SMARTENING TOURISM GOVERNANCE IN CITIES: UNDERSTANDING STAKEHOLDERS' ACTIONS AND PERCEPTIONS IN BARCELONA

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CONTEXT

SMARTDEST is an **EU-funded H2020** research project, bringing together 11 universities and innovation centres from 7 European and Mediterranean countries.

SMARTDEST wants to help cities to become **more resilient in the face of global tourism mobilities** and contribute to their advancement towards a more **just and inclusive social and economic model.**

https://smartdest.eu/
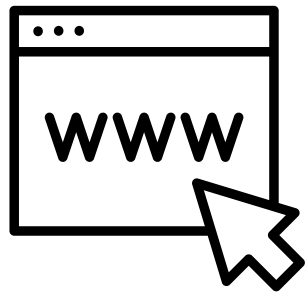
SMARTDEST

**CITIES AS MOBILITY HUBS:
TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION THROUGH
'SMART' CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT**

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to examine further the **role of tourism governance** in the construction of the **Smart Tourism City**, in particular focusing on the **alignment of visions and interests** among the wide range of **stakeholders** involved and on the realistic character of their expectations in the construction of the Smart City.

RQ: How do the Barcelona tourism governance stakeholders perceive and feel involved in the Smart Tourism City Construction?

Barcelona is used as a case study, claiming it to be **one of the world's destinations** where the challenge to embrace 'smart' in tourism governance reforms is at the same time most urgent and ingrained in existing efforts, widely recognised, to develop as a **Smart City**.
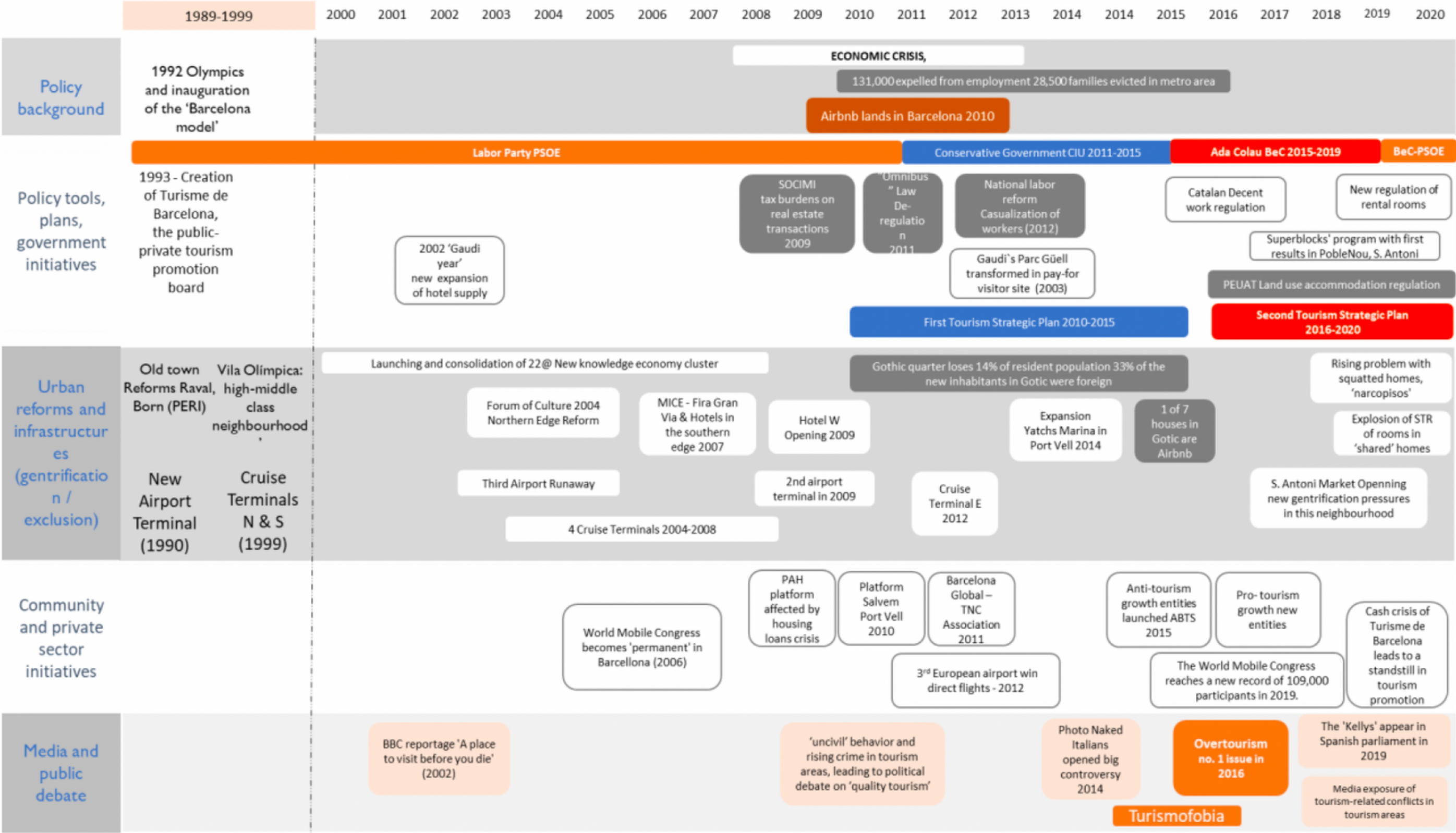
ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

