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Tourism policy, spatial justice and COVID-19: lessons from a tourist-historic city

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ABSTRACT

In many historic and post-industrial cities, tourism is often positioned as an important component for urban regeneration. Yet, the promise of sustainability and social transformation is often empty as policymakers focus on sustaining tourism over supporting greater social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the pandemic has drawn attention to the unsustainable nature of the neoliberal model of tourism engagement. Due to the paucity of research exploring spatial injustice in urban tourism, this study examines the impact policymaking and governance structures have on urban destinations and the potential inequalities this creates. Drawing on Edward Soja's approach to Lefebvre's The Right to the City (1968), this research explores how lessons learned during the pandemic in the tourist-historic city of York, UK, could transform tourism in historic urban spaces. Taking an interpretive case study approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with leading stakeholders to understand the spatial dimensions of the lived experiences of policymaking. The hopeful signs emerging from York's response to the pandemic demonstrate how communities can reclaim voice to build sustainable and purposeful models of engagement. This paper contributes to our understanding by demonstrating the transformative potential that future policymaking could have for reducing the negative impacts of tourism.

Introduction

Tourism has become the panacea for renewal and regeneration in many post-industrial cities as the saviour of business economies and an instrument for poverty reduction. Yet, the promise of sustainability and social transformation is often empty as policymakers have concentrated on sustaining tourism at the expense of greater social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability (Aall, 2014; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). Consequently, concerns regarding carrying capacity, environmental degradation, and the availability and quality of tourism work have drawn attention to the unsustainable nature of the current industrial, neoliberal models of tourism. In addition, the pandemic has intensified social and economic inequalities (Jamal & Higham, 2021) and heightened issues of urban vulnerability (Sharifi & Khavarian-Garmsir, 2020), particularly for those destinations where tourism and hospitality have a major economic role.

For White (2019, p. 290), policies that support tourism can be harmful socially and ecologic- ally, whereby the mantra of twenty-first-century global capitalism is "consume, be silent and die," for which tourism is front and centre. As Joppe (2018, p. 201) suggests, "the term 'policy' is very fuzzy in tourism because of its social, behavioural and diverse nature." Policies that govern tourism tend to be developed for other purposes such as transport, employment, planning, health and are authored by policymakers with little care or investment in tourism. This can create injustices of all kinds (Joppe, 2018). Public policy in tourism at all geographical levels has seen uneven failures and successes in meaningfully engaging stakeholders in decision-making processes and in addressing sustainability (Jenkins, 2014). Consequently, Joppe (2018) calls for research that evaluates the factors involved in formulating

policy processes that engage com- munities in meaningful decision-making that can lead to positive change (Hall, 2011; Joppe, 2018). Whilst previous research has explored spatial injustice in historic cities (Jover & Dıaz-Parra, 2020), this study offers a novel contribution examining the experiences of policymaking and policymakers.

As destinations emerge from the pandemic, striving to achieve a balance between development and sustainability is at the forefront of tourism debates (Butcher, 2021; Rastegar et al., 2021). If concerns regarding the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism are to be addressed, the unlocking of the industry is an opportunity to think radically about how tourism policy can be reimagined for a *just* tourism future (Rastegar et al., 2021). It is within this context that this study aims to critically appreciate how injustice is socially and historically con- structed by exploring the effects of globalisation, governance and policymaking in the tourist- historic city of York, United Kingdom (UK). Tourist-Historic Cities (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Fainstein & Judd, 1999) are characterised by urban structures, natural resources, architecture and culture, where the historic core has become the object of tourist consumption. However, the creation of place-based heritage products can threaten the sustainability of these spaces (Timothy, 2011). Due to York's historic status as an UNESCO World Heritage site and as one of the most visited UK city destinations (Visit Britain, 2022), York was considered to "yield the best data" (Yin, 2009, p. 91) concerning spatial (in)justice. The spatial (in)justices evident in the city manifest in exclusionary decision-making processes managed by a tourism policymaking elite, the corrosive impact of consumer capitalism on economic policymaking, and the impact this has had on public planning and stakeholder engagement. COVID-19 was a moment to reassess and evaluate the emerging themes concerning the governance of tourism through collaborative action and a reclaiming of values.

This study draws upon Edward Soja's (2008, p. 2) geographical and spatial treatment of Lefebvre's The Right to the City. Soja advocates that spatial injustice is not just about outcomes but also "a way of looking at justice from a critical spatial perspective." The emphases here are on the spatiality of justice and injustice, not only in the city, but at all geographical levels, from the local to the global, that impact on the agency of host communities to appropriate urban space (Soja, 2010). Soja's conceptualisation offers an approach to realise solutions to spatial exclusion at the intersection of "race, class, gender and other, often closely associated, forms of human inequality and oppression" (Soja, 1996, p. 22). This research builds on Soja's call to identify and understand "the underlying processes producing unjust geographies" (Soja, 2008, p. 4) within tourism policy- making and governance. Subsequently, our aim is twofold. First, we draw on Soja's spatial approach to justice to examine how public policy and governance processes create inequalities in the tourist-historic city. Second, we identify how lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic show promise for addressing spatially unjust policy processes in historic city spaces.

