Identification of Challenges for the Reconstruction of Heritage Tourism—Multiple Case Studies of European Heritage Cities

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Abstract: The process of coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity to create various scenarios for returning to the path of tourism development. The search for suitable and effective solutions was at the heart of the Tourism Friendly Cities project, in which eight European cities participated. The aim is to define the challenges and tools related to the sustainability of urban tourism. The empirical research was based on the opinions of experts from eight cities involved, and concerned four thematic areas: the quality of life and tourism in the city before and during/after COVID-19, tourism dysfunctions, the sources of conflicts between local stakeholders, and the tools for the sustainable reconstruction of tourism. The results confirmed the existence of a wide range of declared tools for the development of sustainable tourism after the pandemic. The conducted research indicates key areas of conflict in the field of tourism activity. The authors also come to the conclusion that tools for regulating tourist traffic should not be universal, but should meet the individual needs of the city.

Keywords: tourism in heritage cities; destination management; sustainable tourism; challenges; conflicts

1. Introduction

Urban tourism was characterized by a very dynamic development up until the COVID-19 pandemic, which for many cities provided a source of conflict, mainly on the axis tourists—the local community. During the pandemic, the existing restrictions caused tourism to come to a standstill and mobilized cities to implement the reconstruction of tourism based on the new rules [1]. The consequences of the pandemic have created various scenarios. The social and economic costs of tourism cannot be deemed superficial. They include, among others: physical degradation of historical locations, increase in prices of rents, replacement of tourists interested in the cultural heritage of the city with mass arrivals of one-day visitors, spatial and temporal congestion of tourist traffic, not to mention the environmental degradation.

The challenge for local governments is developing the ability to manage tourism in a sustainable way, combining the need for economic growth of all the different sectors involved in tourism with the quality of life of residents. Such a process requires both the introduction of legal, organizational, and financial tools and, perhaps most importantly, the need to cooperate with different levels of government, as well as with private actors, in order to maintain high standards in terms of quality of life and services both for tourists and residents. Both in scientific research [2–4] and strategic documents of cities (Prague, Krakow, Amsterdam), the need to take into account the opinions of residents as the key stakeholders of cities is articulated in the management process. It is not only also about

solutions implemented by the local government or entrepreneurs from the point of view of residents, but about solutions that are articulated firmly by residents. The urban spaces have been even the centres of recent anti-tourism movements [5].

The historic urban landscape (the UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape [6]) approach requires a range of traditional and innovative tools adapted to local circumstances and may include the following:

- tools should take into account a diverse cross-group of stakeholders and allow them to identify the most important values present in a given area, develop a vision reflecting its diversity, set goals, and agree on actions to protect heritage,
- knowledge management and planning tools,
- legal measures and regulations to protect and manage the tangible and intangible attributes of urban heritage, including its social, environmental, and cultural values,
- forms of funding to support local entrepreneurship as well as a variety of partnership models.

Searching for appropriate and effective solutions was at the root of many research projects. One of them was the Tourism Friendly Cities (TFC) project under the EU's Urbact III program (the European Territorial Cooperation program), which aims to foster sustainable urban development in cities across Europe [7,8]. This project was started before the pandemic, Cities struggling with different consequences of tourism participated in the TFC project and included: Genoa (Italy) as the lead partner, Venice (Italy), Dubrovnik (Croatia), Cáceres (Spain), Krakow (Poland), Braga (Portugal), Druskininkai (Lithuania), Dún Laoghaire—Dublin's coastal suburb (Ireland) and Rovaniemi (Finland). The project enabled the exchange of experiences in management and pointed to cooperation between local governments and the tourism sector. The results of the project, including identification of problems and knowledge transfer was an Integrated Action Plan (IAP) addressing the local challenges for each city [9].

A special role was assigned to the so-called Urbact Local Groups (ULG), consisting of stakeholder experts related directly or indirectly to the tourism industry (from the public and private sectors), as well as residents. A special role was assigned to the so-called Urbact Local Groups (ULG), consisting of stakeholder experts related directly or indirectly to the tourism industry, as well as residents. In each city, the ULG constituted the intellectual core working on the diagnosis of the effects of the current development of tourism, including the consequences of the pandemic (this scope of tasks was introduced after its outbreak) and recommendations for a new, more sustainable tourism model. The number of ULG members varied (from a few to a dozen experts). The results of the research were formulated on the basis of the opinions of ULG members.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, TFC cities were looking for and implementing solutions in various areas related to tourism and indicated their desired strategic goals [8,9]. These studies have identified three directions of activities, depending on local needs and conditions. These are the protection of the natural environment and heritage, counteracting excessive tourism (overtourism), and the cooperation of local partners. The above compiled, selective goals of TFC cities confirm analysts' suppositions that tourism should use the experience of the pandemic to the new reality. First of all, the focus should be on the availability of services with the participation of new technologies and solutions supporting sustainable development [10–13]. Reconstruction of the tourism industry will largely depend on the ability of tourism supply to adapt to new conditions, and on the paradigms set out in various recommendations [6,14–17].

The conclusions from the preliminary observations allowed us to identify two goals of the discussion undertaken by the authors in this article. The first is to identify problems and experiences related to tourism activities in Tourism Friendly Cities. The basis for conclusions in this regard is the opinions of experts participating in the TFC project. The second goal is to learn the views of stakeholders of tourist destinations included in the TFC on hypothetical areas and tools necessary to achieve a state of sustainable development in

urban tourism. The adopted cognitive goals are implemented by verifying three research hypotheses, formulated below.

2. Literature Review

Tourist cities, including cultural and historical heritage areas, are not devoid of threats and problems that other cities face. However, they have additional social and organizational conditions that may cause difficulties in mutual contact between stakeholders. The scope of the conducted research requires a literature review from the point of view of such phenomena as problems and conflicts in tourism cities and sustainable tourism tools, also taking into account the pandemic situation. The above-mentioned issues will be discussed in the following subsections.

2.1. Tourist Cities and Their Problems

Cities where tourism is the dominant business activity face a number of problems. Some are of a general nature, but others are closely related to tourism. Some emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, while others have existed for many decades. A review of the literature on the subject shows that the main challenges faced by tourism cities include the following: the seasonality of tourist numbers (cf. [18]), the occurrence of factors harmful to health and environmental pollution [19–21], difficulties with preserving a unique climate and style [22], excessive vehicle and pedestrian traffic [23], threats resulting from the spread of diseases, including zoonoses [24]. The seasonality of tourism also makes it necessary for local operators in tourism cities to look for new business models [18].

Many tourism cities are facing population growth (sometimes a tenfold increase in population in summer compared to winter), which generates a large increase in noise levels experienced by residents and tourists trying to relax during the holiday season [19]. With the rapid development of urbanisation comes the problem of pollution affecting, for example, rivers in tourist cities [20]. The increase in traffic is another serious problem, resulting in the generation of road dust containing particles of heavy metals [21]. Yet another issue is heavy pedestrian traffic, which results in the emergence of huge crowds of people in particularly attractive locations in tourist cities [23]. Developing their infrastructure, tourism cities should simultaneously protect their unique character and climate attracting tourists [22].

