

Sustaining a political system: new urban tourism in Cuba and related conflicts

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7 Sustaining a political system

New Urban Tourism in Cuba and related conflicts

Niklas Völkening

New Urban Tourism as a contested policy in Cuba?

To cushion the most severe socioeconomic effects that followed the collapse of the USSR and of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), the Cuban government promoted international tourism and, among other measures, legalised private accommodation, so-called *casas particulares*, in 1996. The strategy of stimulating tourism in Cuba turned out to be financially successful and simultaneously fostered the emergence of New Urban Tourism, especially in tourism hot spots where many Cubans accommodate international tourists privately. Practices of New Urban Tourism in Cuba are often exciting for tourists and lucrative for hosts, for whom tourism is one of the potentially highest sources of income.

However, Cuba's New Urban Tourism entails causes of conflicts, too. On the one hand, private hosts compete directly with state-run hotels, with an ostensive and sometimes exploitative power imbalance in favour of the state. On the other hand, hosts and other providers of services in New Urban Tourism earn incomes significantly above average, leading to social discontent and apparently contradicting the socialist ideal of an egalitarian society. Furthermore, the rise of New Urban Tourism has pervasive spatial effects regarding the use of space and access to it, which in turn evoke reactions by parts of the local communities.

Based on empirical data collected via semi-structured interviews in Habana Vieja, the historic city centre of Havana (22 interviews), and Trinidad (5 interviews) between March 2017 and April 2019, this chapter reveals the consequences of New Urban Tourism and the concomitant touristification of urban neighbourhoods in Cuba. Especially, spatial changes and altered ways of utilising public urban spaces will be addressed using spatial data collected in comprehensive mappings in both cities. Focal for this chapter is a human geographical analysis of power relations and interests of the actors engaged.

Additionally, the circumstances for Cuba's rise as an international tourism destination since the 1990s will be described, including explanations for the pervasive occurrence of forms of New Urban Tourism within certain urban spaces. Subsequently, the theoretical background of New Urban Tourism is discussed briefly. Afterwards, the local contestations and conflicts accompanying New

Urban Tourism in Cuba will be analysed through Habana Vieja and Trinidad. It turns out that conflicts over New Urban Tourism in Cuba are, surprisingly, motivated by the desire for increasing tourism rather than by the demand to curb it.

Tourism revolution in Cuba to sustain the socialist system

After the victory of Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959, international tourism in Cuba virtually came to a halt for various reasons. Most considerable was the lack of resources to maintain tourism, including the US embargo and travel ban for US citizens (Salinas *et al.* 2017, p. 220) and the framing of tourism as "hedonistic vice" (Sharpley and Knight 2009, p. 242), thus contrasting it with the prevailing socialist ideals.

However, international tourism made a strong comeback after several reforms that tackled the ramifications of the disintegration of the USSR and the COMECON in the early 1990s. As the Cuban economy was highly dependent on subsidised imports from its socialist allies (Zeuske 2016), the abrupt omission of imports threatened the continuity of the socialist-revolutionary system. For instance, Cuban GDP plunged by about 35% between 1989 and 1993 (Salinas *et al.* 2017, p. 221) and the achievements of the revolution, i.e. education, health care and housing, suffered fiercely.

In the wake of this, Fidel Castro declared in 1990 that Cuba had entered a "Special Period in Times of Peace" that was accompanied by fundamental economic and social reforms. These reforms led to enormous growth in international tourism, gaining momentum in the second half of the 1990s (see Figure 7.1). Seminal was the definition of tourism as one of the cornerstones of the new Cuban economy, with a clear objective that also applied to other reforms: to earn hard currency to retain the socialist order (Jatar-Hausmann 1999, p. 49). Already in the early 1990s, tourism had replaced the sugar industry as Cuba's largest source of hard currency income.

The second major building block of post-soviet reforms in Cuba was the legalisation of private enterprises and self-employment (*cuentapropismo*) in 1993. Cubans are currently allowed to work in non-state employment in 201 selected occupations (Mesa-Lago 2018, p. 2). This *cuentapropismo* proved to be advantageous especially in tourism. Additional laws allowed Cubans to run private restaurants (*paladares*) in 1995, to offer private transport (1996) and to rent out private rooms for accommodation (1997) in *casas particulares*.

