become worse off from very different aspects in the long-term. In particular, the experiences of some tourism cities such as Venice, Barcelona, Paris and Seville have proved the clear impacts of overtourism (Diaz-Parra and Jover, 2021; Jover and Diaz-Parra, 2020; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019; Bourliataux-Lajoinie, 2019; Freytag and Bauder, 2018).

What is more is that overtourism is generally characterized by touristification. This concept is used to define the deterioration in residents' quality of life and tourists' quality of experience due to high number of incoming tourists (Barrera-Fernandez et al., 2019: 103). Touristification has several impacts on local residents' lives such as the creation of tourism monoculture, deformation of neighbourhoods and communities, commodification of culture, higher rents and housing prices, high crowd, less walkability, environmental pollution, crime, and traffic (Etxezarreta-Etxarri et al., 2020; Freytag and Bauder, 2018). In this context, city administrations and public administrators face a trade-off between growth-oriented tourism and welfare-state policies (Etxezarreta-Etxarri et al., 2020: 1296 – 1297). Although mass tourism has been on stage during the 20th century, the next period has been the discussion era till now –especially from an urban perspective.

These discussions also introduced measurement methods for overtourism. One of the fundamental indicators to observe urban overtourism is Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC). Although there is no 'De Facto' method to compute TCC, the indicator is generally defined as the maximum number of tourists that a destination can obtain without deteriorating ecological and socio-economic structures (Garrido et al., 2022: 4). Recently some methods to forecast urban TCC have been applied such as fuzzy linear programming. This method tries to determine optimal number of tourists under certain constraints and circumstances for the selected destination (Canestrelli and Costa, 1991).

Such methods are the fruits of innovations in information systems and, they help developing sustainable urban tourism policies.

### **Rise of Sustainable Urban Tourism**

Discussions about the global climate crisis have accelerated at the end of the 20th century. Agenda 21 was the first attempt at maintaining global cooperation on sustainable development. The second attempt was the declaration of Millennium Development Goals by the United Nations. Today, there is a global consensus about maintaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2021). All the goals are different dimensions of Circular Economy which is the main topic of the contemporary world. Circular Economy (CE) approach is a multifaceted view in the context of sustainable development. European Commission describes CE as a sustainable, low-carbon and resource efficient economy (European Commission, 2020). In this manner, CE is maintained by the effective use and recirculation of natural resources. What is more is that it is an approach trying to sustain a balance among economy, society and environment (Corona et al.; 2019:1; Kristensen and Mosgaard, 2020).

Although tourism serves to reduce poverty and increase economic growth, its negative externalities sometimes overcome its positive outcomes. These negative externalities mainly arise from the preference for mass tourism. Today, it is widely accepted that overtourism deteriorates both heritage and ecosystems. UNESCO has declared that some cities like Venice and Dubrovnik are in serious risk because of overtourism. And if urgent actions are not taken, then there is a possibility for them to be removed from the list of World Heritage (Hospers, 2019: 22). Moreover, some studies have proved that overtourism has significant impacts on environmental well-being of such tourism destinations. The COVID-19 pandemic has been an important simulation for this study area. Cecchi (2021) conducted a research on the Venice Lagoon. Results indicated a sharp decline in pollution at the molecular level. Moreover, Monterio et al. (2021) conducted an air quality research for Lisbon. They investigated that air pollutants significantly decreased during lockdown in Lisbon. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected not only environmental pollution rates but also energy consumption behaviors. Zhang et al. (2021) applied analyses of Macao and some other important tourism cities from different countries. They investigated that pandemic decreased electricity

consumption in the tourism industry and increased renewable energy consumption. Only Chinese tourism cities seem to be still based on coal and oil consumption.

The Globe '90 Conference was the first significant attempt to bring together the tourism industry representatives, NGOs, public administrators, and academics to discuss the future of the tourism industry and environment relationship. Five main goals of sustainable tourism have been identified in this conference. They were: (i) developing awareness about the contributions of tourism to environment and economy, (ii) promoting equity and development, (iii) improving host community's quality of life (iv) providing high-quality tourist experiences and (v) maintaining environmental quality (Fennell, 1999). These basic elements arise from the comprehensiveness of the sustainability concept and they express that there are many aspects of providing a sustainable tourism.

