



The paradox of atmosphere: Tourism, heritage, and urban liveability[☆]

Daniel Paiva

Centre of Geographical Studies, Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Universidade de Lisboa, Rua Branca Edmée Marques, 1600-276 Lisboa, Portugal



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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the paradox of atmosphere in urban tourism and reflects on how atmospheric production can become a tool to improve urban liveability. I draw on atmospheric theory and literature on tourism and atmospheres to describe the link between urban atmospheres and tourism experiences, and I draw on the literature on urban touristification to demonstrate the impacts of tourism activities in urban atmospheres and liveability. I contend that urban atmospheres must be recognized as a form of intangible heritage to ensure that urban liveability is guaranteed in touristified cities. Drawing on the notion of the affective right to the city, I develop the notion of atmospheric justice as a principle for the recognition of atmosphere as heritage.

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Introduction

Tourism is very much about things in the air. It is about the appreciation of the sensory atmosphere of places: light, colour, sound, fragrance. It is about how these things come together to form meaningful experiences of cultures, communities, and identities. But there is growing awareness that tourism also leaves things in the air. Pollution. Noise. Gentrification. Such realization is leading scholars to question the atmospheres that tourism makes. It is widely acknowledged that the perception of atmospheres is a fundamental part of the tourism experience, but it is becoming ever more evident that, as tourism promoters and service providers attempt to produce premium atmospheres for tourism consumption, local vernacular atmospheres are also changing beyond recognition. These are intricate changes that manifest themselves at the cultural, economic, social, and environmental level. In this sense, the atmospheres that tourism makes are at the heart of the impact of tourism on places, societies, and the planet.

In this article, I draw attention to the paradox of atmosphere in urban tourism and reflect on what can be done to overcome this paradox. Atmospheres are vital for the tourism experience, as research has found that emotional engagement, sense of authenticity and the formation of memorable experiences are underpinned by positive personal connections with local atmospheres (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Coelho et al., 2018; Li et al., 2022; Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). Paradoxically, the bustle of tourism activities and the economic, social and cultural changes that touristification causes often interfere with the vernacular atmospheres of touristic sites (Paiva & Sánchez, 2021). In this sense, tourism threatens the very atmospheres that it values. Such dynamics are especially contentious in contemporary cities, as the increase in urban tourism – driven by the boom in the sharing economy and low-cost airlines – has led to a growing demand for 'living like a local' tourism experiences (Paulauskaite et al., 2017; Wildish & Spierings, 2019). This demand is transforming local communities, especially in urban centres, as tourism-oriented atmospheres overlap with everyday vernacular atmospheres (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017; Gravari-Barbas & Jacquot, 2019).

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Facing this, and expanding emerging ideas about the affective right to the city and the right to atmosphere (Duff, 2017; Tsavdaroglou, 2016), I develop the notion of atmospheric justice to contend that urban atmospheres must be recognized as a form of intangible heritage to ensure that urban liveability is guaranteed in touristified cities. Drawing on a series of experiments in atmospheric justice, I argue that the process of creating and transforming atmospheres must be a democratic one, in which local communities are capable of working with professionals and experts to ensure that atmospheres are safe and healthy for all urban dwellers and users. In this sense, achieving atmospheric justice is a crucial step to overcome the paradox of atmosphere in urban tourism and to ensure the sustainability of tourism.

Throughout this article, I will draw on a postphenomenological conception of atmosphere as the material ensemble of sensorial elements of a given place. In this sense, atmospheres are the set of sensory stimuli that can be sensed at once and as a whole, and which affect the human body (and other bodies) in multiple ways (Böhme, 2017; Sumartojo & Pink, 2018). Atmospheres have a certain feeling to them, and bodies tend to attune cognitively and emotionally to those spatialized feelings (Griffero, 2014; Paiva et al., 2018). Nevertheless, atmospheres are profoundly material. That is, they are composed by movements of matter, such light, olfactory chemicals, or sonic vibrations (Bille et al., 2015; Bille & Simonsen, 2019). Some of these movements might not be detected by humans, but still affect them in different ways over time (Anderson, 2014; d'Hautesserre, 2015; Simpson, 2020). This postphenomenological conception of atmosphere not only unveils the complex relations between humans and environments, but also sheds light on the social and environmental role of atmospheres as, in this sense, atmospheres are shared material and sensorial spaces, rather than mere individual perceptions.