Literature review

Lefebvre's the right to the city

In 2016, at the United Nations Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador, a New Urban Agenda was launched with Lefebvre's The Right to The City (1968) at its core. The policy "recalls the need to maximise the participation of city dwellers in local governance to avoid further marginalization" (SDG Knowledge Hub, 2016). Lefebvre's radical vision of city life managed and appropriated by its citizens, beyond the control of the state, is a call to action to free policy and governance processes from capitalism (Purcell, 2014). Lefebvre offers a vision of revolutionary change that imagines a world beyond capitalism, state control and neoliberal

consumerism (Lefebvre, 2003). He advocated for a more holistic understanding of the value of city social life that is not reducible to economic imperatives alone by embracing the diversity of human experiences in lived spaces. Theorising The Right to The City, Lefebvre articulates how rights are borne of political struggle performed by mobilised and active citizens reclaiming power, symbolising the "rise to a renewal of political life" (Lefebvre, 1990, p. 32, in Purcell, 2014). Lefebvre (1968) recognised that property rights alienate citizens from urban space that privileges centres of consumption through the process of regeneration (Lefebvre et al., 2000). Turning to consumerism to help regenerate de-industrialised cities has resulted in "the late-capitalist city [existing] in a state of living-death" (Raymen, 2019, p. 87) that is built upon an asocial environment of consumption that supports the flow of capital at the expense of the heterogenous and organic social life of the city (Atkinson, 2017; Cederström & Fleming, 2012). History and sociality have been erased from post-industrial centres by keeping space to its specificity (de Jong & Schuilenburg, 2006), whereby an artificial version of social and cultural activity is supplanted into a city's non-places (Augé, 1995). To counter such loss, city life is re-created through the careful curation of spaces by public authorities through a process of selective appropriation (MacLeod, 2002). This leads to spatial exclusion and marginalisation of social practices (Raymen, 2019).

Such practices are at odds with Lefebvre's vision of city life. He argues that "the right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life" that works to achieve greater diversity and counter exclusion (Lefebvre et al., 2000, p. 158). This renewal is conceptualised as "The right to the oeuvre [work], to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property)," where citizens concretely produce lived city space (Lefebvre et al., 2000, p. 174). Appropriation is conceived in the imaginary of physiolocal and psychosocial city life through customs and enactments that have a use value free of the exchange value rooted in consumption. Yet, hyperregulation, private property rights and luxury private housing built on a culture of consumption have corroded diversity and destroyed what consumer capitalism needs the most—the organic innovative use of urban space (Cederström & Fleming, 2012). Thus, to understand how neoliberal urban policy and governance structures shapes, creates and appropriates city spaces requires a holistic approach for understanding how spatial injustice arises and impacts on the city ecology.

Although Lefebvre's (1974/1998) theory of space in urban society has received significant attention across the social sciences (Fainstein & Fainstein, 1982; Harvey, 2009; Massey, 1984; Soja, 1985, 2000), it is subject to criticism, particularly for privileging space to the exclusion of time, whereby the production of space is perceived as an end point, in contrast to being in constant flux in space-time (Unwin, 2000). In addition, Lefebvre's theory on the production of space was challenged as Universalist, silent on how space transforms into political action and achieves social change (Unwin, 2000). Although similar criticism has been levelled towards scholars such as Harvey and Soja, Unwin (2000) acknowledges that Soja's conceptual approach could offer practical solutions to intersectional forms of human inequality and injustice (Soja, 1996). Soja's spatial treatment of The Right to the City examines how policy and governance structures create spatial injustice through exclusionary processes that operate at material, psychological and social levels, to which we now turn.

Spatial injustice and unjust geographies

The theorisation of The Right to The City in the context of spatial justice has produced a wealth of academic interest and multiple interpretations (Attoh, 2011; Earle, 2017;

Marcuse, 2009; Mitchell, 2003). Notably, and pertinent to this paper, is Soja's (2008) advancement of spatial just- ice which insisted that achieving The Right to The City involves interrogating the processes and relations that produce injustice in cities to enable them to be re-ordered (Iveson, 2011). Soja (2008) asks how radical and progressive approaches to injustices in cities can be realised and argues that putting "spatial" in front of "justice" is crucial in theory and in practice (Soja, 2010). The emphases here are on the spatiality of justice and injustice, not just in the city, but at all geographical levels (Iveson, 2011; Soja, 2010).

For Soja (2008, p. 2), spatial injustice is "an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographical aspects of justice and injustice." Therefore, it is not just about outcomes but a lens for critically evaluating justice from a spatial perspective (Soja, 2008). The spatiality of justice is actively causal, with Soja (2008, p. 4) noting that:

> Spatial (in)justice can be seen as both outcome and process, as geographies or distributional patterns that are in themselves just/unjust and as the processes that produce these outcomes. It is relatively easy to discover examples of spatial injustice descriptively, but it is much more difficult to identify and understand the underlying processes producing unjust geographies.

