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Historic Towns and Regions

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Brian Smith and Matthias Ripp

GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL TOURISM

A Unique Opportunity
for Change Post Covid-19

'We see the key leadership role in securing more sustainable cultural tourism as falling, in large part, to historic towns and heritage cities.... These guidelines show how decision makers can assess their current approach and begin to scope a clear plan of action for a better, more sustainable and resilient future. The Covid 19 pandemic presents them, and all of us, with a once in a life time opportunity to rise to that challenge and ensure the pandemic cloud can indeed have a silver lining.'

1. Introduction

The global health crisis caused by Covid-19 has dramatically affected the global tourism sector to the extent that, in most countries, tourism and leisure activities have come completely to a halt. It appears clear, at the time of writing, that the broader economic and social impact of the pandemic will force a fundamental rethink in the way we live our lives - in ways that policy makers and citizens have not previously contemplated.

Resilience and sustainability are both concepts that feature prominently in post Covid-19 recovery thinking, either on a multinational, national, regional or local level - the ability to bounce back from crisis and the sustainable use of resources are at the heart of the current discourse. As mathematical modelling of the spread and control of the virus gives way to economic models of what the future might look like, most commentators predict a slower recovery curve than initial forecasts, as citizens, businesses and governments come to terms with what is being called the 'new normal'.

Without downplaying the hugely negative impacts of the pandemic, this paper:

- argues that the current crisis provides government, especially local and regional government, with a unique opportunity to start to re-balance tourism - progressively moving away from international mass tourism, to more sustainable, more local, cultural heritage-based tourism.

- draws on earlier work commissioned by the European Association of Historic Towns and Regions [1] providing practical guidance on how historic towns and heritage cities can move towards sustainable cultural tourism through a proactive, integrated process of review and delivery, engaging all stakeholders.

2. Resilience and Sustainability

Resilience is at the core of United Nations work on disaster risk and crisis-prevention and sustainability, the central plank of UN Sustainable Development Goals, defined in 2015 and adopted by nations around the globe (UN 2015). Many of these goals are relevant for tourism e.g.
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- Goal No.11: Sustainable Cities and Communities relates to all types of tourism that involve cities and
- Goal No.13: Climate Action, where different forms of tourist mobility, from cruise ships to planes, are contributing to global emissions and impacting negatively on the planet.

[1] The European Association of Historic Towns and Regions was created by the Council of Europe in 1999.
It is the registered name of Heritage Europe (EAHTR) a not for profit company limited by guarantee

The concepts of sustainability and resilience are like brothers and sisters i.e. from the same family, but still different in character. John Spacey (2016) expresses the inter-relationship clearly, defining sustainability as the practice of reducing or eliminating environmental impact and improving the quality of life of communities - whilst resilience focuses on designing things to endure physical, social and economic shocks and stresses. Resilience, in this context, is primarily associated with city planning and urban design. Its goal is to give cities the structures, systems and resources that allow communities to make it through disasters or sudden change. The practice of resilience can also apply to a nation, region or organisation. Cultural heritage also includes a variety of resilient qualities (Ripp and Lukat 2017). Spacey points out that sustainability and resilience tend to use many of the same techniques. That is to say that many of the things that improve quality of life and reduce environmental impact also tend to make an area more resilient.

Taking the twin concepts further, Ripp and Rodwell (2016) explain the differences conceptually in the table below, using the case study of Forest Management in 18th Century Germany.

While sustainability is a more holistic and linear approach concerned, in the main, with preserving finite resources, resilience incorporates more systemic thinking around preparedness to avoid disaster and the ability to re-bounce after crisis.