This paper is further divided into four sections. First, I address the role that atmospheres play in tourism experiences, focusing on issues of authenticity and co-creation. Secondly, I discuss the paradoxical impact of touristification in the atmospheres of urban centres across the globe, highlighting how changes in the functional and cultural fabric of the city led to profound changes in the vernacular atmospheres of neighbourhoods, which had consequences in terms of public health and social cohesion. Thirdly, I discuss how we can move beyond the paradox of atmosphere in tourism, by discussing the emerging notions of the affective right to the city and proposing the recognition of atmospheres as intangible heritage. Lastly, I discuss the implications of such approach for research and practice.

Tourism and atmospheres

Atmospheres are fundamental for tourism. As the sensory background for touristic experiences, atmospheres set the emotional tones of places, providing a foundation for immersive and deeply engaged experiences (Griffero, 2014). In this sense, atmospheres might facilitate emotional interactions between tourists and the local environment or other individuals, even when tourists are not aware of how atmospheres affect their experience (Choi & Kandampully, 2019; Kucukergin & Dedeoglu, 2019; Neuhofer et al., 2021; Tucker & Shelton, 2018; Zhang et al., 2016). Such interactions do not necessarily entail positive emotions alone. Indeed, in niches such as dark tourism, atmospheres play a crucial role in the representation of painful spaces and events and the enactment of negative emotions such as shock or anger (Martini & Buda, 2020). While atmosphere is usually understood as an immersive *in situ* experience, some scholars have highlighted the possibilities of experiencing atmospheres before travel (for instance, through hotel reservation, photo research or tourist information brochures) and after travel (for instance, through social media posts) (Cariou et al., 2022; Coelho et al., 2018; Kim, 2014).

Given its emotional power, atmospheres are taken to be essential for the creation of memorable tourism experiences, a topic which has received increasing attention in tourism studies (Kim et al., 2010; Mohammad Shafiee et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021). For Coelho et al. (2018), memorable tourism experiences are formed through the conjugation of three processes: atmosphere, socialization, and emotion and reflection. The authors highlight the role that atmosphere plays in the immersion of the tourist, which facilitates the development of personal experiences in the culture of the destination. In this sense, the atmosphere is a foundation for intense interactions that might become memorable. Research has provided some examples of this process. For instance, Li et al. (2022) conducted a study in four cities in China on the role that atmospheres play in the formation of memorable experiences in nightlife tourism. This study shows that deeply sensorial party atmospheres stimulate feelings of pleasure and arousal among tourists, which promotes cultural contact, leading to novel and exciting personal experiences. On the other hand, Lee et al. (2014) studied the revitalization of a linear waterfront park in downtown Seoul and argue that the project's ambiance was fundamental to generate positive emotions and satisfaction among visitors, leading to a greater support to the revitalization project. Horng and Hsu (2021) find similar processes in fine dining, in which the aesthetics of atmosphere stimulate feelings of pleasantness that form the core of memorable dining experiences. As atmospheres provide an important foundation for emotionally engaged and memorable experiences, they also become crucial for the perception of authenticity and the emergence of sense of place in tourism experiences, as I discuss in the next section.

Atmosphere and authenticity

It is widely acknowledged that atmospheres are directly related to the formation of a sense of authenticity in tourism, especially in heritage sites (Cho, 2012; Lin & Liu, 2018). It has also been noted that the atmospheres of tourism services, especially in terms of their design, sensory ambiance and sociality, play an important role in the customer's sense of authenticity (Lovell & Thurgil, 2021; Lu et al., 2015). For instance, Al-Kilani and El Hedhli's (2021) study on two restaurants in Doha (Qatar) shows that the atmospheric elements of the restaurants, namely the ambiance design, the employees' identity and

their communicative practices, play a fundamental role in the customers' perception of the authenticity of the experience, especially in terms of the recognition of the identity traits of the food and its connection to a sense of place.

Authenticity is significant for tourism because it is directly related to the sense of uniqueness that makes certain destinations special and therefore more sought by tourists (Moore et al., 2021; Ramkissoon & Uysal, 2010; Ricky & Vidon, 2018). This is however a controversial concept with multiple and differing perspectives. It is widely recognized that authenticity has different meanings and can refer to object authenticity (the tangible knowledge about the origin of a product), existential authenticity (the subjective feelings associated to an experience), and constructed authenticity (the social construction of authenticity, often mediated by marketing) (Canavan & McCamley, 2021; Conran, 2006; Lew, 2011; Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Wang, 1999). Tourism scholars have been especially interested in understanding what influences existential authenticity, and the apparent mismatch between existential authenticity and object authenticity has gathered substantial attention (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2007; Rickly, 2022). This mismatch has been particularly associated with practices of constructing or reconstructing authentic experiences and places for tourist consumption, which are often deemed to be artificial or soulless (Zukin, 2008, 2009, 2011).

