

# CONCLUSIONS

## II Smart Tourism Congress Barcelona CETT-UB

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## Reflections in the Way of a Conclusion

Along the different days of this congress, multiple visions of Smart Tourism have appeared, a new paradigm that poses challenges in the current understanding of tourism and its management.

Through the conclusions of the congress we will try to offer a general perspective that allows us to understand the core of what we understand as Smart Tourism, and how it relates directly to the challenges and opportunities of tourism today.

Therefore, more than a final discourse, let us take this presentation as a space for reflection that, based on what has been shared and analyzed in the last three days, allows us to outline the lines of reflection that will occupy us in the near future.

In an introductory way, the immaturity of the Smart concept stands out. One of the first reflections focuses on the very etymology of the word, its origin and its application in tourism.

On the one hand, as Hannele Ahvenniemi tells us, there is a perspective that emphasizes the role of technology, analyzing its uses and effects. This vision focuses on the application of technology, assimilating, therefore, the notion of Smart to the latter.

On the other hand, we have a different point of view that places at the center of the story the role of people: their knowledge and their abilities in decision-making. This point of view is reflected, for example, in the opinion of the mayor of Rotterdam, Ahmed Aboutaleb, in relation to Smart City. According to Aboutaleb: 'Cities do not need one type of technology; they need concepts & solutions. I think we need to bring smart people together, to create a homogeneous & comprehensive solution'

This dialectic between human capital and the possibilities of technology still survives today and it means a great difficulty when it comes to reflecting on the notion of Smart Tourism, since technology facilitates the offer of services and tasks and the efficient management of the destination, transforming the way of traveling and the sector. But if there is something indispensable in the tourist activity those are the interpersonal and intercultural relationships that enrich the experience of residents and visitors.

During the days of this congress, we have been able to observe clairvoyantly how there are multiple readings of what Smart Tourism is, we have known research that investigated more in technology, while others focused on aspects more related to management, promotion or on the tourist policy.

However, all the papers and communications had something in common: a certain vision of what intelligent tourism should be. In these conclusions we'll show where this vision aims at by the support of the multiple approaches presented at the congress.

So we will continue the reflection by answering what the purpose of Smart Tourism should be.

There are currently several challenges to which the tourism sector as a whole must respond, including the management of increasingly intense flows, often difficult to absorb in high-density environments, and the transformation of the sector given by the application of the technology in each and every one of the stages of the trip (the one with the assisted inspiration, the one with the intelligent mobility and the later with the shared satisfaction). If we want to reach a current definition of the Smart Tourism concept, it is necessary to take into account these challenges.

So, taking as an example the digital transformation and the new formulas of tourism management, what should be the response that Smart Tourism should give?

There is a worldwide consensus on the importance of tourism as an economic, social and cultural activity. The current globalization of the tourist phenomenon, the arrival of new emerging markets that generate, among other aspects, a greater volume of people who want to travel, changes in habits and interests of tourists and especially the

shift towards a society increasingly focused on the most advanced technologies, creates great opportunities in the tourism sector, but in turn unleashes important consequences for global mobility and the sustainability of destinations. Therefore, the intelligent management of tourism and destinations becomes a key aspect of tourism development of the present and the future.

From Smart optics, intelligent and efficient territorial management of a tourist destination has a lot in common with the notion of Smart City and Smart Destination. In the scientific literature there is hardly any distinction between the two of them. In any case, Buhalis and Amaranggana specify that the technologies used in one or another Smart concept are different. Thus, according to the authors, in a Smart Destination tourists use the technology before, during and after the trip, while the technology implemented in a Smart City remains limited to its use in the city.

To respond to the current tourism management, we cannot limit ourselves to a purely technological perspective, but we must understand the management of destinations from the need to find the balance and relationship between the generation of data and the generation of knowledge for the taking of decisions.

As the DKIW pyramid model indicates, there is a difference in degree between the data that technology can provide us and its use for management. Thus, for Professor Milan Zeleny, there is a difference between know-nothing, know-what, know-how, and know-why and, in order to reach decision-making, we must go beyond the mere data, interpret the information to generate knowledge, that is, to understand the reality that we face to decide reasonably what we want to do and how.