Tourism has undergone tremendous changes as a result of the pandemic. Many scientific papers have been published on this topic [25–29]. The pandemic caused both policymakers and researchers to look at factors that could contribute to mitigating and reversing the downturn in the tourism business (cf. [28,30]). In some parts of the world, the coronavirus caused the initiation of measures aimed at activating urban tourism heritage in many destinations [31]. The term "tourism reset" emerged and large cities began to look for new ways to implement sustainability principles [32] but also to rebuild tourism after the pandemic.

Among the numerous proposals, it is necessary to increase the attractiveness and protect what is valuable, and important for the environment or cultural heritage. They recognise the problems associated with tourism, but they also see new opportunities for development. One idea is to transform tourism cities into smart tourism cities, which should have a positive impact on their competitiveness [28]. Where there is a noticeable lack of tourists and financial revenue from tourism, analyses of tourism potential are carried out (cf. [33]).

Opportunities are also recognised to increase the tourist attractiveness of cities through the construction of new leisure and sports facilities [34]. Attention is paid to solutions traffic diversion is used to improve infrastructure and traffic flows, which reduces vehicle congestion [23]. Optimisation of the spatial structure of tourist attractions is undertaken to ensure the development of regional tourism in tourism cities [35]. Regardless of the measures taken, the residents of tourist cities, as well as tourists themselves, must display a certain commitment to values in their behaviour, including respect for cultural heritage [31].

This will constitute a difficult and demanding challenge, as it raises conflicts between various users of historical space.

2.2. Conflicts between the Stakeholders of Tourist Destinations

For the purposes of conducting research, conflicts occurring in the tourism market are divided according to the parties participating in them. Usually, all stakeholder groups of the tourism market are taken into account, especially tourists and their mutual relationships. Conflicts result from different economic interests (including lost benefits), but also different values and power disparities [36]. The problem is that the public and private sectors are not always able to cooperate. Stakeholders are further divided by different levels of interest and support for tourism [37]. The interests of different stakeholders are conflicting due to the imbalance in cooperation between public sector decision-makers and other entities. The lack of adequate communication and transparency in decision-making further exacerbates existing disputes (cf. [38]).

One source of conflict is the differing needs and expectations of the local population regarding quality of life [39]. Disputes concern the question of "who has the right to the city" [40]. Residents and various tourism business entities have not only different needs but also different interpretations of key heritage sites (for example, how cities are to be promoted) [41]. Stakeholders may also demonstrate different understandings of the function and status of protected areas such as nature reserves [42], although this aspect goes beyond historic cities.

Various conflicts, including conflicts of interest and cultural conflicts, are not conducive to tourism development (cf. [43]). The lack of cooperation points to various negative consequences, including the lack of a shared vision or future strategy for local tourism [37]. Therefore, different decision-makers look for different ways to mitigate conflicts. If tourism activities are to mitigate conflicts of interest among local stakeholders then they need to be educated (e.g., by explaining what the change process is all about), persuaded to pursue joint management (e.g., by implementing participatory decision-making processes), and compensated for lost benefits. For example, locations in the vicinity of protected areas should be provided with alternative sources of funding for traditional crops [44]. The introduction of protected areas can be a source of dissatisfaction for tourists, and thus the process can contribute to the loss of financial benefits [45].

Stakeholders do not find it easy to work together to maintain sustainable development [42]. However, it is believed that local stakeholders in tourist areas can jointly develop different event scenarios or development strategies [46]. This participatory approach to decision-making and management is very important, especially where changes occur in the functioning of the business model [47,48].

Resolving conflicts of interest in tourist destinations involves holding meetings based on the principle of the open table. It is important that decisions are taken democratically and that the constructive nature of such meetings dominates throughout the whole process and not just at the stage of making declarations [49].

When cities experience societal and spatial transformations, there can be the destruction of urban heritage, especially in historic urban neighbourhoods. Different understandings of the values of heritage are a source of conflicts among stakeholders. Additionally, a major factor causing stakeholders to adopt a negative attitude towards their involvement is power disparities. For this reason, it is important to mitigate and resolve conflicts of interest through the participation of NGOs and professionals throughout the organisational change planning process [36]. In order to strive for cultural sustainability, it is important to remember to ensure that all tourism stakeholders directly participate in the processes of making decisions concerning development (cf. [50]).

Despite the involvement of various stakeholders in decision-making processes, it is not always possible to prevent or mitigate conflicts completely. This is the case, for example, during the implementation of strategies aimed at adaptation to the ongoing climate change [45]. Obviously, in order to be able to talk about joint development or

adaptation strategies it is necessary to have adequate analyses, including information on the general attitudes of tourism stakeholders towards sustainable and available tourism (cf. [51]). According to R. Pouwels et al. [52], it is important to improve communication among stakeholders and researchers, increase consensus among stakeholders on how conflicts should be perceived, seek solutions, and generate new knowledge to be used in the future [52].

The issue of conflicts among tourists is very poorly recognised, even when considering not so many conflicts as other conceptual categories such as disputes or arguments. The literature on the subject tends to focus on conflicts between tourists on the one side and their hosts or local residents on the other. It indicates cultural differences and the importance of the quality of interactions among people [53]. It emphasises that the coexistence of local residents and tourists in attractive neighbourhoods and the increased pressure of nightlife in the same areas often lead to conflicts [54].

Conflicts between tourists may result from inappropriate behavior that is inconsistent with accepted social norms. It can be assumed that any conflicts are also influenced by the number of tourists [55]. Few studies indicate inappropriate behavior of tourists that are harmful to the functioning of tourist groups, inappropriate behavior towards tour leaders, and inappropriate behavior towards tour participants [56]. Tourists (compared to non-tourists) are more likely to misbehave in a given service situation because they feel less connected to the service people and perceive less likelihood of disapproval from them [57]. The described causes of inappropriate behavior can cause various conflicts—including conflicts between tourists themselves.

Research on conflicts among the stakeholders of tourist destinations has also resulted in the development of a number of measurement methods. The most popular method called the wheel of conflict has been proposed by Moore [58]. This researcher interprets the sources of such conflicts, narrowing them down to the following causes of conflict: information (stakeholders are unable to identify factual information; they have incorrect data or interpret it differently, or they rely on untrue information, e.g., on rumour), relationships (stakeholders have a negative emotional attitude towards the other side, related, for example, to stereotypical perceptions or misunderstandings; each side is set on retaliation and therefore communicates in this way), values (conflicts are the result of different structures in the hierarchy of values and the various ways of perceiving the city; one side assumes the right to tell the other side what the city should be like, and does not allow for different opinions, which gives rise to the need to defend one's own values and ideas), structural (the reason lies in the structure of the company, a specific social situation, model of culture or environment) and interests (one group of stakeholders sees themselves or another group as the stronger, more privileged party).