Atmospheres are at the heart of the experience of existential authenticity. It has been shown that whether tourists understand certain experiences and places as authentic or inauthentic depends largely on atmosphere, visual appearance and physical settings (Nguyen & Cheung, 2016). However, more often than not, the line between understanding certain spaces as either authentic or inauthentic is thin and blurry. In general, there is a tendency for tourists to understand the vernacular atmospheres of places that are 'off the beaten track' as authentic (Chen & Wu, 2019). This often leads toward tourists seeking more everyday, domestic or even intimate spaces, which might also lead to generate a view of tourism as intrusive among the destination community (Bell, 2015; Chhabra et al., 2013). Nevertheless, there are interesting exceptions in which the tourist's desire to seek authentic atmospheres leads to the exploration of marginal sites with strange or dangerous atmospheres, such as post-industrial or underground atmospheres, which actually takes pressure away from central areas (Arboleda, 2017). The search for 'off the beaten track' or 'everyday' tourism experiences often goes hand in hand with a sense that atmospheres that have been designed are understood as inauthentic, and tourists prefer those atmospheres that emerge from spaces that have a long history (Chen & Wu, 2019; Rickly & McCabe, 2017).

Atmosphere as a tool for experience co-creation

Despite tourists' preference for historically authentic atmospheres, atmospheric design has become a significant approach in the creation of tourism experiences, as service providers are in general quite aware of the power of atmospheres. Initially, such concerns were limited to the design of tourism facilities such as hotels, restaurants, and spas, and mostly related to the need of providing comfortable and tranquil spaces for tourists to relax and enjoy the provided services, with the purpose of increasing customer satisfaction (Edensor & Falconer, 2015; Heide et al., 2007; Loureiro et al., 2013). Over time, there has also been increasing attention to the atmospheres of heritage sites, memorials and museums, as a way to enhance emotional engagement and learning outcomes in these places (Chark, 2021; Smith & Graham, 2021; Sumartojo, 2016; Turner & Peters, 2015).

More recently, the potential of other designed atmospheres for tourism has also gathered significant attention. This is perhaps more evident in the organization of mega-events in which the attraction of international tourists is a clear objective. It has been shown that events such as the Olympic Games, European Capitals of Culture or summer festivals engage in practices of atmospheric production in the design and branding of regenerated urban and rural places (Anderson & Holden, 2008; Lorentzen, 2012; Sundbo & Sørensen, 2013; Tzanelli, 2017).

However, in several cities that have been branded as tourism, leisure or business cities, atmospheric production has also been a prominent feature of urban regeneration projects. Such approach has been applied in quite different geographical contexts, including Asian (Yu, 2019), European (Paiva & Sánchez, 2021) and American cities (Battaglia & Tremblay, 2011; Bell & de Kerret, 2020). The production of atmospheres in these contexts, despite often drawing from elements of local culture, involve similar aesthetic tropes linked to visuality, immersiveness and commemoration, which has led them to be associated to processes of urbanization and Disneyfication (Muñoz, 2008, 2016; Nofre & Martins, 2017). Interestingly, natural spaces have not been excluded from this approach. In fact, the atmospheres of gardens and parks have gathered some attention (Slåtten et al., 2009), and even the experience of wild spaces can be curated to underline the atmosphere and enhance immersiveness (Bideci & Cater, 2019).

Despite the wide acknowledgement of the importance of atmospheres for the tourism experience and, consequently, for the success of the tourism industry, recent studies have unveiled the profound impacts that tourism activities are having on vernacular atmospheres, especially in urban areas. In the next section, I approach this paradox in greater detail.