It is to these underlying processes and the unjust geographies that public policymaking creates in the historic city that we will attend. Injustice manifests in powerful social interests of the various governing processes produced by the political organisation of space. Combined with institutionalised segregation of residential and public space, this produces locational spatial dis- crimination (Soja, 2010). The normal workings of the urban system create uneven (under)development in lasting structures of privilege and advantage, producing unjust geographies in cities (Soja, 2010). Accordingly, Jamal and Camargo (2014, p. 12) argued for just destinations "whose tourism planning, policymaking and practices enable fair treatment of its environmental and social-cultural resources (tangible and intangible), and facilitate the well-being of place, people and pasts." They advocate for a distributive justice that shares benefits amongst inhabitants of the host destination. Although not explicit, this geographical approach highlights the spatial injustice that arises through economically focused tourism policy that perpetuates the colonization and commodification of host-destinations (Barton & Leonard, 2010; Devine & Ojeda, 2017). Poor distribution of economic benefits, exploitation of community cultural identity and environ- mental degradation mark tourism as spatially unjust and draw attention to the relationship between tourism development and spatial justice (Le, sniewska-Napierała et al., 2019). As such, scholars have called for spatial justice to be recognised as a goal of sustainable tourism development (Le, sniewska-Napierała et al., 2019) that promotes a balanced approach to cooperation between stakeholders. The purpose is to achieve democratic justice that upholds the rights and power of local people to make decisions concerning ecological, heritage and cultural preservation, along with economic efficiency that balances the negative impacts of tourism (Higgins- Desbiolles, 2018; Ramo n-Hidalgo & Harris, 2018).

Despite this, spatial justice approaches have seen little attention in city tourism scholarship aside from Diaz-Parra and Jover (2021) research in Seville, Spain. Diaz-Parra and Jover (2021) draw on Lefebvre's The Right to The City to identify the spatial injustices of over tourism in Southern European cities. Yet, their research does not consider the factors in policymaking that can lead to spatial injustice in historic cities, nor the lived experiences of policymakers and the spatial impact on urban life. The absence of local social life from the city is in part attributable to public policy that favours neoliberal economics over social life. Moreover, the absence of an engaged local public creates an artificial and potentially less satisfying experience for visitors (Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2021).

The re-theorisation of The Right to The City in the context of spatial justice has produced a wealth of academic interest and multiple interpretations (Attoh, 2011; Earle, 2017; Marcuse, 2009; Mitchell, 2003). In the last two decades, numerous public organisations have articulated The Right to The City as part of the human rights agenda. Global policymakers such as UNESCO (2006) and UN-HABITAT (2010) have interpreted The Right to The City through policy. However, scholars have criticised recent applications of Lefebvre's The Right to the City as a solution for every kind of urban spatial social cause (see Purcell, 2014). Indeed, Purcell (2014) argues that we need distinctive and diverse applications of The Right to The City that are specific and politically transparent. Yet, on one point, academics, activists and policymakers all share the view that The Right to The City is a struggle "to augment the rights of urban inhabitants against the property rights of owners" (Purcell, 2014, p. 142) to achieve spatial justice for city inhabitants.

Spatial justice, governance and stakeholder engagement

For Soja (2010), the political organization of space is a powerful source of spatial injustice. Astleithner and Hamedinger (2003) describe the shift from *government* to *governance*, and the adoption of a New Public Management (NPM) approach, as the political restructuring of cities. Closely aligned with a neoliberal ideology, with a focus on reduced state intervention, marketisation and privatisation (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Hall, 2011), NPM saw local government adopt characteristics typically associated with the private sector, with an increased focus on efficiency and market-driven policy and strategy (Paddison & Walmsley, 2018). The reorientation of local government has not necessarily improved democratic practices or transparency in decision-making as initially intended (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Dredge, Ford & Whitford, 2011; Moscardo, 2011). Indeed, many argue that it has resulted in a "closing up" of the policy process (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Jamal & Watt, 2011), which has largely focused on the growth of tourism with success measured in the number of jobs created, the multiplier effect and the level of inward investment received (Paddison & Walmsley, 2018). Whilst there is an acknowledgement of the range of actors involved in urban governance and decision-making (Le Feuvre et al., 2016), there are challenges in engaging with a wide variety of interests. This can potentially further cultivate conflict and power imbalances (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Coles & Church, 2007). These challenges are potentially intensified in the context of heritage and historic urban destinations due to their complexity (Paddison & Biggins, 2017; Waterton & Watson, 2013). In this context, tourism becomes appropriated by corporate interests, with little, if any, attention given to the environ- mental, ethical or social implications of tourism (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). The democratisation of tourism, driven by social norms associated with the commercial imperative of the "tourist experience", has resulted in socio-economic spatial injustice. Tourism-focused policymaking is killing the thing we profess to value and has led to a decline in the well-being of cities, with Venice and Barcelona notable examples.