Monetary measures with implications for tourism caused considerable frictions. In 1994, the *Peso Convertible* (CUC) was introduced as a "tourist currency" parallel to the *Peso Cubano* (CUP) after the US Dollar was temporarily legalised as currency. The dual currency system existed until the turn of the year 2020/21, with 1 CUC, whose value was tied to the US Dollar, worth approximately 24 CUP. While the state paid wages in CUP, payments in tourism were generally made in CUC, leading to enormous inequalities concerning income and purchasing power between state employment and tourism. Although the binary system of CUP and CUC has been abolished, it is unlikely that these income differences will

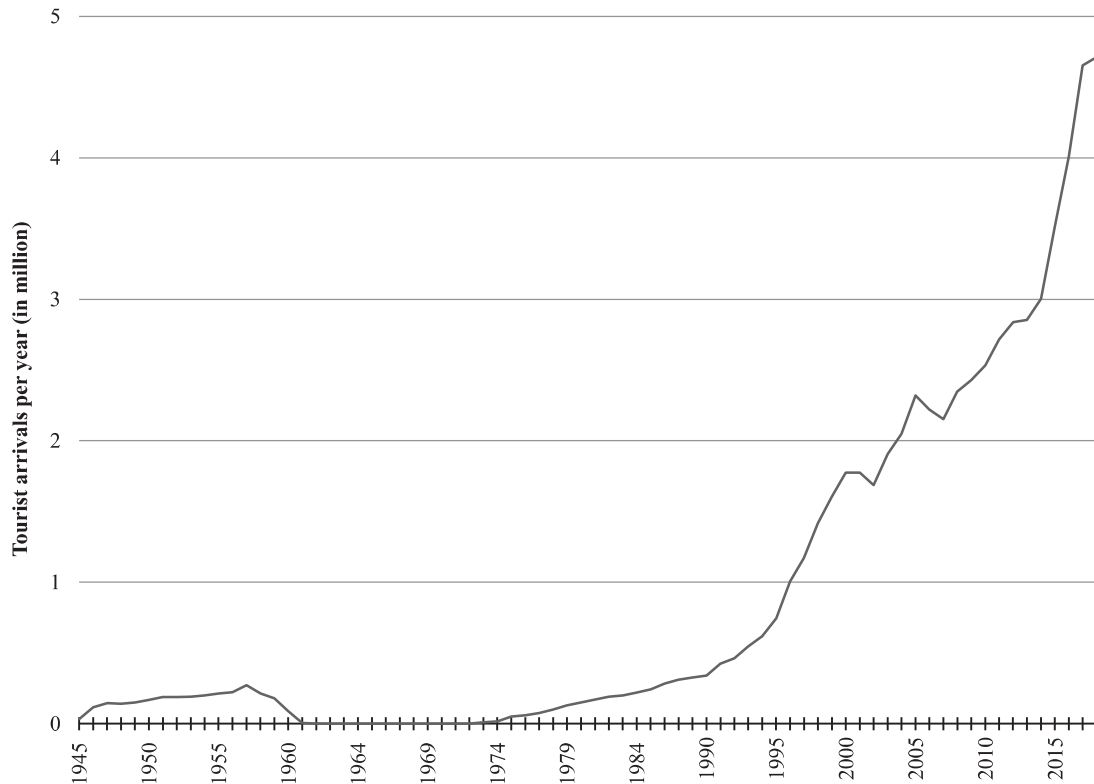


Figure 7.1 Arrivals of international tourists per year (in million) © Niklas Völkening, data from ONEI (2019), Jayawardena (2003) and Garrido (1993)

disappear in the medium term. Tourism earnings, which will presumably continue to be higher, are thus merely denominated in the same currency as the comparatively low incomes from state employment. This leads to paradoxical situations: while doctors, lawyers and professors working for the state struggle to provide for their families, Cubans who are employed in tourism could earn the monthly wage of a state employee in a single day. Since earning hard currency became vital for daily survival, many Cubans try to have a share in tourism, adopting even semi-legal to illegal activities, as it can be difficult to obtain a licence for *cuentapropismo* (Taylor and McGlynn 2009, p. 409, Nau 2016, p. 14).

To sum up the measures taken, the Cuban government introduced market-oriented elements into the national economy like entrepreneurship, international tourism and foreign investments to obtain hard currency for stabilising state and society. In doing so, it used “capitalism to save socialism” (Taylor and McGlynn 2009, p. 412). However, Roland (2010, p. 4) describes tourism as “means to sustain the system”. Initially, tourism was meant to be utilised only for a limited period (Salinas *et al.* 2017, p. 222), as deteriorating effects on Cuban society were feared. However, the promotion of tourism soon became a long-term strategy.