Concept	Sustainability	Resilience
Background	Forest Management. Example: 18th-century Germany	Psychological Resilience: the ability to bounce back from a stressful or adverse situation. Theoretical basis developed in the United States in the 1950s
Objective	To maintain the overall natural resource base	To make systems flexible enough to deal with changes without changing their principal character
Definition	Premise: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on the natural environment. Process: To create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, thereby enabling the fulfilment of the environmental, social and economic requirements of present and future generations	The ability of a system to respond flexibly to situational changes and negative factors without changing the essential state
Type	Primarily linear	Dynamic system
Trend	To enable economic development without damaging the natural resource base	To stimulate flexibility, adaptability and risk-preparedness in order to deal withnsudden or long term changes
Complexity	Fair	High
Level of integration	Semi-integrated	Integrated
Parameters involved	Limited number	High number
Implementation	Management and Development Plans, management mechanisms, etc.	New governance models. Change of attitude and values. Empowering communities. Prioritisation of cross-cutting topics, initiatives and developments

Source: Matthias Ripp

3. Towards Sustainable Cultural Tourism

Although sustainability has been part of mainstream thinking on cultural heritage and tourism for some time, delivering sustainable cultural tourism has remained largely aspirational to date, with mass tourism maintaining its dominant role world-wide. Resilience has only more recently entered the discourse in terms of its importance in delivering cultural heritage led tourism but has particular relevance post Covid-19.

The tourism industry is arguably unique in that that its myriad businesses across the world often rely on assets and services that they do not own, run or fully pay for - ranging from historic landscapes and cathedrals to transport systems and refuse collection. From the international or even national perspective it is an economic sector that cannot be easily planned or controlled other than at the local level. For these reasons the responsibility now falls to local and regional governments to grasp the current post Covid-19 window of opportunity. This means providing the leadership to engage with their communities to rethink, inspire and co-ordinate a common vision that provides a pathway to systemic change and a more sustainable and resilient future.

Reconciling tourism with sustainability remains unquestionably a major policy challenge, even though not a new phenomenon. The European Association of Historic Towns and Regions (EAHTR), supported by the Council of Europe, established an international expert working group[2] in 2009 to prepare, on its behalf, guidelines on how historic towns could develop more sustainable cultural heritage based tourism. The full technical report was adopted by EAHTR and the Council of Europe in 2009 (Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Historic Towns and Cities 2009). This Guidance of course does not exist in a vacuum, with a wide range of international charters and declarations providing context. In addition to the Agenda for Sustainable and Competitive European Tourism (European Commission 2007), other charters and guidelines that relate to sustainable tourism include:

- International Cultural Tourism Charter – Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance (ICOMOS 1999)

- United Nations World Tourism Organisation Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (UNWTO 1999)

- The Burra Charter (ICOMOS Australia 1999)

- The Malta Declaration on Cultural Tourism: Its Encouragement and Control (Europa Nostra 2006)

- The Dubrovnik Declaration, Cultural Tourism – Economic Benefit or Loss of Identity? (Council of Europe & EAHTR 2006)

- Cultural Tourism Policy Guidelines & Declaration (UNESCO 2017)

- Barcelona Declaration - Better Places to Live, Better Places to Visit (NECStouR 2018)