In this regard, inclusive tourism development (ITD) is one of the key concepts of sustainable tourism. ITD suggests a tourism development path capturing all the stakeholders benefiting from and participating in tourism activities (Scheyvens and Biddulph, 2017). ITD has numerous key elements such as: increasing gains of producers; improving benefits of consumers by increasing accessibility of destinations and taking into account demands of marginalized groups; protecting cultural assets and self-representations of host destinations; and widening decision-making processes from top to down (Bellato and Cheer, 2021: 5). ITD approach follows the pro-poor tourism approach (PPT). PPT is based on empowering poor people in the host community, and it has a wider perspective than only taking into account economic benefits. It emphasizes improving environmental, social, and cultural benefits as well as economic gains of poor communities (Holden, 2005). Consequently, PPT is one of the most important approaches for the alternative tourism. Another key concept for sustainable tourism, which can also be counted under the umbrella of alternative tourism, is ecotourism. One of the first comprehensive definitions of eco-tourism has been introduced in 1987 by Ceballos-Lascurain. He defined the concept as traveling to undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with some specific purposes of studying and/or enjoying the scenery, the wildlife and the cultural structure (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987: 13). As time passes, the definition of ecotourism has developed with the addition of new topics such as host community participation and the provision of industrial standards; however, the merit of the ecological concerns stayed at the heart of the concept (Higham and Lück, 2002: 37 – 38).



This environment-friendly tourism approach continues to provide a hope for sustainable tourism development.

ITD, pro-poor tourism, and ecotourism are critical for sustainable urban tourism development. The idea of cities as tourism attraction centers dates back to the 1970s. The main idea behind this policy was to use tourism as a tool for economic growth in urban areas (Grube, 2022: 3). This idea is also part of the tourism-led growth hypothesis (TLGH), which underlines the potential of tourism activities in economic growth process (Brida et al., 2008: 1). TLGH relies on the positive contributions of tourism revenues to balance-of-payments accounts in economies (Nissan et al., 2011: 1568). Consequently, sustainable urban tourism idea is not new wine in old bottles. It has been discussed for approximately 50 years. However, there is no doubt that as the importance of sustainability issues has risen, discussions about sustainable urban tourism have also accelerated and as new approaches like CE and smart economy have been added, the discussion has widened.

### **Smart Tourism Cities: Big Promises**

Smart cities are characterized by four main properties as: technical infrastructure, application domain, system integration, and data processing. Technical infrastructure is related to the cohesion of the city's physical, social, business, and ICT infrastructure. In this context, a smart city integrates hardware, software and network technologies. Moreover, the application domain of a smart city is the inclusion of city administration, citizens, businesses and environment by the efficient use of smart computing technologies and infrastructures. As the other component, system integration offers a view about organic integration of interconnected systems and subsystems. Lastly, data processing refers to the efficient collection and analysis of real-world data (Yin et al., 2015: 5-6). In this context, Smart Tourism Cities (STCs) have an advanced technological accessibility including internet access, portable device connectivity and cloud services (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015). STCs provide technology-based, advanced, and interconnected tourist experiences (Chang and Caneday, 2011).

Following the recent COVID-19 pandemic, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) applications have become the most discussed areas in smart tourism. Numerous tourism destinations have adopted augmented reality to provide tourism



experiences during lockdowns. Some examples of attraction areas using effective AR applications have been: Potatso National Park (China) and The Natural History Museum (London) (Barry et al., 2012; Jiang et al., 2019). However, following the pandemic, numerous museums and theme parks have been added to these examples. VR and AR have not only become smart tourism applications but also tourism marketing tools in the new era. They provide effective tourist engagement and enhanced touristic experiences (Mohanty et al., 2020: 755). What is more, these technologies help to preserve the cultural heritage in protected areas. Since tourists do not physically visit such places, they give no harm during their experiences (Chung et al., 2015).

