

Tourism and liveability in the city.



Context

The 2016 terrorist attacks in Brussels had an important but temporary impact on the tourist industry in the city. Over the last ten years (2007-2017), the number of overnight stays in the Region has increased by no less than 24% (+ 1.343.949). That number is expected to increase even further over the coming years. Recent numbers from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation show that international tourism is booming worldwide, partly driven by rich emerging economies such as China and India. In Brussels, the margin for growth seems especially large, since the number of overnight stays for foreign tourists has risen far less than for domestic tourists, 14% and 89% respectively.

First and foremost, that is good news. The tourism industry plays a crucial part in generating economic growth and employment in the city. It offers new opportunities for creative industries and local talent and the possibility to valorise cultural patrimony. At the same time, more and more European cities are struggling to cope with the growing tourism. Local citizens seem to pay the price for tourism in popular tourist cities. Cities and citizens are starting to revolt against the high numbers of tourists threatening the liveability, the well-functioning and the sustainability of their city. ICT-based and digital solutions carry the promise of an innovative type of tourism, tailored to the needs of the consumer, local citizens and/or suppliers, but they too can have unwanted and unforeseen local consequences (as is the case for sharing services, such as AirBnB and Uber).

Challenges

This context raises a few important questions. How can we anticipate the growth of tourism in Brussels? How should the tourism of tomorrow look like in Brussels and how should it develop? What opportunities does it offer? What are the possible advantages for the Brussels citizens and how can that growth contribute to the Brussels economy? What part can new economic models play in this process? What additional skills would the Brussels working population need to develop to meet the demands of the increasingly diverse population of tourists (country of origin, language, culture, level of education, age). What skills are required (language, etc.) for a well-functioning tourist industry?

What are the limits to growth? Is this type of exponential growth sustainable and desirable in the long run for Brussels? Can tourism be the motor of sustainable urban development or is it a selfish process that depletes local resources to serve non local demands? At whose expense does the growth come? How can the tourist activity be spread to relieve the city centre? What answers can be found to resolve the tensions between local and global interests?

A few specific challenges/opportunities are also possible: what type of adapted needs will tourists have in the future? Take older tourists, for example. Senior citizens are travelling more and more frequently. How can they be integrated into the existing tourist routes? Or what part can tourism play in the integration of minorities and migrants? Today, some companies are working on that, but could it also be an integral part of tourism in Brussels?

The topic can be approached from different angles (or a combination of angles), such as sustainability, accessibility, digitalization, cultural patrimony and creativity. Projects can opt for a macro approach or start from a very specific problem. Although that makes for a very wide array of possible target groups and research topics, the proposed project must lead to tangible solutions that can reinforce well-informed policy and decision making in the future, through a close cooperation with field experts and relevant public authorities.

Possible mentors: [hospitality.brussels](https://www.hospitality.brussels/), [visit.brussels](https://www.visit.brussels/)