There exists a **complexity of challenges at the urban and tourism governance** level. **Tourism is rarely considered a critical element of smart city development plans, strategies, and agendas (Gretzel and Koo, 2021)**

Smart Tourism has a **utopian approach** and is sometimes considered to be a panacea to the externalities that tourism currently faces. But at the same time, **there is very little concrete guidance on how to achieve ST** development. Long-term orientation, collectivism, and low power distance are considered key aspects to rethink the Tourism Ecosystem (Gretzel, 2021)

As the number of **stakeholders increases, destinations become more complex** (Pan et al., 2021). This causes disconnections in the Smart Tourism Ecosystem, mainly in the discursive aspect (agendas, plans, and political factors) as well as in the tangible aspect, with the implementation of these. There is a **lack of understanding of how stakeholders can harness the benefits of destination intelligence and agility** (Buhalis, 2022)

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Governance of tourism is often viewed as a matter of closed committees by which only central players in the tourism and hospitality industries are represented.

In Kitchin's (2015)view, the **absence of case studies of specific initiatives** hinders the understanding of smart cities, and the same applies to Smart Destination initiatives, where **few studies have assessed the real impact of smart solutions at the local level** (Buonincontri & Micera, 2016; da Costa Liberato et al., 2018; Femenia-Serra, & Ivars-Baidal, 2018)

The symbiosis between Tourism Governance and Smart City Initiatives is a necessity in the current socio-economic and tourism contexts

Evaluate the smart impact approach on the reconfiguration of the urban and tourism governance linking policy drivers, structural configurations, and evolutions in moments of change