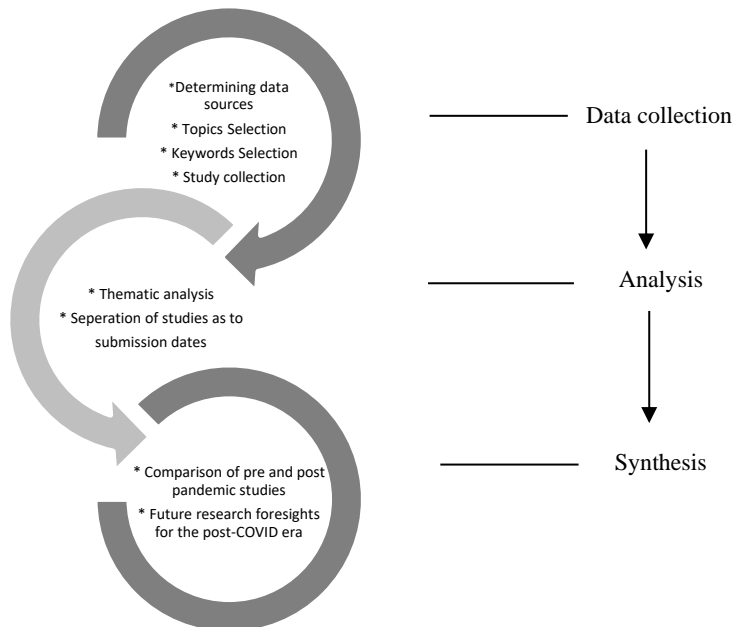
In addition to VR and AR, STCs have several digital and mobile applications. They can be listed as; vehicle tracking and monitoring systems, energy-efficient hospitality services, mobile applications for traveling, and tour guiding (Buhalis and Amaranggana, 2015; Bricu et al., 2020). Especially energy-efficient hospitality services have been one of the main themes following the rise of CE view. Since the circularity for the sustainability is a key element in the contemporary world, smart applications providing energy efficiency in tourism services have become on the forefront. Furthermore, developments in computer operating systems have provided new tools for smart tourism cities. As it is mentioned earlier, forecasting TCCs for urban areas is especially important for mega tourism cities like Barcelona, Venice and Paris. Fuzzy linear programming helps to forecast optimal number of tourists that such destinations can carry without compromising environmental, social, and economic well-being (Canestrelli and Costa, 1991).

## **METHODOLOGY: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature reviews provide insights for researchers and policymakers. They make it possible to observe different dimensions of the literature and, hence, ease the observation of opportunities and obstacles for future research and policy formations. In this regard, it is critical to conduct comprehensive literature analyses, especially for the emerging research areas. Considering this fact, this study aims to conduct an extensive literature survey on the paradigm shift in urban tourism development from a mass tourism approach to a sustainable tourism approach, following the recent pandemic.

The research design of the study is presented in Figure 1. Our literature survey has basically three steps as study collection, literature analysis, and synthesis. In the first step, data sources have been determined as Web of Science (WOS) and Google Scholar databases. These two sources were chosen following the similar literature review studies, such as Casado-Aranda et al., 2021; Hua and Wondirad, 2020; Kontogianni and Alepis, 2020. As the second phase of the first step, four main themes were selected as overtourism, touristification, smart tourism city, and sustainable urban tourism. Since overtourism and touristification concepts are used reciprocally in the related literature, both topics have been considered together. Then, keywords for the data search have been determined as: overtourism, touristification, smart tourism city, smart urban tourism, sustainable urban tourism and sustainable city tourism. For overtourism and touristification search, only the studies in urban/city context have been taken into consideration. The second step of the literature analysis has been the thematic and periodical separations of studies. Finally, the last step of the literature survey is the synthesis. At this stage, pre- and post-pandemic studies have been compared and future research foresights have been made.

**Figure 1.** The research design



Using the selected keywords, 222 studies were collected and separated according to their contents and submission dates. Since one of the main objectives of this study is to investigate the roots of studies after the COVID-19 pandemic; these have been classified as pre-pandemic and post-pandemic studies. However, this distinction has been adopted not as to their publication dates but as to their submission dates. Since publication processes in top journals are generally long and an article's publication process can take 1-2 years following submission. Consequently, a study analyzing conditions in the pre-pandemic world can probably be published after a long time from the beginning of the pandemic. Consequently, the articles submitted to journals before the start of the pandemic, have been classified as pre-pandemic studies. To the best of our knowledge, this distinction is the first in the literature. Although Casado-Aranda et al. (2021) conducted a bibliometric analysis for the tourism research after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is observed that they considered the publication date. Moreover, our literature survey was conducted following a thematic approach. Studies have also been classified according to their main themes. In this respect, both pre-pandemic and post-pandemic studies have been classified as overtourism/touristification in cities, smart tourism cities, and sustainable urban tourism. Table 1 summarizes all the studies as to their themes and dates. Journal articles, working papers and book chapters scanned in WOS and Google Scholar, were included in the survey. There has been determined no date limit for the research due to the fact that all the searched themes are emerging concepts till the end of the 20th century. In this way, the studies' dates range from 1996 to 2024.