Touristification and changing urban atmospheres

Across the globe, but especially in Europe and Latin America, urban tourism has grown exponentially, and it has been associated with significant economic and social change, especially in the inner city (Sigler & Wachsmuth, 2020). This has led to a burgeoning body of works on urban touristification and overtourism, which has been mostly focused on the functional changes caused by the increment of tourism (Nilsson, 2020; Ojeda & Kieffer, 2020). The conversion of housing into tourism accommodation has been a major concern, as housing shortages stemming from the conversion of residential buildings into hotels and apartments into short-rentals have led to increasing rents. Such processes have been understood as a type of tourism-induced gentrification (Sequera & Nofre, 2018), but it has also been highlighted that they stem from the entanglements of tourism fluxes

with other type of international mobilities such as the case of transnational gentrifiers, digital nomads, or international students (Hayes & Zaban, 2020; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020). While most studies on this matter have focused on Southern European cities, the same process has been identified in tourism-oriented cities in Latin America and the Middle East (Hayes, 2020; Zaban, 2020).

Over time, it has been noted that touristification implies functional changes beyond housing, and that retail, services and public space are also deeply affected by the increase in tourism. Retail and services in residential neighbourhoods in cities such as Lisbon, Paris or Torino have shifted from proximity services to tourism-oriented services, as grocery stores, barber shops and cafés are replaced by souvenir and specialty shops (Gravari-Barbas & Guinand, 2017; Guimarães, 2021). Historical facilities such as indoor markets have been a particular focus of attention in this matter, as their classical atmosphere provides an immersive sensory background for tourists (Gilli & Ferrari, 2018; Guimarães, 2018). The expansion of tourism-oriented consumption in the inner city has also generated concerns about the privatisation of public space, as restaurant and café terraces have appropriated sidewalks (Sanz et al., 2021) and major squares have been turned into marketplaces or event spaces (Gomes, 2020; Smith, 2015).

Changing urban atmospheres

As our knowledge of the impact of tourism in urban activities grows, we are becoming more and more aware of how urban atmospheres are changing in this process. Urban atmospheres are a product of the throwntogetherness of the city. They stem from the particular ensembles of human and more-than-human activities that compose urban places, each with a specific rhythm and a certain set of visual, sonic, and olfactory elements. In this sense, urban atmospheres are performances, but they also incorporate a sense of meaning and identity in the affectivity of its experience (Gandy, 2017; Thibaud, 2015). As tourism-oriented facilities and events replace the spaces of local communities, vernacular atmospheres – the ones mostly valued by tourists – are profoundly altered. Some of these changes are intentional. For instance, Guimarães (2022) has shown that retailers in inner-city touristified neighbourhoods in Lisbon draw on elements of local authenticity such as music and iconography to provide new products and store ambiances for tourists. On the other hand, Gravari-Barbas and Jacquot (2019) show how peripheral flea markets in Paris are transitioning from providing everyday products for local residents toward offering new upscale forms of atmospheric consumption that go beyond the purchase of objects. Indeed, there is no doubt that a good number of economic actors such as retail stores, hotels, restaurants or cultural agents not only benefit from the emergence of tourism-oriented atmospheres, but also actively contribute toward the creation of such atmospheres. Nevertheless, a significant part of the atmospheric changes in touristified cities are more of a by-product of the emergence of new spaces and events than deliberate acts. Paiva and Sánchez (2021) have presented the concept of collateral atmospheres to describe the atmospheres that emerge beyond the margins of atmospheres produced for tourist consumption. The concept can be applied, for instance, to the atmospheres of noise that urban dwellers feel when at home in crowded touristic neighbourhoods, or the dirty morning atmospheres that stem from the littering in tourism-oriented party neighbourhoods. Collateral atmospheres are but a manifestation of the tensions that might arise between hegemonic state- or corporate-led practices of atmospheric production for tourism, and the individual everyday practices of atmosphere-making (Bille, 2019; Pink & Leder Mackley, 2016).

These tensions seem to be increasing as the experience of 'living like a local' becomes more and more popular in urban tourism. As a response to the growing desire among tourists to live like a local, sharing economy platforms such as AirBnB and Couchsurfing offered tourists the opportunity to live in traditional houses in lively neighbourhoods, hence avoiding tourist-oriented facilities such as hotels and resorts (Paulauskaite et al., 2017). While it has been noted that the notion of the sharing economy seems to be an illusion, as the listings of platforms of short-term rentals are dominated by corporation-owned houses rather local independent providers (Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021), the platform economy did indeed change tourism cities, as more and more tourists expect to vacation in residential neighbourhoods and experience the local life (Carter, 2019). A major concern regarding this trend is that the touristification of local living leads to the Disneyfication or the spectacularization of local communities, their everyday activities, and their local atmospheres (Nofre & Martins, 2017; Pettas et al., 2021). Indeed, as I discuss in the next section, the changing atmospheres of tourism cities has a profound effect on urban liveability.