In this sense, if we want to respond to the challenges of 21st century tourism we must define how we want tourism destinations to be. For example, if we imagine an intelligent destination, we cannot conceive it without the following characteristics: to be committed to its citizens, to be capable of managing the tourist flows and the resources of the territory in a sustainable manner, to integrate and make accessible to the visitor the local culture, to offer a tourist experience with added value and to cater the tourist activity developed in with a positive impact on the local economy and the quality of life. All these objectives go beyond the possibilities of technology and include elements of tourism policy, product creation, marketing of destinations ... With these objectives as a framework for action, the data becomes data-for-the-decision; in the same way that happens when we are looking at a map, only when we place ourselves in it and we know the place we want to reach, the information becomes useful information to advance.

Thus, the solution from Smart Tourism to the challenge of the new tourism management does not only go through the use of technological tools but also, thanks to them, to generate data for a better understanding of the territory that allows generating responses aligned with the destination vision that we have set on the horizon.

The other great challenge that we have mentioned previously is the digital transformation of the tourism sector. That is, the uncertainty generated by the unstoppable and exponential technological advance in all kinds of fields. The fugacity and dissolution, in the words of the philosopher Byung-Chul Han, are some of the characteristics of our present. This context, characterized by notions such as disruption, forces the continuous rethinking of business models and the understanding of the relationship between companies and the client.

In an area where the relationship with the customer is paramount, as it is the tourism sector; the digital transformation is unignorable and it is the paradigm in which we move; an antiparadigm in a certain sense, since we cannot take anything for granted or immovable, but we have to be in continuous follow-up.

In this line, traditional tourism companies have seen how, thanks to technology, new business models have appeared that have meant a radical change for the tourism sector and its regulation, as well as for the optimization of its processes.

The digitization of companies, that is, their adaptation to this new context, does not lie solely in the use of technology; but that every digitization process requires a structural and organizational adaptation that finds new ways to value the human capital of companies. Taking the sentence

from Professor Barbara Neuhofer: "when we talk about Smart Tourism, we must talk first and foremost about people and their experiences."

In this sense, from the field of Smart Tourism, we see that tourism companies must respond similarly to the previous challenge. Its adaptation to the current context happens not only by using as much more technology as possible, but in adapting itself in the best way to satisfy the expectations of visitors, increasingly hyper-connected and interactive, and offering them the best possible services and experiences. And this goes through the acceptance of new attitudes and accepts reformulating strategies in a radical way to give the best possible response to the needs and expectations of visitors in an increasingly competitive environment at a speed that exceeds the limits of the regulation.

At this point, we can summarize that Smart Tourism is based on three key factors or axes such as technology, innovation and sustainability. Understanding innovation as a change based on knowledge capable of generating value. That is, a value for companies, for tourists and for territories. Thus, in the tourism sector, innovation has to do with improvements in aspects such as promotion, commercialization, design of products or experiences, and the organization and distribution of work. Undoubtedly, innovation and knowledge are basic elements of destinations and tourist companies to achieve competitive advantages that make them better than their competitors.

In terms of sustainability, it must be mentioned that the paradigm of sustainable development lays on guaranteeing the balance between economic growth and the preservation of the environment and the socio-cultural environment. And, from both the tourism companies and the institutional sphere, decision-making must be based on this global and transversal vision of sustainability, be it a more sustainable destination (environmentally, economically, socially and culturally), a tourist experience more coherent and respectful with the local heritage and culture or a business model proposal that breaks into the market using a disruptive technological element to facilitate and improve the visitor experience. In fact, as Professor Xavier Font comments, "Being sustainable is the smartest thing we can do."

So, we can see how the reflection on Smart Tourism goes beyond the analysis of the application of technology to tourism and forces us to face questions and challenges that require deep questioning, such as: what types of tourism experiences are specific to smart tourism? From an ethical perspective, what goals should we give to Big Data? Is it as legitimate to use Big Data for the management of a territory as for private purposes? What is the role of residents in a smart destination? What kinds of institutions are adequate to transform information into knowledge for decision-making?

Without wishing to lecture anyone, but with the unequivocal desire to make a contribution to this exciting world of intelligent tourism, I would like to conclude with an approximation of what we understand by Smart Tourism, being our desire to be incorporated in future publications and conferences as one more element of development and debate of the tourism sector and the academic field.

*"Smart Tourism is the interaction of tourists, residents, companies and destinations and their integration into efficient management systems through technology, innovation and knowledge with the aim of achieving a more sustainable, accessible and quality tourism."*

Now, after this last conceptual contribution, we get down to work to answer all these questions and many more within the framework of the III Smart Tourism Congress Barcelona to be held in 2020 and to which all of you are invited from today.