Conflicts occurring in tourist destinations can also be considered in the context of the opposition between the tourism business on the one side and the natural environment and the local population on the other. Sustainable tourism can be a solution to such conflicts [37,41,44].

2.3. Sustainable Tourism and Its Importance in Solving Various Problems, Not Only Those Related to Tourism

The conduct of tourism activities causes numerous environmental problems, although they are not the focus of this research [59,60]. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, it was noted that the fetish of economic growth could hinder the functioning of tourism in the long term [61]. This is why sustainable development focused on the economic, environmental, and social dimensions is so important for many organisations, especially those operating in the hospitality and tourism industries [62]. Awareness plays an important role in the transition towards sustainable tourism [63] and has a role to play in solving many economic and social problems, also those indirectly related to tourism. It aims to improve the quality of life of society, both objectively and subjectively [64].

Various publications point to the benefits associated with sustainability in tourism. These include increased income and thus improved economic stability [65] and overall economic benefits (cf. [66]). In sustainable development, the tourism industry will search for opportunities to increase competitive advantages in view of intensifying competition [48,67,68] and to pursue the objectives set by the UNO [69–71].

The practice of maintaining sustainable development has contributed to solving many of the problems of the modern world. Researchers indicate that the goals of sustainable development should be pursued by:

- implementing environmental regulations for sustainable development [72],
- executing various educational programmes [65,73,74],
- using Big Data and open innovation for sustainable development [75],
- certifying sustainable development systems [76],
- undertaking eco-initiatives and supporting "green" entrepreneurship [77],
- implementing and improving various methods of measuring sustainability (cf. [78]),
- hiring people for leadership positions with the right qualities (strong attitudes, relevant education, and experience from other organisations) [79],
- introducing the role of change agents (including children) for sustainable tourism [80],
- pursuing regional cooperation [81],
- investing in green infrastructure (cf. [82,83]).

Already in the previous century, researchers started to consider the potential benefits of sustainable tourism. It was recognised that sustainable tourism should generate economic and environmental benefits, as well as increase the involvement of local communities [84]. Research shows that sustainable development practices have a positive impact on the competitive advantage of hotels [67,68]. For this reason, hotels are increasingly incorporating sustainability issues into their business models and strategies [82,85].

When writing about the benefits of sustainability, it is impossible not to emphasise the development opportunities it provides, but also the benefits it delivers. Investors increasingly respond to corporate CSR and ESG reports [86]. However, it is important to remember that adopting sustainability principles and strategies is difficult. In this context, the following four barriers are identified: owner/operator knowledge, costs, lack of awareness of external forces, and accessibility related to location [62].

Summarising the literature review presented here, it is important to note that negative phenomena taking place in the tourism industry are often attributed to tourists and direct providers of tourism services. However, the problems occurring in heritage cities need not result from the fact that they are tourist destinations, or at least not solely from the conduct of tourism activities. Nevertheless, it is worth investigating how the tourism function is assessed in such heritage cities.

It also seems important to measure the level of conflict observed in tourism cities and to identify which relationships generate the most tension. The conducted review of research indicates significant areas of conflict occurring not so much between tourists and other stakeholders, but among tourists themselves and between residents and stakeholders involved in tourism activities [87]. However, the unique character of heritage tourism results from the qualities that often have an identity dimension [88].

Ways of addressing the problems and conflicts observed in cities where heritage tourism is prevalent should also be the subject of research. However, it must be made clear that finding universal solutions for all cities may prove to be utopian. Even sustainable tourism will generate diverse impacts and countermeasures. Thus, problems such as over-tourism or no-tourism may have to be balanced against the individual needs and unique characteristics of particular destinations.

Due to the above considerations, hypotheses were formulated with a view to their subsequent empirical verification in the course of the research. The following three issues formulated as research hypotheses were considered particularly relevant:

H1. *In heritage tourism destinations, the highest level of conflicts among stakeholder groups occurs between local residents and other stakeholder groups, excluding tourists.*

H2. *In tourism cities, there are noticeable trends towards the implementation of sustainable development principles in tourism activities.*

H3. *The tools used to regulate tourism should not be of a one-size-fits-all type but should respond to the individual needs of a given city.*

3. Research Methods

The verification of the formulated hypotheses and the implementation of the objectives of the work required a research process involving theoretical and empirical research. The main research method used by the authors in theoretical research was a systematic literature review. The literature on the subject was reviewed in the course of the following stages: (1) selecting keywords: tourist city/town, Covid, problem-solving, problems, conflict of interest, stakeholders, conflict between stakeholders, local interest, sustainable, tourism, advantage/benefits, (2) searching for publications containing the identified keywords in the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Academic Search Ultimate, including Business Source Ultimate, Eric, Education Resources Information Center, AGRICOLA, Open Dissertations, Green FILE, Legal source (3) becoming familiar with the returned publications, (4) reviewing the publications, (5) preparing a map of the available literature, (6) summarizing the selected publications, and (7) arranging the collected research material. The applied procedure is consistent with the general methodology of conducting research (8) and the methodology of research in management sciences [89].

Based on the preliminary analysis and literature review, two research goals emerge. The first one is the identification of problems and experiences related to tourism activity expressed by local experts, including in particular in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to assess the level of local conflicts between stakeholders and actions to gradually lead to the sustainable development of tourism. The second goal is to obtain the opinions of stakeholders regarding hypothetical areas and tools necessary to achieve a state of urban tourism balance. The empirical research was based on a survey conducted using the CAWI technique (from autumn 2021 to spring 2022) among 104 experts representing the public and private sectors, forming the Urbact Local Group (ULG) in eight European cities. These studies were qualitative in nature, based on expert opinions, and therefore not representative. The research was carried out on the initiative of the authors with the consent and assistance of the TFC project leaders and was not financed from public funds. It is worth noting that the partner cities are not similar in terms of area or population, therefore the structure of the community of experts invited to the study was selected according to the size of the represented city and the number of ULG members.

The survey questionnaire was developed in English, although due to the fact that the authors of the research were Poles, a version in Polish was also created. Thanks to this, the questionnaire in Polish was made available to experts from Poland, while experts from other countries were provided with a questionnaire in English, which was the commonly accepted language of communication in the TFC program.

Theses assessed by experts were the subject of local ULG debates. This means that the experts discussed the issues in their own local environment. This fact significantly increases the credibility of the study and increases the likelihood that the questions asked and the issues raised were properly understood.