Table 1. The literature survey

Pre-Pandemic Studies			Post-Pandemic Studies			
Overtourism/ Touristification in Cities	Smart Tourism Cities	Sustainable Urban Tourism	Overtourism/ Touristification in Cities		Smart Tourism Cities	Sustainable Urban Tourism
Abbasian et al. (2020) Alonso-Almeida et al. (2019) Amore et al. (2020) Barbhuiya (2020) Barrera-Fernandez (2019) Belhassen et al. (2014) Bertocchi et al. (2020) BouchonandRauscher (2019) Bourliataux-Lojoinie (2019) Capocchi et al. (2019) CelataandRomano (2022) Diaz-ParraandJover (2021) Etxezarreta-Etxarri et al. (2020) Fedyk et al. (2020) FreytagandBauder (2018) GowreesunkarandSeraphin (2019) Hospers (2019) JoverandDiaz-Parra (2022) JoverandDiaz-Parra (2020) Koens et al. (2018) Khomsi et al. (2020) Martins (2018) Milano et al. (2019) Minguez et al. (2019) Nilsson (2020) Novy (2019) NovyandColomb (2019) Oklevik et al. (2019) Outon (2020) PasquinelliandTrunfio (2020) Pinke-Sziva et al. (2019) Pixova and Sladek (2017) RamosandMundet (2021) SequeraandNofre (2020) Seraphin et al. (2018) Smith et al. (2019) Vargas-Sanchez (2020) Zemla (2020) Zerva et al. (2019) ZmyslonyandKowalczyk-Aniol (2019) Zucco et al. (2020)	Arenas et al. (2019) Aydin and Emeksiz (2018) Boes et al. (2016) Brandt et al. (2017) Cavalheiro et al. (2020) Chan et al. (2019) Choi et al. (2021) Coca-Stefaniak (2019) Coca-Stefaniak (2020) Coca-Stefaniak and Seisededos (2020) Dabeedooal et al. (2019) Corte et al. (2017) Femenia-SerraandIvars-Baidal (2021) Ghorbani et al. (2020) Gretzel et al. (2016) Guerra et al. (2017) Guo et al. (2014) Han et al. (2018) Ivars-Baidal et al. (2019) Jasrotia and Gangotia (2018) JungandHan (2014) Khan et al. (2017) Koens et al. (2021) LalicicandÖnder (2018) Molinillo et al. (2019) Moorhouse (2020) Nam et al. (2021) Shafiee et al. (2021) Tom Dieck and Jung (2018) Trinchini et al. (2019) UmandChung (2021) Utami et al. (2018) Zheng et al. (2020)	AallandKoens (2019) Boom et al. (2021) Cameron et al. (2012) Chadha and Onkar (2014) Cummings (1997) da Silva et al. (2019) Ekinci (2014) Grah et al. (2020) Hinch (1996) IdikutandEdelman (2003) JonesandNewsome (2015) Jurado-RivasandSanchez-Rivero (2019) Kurt Konakoglu et al. (2019) Kusakabe et al. (2015) Lerario and Di Turi (2018) Mata (2019) Maxim (2015) Maxim (2016) Miller et al. (2015) Musavengane et al. (2020) Nyerere et al. (2020) Olcár (2020) Önder et al. (2017) PhucandNguyen (2020) Qureshi et al. (2017) Razali and Ismail (2014) Savage et al. (2004) Scott and Cooper (2010) Stahan (2018) TimurandGetz (2008) TimurandGetz (2009) ZamfirandCorbos (2015)	Amrhein et al. (2022) Aston et al. (2023) Berselli et al. (2022) Birenboim et al. (2022) Blasco