Tourism atmospheres and urban liveability

Changing atmospheres are more than a mere change of the urban scenery. They entail effects at the level of urban liveability, especially regarding community building and public health. On the one hand, it well-documented how over-tourism affects local communities. Not only the touristification of retail and services generates mismatches between premium tourism atmospheres and the everyday vernacular atmospheres of social groups, leading to the loss of community places and cultural references (Gravari-Barbas & Jacquot, 2019; Paiva & Sánchez, 2021), but also the demographic changes resulting from the gentrification of tourism areas lead to the emergence of an 'atmosphere of displacement' that further degrades social ties in local communities (Bourlessas et al., 2021). On the other hand, it has been widely demonstrated that touristified urban atmospheres are also polluted atmospheres. Noise is the most common complaint regarding the atmospheric changes induced by tourism activities, and widely known as the greatest driver of tourismphobia (Almeida-García et al., 2021; Bild et al., 2022; Casquilho et al., 2022). Yet, tourism is also usually identified as a driver of air pollution in urban areas (Nosheen et al., 2021; Rico et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2020a). While often pollution is not consciously perceived by humans, it has been shown that visible pollution (smog) and public information about pollution data has an impact on destination choice among tourists (Li et al., 2015; Tang et al.,

2019). Despite this, often both urban dwellers and tourism service providers must learn to coexist with pollution in tourism areas (Mostafanezhad, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020b).

These consequences of the touristification of atmospheres illustrate how atmospheres are more than a background for experience. Instead, they are a crucial foundation for urban liveability and the aftermath of damaged vernacular atmospheres can be deeply troublesome. Paradoxically, the damaging of vernacular atmospheres tends to increase the search for authentic local living experiences, rather than reducing demand. As Ji (2021) has noted, when the authenticity of places is threatened, they become even more desired as they are seen as scarce, exclusive or nostalgic.

In this scenario, what can be done to ensure that tourism does not degrade the everyday living atmospheres of local communities? In the next section, I contend that recognizing atmospheres as a form of intangible heritage can be a crucial step to ensure that urban liveability is guaranteed in touristified cities. The concept of intangible heritage is complex as it is often context-dependent and intersects profound cultural and political issues, which are impossible to approach in-depth in the scope of this paper (Benhamou, 2020; Melis & Chambers, 2021; Smith & Akagawa, 2009). For this reason, rather than providing a detailed discussion of the cultural and political entanglements of intangible heritage, I will focus on the challenges to understanding atmospheres as heritage. After discussing this, I propose and discuss the notion of atmospheric justice as a principle for the recognition of atmospheres as heritage.

Atmosphere as heritage

Atmospheres are cultural phenomena intrinsic to any place. They stem from the ensembles of social practices and the built environment that are formed over time, and lend perceptual coherence to different spaces, thus contributing toward the formation of sense of place and place attachment (Böhme, 2017; Griffero, 2014). In this sense, atmospheres contribute to the emergence of a sense of uniqueness in each place, culture and community (Bille et al., 2015; Gandy, 2017). Atmospheres form a part of everyday life, shape social relations, and underpin the formation of local identities and sense of place (Paiva & Cachinho, 2018; Sumartojo & Pink, 2018). For these reasons, it is easy to argue that atmospheres are a cultural phenomenon that forms part of the heritage of places.

However, considering atmospheres as heritage is problematic due to their multiple and contested nature which makes it difficult to define a specific atmosphere. Atmospheres are vague phenomena that stem from certain ensembles of local sensory elements, but they are more than just the combination of those elements (Böhme, 2017; Griffero, 2014). They are result of the encounter between those spatial ensembles and bodies, and for this reason each atmosphere is different for each person (Edensor & Bille, 2019; Sumartojo & Pink, 2018). In this sense, atmospheres are always co-created events, and therefore any consideration of atmosphere as heritage must include not only spatial features but also the sensing bodies that inhabit atmospheres. Moreover, most atmospheres are not always already there: they might occur at a specific time of the day, the week, or the year, or they can even be sporadic and unpredictable (Anderson & Ash, 2015). This generates questions of temporal boundaries that add up to the perhaps more evident issues of spatial boundaries.