Due to the fact that 14 experts did not complete the questionnaire for unknown reasons, they were not included in the study. Therefore, in the end, 90 experts took part in the research. This did not violate the predetermined purposeful structure of expert selection. The selection of experts was made purposefully, by including representatives of the public and private sectors participating in the TFC project. The location of the cities and the distribution of the experts is presented in Figure 1. The blue points on the map are cities

belonging to the URBACT network. The greater intensity of blue points results from the high density of such points on the map of Europe.
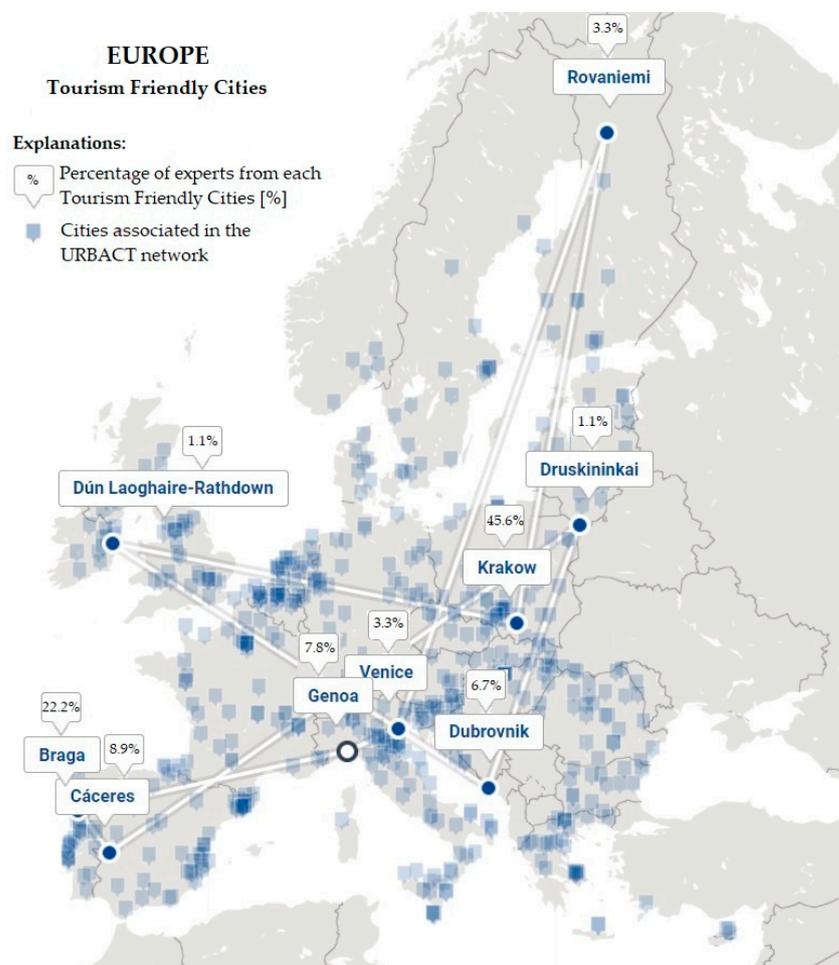

Figure 1. Distribution of experts according to TFC cities. Source: URBACT Driving change for better cities. Website: https://urbact.eu/tourism-friendly-cities (with the consent of the owner of the graphic) (accessed on 11 April 2022).

The survey was conducted with the use of a structured questionnaire (part of which forms the basis of this analysis) and the reliability measurement of which using the Alfa-Cronbach coefficient was 0.917. This means a high reliability of the developed research tool. The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions divided thematically into several parts. Two measurement scales were used in the construction of questions. The first, a 10-step gradation scale with an interval of 1 unit (1–10), concerned the intensity of specific phenomena, i.e., the level of quality of life or attitude towards tourists after and before COVID-19. The second measurement scale was a 5-point Likert scale: no (1), rather no (2), I have no opinion (3), rather yes (4), yes (5) used to determine the agreement of the experts with the opinions presented and to determine the level of conflicts in tourist activity, etc. In some cases, the scale was aggregated to 3 points by summing up the negative (no (1) and rather no (2)) and positive (rather yes (4) and yes (5)) responses.

The analysis of the collected research material required the use of various quantitative methods. First, the collected data was organized using descriptive analysis (average, standard deviation, median, dominant, coefficient of variation, coefficient of asymmetry, kurtosis). In some cases, the significance level of differences between the average levels of different phenomena for experts representing the public and private sectors was also examined. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney test was used to analyse the significance

of the differences between the two independent variables. In the case of comparing two dependent variables, i.e., the level of a given phenomenon for the same experts before and after the occurrence of a given event (here: COVID-19), the Wilcoxon pair-order test was used. All calculations were performed using Statistica 13.3 and RStudio 2023.03.0.

4. Results

The collected research results were divided into four parts: (1) quality of life and tourism in the cities before and during/after COVID-19, (2) tourist dysfunctions in the cities, (3) the sources of conflicts between local stakeholders, (4) tools for the sustainable reconstruction of tourism.

4.1. Quality of Life and Tourism in the Cities before and during/after COVID-19

The results obtained on the basis of the opinions given by 104 experts indicate that the standard of living is assessed as being at a fairly high level of 7.22 ± 1.71. However, the median value is slightly higher and equals 8. The most common measurement value was 8. In the studied group, there was a left-asymmetric distribution (−0.46), which means that scores higher than the average prevail. Kurtosis indicates a leptokurtic distribution. When assessing the differences between the ratio of experts to tourists before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, it was noticed that there was no statistically significant difference between the measurements ($p = 0.238$). The average level of the phenomenon before the COVID-19 pandemic was 6.94 ± 2.17, while after the pandemic it was insignificantly higher 7.28 ± 2.17. In both cases, the distribution of the scores was similar—moderately asymmetric left-sided and moderately leptokurtic.

The experts were asked for their individual assessment of tourism in the city before COVID-19. The highest percentage of positive responses was noted for the statements "I am glad that tourists come here because it means income for the city, jobs, and a positive image" and "It is natural that tourists come to our city. We should show our hospitality". Both opinions received 91.3% positive ratings. More than half of the experts (58.8%) also positively responded to the statement "Tourists focus too much on the city centre". In turn, the greatest negative opinions from the experts were caused by statements such as: "I simply cannot tolerate having tourists in my surroundings!" (92.5%), "Unfortunately, I see more negative than positive aspects of tourists coming to my city" (77.5%), and "Tourists mainly cause problems. There are too many of them, which means a lower quality of life for the inhabitants. Something should be done about it" (67.5%). The remaining responses are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment of experts' agreement with statements on tourism in their city.

How Do You Assess Tourism in the City Before COVID?	Positive	Neutral	Negative
I am glad that tourists come here because it means income for the city, jobs, and a positive image.	91.3%	6.3%	2.4%
It is natural that tourists come to visit our city. We should show our hospitality.	91.3%	5.0%	3.7%
Tourists focus too much on the city centre.	58.8%	20.0%	21.2%
Too few tourists. The untapped potential of the city.	28.8%	24.9%	46.3%
The city has no attractive offer outside the tourist zone.	26.3%	12.4%	61.3%
It suffers from overtourism.	25.0%	15.0%	60.0%
Tourists mainly just cause problems. There are too many of them, which means a lower quality of life for the inhabitants. Something should be done about it.	17.5%	15.0%	67.5%
Unfortunately, I see more negative than positive aspects of tourists coming to my city.	7.5%	15.0%	77.5%
I simply cannot tolerate having tourists in my surroundings!	1.2%	6.3%	92.5%

Source: own study.