There is a paucity of research that examines how governance hierarchies and their actors' impact host communities (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010). Subsequently, governance structures and processes need to be examined, with a particular focus on who is involved and who is excluded from the decision-making process (Hall, 2000; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013) and the injustices that this creates. The structures and approaches to stakeholder engagement are critical in facilitating a representative and balanced perspective of the destination community (Dredge, 2001). Creating opportunities for community stakeholders to actively participate in policymaking and development planning in a way that is sensitive to long

term needs and impacts is important (Blackstock, 2005; Paddison & Walmsley, 2018). Dredge (2006) calls for research that explores the application of theory and its development in the context of community engagement in tourism planning. A sustainable recovery from the pandemic requires solutions based on local interests which bring positive social, economic, environmental and ethical change (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). For a burgeoning number of scholars (Harvey, 2003, 2009; Jamal & Higham, 2021; Marcuse, 2009; MacLeod, 2002), promoting justice and equity is at the forefront of the change needed, no less in historic tourist cities such as York. Agyeman and McLaren (2017, p. 25) advocate a bridge between socio-spatial and socio-economic divides through the notion of sharing and the right to appropriate or remake city spaces. The concern here is to "achieve inclusion through prioritizing historically neglected neighbourhoods for new high-quality shared infrastructure, and public services, buildings, and spaces, through attending to patterns of design and management to create culturally inclusive spaces" (Agyeman & McLaren, 2017, p. 25).

The tensions which emerged regarding sustainable tourism development and post-COVID recovery provide a rationale for interpreting governance and policymaking within historic urban destinations. The nature of the planning and management of the tourist-historic city has been well articulated in the tourism literature (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000; Page, 1995). Yet, there is a lack of research regarding how public policy and governance structures perpetuate spatial injustice in tourist-historic cities through exclusionary and discriminatory processes, where those who live in historic cities become the possession of tourism (White, 2019). We trouble how public policy promulgates hyper-consumerism in historic cities by highlighting the socio-cultural harm this produces. Urban human life has fallen victim to the environmental injustices of tourism policy that promote hyper-consumption and capitalism. It is within this context that this study seeks to critically appreciate how spatial injustice is socially and historically constructed in the tourist-historic city of York, UK.

Following the decline of the railway and chocolate industries, tourism is now York's leading economic sector. Prior to the pandemic, the city received an estimated 8 million visitors a year. The sector supports approximately 24,000 jobs and contributes £608 million to the local economy (Visit York, 2022). As a major heritage visitor destination, York's popularity is afforded to its rich and diverse history, with notable attractions including York Minster, the National Railway Museum, and the Jorvik Viking Centre (Visit York, 2022). The historic centre of York is unique due to its geographically compact nature, its internationally important Minster, well preserved ancient Viking and Roman heritage and archaeology and mediaeval quarter. The city supports a thriving independent business community, with 65% of all businesses occupying space in the city centre (City of York Council, 2022). The development and management of tourism in York have been widely documented (Augustyn & Knowles, 2000; Croft, 2018; Meethan, 1997; Mordue, 2005; Paddison & Biggins, 2017; Paddison & Walmsley, 2018). However, as the city emerges from the pandemic, it is timely to critically assess the spatial injustices embedded in the city's governance and policymaking structures and the implications this has for its resident communities. We respond to Hall's (2007) call for research that examines how the neoliberal discourse has affected policymaking and implementation in tourism.

Methodology

This research adopts an interpretative methodological approach that places reliance on people's interpretations of situations and behaviours (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). The interpretive paradigm "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-

world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). As such, the researcher has an important role here, seeking to understand the context and then make an interpretation of what is found. The researcher must look to understand the multiple interpretations offered so that they can build a holistic understanding of the phenomena being studied (Veal, 2011). Interpretivism rejects the positive notion that there is one objective truth and acknowledges the existence of multiple realities which can only be understood from the perspective of those involved (Goodson & Phillimore, 2004). Given that this study focuses on exploring social, cultural, and environmental injustice produced through neoliberal tourism policy and governance, an interpretative methodological approach was considered appropriate.

A case study approach offers a method of inquiry to explore, analyse and interpret a single or a range of instances of the same phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The growth of tourist-historic cities and the tensions which have emerged between tourism development and the local community

Table 1. Study participants.

Participant	Sector
Pb1	Public sector
Pb2	Public sector
Pb3	Public sector, charitable
Pb4	Public sector, charitable
Pb5	Public sector
Pr1	Private sector
Pr2	Private sector
Pr3	Private sector
Pr4	Private sector
Pr5	Private sector
Pr6	Private sector
R1	Resident
R2	Resident
R3	Resident

provide a rationale for interpreting the governance of tourism within urban destinations. As a result, cities which demonstrated characteristics of Fainstein and Judd (1999) tourist-historic city were identified as possible case study destinations and thus enabled the narrowing of the selection process. Furthermore, an element of pragmatism also determined the selection of cases. Specifically, access to informants and documentary sources sufficient to provide rich data for the study influenced the choice of case study. Indeed, Yin (2009) advocates this pragmatic approach in case study selection where he argues that the researcher should "choose the case that is likely, all other things being equal, to yield the best data" (Yin, 2009, p. 91). Consequently, York was selected as an appropriate case study.