Interactions between Cubans and tourists mostly take place within well-defined boundaries. Since tourism revenues are vital for the Cuban state, the level of control the state exercises is extraordinarily high. In many other countries,

such strict political regulation of tourism markets is rare and often outsourced to Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) or similar entities (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 5). In Cuban tourism, the high level of control has persisted throughout the past three decades and the changes of government in the meantime. The “smooth and uneventful” (LeoGrande 2015, p. 378) transition of power from Fidel to Raúl on 31 July 2006, put the “more capital-friendly” (Roland 2010, p. 14) of the Castros in charge and lead to further market-oriented reforms that boosted tourism additionally.

From an economic perspective, these reforms were successful. GDP increased significantly and, according to World Bank data (2018), reached pre-crisis levels in 2005. Until 2018, Cuban GDP grew at an average annual rate of 4.9% (own calculations based on World Bank 2018), although the rate of growth slowed down substantially recently. However, figures on the Cuban economy must be viewed with some caution, as Schmieg (2017, p. 6) estimates that figures published by government authorities overestimate the Cuban GDP more than twofold. The supply situation improved as well and the Cuban leadership seems to be confirmed in its course regarding tourism. Even after the election of Miguel Díaz-Canel as new President of Cuba in April 2018, a shift in the current importance of tourism for the Cuban economy is unlikely—and has not occurred to date. However, the extensive incorporation of tourism in Cuba’s national economy was so radical that Jayawardena framed it as a “tourism revolution” (2003, p. 56). This revolution entails socioeconomic and spatial consequences, some of which can be traced back to forms of New Urban Tourism in Cuba.

What is ‘new’ about New Urban Tourism?

In differentiation from other forms of urban tourism, the ‘new’ in New Urban Tourism predominantly lies in the “scale, complexity and diversity of consumption experiences which now exist in urban landscapes built specifically for tourism and leisure” (Hall 2017, p. 145). In particular, three dimensions characterise New Urban Tourism: the “extraordinary mundane”, specific “encounters and contact zones” and forms of “urban co-production” (Stors *et al.* 2019, p. 8–11) that shape urban space in novel ways and that make it increasingly difficult to distinguish ‘tourists’ from ‘locals’ and ‘tourism’ from ‘everyday life’ (Maitland 2013, p. 13, Eldridge 2019, p. 423), as tourists blend into the everyday life of cities (Füller and Michel 2014, p. 1306).

Simultaneously, tourism destabilises the mundane and hinders the local societies’ ability to reproduce, when tourists and temporary residents gradually supplant it (Cócola Gant 2016, p. 7). This is often attributed to the sharing economy, sometimes framed as “gentrification battlefield” (*ibid.*) and frequently linked to holiday rentals such as Airbnb. Although critical voices stress the negative consequences of the sharing economy, such as the alteration of socio-economic structures of urban areas and various types of displacement through the conversion of housings into accommodation (*ibid.*), it need not necessarily be harmful. Thus, Airbnb or *casas particulares* simultaneously benefit the property owner,

the tourist and may generally stimulate local economies (Fang *et al.* 2016, p. 264–266).

Nonetheless, New Urban Tourism is a source of conflicts and contestations that seemingly increase in urban settings, which is reflected in the proliferation of vague catchphrases like ‘touristification’, ‘overtourism’ and ‘tourism-phobia’ (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 1–2). However, buzzwords like the aforementioned disguise the highly political character of tourism and give it the appearance of being all but positive (Novy 2016). In addition to the global intensification of tourism, growing numbers of actors—inhabitants, tourists and investors—claim limited urban space (Koens *et al.* 2018, p. 5), leading to multi-layered conflicts. These contestations are embedded in broader disputes regarding the “right to the city” (Lefebvre 1968), which in essence often involve conflicts between the interests of dwellers on the one hand, and capital seeking profit-maximisation on the other.

Two main reasons for conflicts in the wake of New Urban Tourism are closely connected to this: first, the unequal distribution of profits and costs of tourism and second, the evident prioritisation of tourism in urban politics paired with perceived neglect of control and regulation (Novy and Colomb 2016). Although conflict and contestation over tourism are not new, the current quality, quantity and placing of resistance against tourism are unprecedented, emerging in reaction to more and seemingly unregulated tourism (Novy 2018).