In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, experts were asked if the city's residents seemed to be happier with having fewer tourists than before the pandemic. Nearly half (44.9%) of the TFC city representatives confirmed that their satisfaction is greater than before the pandemic due to less tourist traffic, although slightly fewer, 37.7% said that they did not notice the difference. Only 17.4% of the experts have no opinion on this subject.

The experts were also asked if they had noticed changes in tourist behaviour compared to pre-COVID-19 behaviour. At the same time, it was specified what possible changes result from reports in the literature and the experiences of other participants of the study, for example, the ways of using services, etc. Many changes were noticed, but the most frequently mentioned was the more frequent use of takeaway meals by tourists. As many as 42.0% of experts noticed that during the pandemic such behaviour was evident much more often than before. Slightly fewer experts (37.7%) noticed an increase in the frequency of using Booking/Expedia reservations, every third expert (34.8%) noticed an increase in the use of Airbnb offers by tourists, 30.4% of experts noticed a tendency for tourists to reduce their expenses, and 29.0% noted shorter stays. Table 2 provides a complete overview of the opinions.

Table 2. Changes in tourist behaviour during the pandemic.

Noticeable Changes in Tourist Behaviour	Tourists Use More Often	No Change	Tourists Use Less Often	I Have No Opinion
Use of Airbnb services	34.8%	11.6%	13.0%	40.6%
Use of Uber services	21.7%	13.0%	8.7%	56.6%
Use of Booking/Expedia services	37.7%	17.4%	5.8%	39.1%
Use of takeaway meals	42.0%	14.5%	5.8%	37.7%
Reduced expenses	30.4%	20.3%	10.1%	39.2%
Shorter stay	29.0%	27.5%	7.2%	36.3%
They look for cheaper services	23.2%	33.3%	7.2%	36.3%

Source: own study.

The experts were also asked about whose activities aimed at increasing resilience/competitiveness they observed at the level of the local economy. Most experts see the activities of private entrepreneurs (69.0%) and local authorities (60.6%). It is worth noting, however, that half of the experts noticed the initiatives of other stakeholders (Table 3).

Table 3. The structure of actors taking initiatives aimed to increase resilience/competitiveness at the level of the local economy.

Type of Measures	Positive	Neutral	Negative
Initiated by business owners	69.0%	18.3%	12.7%
Initiated by local authorities	60.6%	28.1%	11.3%
Initiated by other stakeholders	52.1%	28.2%	19.7%

Source: own study.

They were also asked if they saw a shift in contemporary tourism towards the principles of sustainable development. Every second respondent perceives such a change (47.9%), every fifth does not think about it (21.1%), and almost every third does not see an adjustment towards sustainable tourism (31.0%).

4.2. Tourist Dysfunctions in the Cities

The second area of the identified phenomena was the key problems of cities, hypothetically provoked by tourism. The experts were asked to assess the significance of this problem on a scale of 1 to 5, which provided average assessments of these problems. It is worth noting that the biggest problem of the analysed cities is the lack of sufficient parking spaces (3.68 ± 1.26) as well as high rent (3.53 ± 1.18) and high land prices (3.5 ± 1.21). Slightly

lower scores were awarded to problems with short-term rental of flats (3.47 ± 1.26), street congestion (3.41 ± 1.18), and depopulation of buildings (3.35 ± 1.39). The assessments of the given problems are very similar, and therefore, due to the same median value, should be classified into a group of similarly assessed problems. A slightly lower category should be given to noise at night (3.20 ± 1.25) and excessive street noise (3.19 ± 1.31). Interestingly, the problems indicated least were air pollution (2.55 ± 1.29), security issues (fights, screams) (2.55 ± 1.14), and the lack of local infrastructure (shops, etc.) (2.41 ± 1.1). The full list of descriptive measures for the individual problems is presented in Table 4. It can be seen that a number of phenomena indicated by experts were already reflected in actions taken before the pandemic.

Table 4. Problematic issues for the city.

Problematic Issues for the City	Av	SD	Me	V	As	k
Lack of parking spaces	3.68	1.26	4	0.34	−1.05	−1.02
High rent	3.53	1.18	4	0.34	−0.40	−0.55
Highland purchase prices	3.50	1.21	4	0.35	−0.41	−0.55
Problems with short-term rental of flats	3.47	1.26	4	0.36	−0.42	−0.73
Traffic congestion	3.41	1.18	4	0.35	−0.50	−0.74
Depopulation of buildings in the district	3.35	1.39	4	0.41	−0.47	−1.16
Noise at night	3.20	1.25	3	0.39	−0.64	−0.97
Excessive noise on the street	3.19	1.31	3	0.41	−0.62	−1.20
Tourism gentrification	2.99	1.20	3	0.40	−0.85	−1.00
Excessive number of places to drink alcohol	2.89	1.37	3	0.47	−0.08	−1.19
High prices for services and goods in shops	2.86	1.15	3	0.40	−0.12	−0.86
Waste pollution (rubbish)	2.85	1.20	3	0.42	−0.96	−1.08
High water usage	2.72	1.03	3	0.38	−0.28	−0.63
Crowded public transport	2.69	1.27	2	0.47	0.54	−1.04
Air pollution	2.55	1.29	2	0.51	0.43	−0.81
Safety issues (fights, shouting)	2.55	1.14	3	0.44	−0.39	−0.99
No local infrastructure (shops etc.)	2.41	1.10	2	0.46	0.37	−1.28

Source: own study. Explanations: Av—arithmetic average, SD—standard deviation, Me—median, Vx—coefficient of variation, As—asymmetry coefficient, k—kurtosis.