Following a review of the literature, in-depth, interpretive semi-structured interviews were conducted. A purposive sample of 14 key informants (Table 1) including business leaders, public officials, elected council members and residents were interviewed between April 2021 and March 2022. Potential informants were contacted on a personal basis and identified through either holding a significant role in tourism policy and governance or as a member of the community. The sample size was small and targeted to enable in-depth discussion held through a secure online platform (Microsoft Teams). Both researchers shared a similar background, experience and language of the participants. This enabled acceptance as insiders which helped to build rapport. The identities of the research participants have been anonymised because it is recognised that those holding senior leadership roles (public or private sector)

could be identifiable. Respondents have been classified as per their sector, with Pb denoting Public Sector, Pr representing Private Sector and R signifying residents. There was no fixed or predetermined sample size. Interviews were conducted until it was felt the study provided a robust insight and when data saturation was achieved with no new insights emerging.

A semi-structured (Saunders, 2021) interview schedule was developed around key themes that emerged from the literature. This included policy and governance, sustainability, perceptions and experiences of policymaking and the impact this has had on urban life, how policy and governance have changed following COVID-19 and the spatial justice implications of this on building a sustainable tourism future for the city. The topic guide was just that and conversations were facilitated to cover the ground most pertinent to the interviewee. Interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes, were transcribed, and later transferred to the NVivo 12 software package for analysis. Descriptive themed analysis produced 18 codes and sub-codes that were grouped under themes such as justice, injustice, social change, sustainability, and governance. Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase approach for thematic analysis was adopted (Table 2), which provides rig- our and validity in qualitative data analysis enabling crucial links to be made between theory and the data collected. Ethical approval was sought and all interviewees provided written con- sent to participate in the research.

Table 2. Thematic analysis framework.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes across the entire data set	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic manner, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Phase 1) and the entire data set (Phase 2), generating a thematic "map" of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes overall	On-going analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

Findings and discussion

Several themes emerged from the analysis and provide a structure to the discussion which follows. First, we examine the spatial injustices apparent in economic policy and local development. Second, we review how the underlying governance processes and spatial discrimination impact stakeholder engagement in the decision-making process. Finally, we reflect on the lessons learned from COVID-19 and the hopeful signs emerging for the future of tourism in the city.

Spatial justice: economic policy and local development

Economic inequalities and social division associated with neoliberal globalization create spatial injustice, particularly within a city context (Soja, 2008). Our research found that when tourism is an expression of neoliberal policy, as evident in York, it is subject to the same negative forces of disinvestment that characterise broader capitalism. In the case of York, the decline of the traditional manufacturing industries during the 1980s and 1990s obligated the local authority "*to find suitable economic growth alternatives to help create jobs and stimulate investment*" (Pb2). This primarily occurred through the promotion of York as an international tourist destination (Paddison & Walmsley, 2018). York's historic streets became a centre of consumption, with eco- nomic policy embracing consumerism to help regenerate de-industrialised York (Mordue, 2005). However, as concerns regarding the quality of employment in tourism grew, rather than imagine a world beyond capitalism and neoliberal consumerism (Lefebvre, 2003) that might support quality employment opportunities, economic policy instead focused on encouraging "*high value jobs*" (Pr3) in sectors such as bioscience and the digital industries. Although tourism employment in York represents approximately 14% of the city's economy (City of York Council, 2022), as one respondent noted, the sector is now considered "*a subset of economic growth, perceived as those crappy jobs"* (Pb1). Despite recognition that "*there's lots that we [the local authority] need to do to improve pay, quality, skills and career progression in tourism"* (Pb2), the local authority feels "*powerless*" (Pb2) due to a "*lack of funding, resource*

and political willingness" (Pb5) to alleviate the socio-economic injustices produced through low pay, precarious working conditions and poor progression opportunities in tourism (Sun et al., 2022). This sense of powerlessness was particularly felt by policymakers in the city, with one respondent commenting that *"tourism in York is politically marginalised"* (Pb1) and therefore subject to discriminatory policymaking where tourism is "*not taken as seriously as other economic development areas*" (R1). This underlying policy process of privileging "high value" sectors over tourism has created uneven and ad-hoc geographical approaches to planning and development in the city leading to spatial injustice associated with reduced social mobility and economic inequality (Lee, 2009). York's approach, whilst not uncommon, is at odds with Lefebvre's vision of city life. Policymaking and governance processes are entangled in capitalism creating socio-economic spatial discrimination that results in the marginalization of local communities.