et al. (2021) Blazquez-Salom et al. (2021) BrancaandHaller (2021) Calle-Vaquero and Garcia-Hernandez (2023) Calle-Vaquero et al. (2020) Chamizo-Nieto et al. (2023) Cheung and Yiu (2023) Cheung and Yiu (2022) Cocola-Gant (2023) Dimitrovski et al. (2022) Dürr et al. (2021) Fernandez-Tabales et al. (2023) Garcia-Buades et al. (2022) Garcia Mestanza and Bakhat (2021) Ghaderi et al. (2022) Gil (2023) Goodwin (2021) Guimaraes (2021) Hagemans et al. (2023) Herruzo-Deminguez et al. (2024) Hernandez-Maskivker et al. (2021) Hidalgo-Giralte et al. (2023) Hidalgo-Giralte et al. (2021) Hristov et al. (2021) Jover and Barrero-Rescalvo (2023) Jover et al. (2023)	Kapoor and Wangdus (2022) Kim and Holifield (2022) Leccis (2023) Liberatore et al. (2022) Majdak and de Almeida (2022) Mendoza and Russo (2023) MihalicandKuscser (2020) ParralejoandDiaz-Parra (2021) Pasquinelli et al. (2021) Pasquinelli and Trunfio (2021) Pereira et al. (2022) Perez Garrido et al. (2022) Perles-Ribes et al. (2021) Pettas et al. (2021) Porfido et al. (2023) Purwandani and Pakan (2022) Remenyik et al. (2021) Rozmiarek et al. (2022) Salerno (2022) Sanchez-Montanes et al. (2023) Santos-Izquierdo et al. (2023) Santos-Rojo et al. (2023) SibrijnsandVanneste (2021) Song and Wondirad (2023) Trivi et al. (2023) TulumelloandAllegretti (2021) Weaver (2022) Yuval (2021) Zemla and Szromek (2023) Zhang et al. (2021)	Briciu et al. (2020) Buhalis et al. (2023) Calle-Lamelas et al. (2023) Casado-Aranda et al. (2021) Liberatore et al. (2022) Chung et al. (2021) D'Amico et al. (2022) De Carlo et al. (2021) Fernandez-Diaz et al. (2023) Eichelberger et al. (2020) El Archi et al. (2023) Garcia-Milon et al. (2020) GretzelandKoo (2021) HabeebandWeli (2020) Ivars-Baidal et al. (2023) Ivars-Baidal et al. (2021a) Ji and Yin (2022) Kapiki (2021) Kivılcım Zorba (2023) Kim and Kim (2023) Köse (2022) Lee et al. (2022) Lee et al. (2020) LeeandHlee (2021) LiaoandNong (2021) Lu et al. (2021) Marchesani (2023) Marchesani and Masciarelli (2023) Navalon-Garcia et al. (2023) Qi and Li (2022) Suanpang et al. (2022) Trip et al. (2021) TrunfioandPasquinelli (2021) Vardopoulos et al. (2023) Wang et al. (2021) Xu et al. (2024)	Alvarez-HerranzandMacedo-Ruiz (2021) Amen et al. (2023) Baeilashaki et al. (2023) BellatoandCheer (2021) Brochado et al. (2023) Cherysh et al. (2023) Cho et al. (2022) Gonia and Jezierska-Thöle (2022) Grube (2023) HuaandWondirad (2021) Ivars-Baidal et al. (2023) Ivars-Baidal et al. (2021b) Jafarinia (2022) Kamuti (2022) Matusikova and Sambronka (2023) Panasiuk (2021) Pormayeh et al. (2022) Serrano et al. (2020) Thu and Dinh (2022) Torres-Delgado et al. (2023) Zhou et al. (2021)