Problems reported by experts were subject to a detailed analysis in individual cities. The results are presented in Figure 2. Thanks to this comparison, it can be seen that the experts were not unanimous, and the cities can be grouped according to similar problems. Most of the examined cities show a level close to the average (marked with a dotted line), but in the case of a few problems, some cities record extreme results. Among them is Venice, which particularly strongly emphasizes the problem of depopulation and short-term rental. Dun Laoghaire, on the other hand, points to high land prices. Some cities also show a lower level of reported problems than others. An example is the aforementioned Dun Laoghaire, which does not record problems with traffic jams, air pollution, excess alcohol outlets, night noise, or safety problems.
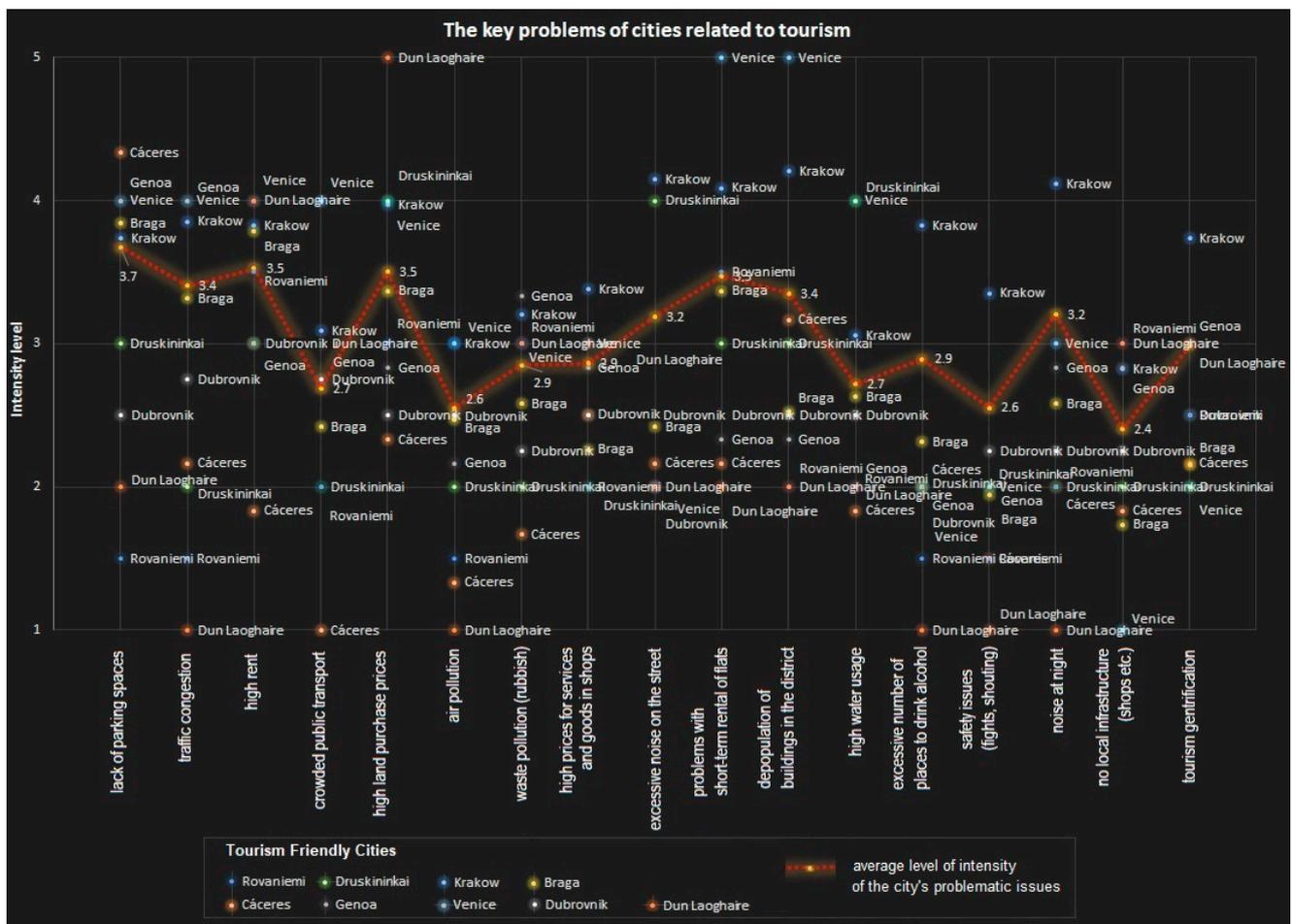
Figure 2. Problems reported by individual cities. Source: own study.

4.3. The Sources of Conflicts between Local Stakeholders

As shown in the literature review, the relations between stakeholders in the tourism industry may (but do not have to) bear features of conflict, the main axis of which is the level of direct economic benefits. With regard to potential conflicts in the field of tourism, the main groups of stakeholders may include entrepreneurs, tourist organizations like DMO (Destination Management Organisation), local authorities, and local communities. The biggest challenge is to take into account the interests of the last of these groups, especially that part of the local community that is not involved in the development of tourism but is influenced by the impact on everyday life and the external effects of urban tourism.

Experts' opinions on perceived conflicts between local authorities and tourism entrepreneurs in the field of tourism management were also examined. The overwhelming majority of experts (68.9%) stated that there was no such conflict. Only every fifth (18.9%) stated that they occasionally occur.

The distribution of the responses indicates how difficult and subjective it is to assess the sources and the social groups that may be in conflict. The experts were also asked to determine to what extent tourism caused conflicts between groups of city stakeholders before the pandemic. This time, however, the experts were given the opportunity to determine the intensity of these conflicts on a scale of 1 to 10 (where: 1—weak conflict, 10—extreme conflict). Figure 3 presents an overview of average scores for each of the conflict pairs identified in the studied tourist destinations. It should be noted that the most frequently identified conflict is the relationship between residents and local authorities (5.26), although the tension in this conflict should be described as average. Slightly lower average scores are noted for the relationship between tourists and residents (4.78) and

between tourism enterprises and residents (4.88). Conflicts of the lowest intensity occur among tourists themselves (2.79).
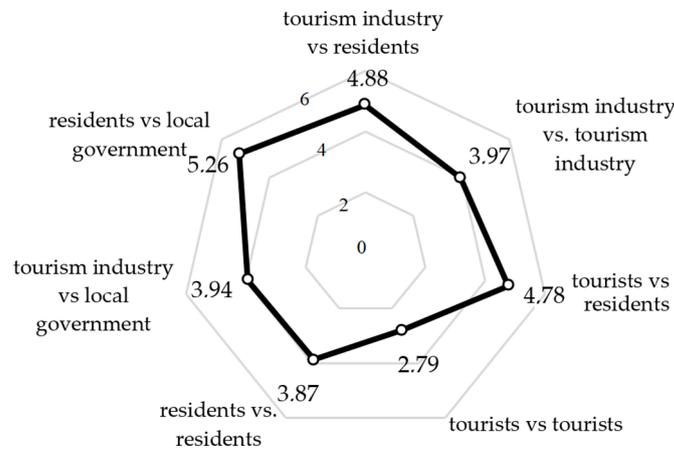

Figure 3. Conflict value indicator. Source: own study.