In addition to their phenomenological qualities, atmospheres are also cultural and social phenomena, as the contestations around touristification suggest. People undertake their own atmospheric practices, and communities recognize the atmospheres of their spaces of encounter as their own and as a part of their culture and everyday living (Bille, 2019; Sánchez, 2016). The opposite also occurs, as people and communities also reject designed atmospheres that they understand to be inauthentic or imposed (Paiva & Sánchez, 2021). In this sense, atmospheres have a political dimension that must not be neglected (Sumartojo, 2016). For these reasons, a specific atmosphere cannot be defined as heritage in the same way as tangible assets such as monuments or intangible things such as music can.

In addition, atmospheres have complex relations with already recognized forms of heritage. For instance, heritage sites have their own atmosphere, which may be part of what is considered as heritage (Kepczynska-Walczak & Walczak, 2015; Kılıçarslan & Caber, 2018). On the other hand, the atmosphere of some places is composed by cultural elements that might be already recognized as intangible heritage, such as music or food (Farrelly et al., 2019; Riedel & Torvinen, 2020). Nevertheless, the social and cultural significance of atmosphere, its relevance for the identity and well-being of local communities, and its importance as a resource for touristic consumption suggest that atmosphere must be valued and protected as vital cultural resources.

Toward atmospheric justice

How can atmospheres be valued and protected as vital cultural resources? Rather than trying to fit atmospheres into conventional understandings of heritage, I would instead propose that the way forward is to think in terms of atmospheric justice. There is growing awareness of the need for atmospheric justice, stemming from the acknowledgement of the diverse types of pollution that are contaminating the atmosphere. While at first such concerns were mainly concerned with justice regarding atmospheric change induced by the climate crisis (Vanderheiden, 2008), these insights have been transferred to urban settings in which atmospheric conflicts go beyond, while not excluding, material and environmental concerns (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2014).

In the context of tourism cities, I would argue that atmospheric justice must be a process of protecting people and communities' right to engage in atmospheric practices. Given that atmospheres are phenomenological performative events (Bille & Simonsen, 2019; Gandy, 2017), heritagization must be focused on the practices of doing atmospherics, rather than attempting to pin down what a specific atmosphere is and how it can be evoked. Focusing on atmospheric practices not only emphasizes

the democratic dimension of atmospheres, it also allows us to acknowledge that, as performative events, atmospheres are also ever-changing. What is at stake, thus, is not so much *if* urban atmospheres change, but *who* can make urban atmospheres change.

Indeed, it has been acknowledged that atmospheric production within the context of tourism should take into account the specificities of each place and their local communities. For instance, [Volgger \(2019\)](#) calls for a humble and careful approach to atmospheric production that departs from existing identities, traditions, and atmospheres, rather than attempting to redesign atmospheres from scratch. He claims that atmospheric interventions must be attuned to the local sense of place, which entails knowing the cultural and social specificity of each place, and harmonizing new sensorial interventions with the existing atmosphere. Volgger's perspective echoes the insights on atmospheric co-creation that are well established in atmosphere studies. I am referring to the notion that the design of atmospheres is never a one-sided task, as the experience of atmospheres largely depends on the expectations, willingness, mood and choices of the experiencing subjects ([Edensor, 2012](#); [Lacey, 2022](#); [Michels & Steyaert, 2017](#)). Thus, successful atmospheric interventions entail the construction of a profound knowledge of places and their affects, even though it is never possible to completely predict the outcome of each intervention ([Sumartojo et al., 2017](#); [Sumartojo et al., 2019](#)).

Atmospheric justice and the right to the city

While there is wide recognition that the production of atmospheres should not be conceived as a top-down, one-sided task, there is little exploration of how such practices can become more democratic. Despite this, some emerging ideas are providing starting points to think about this issue. Namely, [Tsavdaroglou \(2016\)](#), departing from the analysis of touristic cities such as Barcelona, Athens or Istanbul, has argued that the disputes over atmospheres in these places must lead us to reconsider the debates around common space and to start thinking about atmosphere as a right. For Tsavdaroglou, the question of who has the right to produce atmospheres is the main point of contention in these conflicts, although it has rarely been framed in such a way. However, in this sense, the right to atmosphere can be framed as a concrete and prominent issue for the fulfilment of the right to the city. While Tsavdaroglou does not elaborate what would the right to atmosphere entail in theory and praxis, ongoing debates regarding the right to the city can provide inspiration for this task.