However, deferrals linked to New Urban Tourism are embedded in particular socio-economic, political and spatial conditions that constitute the framing context for conflicts and need to be addressed, in order to comprehend the multidimensionality of those contestations. Therefore, policy-oriented (Mordue 2017) and multi-scalar perspectives considering “globalisation, economic restructuring, neoliberalisation and financialisation” (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 4) are necessary to grasp the entanglements of New Urban Tourism. Nonetheless, tourism is not necessarily the focal point of mobilisation, but may only be one dimension of critique within a broader movement affecting urban development, for instance concerning the distribution of profits generated in public spaces (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 9).

These remarks on new Urban Tourism were mainly derived from literature considering urban areas of the Global North (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 5), posing the question of global transferability. Although some studies were published on urban tourism and its effects in the Global South¹ (i.e. Betancur 2014, Janoschka and Sequera 2016, Preston-Whyte and Scott 2017), societies in developing countries hitherto seem to be under-represented in studies on New Urban Tourism. Despite being a global phenomenon, the forms and consequences of New Urban Tourism may vary greatly, depending on the socioeconomic and cultural background of a city and its residents.

Although the importance of digital technology as the “backbone of many New Urban Tourism phenomena” (Stors *et al.* 2019, p. 9) is undisputed, this chapter touches on the topic only lightly. This is because Cuba ranks among the least connected countries in the world in terms of internet access (Grandinetti and Eszenyi

2018). Although a 3G-network was established in December 2018, large parts of the population still lack reliable internet access.

To contribute to New Urban Tourism research, this chapter presents an example from the Global South, exploring the general consequences of New Urban Tourism and touristification within the special context of Cuba. Additionally, conflicts between various actors with differing levels of power will be analysed. Finally, the influence of tourism, especially New Urban Tourism, on urban societies in Cuba and its spatial effects as well as altered ways of usage for public space will be described. As there are only a few research examples on contestations of New Urban Tourism in the Global South, this chapter speaks for multidimensional, comprehensive analyses, which transcend disciplinary boundaries to contribute to a thorough understanding of New Urban Tourism and its effects in the Global South.

Special cases: tourism in Havana and Trinidad

The reasons for New Urban Tourists to visit Cuban cities and to demand respective services are similar to those in other urban destinations. Many tourists desire to experience ‘real’ Cuba. Especially young Western tourists tend to seek experiences from a local perspective or—even better—being accompanied by locals (Cohen and Cohen 2012). The need for authenticity and originality, for not-yet commodified experiences, is increasing among discerning tourists (Maitland 2013, p. 14), especially as online tourism services, accommodation and tours facilitate the satisfaction of the thirst for ‘authentic’ experiences (Pappalepore *et al.* 2014). However, as indicated, this is not fully applicable in the Cuban case.

Various forms of *cuentapropismo* offer opportunities for tourists to get in touch with ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ Cubans. Especially *casas particulares*, *paladares*, guided tours and other services offered by *cuentapropistas* are popular among foreign tourists. In recent years, the share of international tourists staying overnight in *casas particulares* remained stable at roughly a quarter (see Figure 7.2). However, to acquire a licence for a private business in tourism and to meet the strict standards often requires significant investments beforehand, limiting these possibilities to Cubans with high income or with relatives abroad sending remittances (Simoni 2017, p. 297), thus excluding many Cubans from private engagement in tourism.

In both exemplary cities chosen for this chapter, forms of New Urban Tourism take up a reasonable proportion of the local tourism market. Habana Vieja and Trinidad also have some further similarities. In both cases, tourism is concentrated in “tourist bubbles” (Judd 1999) that have been valorised for tourist consumption. Habana Vieja and Trinidad are some of the cultural and architectural highlights in Cuba (Látková *et al.* 2017, p. 357), therefore they are among those urban destinations with most foreign visitors. Both were declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Habana Vieja in 1982, Trinidad in 1988, further increasing their touristic attractiveness. Furthermore, especially the touristified areas in Habana Vieja and Trinidad feature relatively high and further increasing prices and costs of living,