- Kyoto Declaration on Tourism and Culture: Investing in Future Generations (UNWTO 2019)
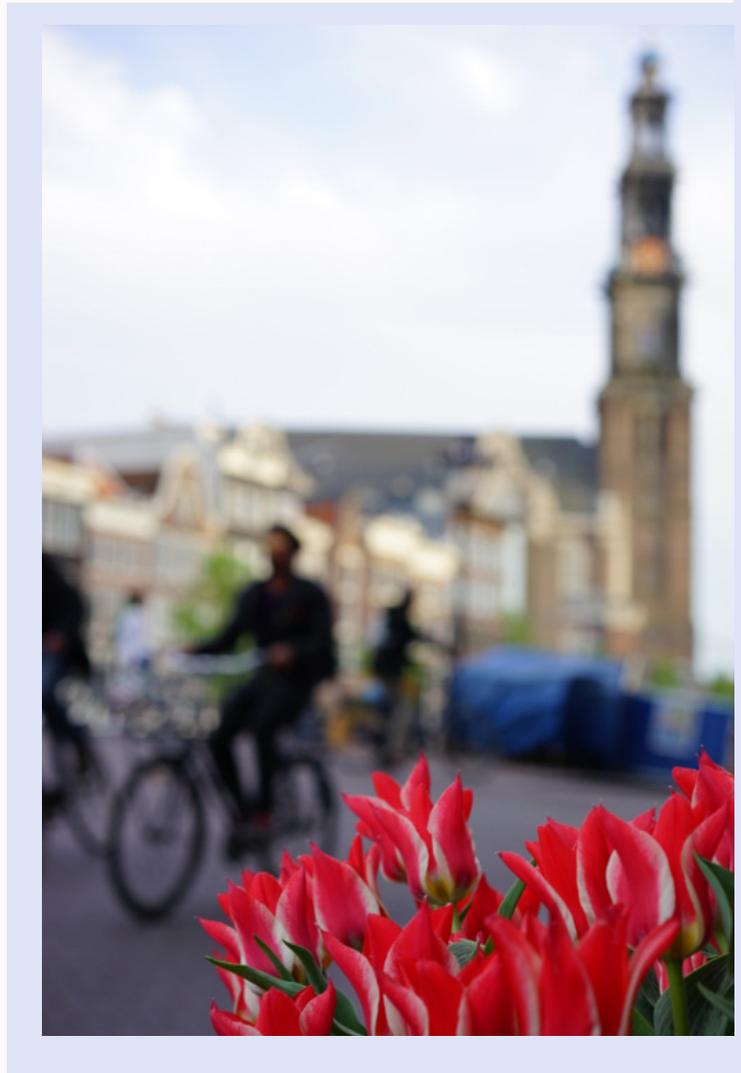
The summary EAHTR Guidelines - Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Historic Towns and Cities (EAHTR 2009) - are intended for use principally by policy makers and practitioners within municipalities but have relevance also for other stakeholders best placed to influence more sustainable approaches to cultural tourism. We have needed to add only very minor updates to the guidelines as part of this paper, in order to take account of the importance of resilience in the current circumstances, and in the light of more recent publications referred to above

Whilst these guidelines focus on the 'what' and the 'how' of sustainable cultural tourism, they do not aim to provide a detailed tool kit of potential solutions. Replicating solutions that have been successful elsewhere requires careful consideration of the needs and challenges of an area and should not, in our view, be the starting point of any strategy aiming to deliver sustainable and resilient cultural tourism.

[2] The expert group was led by Brian Human (BRH Associates) and comprised: David Bruce (Walled Towns Friendship Circle), Anthony Climpson (New Forest District Council), Michele Grant (LR Consulting), Peter Lane (Planet PLC), Professor Robert Maitland (University of Westminster), Duncan McCallum (English Heritage) and Matthias Ripp (World Heritage Management, Regensburg).

Instead the guidelines provide a scoping tool as the key first step to help ensure that the tourism offer developed is both sustainable and resilient and meets both local and visitor needs. They are designed to help decision makers openly assess their current approach and to develop a clear plan of action relevant to local circumstances. In this way the guidelines remain entirely relevant to all historic towns and cities across Europe and world-wide and provide a catalyst to re-balance tourism locally and kick-start a move towards more sustainable and resilient cultural heritage-based tourism.
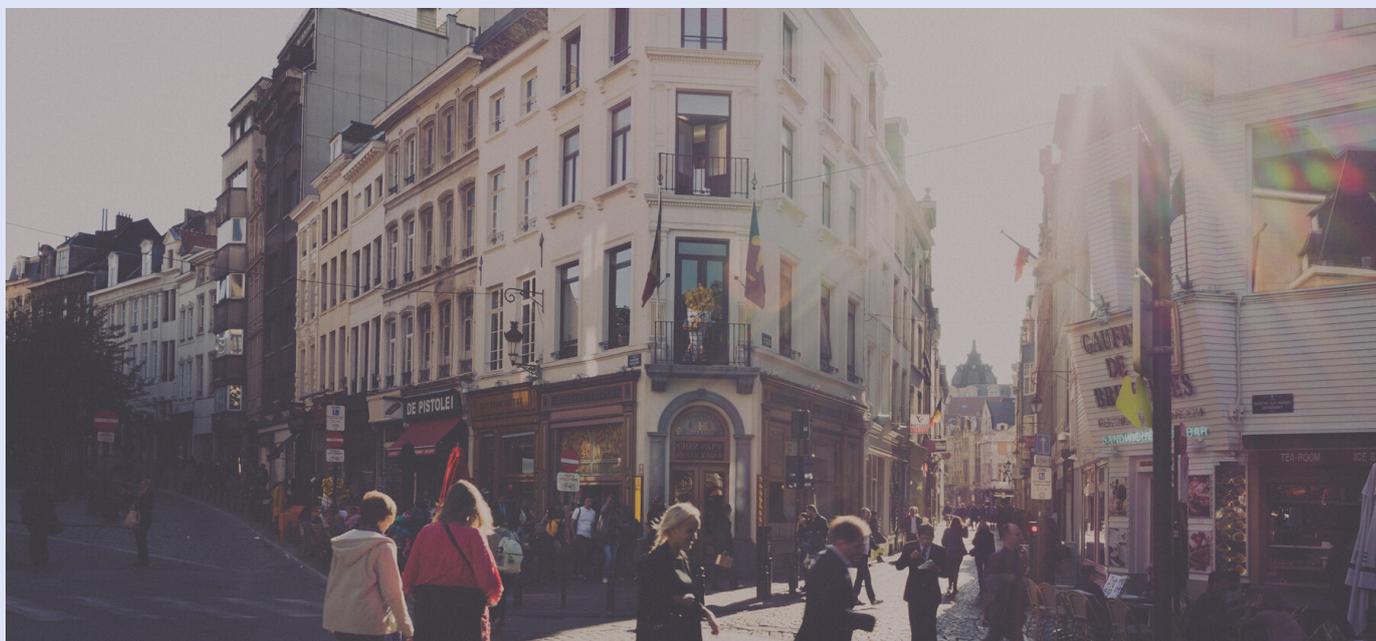
4. Guidelines for Sustainable Cultural Tourism