The right to the city, first proposed by [Lefebvre \(1968\)](#) and later expanded by urban thinkers such as [Harvey \(2003\)](#), [Mitchell \(2003\)](#), [Marcuse \(2009\)](#) and [Simone \(2005\)](#), refers to the range of possibilities of participating in the city and its organization. In this sense, the notion of right to the city changes as the urban realm itself mutates. While debates were initially focused on issues of access and participation in urban politics, in the last decade discussions have shifted toward the possibilities of acting on specific elements of urban living, leading to discussions on topics such as the right to the informational city, to city branding, to city energy, or to urban walking ([Becker et al., 2020](#); [Masuda & Bookman, 2018](#); [Middleton, 2018](#); [Shaw & Graham, 2017](#)). In this context, tourism has been understood as an activity that hinders the right to the city for urban dwellers ([Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2021](#); [Novy & Colomb, 2019](#)), leading to a conflict between the right to the city and the right to travel ([Perkumienė & Pranskūnienė, 2019](#)). In this sense, ensuring that urban dwellers retain the capacity to engage in their own atmospheric practices in the touristic city is fundamental to guarantee the right to the city. This becomes even more relevant if we take into account that the ongoing debates about the right to the city have been criticised for being too focused on discursive matters.

Indeed, it has recently been argued that scholars concerned with the right to the city have neglected how this right is actually performed in everyday life, as they have focused exclusively on the political and juridical discussion of how the city should be organized and who should participate in its organization ([Attoh, 2011](#); [Kuymulu, 2013](#)). For [Duff \(2017\)](#), understanding how the right to the city is claimed and embodied in the everyday experience of urban life is as important as the political discussion around it. Duff contends that the right to the city has a crucial affective dimension, as this right can only be fulfilled through actual material social events that claim and materialize it. In this sense, Duff proposes that the fulfilment of the right to the city should be evaluated through the capacity of citizens to become visible, to occupy public space, and to act and communicate social and political concerns. Rather than limiting this capacity to punctual political manifestations in public space, Duff believes that the right to the city is instead materialised in the citizen's capacity to organize the living spaces of their everyday lives. With this in mind, I would argue that achieving the right to atmosphere in tourism cities – a crucial step for the materialization of the right to the city – entails ensuring that urban dwellers retain the capacity to engage in the organization and materialization of the vernacular atmospheres that are central to their local culture and communities. In the next section, I discuss some experiments that have attempted to achieve this right to atmosphere in tourism cities.

Experiments in atmospheric justice

There have been local initiatives in touristified spaces that attempt to engage in practices of protecting vernacular atmospheres, which can be also conceived as attempts to materialize the right to atmosphere. As it is common in atmospheric practices, not all of these experiments have explicitly aimed to engage in the making or remaking of local atmospheres ([Griffero, 2014](#); [Paiva & Sánchez, 2021](#); [Sumartojo & Pink, 2018](#)). However, their interest in reclaiming the right of urban dwellers to appropriate, organize and enjoy the sensory and social dimension of public and private space in touristic places entails a practice of care for atmosphere.

Some of these initiatives have been undertaken in the context of protests against tourism. For instance, [Bruttomesso \(2018\)](#) describes *Fem Plaça*, a protest event that ran monthly in Barcelona, in which local residents would occupy a square to reclaim

public space from tourist-oriented privatisation. The protests were composed by everyday socializing activities – chatting, eating, spending time together – in public space, thus co-creating a multi-sensory, festive atmosphere simply by gathering a local community. On the other hand, [Grube \(2019\)](#) presents the case of a series of performative interventions conducted between 2015 and 2016 in Berlin, in which activists created scenes of irritation stemming from the encounter between tourism activities and urban everyday life, with the purpose of provoking reflection and challenging stereotypes and resentments. Such interventions attempt to engender alternative atmospheres from encounters between the local community, highlighting the contrast between these forms of appropriation of public space and the forms promoted for tourist consumption. By attempting to enact atmospheric justice by protecting vernacular atmospheres without excluding tourism, they materialize the right to atmosphere and provide insights on how atmospheres can be treated as local heritage.