It is important to identify the sources of the conflict between the stakeholders (Figure 4). The analytical tool for managing the universal nature of conflict is the so-called wheel of conflict [58]. The research shows that most of them, i.e., every third (33.3%), indicate two equal causes. The first is a *conflict of relations* (transferred from the *sphere of interests*), i.e., an attitude in which the stakeholders have a negative emotional attitude towards the other party related e.g., to stereotypical images or misunderstandings, where each party is obliged to retaliate and communicate in this form. The second source is an *information (data) conflict*, in which the stakeholders are not able to determine the actual state (they have incorrect data or interpret it differently, or rely on false information, e.g., gossip). Other sources of conflicts were indicated by a smaller percentage of experts but in each case a high proportion, totalling 25% of respondents. A total of 25.7% indicated a *conflict of structure* as the source of conflicts, i.e., a conflict that is not caused by the individuals in conflict, but by the structure in which they function. This may be the structure of the company, a specific social situation, the dominant model of culture, or the environment. This is a conflict that is better than the others. Until it is resolved on a structural level, the dispute will return like a boomerang.
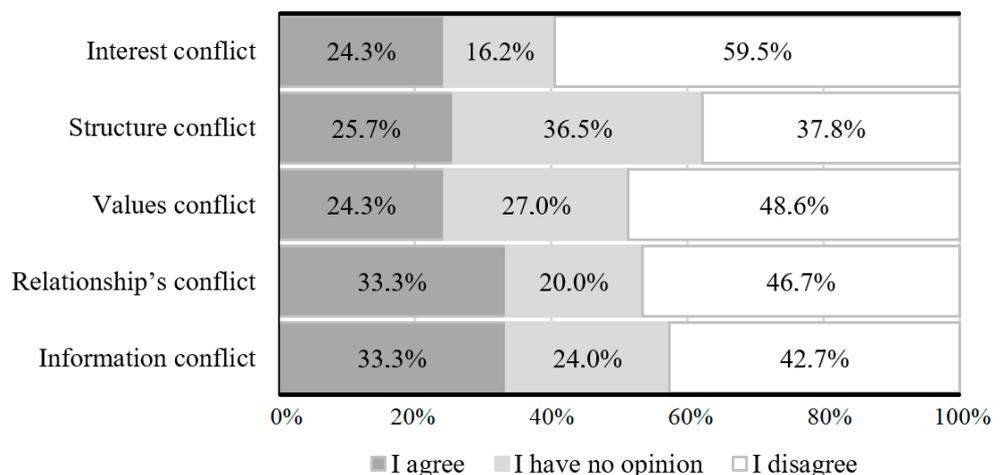

Figure 4. Sources of conflicts between stakeholders. Source: own study.

A *conflict of values* was indicated by 24.3% of experts. These conflicts are the result of different structures in the hierarchy of values and a difference in looking at the city.

Some people give themselves the right to tell others what the city should look like and disagree with others' views. This gives rise to the need to defend one's own values and ideas. The same number of experts (24.3%) indicated a conflict of interest in which one group of stakeholders perceives itself or another group of stakeholders as stronger and more privileged.

Comparative analysis of the significance level of the differences between the assessments of public and private sector experts showed few statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$). Public sector representatives assessed the level of conflict between tourists and residents differently ($p = 0.019$). Experts from the public sector assessed it at the level of 5.38, while those from the private sector assessed it at the level of 3.94. The problem of public transport congestion was also perceived differently ($p = 0.016$). Public sector representatives assessed this problem higher (3.0) than people from the private sector (2.26). In the remaining comparisons, the differences were not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that no differences are noticed between the responses of public and private sector experts.

4.4. Tools for the Sustainable Reconstruction of Tourism

As indicated in the theoretical description of the problem, understanding sustainable tourism may have many concepts, tools, or monitoring indicators. Among them are also those that, according to the authors, are declarations (even political), and which are difficult to implement. For the needs of the study, 20 hypothetical tools were selected, appearing in numerous analyses and strategic documents produced by the cities. The experts were tasked with assessing 20 hypothetical urban tourism management tools that could have sustainable effects. The authors do not decide which tools can be effective and whether their implementation is feasible.

Only the following tools were obtained clearly below 50% of responses: limiting the existing short-term rental, increasing entry restrictions to the city centre, and charging higher local taxes for service providers using the city's cultural heritage. This is particularly puzzling and shows the differentiation of attitudes towards the actions of many cities to limit/regulate short-term rental or introduce principles for the so-called night-time economy (Table 5).

Table 5. Effective tools for the sustainable reconstruction of tourism.

Hypothetic Tools for the Sustainable Reconstruction of Tourism	Percentage of Positive Answers *
Communication and involvement of local communities	89.8
Creation of attractions that benefit both residents and visitors	85.5
Encouraging visitors to explore outside the historical centre of the city	85.5
Measuring and monitoring tourism	82.6
Initiating discussions about development problems and establishing common goals for all stakeholders	82.6
Supporting new tourist offer initiatives, even niche ones	79.7
Intensify the tourist promotion of the city in order to 'recover' tourists	79.7
Integrated online booking systems for tourist attractions and cultural institutions	78.2
Introducing campaigns to make tourists aware of the rights of residents, providing information on local laws, customs	76.8
Creating mobile applications with alternative attractions	72.4
Introducing a voluntary, free sustainable development quality certificate for service providers (ecological, sanitary, service, etc.)	68.1
Striving for a consensus between residents and local service providers	65.2
Create or strengthen tourism management through the local DMO	60.8
Creation of preferential tax conditions for service activities maintaining the local identity in the city centre	53.6

Table 5. *Cont.*

Hypothetic Tools for the Sustainable Reconstruction of Tourism	Percentage of Positive Answers *
Introducing registration rules for short-term letting as a business activity	59.4
Limiting the development of certain types of services in the historical/tourist zone	59.4
Creation of preferential tax conditions for service activities maintaining the local identity in the city centre	53.6
Limiting the existing short-term rental	37.7
Increase entry restrictions to the city centre	31.9
Introduce restrictions on the night opening hours of gastronomy establishments	31.8
Charge higher local taxes for service providers using the city's cultural heritage	17.3

* The percentage of responses "rather yes" or "yes" with a value of at least 50% of responses in total. Source: own study.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The research conducted by the authors in eight tourist cities where the Tourism Friendly Cities project was carried out made it possible to verify several hypotheses (Table 6). The conclusions of the conducted research indicate that negative phenomena in the urban space do not have a clear cause-effect relationship only with tourism, because the research results did not indicate a clearly negative assessment of tourism in all cities in the process of city management and its evolution. The assessment of the impact of tourism activity in the city is generally positive. It is also known that among the local stakeholders of the tourism industry, the highest rate of conflict is between residents and the tourism industry, and between residents and local authorities (H1). This means that the attitude of the inhabitants becomes a key challenge for local stakeholders, requiring dialogue and participation.

Table 6. Result of verification of research hypotheses.

Hypotheses Verified in Research	Result of Verification of Research Hypotheses
H1. *In heritage tourism destinations, the highest level of conflicts among stakeholder groups occurs between local residents and other stakeholder groups, excluding tourists.*	Verified positively (hypothesis confirmed)
H2. *In tourism cities, there are noticeable trends towards the implementation of sustainable development principles in tourism activities*	Verified positively (hypothesis confirmed)
H3. *The tools used to regulate tourism should not be of a one-size-fits-all type but should respond to the individual needs of a given city*	Verified positively (hypothesis confirmed)

There is a noticeable shift towards the principles of sustainable development, including tools for tourism, as all destinations have started procedures for building new concepts, including legal and financial instruments (H2). It is not yet possible to assess their effectiveness, also through the indicators described above, but they are a radical move in the right direction. The tools used for balancing tourism cannot be universally applicable and should be adapted to the character of the city (H3). There is a clear determination to change cities where the phenomenon of over-tourism occurred before the pandemic, and in those with clear natural values, the emphasis is on protecting and preserving the environment. Implemented tools to balance tourism must not limit residents' access to infrastructure and services. Therefore, each destination should choose a set of specific and useful indicators. The listed tasks and principles are, of course, a set of many tools that must be utilised to achieve the goals. Among them, those that obtained the highest rates of acceptance by experts in this research can be implemented, assuming their adaptation to the local environment.