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION
1st part

Empirical Research

Interest Groups

Tourism Governance

Smart Approach
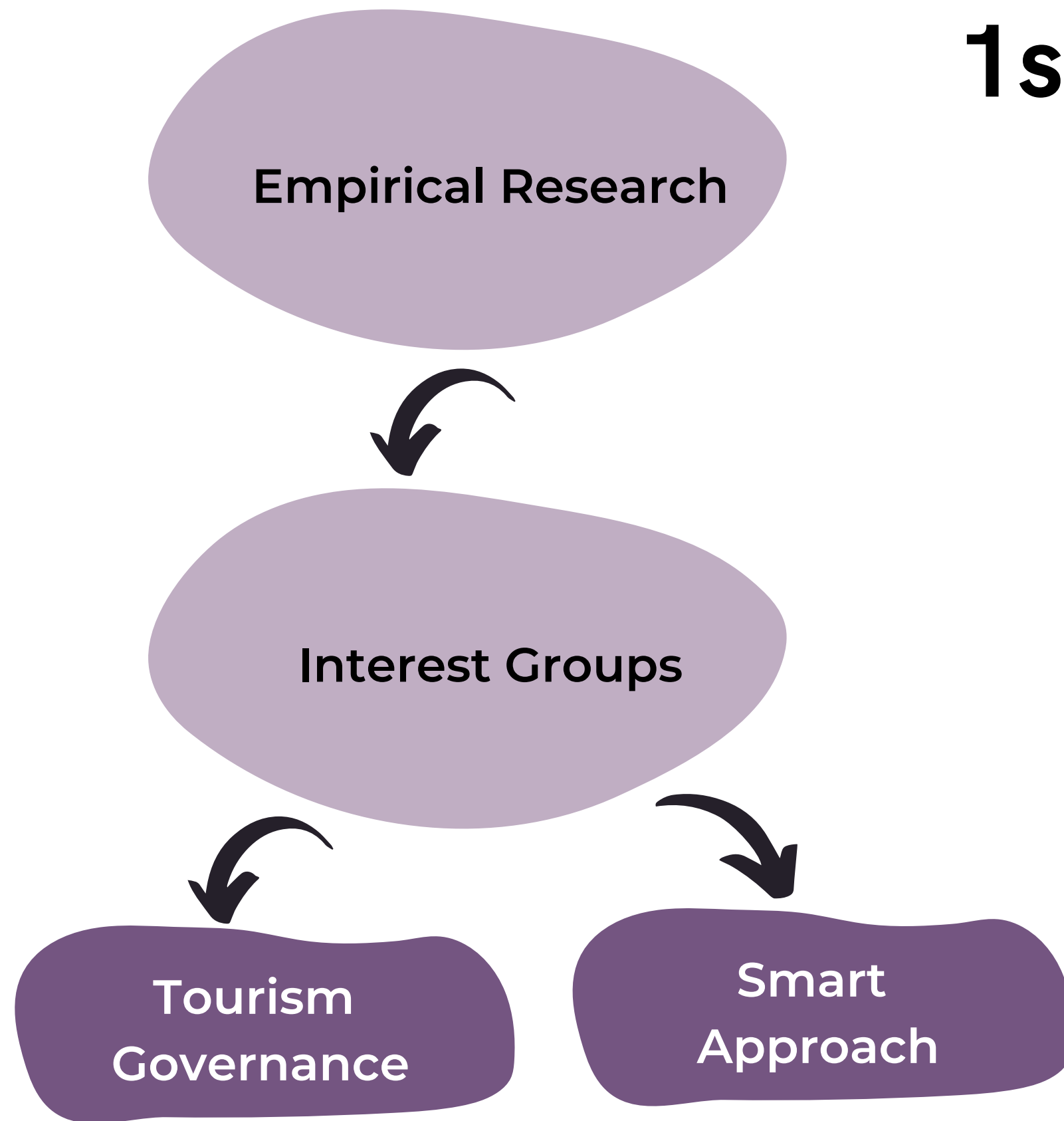
Smart City related documents	Tourism management related documents
-ICT Master Plan: Deployment of "Smart" Infrastructures in the Public Space (2014) -Barcelona Digital Plan (2016)	-Tourism Strategic Plan 2020 (2015) -Special Tourist Accommodation Plan –PEUAT- (2017) -Territorial Tourism Management Strategy (2018) -Barcelona Tourist Mobility Strategy (2017) -Government Measure. Creation of new ideas and contents to improve Mobility and Sustainability in Tourism (2020)

RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION
2nd part

Background

In a previous workpackage an agents mapping was tracked to know the involvement of stakeholders and their relationships in tourism management and other domains of governance:

- Governance Stakeholders
- Planning Ecosystem Stakeholders
- Smart City Stakeholders

On the initial selection, actors were classified by:
- Scale of action (international to local)
- Nature (public, private or mixed)
- Type (government, internal and external stakeholders).

And by their participation in different instruments

Thematic Analysis

26 interviews with Key Informants

Dissecting positionings and perceptions

The aim is to contribute to a **more comprehensive knowledge of 'implemented' smart tourism city matching with overarching smart city agendas,** mediated by the stakeholders' understanding of smart city strategies and their development, with the intention of deriving some implications regarding the governance structure on which (smart) tourism city development rely.