We can also find examples of the protection of local atmospheres in the work of local tour guides who take on the role of mediators between tourists and local communities, especially in marginal communities. For instance, [Jamerson and Harrison \(2023\)](#) describe how tour guides use music, verbal sound and urban soundscapes to promote intercultural exchanges between tourists and Black communities in Harlem (New York), which contribute toward dispelling negative stereotypes regarding the area. Notwithstanding concerns about racial commodification, these encounters place value on the local vernacular atmospheres as symbols of both community and intercultural exchange. Similarly, [Lindmäe \(2023\)](#) shows how graffiti tour guides in Comuna 13 (Medellín) mediate the tourism experience, contextualizing and reframing the progressive spatial and social changes in the neighbourhood by fusing community narratives and atmospheric experiences in the guided tour. While it can be argued that these tourism practices still frame vernacular atmospheres as commodified products to be seen through the tourist gaze ([Ryan et al., 2000](#); [Zhang & Xu, 2023](#)), local tour guides can curate the modes of presenting and experiencing these atmospheres in ways that prevent the emergence of collateral atmospheres that generate noise, pollution, displacement, and loss of community places and cultural references.

These examples should inspire us to think about how community-based tourism atmospherics can develop effective ways to improve the quality of life of residents in touristified urban areas without leading to tourismphobia (see also [Deng et al., 2011](#); [Jee et al., 2019](#)). However, while such examples can provide inspiration to think about how atmospheres can be protected as a form of heritage, achieving atmospheric justice is still a task that demands further discussion and experimentation. In the following conclusion, I reflect on what tourism scholars can do to contribute toward the protection of atmospheres as heritage.

Conclusion

Overcoming the paradox of atmosphere in urban tourism is crucial to ensure the sustainability of tourism activities in contemporary cities. As long as tourism activities keep endangering the very atmospheres that tourists seek, liveability in touristified urban areas, by giving citizens the right to claim and materialize their own atmospheric practices, is an urgent matter. Tourism scholarship can and should contribute toward this goal, by developing new research agendas on practices that can materialize the right to atmosphere in touristified cities.

Thus far, as we have seen, research on atmospheres and tourism have been mostly focused on the role that atmosphere plays in the co-creation of meaningful, immersive, and memorable tourism experiences, or the negative effects of overtourism on local atmospheres and its consequences. What is common among these studies is the significant focus on the practices of tourism service providers; on one hand, as co-creators of atmospheric experiences, and on the other, as the gentrifiers or the privatizers of atmospheres. More attention must be given to communities in areas of urban tourism and their atmospheric practices. What are the atmospheres that local communities value? What kind of atmospheric practices do they wish to engage in their everyday lives? What are the sites, times, and artifacts required to enact such atmospheres? How can these atmospheres co-exist with tourism activities? These questions are central for a greater understanding not only of how vernacular atmospheres might be affected by tourism activities, but also what kind of atmospheric practices require protection. Alongside such research, a greater attention to modes of participation and governance in atmospheric practices is needed, given the multiplicity and diversity of agents that engage in atmospheric production. Tourism planners and urban designers can play an important role in mediating atmospheric conflicts, however there has been little exploration of practical case studies that can provide insights on how to approach such issues. Although the production of atmospheres has entered the debates about urban planning and regeneration ([Mackrodt, 2019](#); [Viderman & Knierbein, 2020](#)), there is still much to know about what kind of modes of public participation, conflict resolution, mitigation of exclusion, and structures of governance work better when it comes to harmonize the atmospheres of the city. Planners and designers require guidelines and best practice examples to tackle such delicate issues.

Methodologically, such research implies continuing the ethnographic tradition that atmosphere studies have established, but also opening up its studies to the participation of local communities. Although atmosphere scholars have been more and more concerned with developing methodologies that account for diverse atmospheric perceptions ([Schroer & Schmitt, 2018](#); [Sumartojo & Pink, 2018](#)), there is a significant lack of engagement with participatory methodologies. Researching the right to atmosphere of communities in tourism-oriented urban spaces require such engagement, as the focus must be on the empowerment of individuals and communities to assert their capacity to engage in their own atmospheric practices. Undertaking these research agendas might be challenging, as it requires asking new questions, developing new methods, and engaging with new kinds of actors, but it is also fundamental to ensure that research on the atmospheres of tourism provides a relevant contribution to urban liveability.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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Daniel Paiva is a researcher at the Centre of Geographical Studies of the Universidade de Lisboa under the Concurso Estímulo para o Emprego Científico. Daniel is also PI of the research project UrBio – Making urban planning and design smarter with participatory mobile biosensing. His research investigates affective urbanism and the experience of urban environments, with a focus on the effects of consumption- and tourism-led urban regeneration on the everyday experiences of urban dwellers.