However, the experts pointed to the complexity and difficulty of unifying strategic solutions, as the distribution of their acceptance for the proposed tools was not unanimous. It does not seem feasible to implement all possible tools in each city, and it is not even justified. On the surface, the tools may seem to be the same, but they exist in different

socio-economic urban surroundings and assume different dimensions. Permanent dialogue between local stakeholders should be considered an essential tool, something which is also underlined by the cities in the TFC project. This can lead to the strategic choice of a limited number of tourism sustainability tools acceptable to all. The cooperation undertaken and the exchange of knowledge practised by TFC cities provided examples of so-called open innovations that can be implemented in other cities [90]. The phenomena observed and assessed by the experts were reflected in the strategic working documents of each of the TFC cities. Firstly, they clearly show that it is necessary to respect the needs of the inhabitants, although this may be accompanied by some conflicts. This has been underlined for several years [91–95]. Secondly, the toolkit is not universal and is or will be implemented depending on local conditions. One innovative tool not raised so far in the literature, and also the result of the pandemic, is paying attention to the forms of integration with residents and stimulating their tourist activity in their own city [9].

The discussion on the results obtained by the authors should be supplemented with the results obtained by the organizers of the research project at TFC. The TFC project ended in May 2022. As part of the project, tasks and tools for implementing the strategic goals were developed for each city [96]. However, these guidelines were individual in nature.

The implementation process will probably be dynamic over time, as well as monitored and evaluated. The TFC network also recommended the principles of rebuilding tourism in other cities, indicated by The Manifesto (internal TFC document) which can inspire the development of an integrated strategy of sustainable tourism and innovative actions (Table 7).

Table 7. The Tourism-Friendly Cities Manifesto: 10 principles on how cities can make the impact of tourism more sustainable.

Principles	Main City
Fostering proximity tourism by improving the offer to tourists and residents	Genoa
Making local stakeholders and residents innovative ambassadors of the city's attractions	Braga
Promoting local craft production to attract quality tourism	Cáceres
Making city infrastructure more accessible to all	Druskininkai
Implementing innovative and clean mobility solutions for tourists and residents	Dubrovnik
Improving public spaces and civic infrastructure for residents and tourists	Dún Laoghaire
Attracting new generations of tourists to rediscover the city's attractions	Krakow
Balancing the needs of the economy, society, and nature	Rovaniemi
Educating tourists to respect tourism destinations and to live in them like a local	Venice
From local to global: planning tourism recovery with local communities	all cities

Source: [97].

It is worth noting, however, that a number of the proposed tools and indicators are expensive in the short term (especially involving the private entrepreneurial sector), which may encounter resistance to implementation, especially in an uncertain future accompanied by new phenomena such as the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis and inflation. In such a situation, it seems realistic to narrow down the planned activities. It is also not certain whether the implemented tools will be effective in achieving a balance, as there are already

analyses showing that a number of trends are not conducive to such a goal at present and in the coming years [98,99].

Sustainable tourism activities defined years ago are still valid and should be characterized by [100]:

- optimal use of natural resources, proper management of ecological processes, and efforts to preserve biodiversity,
- respecting the socio-cultural attitudes of the local community, preserving its cultural heritage and traditional values, as well as undertaking actions for intercultural understanding and tolerance,
- ensuring real and long-lasting economic processes enabling social benefits for all.

One of the key aspects of sustainable development is monitoring the impact of tourism on the target area and indicator systems for measuring sustainable tourism development proposed by international organizations and institutions such as the UNWTO, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, VISIT (Voluntary Initiative for Sustainability in Tourism, United Nations World Tourism Organization), indicators proposed by the Tourism Sustainability Group (TSG) or the European Tourism Indicators System for Sustainable Destinations-ETIS [101]. The latter is a system for planning, implementing, supporting, and monitoring sustainable management of a tourist destination, including by applying the indicator method. Sustainability is measured by a set of 43 key (core) indicators and supplementary indicators—dedicated to specific types and profiles of destinations. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council established and manages global sustainability standards, known as the GSTC Criteria [102]. There are two sets: Destination Criteria for public policy-makers and destination managers, and Industry Criteria for hotels and tour operators. The implementation of indicator systems is an element of managing the sustainable development of tourism in a city and must be integrated with the strategic assumptions of the destination. Therefore, the choice of indicators must be embedded in the actual situation (depending on the stage of tourism development, destinations, most important challenges, and strategic goals). They are organized around four main themes: sustainable management; socio-economic impacts; cultural impacts; and environmental impacts. Similar recommendations are included in the One Planet Sustainable Tourism Program [103] and are even mentioned in the UNWTO documents on post-COVID tourism [15–17,103]. A document from 2022 by the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Sustainable Tourism has developed principles to guide businesses, governments, destinations, travellers, and resident communities to better design and manage tourism destinations and practices [104].

In this context, it should be noted that an important element of sustainable development is the preservation of local culture, both in terms of local artistic creativity, but also in terms of historical heritage (Figure 5). In this way, activities undertaken to preserve local and regional heritage become both an element of implementing sustainable tourism and deriving socio-economic benefits from it.

In this way, in addition to activities such as respecting the local community, trying to preserve the local natural environment, and stimulating socio-economic benefits, an element that provides benefits from sustainable tourism is also the provision of cultural heritage. Therefore, in the studied cities constituting the TFC group, historical and cultural heritage is an important element of creating sustainable tourism.

Based on the above model of mutual relations, one can indicate an important area of activities related to the role of cultural heritage in creating sustainable tourism. Its importance seems to continue to grow. Taking into account cultural and historical heritage among the elements integrating the factors of sustainable tourism may allow for its profiling. If this relationship becomes dominant, sustainable tourism may take the unique form of **sustainable heritage tourism**.

Figure 5. The role of cultural heritage in sustainable tourism. Source: own study.

It should be noted that the results obtained in individual cities are similar. Despite the differences that can be seen in these destinations, there are similarities in the perception of problems related to tourism. The need to formulate individual programs for the development of sustainable tourism also leads to the possibility of developing program frameworks that include the tools mentioned in the article. The importance of residents in each of these destinations, who are parties to the most common conflicts, is also noticeable. Research has shown that the relationships most at risk of conflict are those between tourists and residents and between the tourism industry and residents.

Although qualitative research does not allow the results to be generalized to other areas, the results obtained may support the authorities of other cultural heritage tourist destinations in developing individual programs. Problem-solving experience in selected European cities can contribute to increasing problem-solving capacity in other areas of the world.

6. Limitations and Future Research Trends

A weakness of the study is the selection of cities that qualified for the TFC. It should be noted that the authors had no influence on the selection of the cities participating in the TFC project but used it in accordance with the methodology adopted by the project organizers. Further research directions should include an analysis of the attitudes of residents of each city towards implemented or proposed sustainable tourism tools and the development of mechanisms for monitoring the effects of such tools. An important research problem also seems to be the impact of street incidents, protests and conflicts caused by immigrants. This factor may significantly reduce tourist traffic in tourist cities.

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