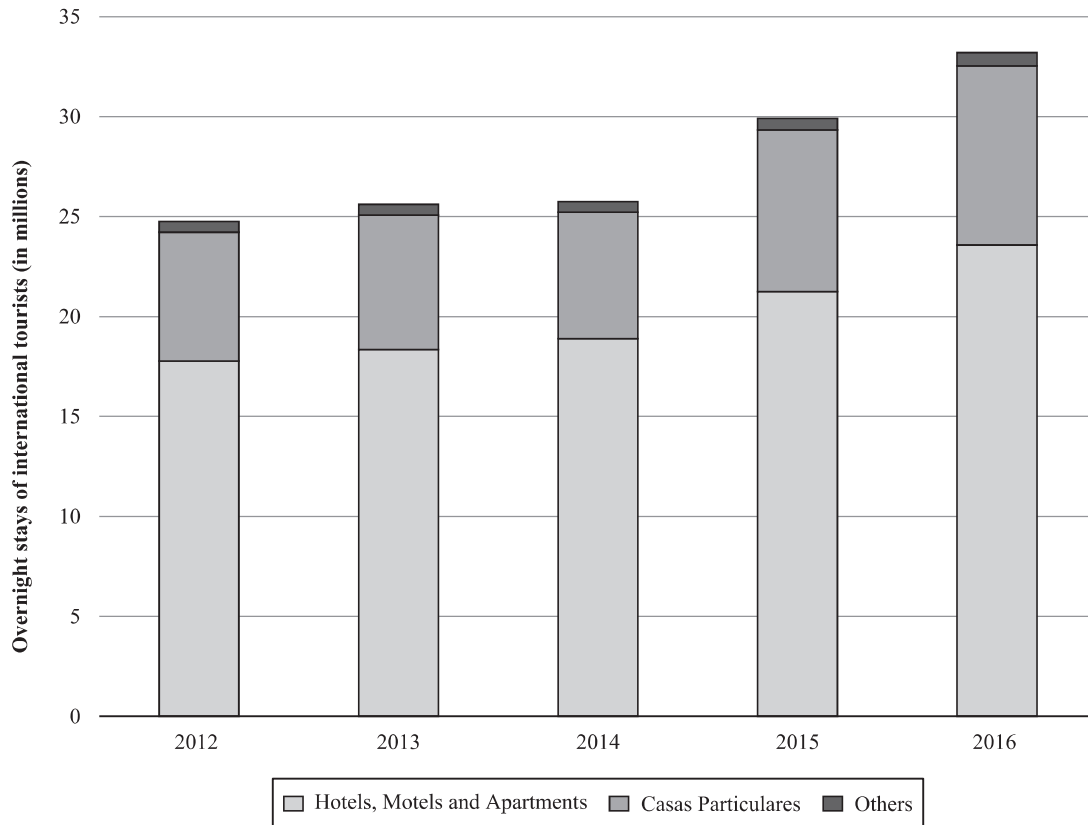


Figure 7.2 Overnight stays of international tourists in Cuba by type of accommodation © Niklas Völkening, data from ONEI (2017)

as several interviewees remarked with concern. In combination with the low average income, this creates spaces that are virtually not financially feasible for most of the local population.

In the section below, Habana Vieja and Trinidad are introduced with a special focus on tourism development, the actors involved and conflicts related to New Urban Tourism. Subsequently, the differences between both urban spaces, which also exist, are discussed.

Habana Vieja—spatial segregation and displacement

Habana Vieja, the historical centre of the Cuban capital, located just 100 miles south of Key West on the Florida Strait, is touristically attractive for various reasons, such as its history, culture and architecture. About 90% of the buildings in the historic centre have high architectural and/or historical value (Peters 2001, p. 5). Nevertheless, during the years following the Cuban revolution, buildings and infrastructure within Habana Vieja were neglected by the central government (Foster 2003, p. 788). The circumstances of the Special Period further deteriorated building conditions. At the initiative of the Oficina del Historiador de la Ciudad de La Habana (Office of the City Historian of Havana), which is directly

subordinated to the state council, programs for renovation and restoration, centrally headed by the Oficina, were introduced in the 1980s. But restoration efforts did not gain momentum until Habana Vieja was designated as a tourism hot spot at the end of the 1990s by order of the Ministry of Tourism. The restorations led to substantial spatial, social and economic transformations. In particular, areas of high potential for touristic commercialisation have shown significant improvement in building and infrastructure conditions since then, while areas of lower touristic interest often remain ruinous (Völkening *et al.* 2019).