Analyzing the literature from the perspective of journals seems remarkable, because most of the studies are journal articles. Since our study follows a Mixed Method harnessing both qualitative and quantitative analyses, the quantitative measures are also given in this section. Our literature analysis shows that 206 articles have been published in 79 different journals from diversified fields ranging from tourism to economics and business. However, most of these journals are in the field of tourism. Moreover, the distribution of studies according to journals provides a deeper outlook. It is observed that 37 articles have been published in Sustainability; 19 articles have been published in International Journal of Tourism Cities; and 13 articles have been published in Journal of Sustainable Tourism. The main reason behind the high volume of articles in Sustainability arises from the popularity and the fast publication opportunity of this journal. It publishes high number of articles, not only about urban tourism but also about diversified fields of social sciences. Figure 2 reveals more detailed information about the number of articles published as to journals.

**Figure 2.** Number of articles published per journals

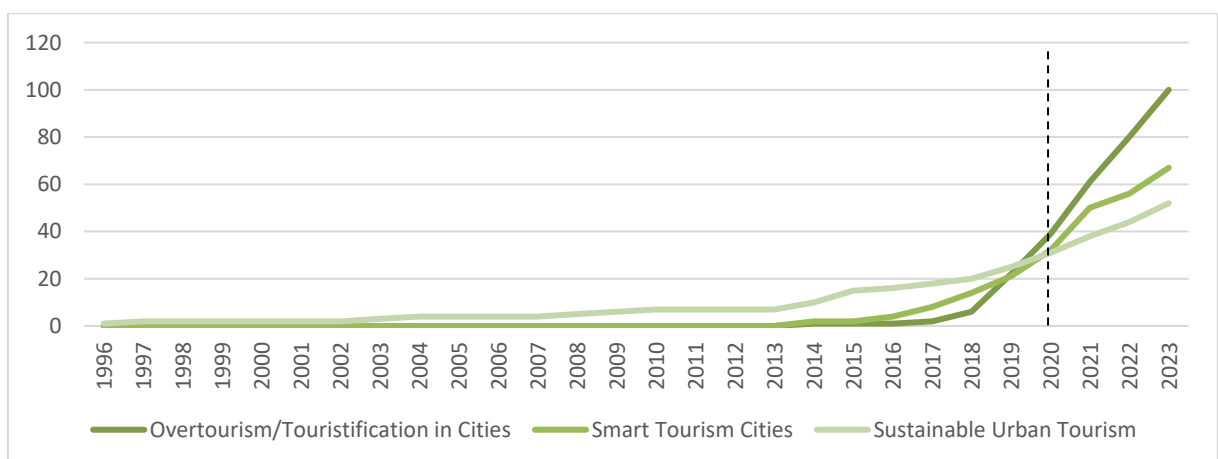


**Note:** Journals published more than 1 article in related fields, are included in the graph.

Comparison of pre-pandemic and post-pandemic studies as to themes, provide another aspect about the development of concepts in the related literature. In this manner, there exist 41 pre-pandemic studies about overtourism and touristification in cities. Date range of these studies are 2014 and 2021. Moreover, the number of post-pandemic studies at this thematic field is 60. Furthermore, the number of pre-pandemic smart tourism cities studies is 33 and their dates range from 2014 to 2021. The number of post-pandemic studies in this field is however, 35. Lastly, the number of pre-pandemic sustainable urban tourism studies is 32 and their dates range between 2014 and 2021. The number of post-pandemic studies in this field is only 21. Although it seems that the number of studies about sustainable urban tourism is fewer in post-pandemic period, the studies in other thematic fields exhibit accelerations in the rate of publication.

Figure 3 shows the cumulative numbers of studies as to years and themes. Cumulative values exhibit that the overall number of studies about overtourism and touristification has increased after 2018 and this acceleration trend has continued in the same path following the introduction of the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, studies about smart tourism cities have increased in volume after 2016 and this development path has continued following the pandemic. However, it also seems that there is a break in the acceleration of the volume of studies as of 2021. Lastly, the cumulative number of studies on sustainable urban tourism exhibits a steady growth path before and after the pandemic.

**Figure 3.** Cumulative volumes of studies according to years and themes



It is seen that most of the urban tourism studies are still about overtourism and touristification in the post-COVID era as in pre-COVID era. However, it is observed that

fewer studies have been published about sustainable urban tourism in post-pandemic period. The main reason behind this evidence is that the pandemic has created a more fragmented view about the urban tourism. Most of the emerging studies are specialized in the sub-themes of sustainable urban tourism instead of a comprehensive perspective. Nowadays, studies focus on the specific components of sustainable urban tourism, such as walkability, environmental degradation, urban ecotourism, inclusion of marginalized groups etc. (Please see Barrera-Fernandez and Hernandez-Escampa, 2022; Xie et al., 2021; Lin et al., 2022; Cardoso et al., 2022; Khaki et al., 2022; Camargo et al., 2022). Although this situation creates opportunities to develop detailed analyses and to form specific policy instruments, it is also hazardous due to the fact that studies are diverging from a comprehensive overview.

## CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable urban tourism is a key policy areas of the post-pandemic world. However, it is a multifaceted issue, and UNWTO (2018) indicated that there are several success factors to provide such a tourism policy. These factors can be listed as: long-term vision and strategic planning, public and private sector involvement, economic support, community engagement, cultural heritage protection, event organization, sustainable management and technology. Some issues are especially important under these topics such as overtourism. Overcrowd and gentrification are critical for strategic tourism planning (Gonzalez et al., 2018). In this context, comprehensive metropolitan tourism strategies integrating land use planning and tourism planning, developing urban specific mobility plans, preventing illegal accommodation and promoting social housing for the low income households, should be promoted. Moreover, environmental sustainability should also be on the forefront. The urban ecological footprint and carrying capacity assessments should be taken into account in strategic urban tourism modelling. Promoting green and social certifications at the industry level may be an effective policy instrument at this point. It is sure that increasing financial and technical supports for sustainable and responsible businesses is another important trivet of an effective policy. Moreover, as is widely accepted today, the tourism industry is a large consumer of natural resources. Hence, it is critical to reduce overconsumption and improve recycling. These actions are critical from the lens of CE in the post-pandemic period (Gonzalez et al., 2018: 30 – 33).



In the pre-pandemic world, it has been proven that travel and tourism activities are responsible for approximately one-tenth of global GHG emissions (Lenzen et al, 2018). Moreover, empirical evidence has exhibited that the only responsible was not transportation, but also the consumption of goods and services was in turn significantly (Gross, 2018). In the post-COVID period, tourism demand and supply trends have transforming significantly. Still the path is unclear. However, some certain evidences have been experienced and some foresights have been made for the policy formation. It seems that circularity will be one of the main dimensions of travel and tourism activities in the post-COVID era. In this respect, efficient supply chain management, a coherent circularity framework for stakeholders and efficient environmental management systems seem pivotal for the near future (Einarsson and Sorin, 2020: 30). And all these facts gather around innovation and technology.

The contemporary world is witnessing a rapid transformation in technology. Mankind has never experienced such rapid transformation. Pathbreaking innovations emerge in short periods and hence, all sectors try to adapt fast transformations in supply and demand conditions. Moreover, the recent pandemic has added new dimensions to some sectors like tourism. Health and hygiene protocols have added new burdens to travel and tourism activities. In this sense, touchless technologies, smart applications, VR and AR practices have emerged to face these burdens. Digitization and innovation have become fundamental facts of the transformations in tourism supply and demand in post-pandemic period (WTTC, 2020b). In this regard, smart urban areas have become on the forefront. Today, smart tourism city formation seems critical for an effective sustainable urban tourism policy formation. Based on these facts, a systematic literature review of sustainable urban tourism was conducted in this study. *The distinction between pre-COVID and post-COVID periods in the literature exhibited the acceleration in the number of overtourism studies and smart tourism city studies. These evidence prove that the reasons for current unsustainable urban tourism and the tools to provide sustainable urban tourism have both been noticed.*

*As seen in the literature analysis, overtourism (hence touristification) is a theme has taking attention in both the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic periods. It is important since it is one of the concrete facts of urban carrying capacities. It seems it is one of the main obstacles to reach the sustainable urban tourism areas. Today, mass tourism has*

become to be perceived as a dangerous way of tourism development and overtourism is the key phenomenon at this stage. Hence, urban areas –especially mega tourism cities– need a new kind of tourism policy that addresses contemporary trends. In this context, smart systems come to the fore. Smart systems and applications are core elements of the 4th Industrial Revolution. *Consequently, smart tourism city formation may be an effective alternative tourism policy tool in the axis of sustainable urban tourism in the post-COVID era.* Figure 4 summarizes these themes in the context of sustainable urban tourism development.

**Figure 4.** The thematic relationship for the sustainable urban tourism development



*The literature review in this study revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the route of urban tourism studies. The rate of overtourism and smart tourism studies in urban context have accelerated. Also, it is observed that although the importance of sustainability is on the forefront, the number of emerging sustainable urban tourism studies is quite low. As it is mentioned earlier, the most possible explanation of this evidence is the fragmentation in the sustainable urban tourism studies. With the rise of the CE perspective, more specific and fragmented studies focusing on certain topics, such as waste management, resource efficiency and recycling, are published. Although concentration on certain topics is substantial, a risk lies at the heart of this tendency. Sustainable urban tourism policies are multifaceted and comprehensive. Hence, focusing on specific issues may cause not to see the big picture. Consequently, there seems an urgent need for emerging sustainable urban tourism studies that deal with the subject holistically, in the related literature. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed that humanity and hence the Earth has reached their limits. From now on, sustainability is not only a discussion area but also a matter of life and death for future generations.*

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