We reproduce extracts and illustrations below, including minor updates, from the published summary guidelines in order to explain the approach advocated. The key processes and questions set out aim to provide a structured framework within which relevant strategies and solutions can be identified and a practical pathway to change agreed and implemented.

The following definitions are used in the guidelines:

Cultural Tourism: Tourism, the principal purpose of which is to share and enjoy physical and intangible heritage and culture, including landscapes, buildings, collections, the arts, identity, tradition and language.

Historic Towns and Cities: Historic places and areas, including villages, small towns, cities and parts of larger urban areas with significant cultural and heritage assets.

Sustainability: The guidelines are based on the Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development, as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Resilience: The ability of cultural heritage tourism to re-bounce and recover from challenges and crisis.
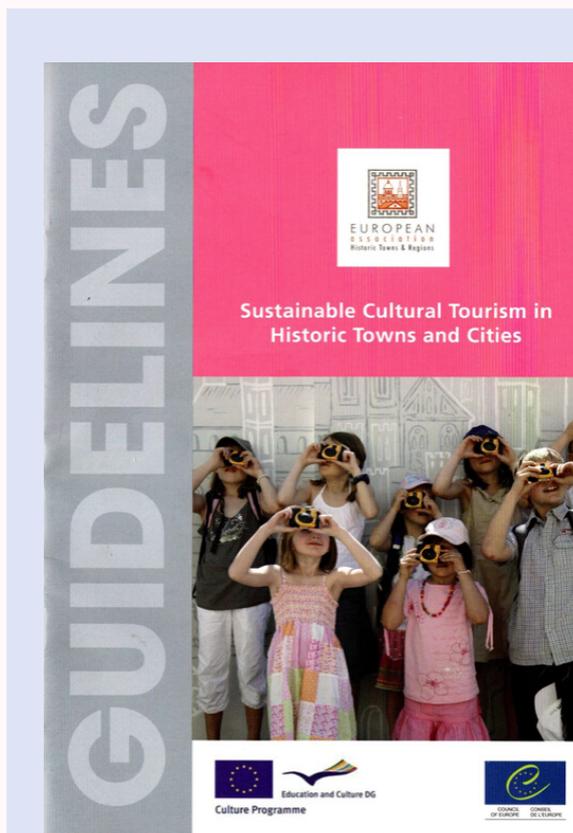
A Framework for Action

An effective framework requires an integrated approach to: developing a position statement; objectives and policies; processes; delivery and action; as well as a basis for appraisal.

Municipalities are encouraged to use the checklist of questions below as a framework for the creation of an Action Plan that meets the needs of their locality. Answers to the questions posed need to be based on a self-critical, open assessment of the circumstances prevailing and will benefit from independent evaluation and support.