Along with improved building conditions, a distinct increase of offerings for tourists is observable. Especially the number of *casas particulares*—as an apparent form of New Urban Tourism—increased sharply in Habana Vieja. The expansion of touristic offerings is at the expense of local dwellers, especially those who earn CUP-income in public service and are therefore excluded from almost any CUC-offerings. The increase of high-price, tourism-oriented restaurants, cafés and shops is paralleled by a drastic decrease of CUP-shops available for local amenities in Habana Vieja (Völkening *et al.* 2019, p. 90). The increase in offerings directed towards tourists is spatially concentrated into the four plazas in north-east Habana Vieja that were extensively restored (Scarpaci 2000, p. 728). Additionally, since real estate commerce has been legal since 2011, social groups with higher incomes have started to spatially segregate from lower-income classes, which are increasingly driven out of Habana Vieja (Völkening *et al.* 2019).

The displacement of dwellers from Habana Vieja in favour of tourist offerings meets the criteria of what Gotham (2005) called “tourism gentrification”. Following Marcuse (1985), both “direct displacement” and “displacement pressure” are observable in Habana Vieja. “Exclusionary displacement”, though an integral component of Marcuse’s triad of displacement, plays a secondary role, as renting living space is rather uncommon in Cuba. While “direct displacement” points out the physical expulsion of dwellers of a certain area (Marcuse 1985, p. 205), “displacement pressure” describes the progressing decrease of living quality for present inhabitants, rendering the area “less and less livable [sic]” (Marcuse 1985, p. 207), for instance because social bonds break apart or the possibilities of sustaining a livelihood deteriorate, e.g. due to rising prices of consumer goods or rental fees. Cocola Gant (2016, p. 7) uses “collective displacement” to describe the cumulative or chronological occurrence of these forms of displacement, which progressively favours further touristification at the expense of local communities.

It is important to envision that displacement of local dwellers and the touristification of urban areas are not merely uncontrollable outputs of the interaction between supply and demand, but are subject to deliberate actions and decisions of investors, individual landlords, tourist companies and, ultimately, policy providing the legal framework (Slater 2017). Consequently, focus should be put on actors and their interests, both in theory and in empirical works.

In this context, “displacement by heritage dispossession” (Janoschka and Sequera 2016, p. 1182) is observable in Habana Vieja. At first, public space is cleansed and secured, while informal economic activities are driven out. In a second stage, dispossession and displacement take place, mostly justified by

arguments of heritage protection, manifesting the “structural violence of tourism” (Büscher and Fletcher 2017, pp. 657–659) also occurring in Habana Vieja. Nonetheless, a representative survey among the residents of Habana Vieja conducted in 2019 shows that 57% of the population regard tourism as beneficial to their and their families’ lives. In contrast, 38% of the population perceive tourism as not beneficial and respectively disadvantageous to their life (Echarri Chávet *et al.* 2019, pp. 12–13).

In conclusion, the restorations accomplished under the guidance of the Oficina were mainly responsible for the rise of Habana Vieja as an international tourism destination. The past three decades have been characterised by a rapid and lasting increase in touristic offerings, both public and private. Forms of New Urban Tourism give Habaneras and Habaneros various possibilities to earn relatively high incomes, simultaneously leading to ongoing displacement of dwellers, the touristification of large parts of Habana Vieja and eventually to conflicts between different groups of actors.

Trinidad-dominance of the private economy and increasing competition

Trinidad, the second example, is a “smaller walkable version of Habana Vieja with key differences” (Scarpaci 2012, p. 82). The town is located on the southern shore of central Cuba, at the foot of the Escambray Mountains. Trinidad is touristically attractive mainly for three reasons. First, it features magnificent colonial architecture, with many buildings in the city centre being in excellent condition, thanks to restorations initiated and instructed by the Oficina del Conservador de Trinidad (Office of the Conservationist of Trinidad). Second, the tropical beaches at Ancón peninsula are located just several kilometres south of Trinidad. Third, Trinidad offers good transport connections and is a springboard for various regional attractions (Scarpaci 2006, pp. 212–213). Consequently, the city is “flooded with international visitors throughout the year” (Tanaka 2013, p. 57).