Tourism is not part of a national public investment agenda, particularly with regards to creating high value jobs (Font et al., 2019). This, therefore, limits the extent to which public authorities can address workforce inequalities at a local level, as evident in York. However, even though recent reductions and pressures on local public finances were well understood, many respondents felt that the local authority should provide the "*strategic leadership*" (R3) in addressing economic inequalities and a lack of investment in the sector. For example, one business leader commented that: *"one of the weaknesses with the local authority is that it's good at talking about strategy, but not actually good at delivering on anything"* (Pr2). This is compounded by the development and delivery of policy being perceived as a *"closed and highly politicised process"* (Pr1), leading to significant spatial injustices resulting from economic policy that fails to recognise and address key social, cultural and environmental needs. The lack of collaboration between policy and governing organisations exacerbates spatial injustice concerning "business growth" (Pr5), decision-making and compounds the precarity of employees working in the sector. The national drive, founded on capitalism, to stimulate high growth businesses and jobs, particularly in the science and digital sectors, marginalises tourism. As one local resident claimed, *"there will not be real change until there's a cash injection into local services which would then allow [local authority] leaders to take tourism seriously"* (R1). Consequently, local people remain in low paid jobs, with poor working conditions and limited career progression opportunities. This perpetuates harmful forms of tourism and community exploitation that impacts on sustainability. Investment in high value sectors creates geographic marginalisation, resulting in locational exclusivity in high value areas and the associated issues of gentrification (see Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2021).

Our research found that respondents felt York lacked a *"cohesive local plan"* (Pr5), including a strategy for the development of the city's physical environment, with an ad-hoc approach to redeveloping city spaces and apathy to actively engage host communities in the decision-making process. This was attributed to the "*short-term lifespan of political office*" (R2), leading to a reluctance by politicians to *"make big decisions"* (Pr5) and invest in the creation of a long-term strategy for the city. Soja's vision of the city is based on realising solutions to spatial exclusion through enabling communities to tackle underlying spatial discriminatory processes that govern how city space is appropriated. Our research has shown that, in the case of York, decision-making in tourism is controlled by a managerial elite, which has limited representation from across the city. As a result, it appears that major building and investment projects "*are happening in isolation*" (Pr6), with *"local people, potential investors and developers not able to see what is going on or the opportunities that exist"* (R1). This has created significant frustration among our respondents, with one interviewee expressing: *"what's the point of government if you're not going to have a plan for your city? Everything*

is done in a piecemeal way and there's no thought to how it all works together" (Pr5). A lack of coordinated partnership work perpetuates spatial injustice where local stakeholders are largely powerless in the decision-making process and are subject to locational discrimination produced by ad-hoc planning controls. Indeed, respondents felt that this lack of coordination has led to underinvestment and degradation of York's public spaces, with one respondent commenting how *"the quality of our streetscape is just shocking"* (Pr1), admitting that "*millions were required to transform the main shopping streets into something that meets European standards*" (Pr1). The social, cultural, and environmental fabric and health of York is degraded by a lack of coordination, leadership and power to influence decision-making and investment. This reduces York's attractiveness and effectiveness as a space for social and cultural interaction pertinent to the needs of its residents (Jamal & Camargo, 2014). Investment is not just about fiscal benefits but should also be concerned with investing in public pride, social, cultural, and environmental health by shifting perspectives about how spaces are appropriated. Yet, there is little political incentive to develop collaborative approaches to decision-making when public policymaking is underpinned by a neoliberal free-market philosophy. To address spatial degradation and discrimination, political recognition of tourism's economic place within the city, combined with planning solutions that support stakeholder decision-making, are needed (Jamal & Camargo, 2014).

Spatial justice: governance and stakeholder engagement

The political organization of space is a powerful source of spatial injustice (Soja, 2010, p. 3). In the wake of New Public Management policies (Paddison & Walmsley, 2018) to devolve public sector control and responsibility for tourism and economic policy to the private sector, the City of York Council established a destination management organisation (DMO) "Make it York," with its tourism division branded as "Visit York." Structurally, the organisation is founded on an eco- nomic principal to generate its own income. Consequently, as described by one respondent, the local authority's approach to *"devolving responsibilities"* (Pr2) like tourism to external organisations has placed a *"commercial imperative on those organisations"* (Pb4); a situation which is also true of the city's Museums Trust. As a result, even though these organisations are charitable, they are duty bound to make a profit. This *"has an impact on how you work with your communities"* (Pb3) that leads to spatial injustice. As noted, several scholars have argued that the reorientation of local government has had a negative impact on democratic practices (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Jamal & Watt, 2011; Moscardo, 2011). This was evident in York, in part due to the organisational structure and funding model adopted by the DMO. A proportion of the DMO's income is derived from membership subsidies. Beaumont and Dredge (2010) remind us that the adoption of a membership model can prevent the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in destination management. This can result in the exclusion of key stakeholders in the policy process (Hall & Jenkins, 1995), leading to corporate interests dominating decision-making and policy implementation. Such spatial injustices were noted by one respondent:

> I'm aware that there's a number of individuals and businesses in the city who don't pay for membership but should have a seat at the table. Destination management should include all those who want to be involved, not just those who can afford to pay a fee. (Pr4)