Position Statement

Sustainable cultural tourism requires careful planning and management. Achieving this demands a clear starting point provided by a rigorous position statement to establish:

a. The key cultural assets of the place

b. The current profile of tourism to the place

c. The social, economic and political factors shaping attitudes towards tourism

d. Regional, national and international tourism trends

Objectives and Policies

a. Is there a consistent local vision, objectives, strategy and policy framework for cultural tourism agreed at the heart of corporate municipal government?

b. Is the strategy joined up with regional and national policy?

c. Does the framework include a cultural tourism strategy, destination management plan and inclusion of tourism issues in land use and transport planning policies?

d. Does the policy framework:

    i. Take a long-term view?

    ii. Ensure a holistic and integrated approach across the full range of multidisciplinary activities?

    iii. Have a foundation on robust, objective evidence and an understanding of culture, heritage, tourism and tourists?

    iv. Manage risk and adopt the precautionary principle?

    v. Include the ability to respond and recover to crisis and to take into account factors to strengthen urban resilience

    vi. Include provision for review based on monitoring?

Processes

a. Are all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, politicians and heritage and interest groups responsible for the stewardship of the place engaged in the development of the objectives and policies and the subsequent delivery of more sustainable tourism?

b. Are there measures to develop effective decision making through education and training for policy makers and decision takers?

c. Does the approach to developing local engagement include:

    i. Establishing formal or informal inter-agency delivery partnerships?

    ii. Use of a Tourism Forum to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the host community?

    iii. Use of local guides and volunteers?

Delivery and Action
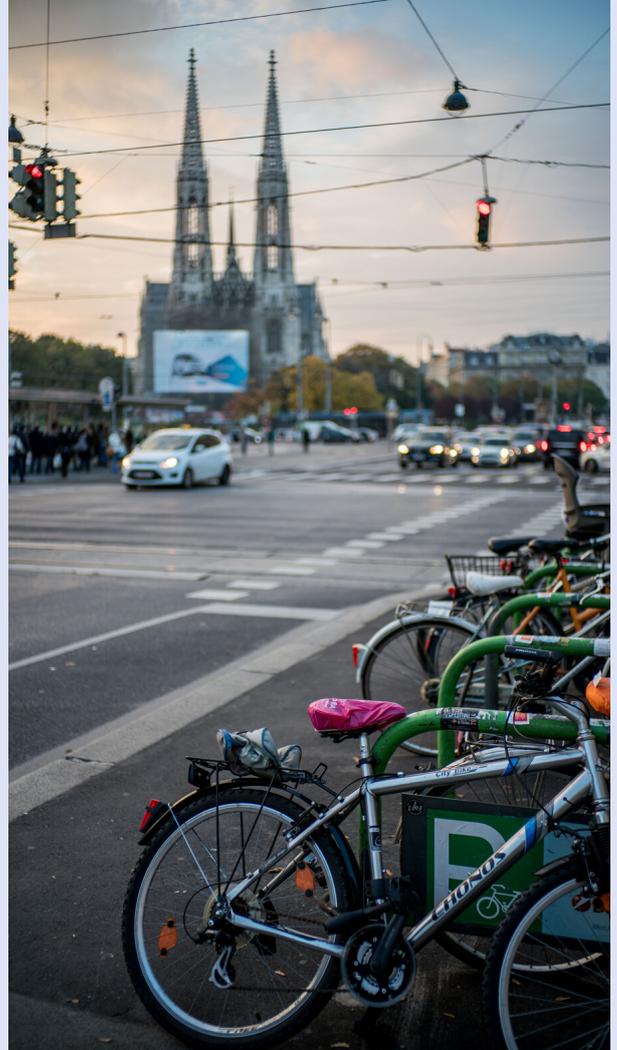
a. Take steps towards establishing a sustainable and resilient destination:

    i. Include a clear understanding of which local products and markets are to be developed and which are to be managed.

    ii. Ensure that marketing and media exposure is objective and aimed at potential cultural tourists who have a real interest in visiting the destination for its inherent qualities.

    iii. Use destination management techniques to balance demand and capacity by managing/restricting access to sensitive sites and spread the visitor load both spatially and temporally and consider lengthening the stay.