During the Special Period and the reorientation towards international tourism, the Havana-based Ministry of Tourism initiated touristic development in Trinidad in a top-down attempt, declaring it a “tourist pole” within the centrally planned economy (Gutiérrez Castillo and Gancedo Gaspar 2002). Originally, the Ministry focused on the development of beach tourism on Ancón peninsula. The central plan, which was updated at the beginning of the 2000s and has not yet been realised, earmarked some 4,000 hotel rooms, contradicting the ideas of local authorities and the Oficina del Conservador (Scarpaci 2006, p. 207, 2012, p. 81).

Similar to Habana Vieja, the driving force for restoration—and touristification—in Trinidad was the Oficina del Conservador. The idea of the Conservador comprised the erection of small hotels with few rooms in the historic centre, funded by international investors (Scarpaci 2006, p. 216). To finance the restoration efforts and to sustain the work of the Oficina del Conservador, it raised a tax on the gross revenue of local venues and shops that was reinvested in the restoration of further buildings (Scarpaci 2006, p. 214).

However, the gentle restoration of the city centre was not necessarily focused on tourism development, but primarily on heritage conservation (Scarpaci 2012, p. 81). In further development, emphasis was put on the restoration of the residential areas of the borough of Tres Cruces (*ibid.*). The cultural events organised by the Oficina del Conservador, which are solely for residents, serve the same purpose, offering an “important space of expression for locals in a town dominated by tourism” (Tanaka 2013, p. 58). Although the restoration of ruined buildings was geared towards tourism in Trinidad, too, the revenues of the Oficina del Conservador were also used to restore family housings and infrastructure not directly related to tourism.

Basically, the Oficina del Conservador was able to assert its position on the development of tourism in Trinidad, as for many years there were no major hotels within the historic centre (Scarpaci 2006, p. 209). Even today, with some hotels having opened in central Trinidad, local *casas particulares* offer six times more rooms than the hotels on site. Consequently, a relatively large proportion of the local population can participate in and profit financially from burgeoning tourism.

Conservation politics incorporating social awareness certainly are rare. While dwellers in many city centres across Latin America have to succumb to urban development predominated by the interests of international capital (Betancur 2014), Trinidad is a great exception (Scarpaci 2006, p. 27).

The Oficina del Conservador plays a crucial role in the restoration and the increase of attractiveness for tourism in Trinidad. The main beneficiary of this is the local population engaged in New Urban Tourism, while the state and people employed in public non-touristic services benefited significantly less. However, displacement of dwellers are far less common than in Habana Vieja, although recent years have revealed increasing competition by state-run venues, in particular to the disadvantage of *cuentapropistas*.

State versus privately run accommodation in Cuba

In both Habana Vieja and Trinidad, the restoration of cultural heritage, which is the foundation for touristic commodification, was not centrally governed and scheduled (Scarpaci 2012, p. 82), but rather emerged incidentally as a result of the commitments of individual actors. The possibility for both spaces to turn into hot spots of tourism was additionally accomplished by legislative changes and ensuing reactions by local authorities, residents and international investors.

Therefore, the cause and the effect of New Urban Touristification should not be confused. Instead of a few pioneering tourists ‘discovering’ places unspoiled by tourism that thenceforward turned into professionalising destinations, the spread of touristic offerings is rather the tangible manifestation of subjacent processes, which depend on political and economic dynamics not necessarily linked to tourism (Koens *et al.* 2018, p. 8). In Cuba, those are mainly political decisions and the application of (political) power causing socioeconomic deferrals and shifts in spatial appropriation. Different than in many other cities, Cuban municipal authorities play just a minor role in facilitating and directing tourism. Instead, the

centralised Cuban government and its ministries ultimately control tourism development via central plans that other governmental bodies—such as the Oficinas in Havana and Trinidad—must ~~be~~ subordinate to.

In Habana Vieja and Trinidad, New Urban Tourism gives rise to various conflicts and contestations. One focal source for conflict is the “restratification” of society (Nau 2016, p. 13) along an economic axis and the widening income gap between people who earned CUP and those who earned CUC (LeoGrande 2015, p. 395). These differences lead to the emergence of a “class of new rich” (Simoni 2017, p. 305) at the hot spots of international tourism, with only a few residents profiting from tourism. And while incomes rose significantly for some Cubans, costs of living increased strongly, too (Hoffmann 2015, p. 5). This poses problems to maintain the provision of basic supplies, especially for marginalised groups. Much stronger than in many cities of the Global North, New Urban Tourism contributes to increasing disparities among the population, putting dwellers, who profit from tourism, under pressure from above and below.