The result is a top-down approach, with highly targeted consultation that excludes several key stakeholder groups. As one responded noted, "*Make it York needs to take its destination management much more seriously and that involves [a] coordinated approach*" (Pr1). This spatial injustice compounds host communities' sense of powerlessness and passivity

when it comes to involvement in local decision-making and appropriating city spaces. This has resulted in an acknowledgement that "*York people feel quite excluded from the city centre"* (Pb1), creating an absence of social life and cultural expression in the city. When public policy is founded on neo- liberal capitalist consumerism, localism or the social and cultural health of the city are not valued, managed, or nurtured because they are not perceived to achieve a fiscal return (White, 2019). Spatial injustice is manifest through public officials looking beyond the city for creative solutions, inward investment and expertise that exacerbates the problem of how to bring "*localism back into the city"* (Pr1). For example, to ensure financial sustainability and to address the loss of "the social" from city life, public authorities and DMO's re-animate city spaces through the careful curation of licensing buskers, Christmas markets and carol singers. Only social activities sanctioned by public authorities are privileged with spatial legitimacy and permitted to inhabit city spaces. This leads to spatial exclusion and marginalisation of unauthorised social practices. To address this, it was felt that the public authorities "*need to [connect with] stakeholders in a genuine open forum to develop a strategy that allows the city to move forward as a whole*" (Pr2) to achieve *just* appropriative processes that reanimate organic city social life.

The establishment of the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB) during the pandemic was, in part, an attempt to broaden consultation and engagement in tourism decision-making. As one public official noted, *"prior to the pandemic we'd never had such a varied group come together and be more pragmatic"* (Pb2). They described the TAB as *"far more inclusive"* and *"the voice of the sector"* (Pb2). The wider implication of the establishment of the TAB is described by another respondent: *"Make it York always have ideas that don't necessarily speak for the whole city"* (Pb1) and there is a need for *"checks and balances"* (Pb1) that enables the sector to actively lead decision-making. This approach to destination management is one that seeks cooperation between stakeholder groups and goes someway to help achieve equity, justice and enhance democratic practice (Leˌsniewska-Napierała et al., 2019). Whilst it was apparent that further stakeholder representation could be enhanced, the advisory board offers an opportunity to re-think traditional neoliberal economic approaches to destination management (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Ramo̧n- Hidalgo & Harris, 2018). COVID-19 accelerated these processes of appropriation to which we now turn.

Spatial justice and COVID-19: hopeful signs for appropriating the tourist-historic city

Notwithstanding the impact of COVID-19 on the tourism industry, our research found that in the case of York, it also created a unique moment that galvanised communities in active participation and management of the challenges that the tourism sector faced. As one responded noted, *"because of COVID the city maximised its small size to get the right stakeholders together to have a strategy for what we were communicating about the city"* (Pb4). The local authority acted as a facilitator in managing this process bringing together various stakeholders in a "*unique moment of good coordination*" (Pr2) where *"being involved in these communications meant that we were persuaded to open, even though it wasn't economically viable for us"* (Pr3). The pandemic resulted in policymaking organisations, such as the local authority and the DMO, collaborating with businesses to appropriate spaces through acting on "*feedback from the business community*" (Pr5). As one public official noted:

> We listened and responded to what businesses wanted. For example, at a time when hospitality couldn't have people indoors, a lot of them wanted to create outdoor seating areas. We worked with local businesses and the council to enable this to happen in a timely and effective way. This would never have happened here [in York] without that kind of working relationship. (Pb5)

Through carefully considered processes of appropriation for managing the reopening of the city in August 2020, York outperformed its projected visitor numbers with some attractions, such as the city's art gallery, receiving 60% more visitors than previous years. The local authority facilitated a move towards more collaborative processes and meaningful decision-making. During the pandemic *"partners came together and worked collaboratively in a way that hasn't been done before"* (Pr5) that began to address spatial discrimination and distribution that created socio-eco- nomic benefits for local people. If this approach was adopted permanently it would facilitate "*genuine stakeholder engagement in shaping the future of the city"* (Pr2). However, as one responded argued, such an approach would require the "*willingness on the part of the local authority to step away from politics in order to make a process like this happen more permanently"* (Pr2).

Our analysis identified that, during the pandemic, there was a recognition that what makes a city vibrant is its socio-cultural life and its ecological health is predicated on collaboration and the organic appropriation of city spaces. Neoliberal growth economics cannot be the foundation for what tourism *is*. Indeed, policymakers in York understood the importance of this and that *cultural product development needs to be "something that's done as an extension of people's natural behaviour that they like to do instinctively"* (Pr2). Implementing it, however, is another matter, as one respondent commented:

> The pandemic has opened [a] vista of what is possible in terms of engaging with communities and allowing different voices to be heard. That moment might not last long, of course, but it is a moment to act! (Pb1)

Seizing the moment is a key challenge and calls for appropriative approaches that facilitate stakeholder engagement to reanimate the socio-cultural life of the city (Le, sniewska-Napierała et al., 2019; Purcell, 2014). Reclaiming a values-based approach for developing and delivering cultural products offers a sustainable and appropriative approach for reshaping tourism (Moscardo, 2018). Public officials described how volunteering and collaborative action demonstrated through the pandemic offered solutions and accelerated collective community efforts to reclaim amenities, such as pubs and libraries, and when "*owned by residents, spaces that people feel they can take charge of and develop cultural products, show great potential"* (Pb1). There is a shift in recognition that "*public spaces and venues need to facilitate more mixed and exciting uses to increase levels of footfall*" (Pb5) to tackle unjust distributional patterns that privilege certain types of cultural product and economies over others to facilitate local economic and socio-cultural appropriation.