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
Public Tourism Management	
Municipality	3
Regional DMO	3
Experts	2
Tourism Industry	
Accomodation Management	2
Travel Agencies	1
Related Sectors	
Chambers of Commerce, SMEs and lobbies	4
Others	3

CATEGORY	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
Social and Political Actors	
Grassroots associations	2
Labor Unions	2
ICT and innovation stakeholders	
Urban and Digital Innovation	1
Urbanism and Strategic Planning	1
ICT Sector	2
TOTAL	**26**

SMART TOURISM ECOSYSTEM STAKEHOLDERS

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

Barcelona

30-70 minutes

26 Interviews

Formated and Coded Data

Transcription and Translation

16 Male
10 Female

December 2021 - March 2022

Ethics: All the interviewees signed the information sheets and consent forms.

The interview process has been double-checked by the Research Ethics Committee: URV-EU

Saturation was reached, but relevant stakeholders declined the invitation.

1 Manually developing the initial codes following data collection from the interviews and document analysis through organized segments of similar and related text to assist interpretation

2 As a result, **six code categories**: City governance involvement, Smart City Strategy alignment, Perception of the Smart City, Key initiatives (public-private), Externalities, and Current situation of tourism digitisation.

3 During the development of the manual, code clusters were put together into coherent groups and consolidated into high-level themes with similar characteristics.

4 Data segments representative of each code were matched to the codes in the text. **The transcription process involved assigning inductive codes to data segments describing new text themes**

5 Finally, a review of the themes and code relationships was conducted.

RESULTS

Smartening governance in an evolving destination ecosystem

- Agents directly involved → classical tourism sector
- ICT and innovation related stakeholders different approaches
- Low involvement of social stakeholders
- Public administration perspective is the total governance

"We don't participate, but I think we should be there (...) We work with the Economy (area), but we do not work directly with tourism."

"I don't think that one of our functions (...), is to participate in governance. It is, for example, to advise or facilitate, or to be at the service of the Barcelona City Council in this case, to be able to put into question technology, to attract tourism of technological talent.... We can facilitate the creation of ecosystems, which we already do as a governing body"

"I would say that in tourism policy, (...) it is difficult to have complete sovereignty over the issues, but instead there is an absolute interdependence. To begin with, we are talking about an activity: tourism, which has very liquid borders and therefore tourism, urban planning, mobility, housing, environment, etc. is a cross-cutting issue that we must take into account

"I would like to insist that the level of participation in tourism management in Barcelona must be one of the highest in the world and, of course, in Spain and many European cities. However, it has two poles, and these two poles are not conveyed. The DMO has a vocation and a promotional function, and here the social sectors are not present. There is a tourism and city council in which everyone is present."

RESULTS

Current situation of tourism digitisation & Pilot Projects

- The findings confirmed that the initiatives with public-private partnerships, where the public administration leads the project, have a strong influence and are the most well-known and widely supported by the agents.
- Some actors feel excluded in the digitisation process conducted by the public administration
- Lack of or incipient coordination with national STD networks
- Smart and digitization as a separate concepts
- Awareness about the stakeholders' map expansion
- High expectations concerning the future prospects of STD

Smartization and related problems

- Barcelona as a Smart Working tourism destination
- Data Value and Open Data
- Smart Understanding
- Smart Initiatives will not finish with the old problems

CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed stakeholders' perspectives on urban destination governance and smartification processes, presenting a lack of consensus on the priority aspects of Smart Tourism City Governance - **Integrating tourism city governance into smart city governance is still superfluous.**

The participation of ICT and innovation sectors in formal governance and decision-making processes in tourism is still scarce, thus making it difficult to stimulate co-creation to establish smart policy governance challenges, and resulting in a **lack of data structure** that entails the failure to take advantage of the business and citizen-generated data in policy and plans design.

The stakeholders widely accept the concept of the smart, but **the smart mindset (Gretzel, 2021) that would improve destination governance is still in the process.**

It is necessary for holistic smart tourism development to make the transformation to the smart approach but also to reach better tourism management (Friedmann, 2000 [27]; Gretzel & Koo, 2021[16]) that minimizes the power distance and political and ideological divergences that are still very evident.

As the interviewees pointed out, the prevalence of pilot plans over ongoing projects makes it difficult to implement over the long term and to evaluate their consequences subsequently.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank You for your attention

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