    iv. Include an understanding of factors and mechanisms to respond to potential crisis (resilience).

    v. Use interpretation carefully to celebrate the distinctive culture, heritage and diversity of the place

    vi. Establish mechanisms to ensure that a proportion of the economic benefit accruing   from tourism is reinvested in the culture and heritage of the place.

    vii. Actively promote the use of sustainable transport, including cycling, walking and public transport, locally and for access, and charge accordingly

    viii. Meet visitor needs for services, information, comfort, stimulation and safety.

    ix. Provide advance information to visitors to plan their visit effectively and encourage appropriate and sustainable behaviour and transport use.

    x. Respect diversity and meet the needs of minority groups and people with impaired mobility.

b. Take steps to support and develop sustainable businesses:

    i. Favour businesses with good long-term prospects that are rooted in the inherent strengths of the destination?

    ii. Encourage businesses that take conservation and community engagement seriously and show strong corporate social responsibility?

    iii. Encourage community businesses based on marketing locally distinctive products?

    iv. Encourage businesses that invest in training and skills to provide obs for local people?

c. In developing sustainable products, is there a focus on:

    i. Attractions that are built on the inherent strengths of the area and which reinforce distinctiveness and identity?

    ii. Complementing the inherent qualities of the place where there is pressure to diversify the product(s)?

    iii. Products that are identified and developed by the local community – community based tourism – and provide them with a direct income?

    i. Using tourism creatively to find new ways of viably and flexibly reusing historic buildings?

    ii. Sourcing local goods and materials that benefit local people?

    iii. Services and products with small carbon footprints?

Appraisal

a. As culture, heritage and tourism are not static, is the approach to sustainable cultural tourism subject to fundamental regular review, dependent on the rate of change, usually at not more than five year intervals?

b. In order to provide evidence for policy development and investment decisions, are tools and methodologies developed continually to:

    i. Measure the local quantitative dimensions – volume and value – of tourism?

    ii. Assess the physical and social impacts and other qualitative aspects of tourism?

c. Do you regularly review best practice to learn from the experience of other destinations?

Process Overview

These guidelines embody the fact that places and cultural tourism are not static, but exist in relationships that affect each other. Figure 2 summarises the principles and guidelines as a process.

Figure 2 Sustainable cultural tourism – a dynamic process
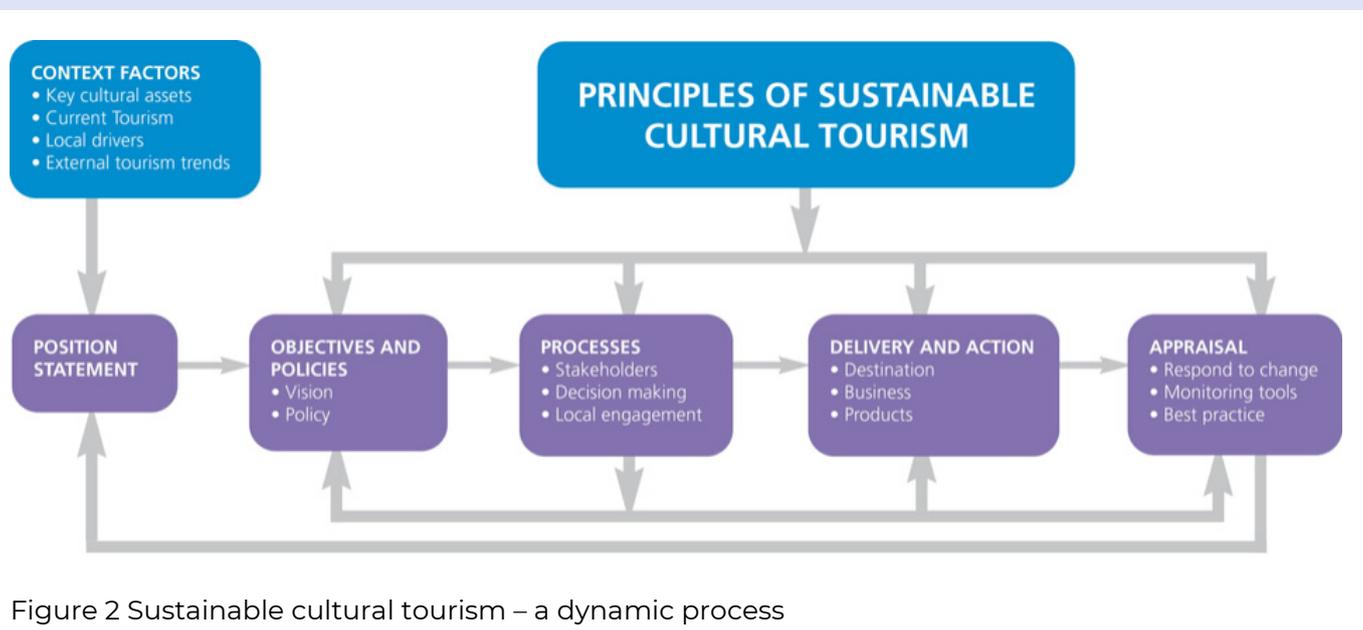
In applying the guidelines, it is important to consider the relationship with the visitor. Figure 3 sets out a simplified form of a visitor journey that embraces the thinking behind this framework. Each step has a counterpart in the principles and guidelines and is important in ensuring that the objectives are realised on the ground.