Pressure from above is applied by the state through increasing competition by its venues—for instance concerning accommodation and gastronomy through which the state seeks to safeguard the highest possible revenue. Although its intentions are presumably appreciable, such as cross-financing the welfare system, the repercussions for *cuentapropistas* are grave. While in Habana Vieja the touristic demand seems to grow in step with supply, the number of *casas particulares* and *paladares* in Trinidad increases faster than the demand of international tourists. As state-run hotels and restaurants push progressively into local markets, competition becomes fierce. The *cuentapropistas* of Trinidad are relatively powerless compared to state-backed hotel chains. Prospects for effective protest and contestation are limited, and open protest is still hard to carry out.

Pressure from below is applied by those groups that are excluded from tourism and that ogle the high incomes generated in tourism. This occasionally evokes signs and utterances of envy and concerns about the egalitarian Cuban society—partly to be heard as whispers on the street, partly broadcast on state television. But more often, Cubans acknowledge the necessity of revenues generated in tourism to sustain the welfare system in Cuba. Nonetheless, the seminal factor for preventing discontent and protest against tourism and accompanying inequalities is the hope many Cubans put into tourism, awaiting their own participation in tourism. The opportunity to obtain financial benefits through tourism may enlarge the willingness to tolerate or even promote it (Scheyvens 2007).

This offers an interesting difference in attitude towards New Urban Tourism in many other cases. In most European cities, dwellers are among the advocates of increased regulation, the limitation of short-term rentals and other forms of New Urban Tourism (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 8). However, in Cuba, large parts of the population argue for an increase of licences for forms of New Urban Tourism, as they might profit from it. On the other hand, the state seeks to increase control over private engagements in tourism by decreasing the awarding licences for *casas particulares* and restricting employment opportunities in tourism.

While some mobilisations against New Urban Tourism intertwine their critique of tourism with an anti-capitalist stance (Novy and Colomb 2019, p. 8), this actually expectable connection is rarely formulated in Cuba. Instead, although the capitalist character of tourism is generally acknowledged, it is often tolerated—if not appreciated—as a necessity to support the socialist system.

The particular case of Cuban New Urban Tourism

As shown by the examples of Habana Vieja and Trinidad, New Urban Tourism also leads to discontent and conflicts in Cuba, especially in tourism hot spots which are affected by multi-scalar conflicts which have altered utilisation of public space. Conflicts often arise between *cuentapropistas* and the state as a result of a competitive situation and between Cubans who are financially better off through tourism and their fellow citizens who remain in relative poverty.

In both cases presented, the dominant structure for tourism development is a top-down hierarchy, controlled by the central Cuban government. However, local authorities, like city historians or conservationists, may participate in shaping urban space and the possibilities of appropriation for the local population, though with limited influence. Eventually, dwellers have few possibilities to assert their interests against governmental bodies—on local as well as regional or national levels. From this perceived power imbalance, several sources for conflict and contestation arise, mostly concerning access to tourism and the monetary resources it promises.

Urban tourism is the driver for economic development in many Cuban cities. Tourism in general is vital to sustain the social system, while partially it contributes to the erosion of society. To a certain extent, this is specific to Cuba, struggling to combine the imperatives of socialist society and capitalist tourism. For Cubans, engagements in New Urban Tourism offer opportunities of income far above the average. Despite criticism towards it, *cuentapropismo* in tourism seems to be worthwhile for many Cubans. While this might be beneficial for individuals, it is potentially harmful for society and social order. Simultaneously, New Urban Tourism fuels competition between private providers of tourism services in Cuba and the state, mainly in an economic arena that might also spill over into social or political issues.

In conclusion, conflict and contestation around New Urban Tourism in Cuba targets the transforming forces of tourism, as well as the distribution of revenue generated in tourism. As the analysis of Habana Vieja and Trinidad indicates, societies in the Global South are confronted with tourism-related problems partially similar to those of societies in the Global North. However, in other regards, they face challenges that are perceived as more seminal than questions of authenticity, for example if economic opportunities outlast social discontent.

Note

- 1 The term “Global South” attempts to productively incorporate historical experiences of colonisation, imperialism and socioeconomic dependencies and inequalities into the notion (Dados and Connell 2012, p. 13).

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