If York was to recognise the potential of engaging with its local communities to reanimate the cities social life, tourists would have a greater opportunity and "*sense of connecting with a distinctive community and environment"* (Pb1). The disconnect between a focus on economic growth and what is needed in York is starkly illustrated through the ways in which the marginalisation of tourism as an industry in the city leads to social, cultural and environmental disinvestment and degradation. To reclaim a socially and culturally vibrant ecology, a shift is needed to stem the economic leakage associated with the forces of global commodification that result in the loss of city social and cultural life (Soja, 2010). During the pandemic, the local authority established processes of governing through "*consultations that have become better and more important"* (Pb2). Such an approach tackles spatial discrimination and creates a balanced appropriative ecology that leads to citizens reclaiming city spaces, promoting cultural expression and engagement. Indeed, as one responded noted: *"I think the future's bright and we [have] to shape [tourism] and plan for it rather than letting it just happen"* (Pr5).

Conclusion

Cities are central to the study of contemporary global tourism and are invaluable in examining the dynamics, impacts and broader sustainability issues related to tourism (Aall & Koens, 2019; Ashworth & Page, 2011). As destinations emerge from the pandemic, there is an urgent need to seek a socially just, responsive, and environmentally sensitive future, particularly in our urban spaces (Rastegar et al., 2021). This calls for research examining the impact policymaking and governance structures have on urban destinations and the inequalities this creates. Edward Soja's spatial treatment of Lefebvre's The Right to the City offers a critical approach to evaluate how policymaking in historic cities creates spatial injustice through exclusionary processes that operate at material, psychological and social levels. Understanding city-life through a policymaking lens illustrates how local communities are subject to unjust geographies that are spatially dis- criminatory. As evident in York, a fragmented approach to public policymaking, founded on neo- liberal consumer capitalism, has resulted in distributional injustice and spatial exclusion. If we are to reimagine a *just* tourism future (Rastegar et al., 2021), understanding how spatial injustice is socially and historically constructed is critical to finding new ways to manage tourism. The les- sons learned from COVID-19 for addressing spatial injustice reveal how communities can re- appropriate city spaces to tackle distributional discrimination. Carefully designed structures and mechanisms are required that enable local people to influence decision-making. The collaborative working practices between institutions across public and private sectors illustrates what could be achieved through reclaiming social values that instituted a re-animation of city life.

This study offers a novel approach by focusing on the experiences of policymakers to understand the ways in which tourism policy is economically marginalised at a political level and the consequences this has on the social life of the city. The politicised short-termism of economic policymaking illustrated by the absence of an economic masterplan demonstrates how York's local communities are excluded from "bigger picture" decision-making concerning the future of the city. As a result, citizens mobilities are reduced both socially and economically through pre- carious low-paid working conditions and the rights to appropriate city spaces for local cultural expression. Even elite policymakers are disinvested from decision-making processes because of the ad-hoc way tourism policy is realised and governed. The lack of long-term strategic planning marginalises communities and corrodes diversity in our cities.

This research has shown that spatial justice should be recognised as a central goal of sustainable tourism policymaking. This is realised through enabling local stakeholders to achieve democratic justice whereby decisions concerning ecological, heritage and cultural preservation are made in tandem with achieving economic efficiency that balances the negative impacts of tourism, with greater distributive benefits being afforded to local communities (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Ramon-Hidalgo & Harris, 2018). Whilst we acknowledge that a single case study limits the transferability of the research findings, it does provide an in-depth analysis of spatial injustice produced by policy and governance processes in a European historic city destination. Further studies that adopt a comparative case study method would be both interesting and useful in exploring these issues in different contexts. As our research has demonstrated, there is a need for scholars and policymakers to root policymaking in the local social, cultural, and environmental health of a city. Re-imaging the historic city for a sustainable and participative future needs policy that shifts from treating tourism as a poor cousin and instead invests in its social and cultural health through collaboration and co-creation with the local community. As shown in the case of

York, lessons learned during COVID-19 have drawn attention to the positive impact of community engagement. However, more work is needed if we are to create a balanced approach to cooperation between stakeholders to achieve spatial justice. We, therefore, call on scholars to identify "the underlying processes producing unjust geographies" (Soja, 2008, p. 4) to realise a sustainable, collaborative future for our city communities based on creating value that is more than the pursuit of profit.

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