Figure 3 Sustainable cultural tourism and the visitor journey (with acknowledgements to Tourism Site Network)

Action Plan

All the preceding stages should be brought together in a Sustainable Cultural Tourism Action Plan. This has seven main steps:

1. Endorse the Principles (see full guidelines) through adoption as corporate policy

2. Establish a stakeholder group of all key interests in the community

3. Prepare a collective Position Statement

4. Assess the current position against the guidelines

5. Agree actions, resources and timetable

6. Implement proposals

7. Monitor and review

The production of a Sustainable Cultural Tourism Action Plan will benefit from a degree of independent support working in partnership with the municipality and local stakeholders.

5. Conclusions

The global health and economic crisis created by the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted hugely on society and created unprecedented levels of uncertainty as to what the future holds. The tourism and leisure sector has been hit hard and the need for coherent strategies on the way forward are especially urgent for social, economic and, critically, environmental reasons. This paper argues that the crisis presents a unique opportunity for those responsible for tourism to imagine a different world: to effect positive and systemic change by rethinking our approach towards more sustainable, more local cultural tourism.

Whilst cultural tourism is an important part of the European economy, there is also a compelling case for safeguarding place-based European cultural heritage as the main resource for cultural tourism. Indeed, there are innumerable opportunities for a positive relationship between culture and heritage and tourism. These will be different in each place and responses will need to reflect these differences. Parts of Europe, for example, were struggling before the pandemic to manage the numbers of international visitors whilst other, often newer, EU member countries have, as yet, limited experience of the destination management approach to tourism embodied in these guidelines.

We place sustainability and resilience at the heart of the guidance proposed, where tourism should not be perceived as a closed sector, but rather as part of a system which includes urban heritage, tourism and the cultural, social, economic and environmental interactions that arise. The principles and guidelines set out in this document aim to provide a consistent and holistic framework for decision making by municipalities and other stakeholders, while respecting and recognising the potential of local distinctiveness. The guidelines do not ignore the broader environmental issues – an argument that travel is inherently unsustainable – but seek to show how actions towards more sustainable tourism can be taken locally in the context of that bigger picture: in part by celebrating and exploiting the fact that visitors can be local as well as international and that businesses can be rooted in the inherent strengths of the destination.

We see the key leadership role in securing more sustainable cultural tourism as falling, in large part, to historic towns and heritage cities. The democratic mandate of local and regional government provides the platform to engage with their communities - citizens and businesses - in order to rethink, inspire and co-ordinate a common vision that provides a pathway to systemic change and a more sustainable and resilient future. The guidelines presented here are designed to show how decision makers may openly assess their current approach and begin to scope and develop a clear plan of action for a better, more sustainable and resilient future. The Covid-19 pandemic presents them, and all of us, with a once in a life time opportunity to rise to that challenge and ensure the pandemic cloud can indeed have a silver lining.
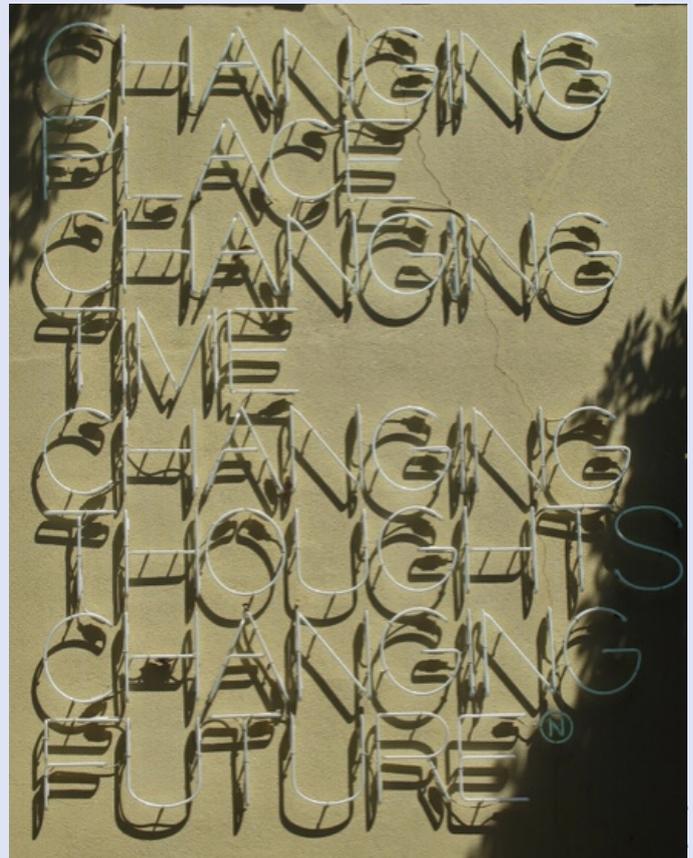
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About Heritage Europe (EAHTR)

Heritage Europe was formed as "The European Association of Historic Towns and Regions" by the Council of Europe in October 1999 as part of the initiative "Europe – A Common Heritage". It now represents, through its range of membership and partnership arrangements, over 1200 historic and heritage towns, cities, and regions in 32 European countries.

Heritage Europe's principle objective is to promote the interests of historic towns and cities across Europe through:

- International co-operation between heritage organisations, and historic towns, cities, and regions.
- Sharing experience and good practice between historic towns, cities, and regions.
- Promoting vitality, viability and sustainable management of historic towns, cities, and regions.

It does this through working in partnership with like-minded organisations to support projects, develop cultural heritage policy and provide expert advice and guidance on all aspects of sustainable, integrated heritage-led regeneration of historic urban areas.

About the OWHC – Organization of World Heritage Cities

Founded on the 8th of September, 1993 in Fez, Morocco, the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) is a collaborative body that shares expertise on all issues related to the urban management of a World Heritage property. The OWHC interconnects more than 300 cities that incorporate sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The primary objectives of the Organization are to facilitate the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, to encourage cooperation and the exchange of information and expertise on matters of conservation and management, as well as to develop a sense of solidarity among its member cities. To this end, the OWHC organizes World Congresses, seminars and workshops dealing with the challenges faced in the area of management and it provides many programs and projects for its member cities which aim to promote and support the maintenance, recognition and enhancement of their world heritage. The headquarters of the OWHC are located in Québec/Canada, and 8 Regional Secretariats are supporting the work, based on a geographical and cultural subdivision.

About the authors

Brian Smith is an urban planner. He was City Planning Officer of Norwich, UK, from 1985 – 1998 and past chairman of the English Historic Towns Forum. Brian was appointed Secretary General of Heritage Europe by the Council of Europe in 1999. He was joint editor of "Cultural Heritage Counts for Europe" (2015) and co-author of the Horizon 2020 Expert Group on Cultural Heritage report "Getting Cultural Heritage to Work for Europe" (2015)

Matthias Ripp, a historical geographer, is coordinating the "Old Town of Regensburg with Stadtamhof" site. He specializes in integrated heritage management, heritage communication, governance and resilience of urban heritage and is chairing the German Association of World Heritage Cities. He is also a member of the European Heritage Panel and the Regional Coordinator for the Organisation of World Heritage Cities (OWHC).

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