4 Air connectivity for leisure tourism: the way forward

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Abstract

International tourism arrivals by air account for almost 60% of all tourism arrivals. Despite the spectacular increase in air connectivity there are distinct differences between connectivity types, with direct and indirect connectivity, airport connectivity and hub connectivity. Tourism destinations are impacted by the air connectivity type that is available in their nearby or serving airport. The aim of this chapter is to discuss the tourism dynamics resulting from the emerging transformations in air connectivity, and the implications on international air travel. Increased air connectivity is linked to economic growth and development, however direct air connectivity has been driving both tourism and air transport industries. The introduction of new aircraft which can fly longer and more economically is likely to transform direct connectivity and hub connectivity at the same time. Airline business models have evolved over the last 20 years and it is highly likely that this transformation will continue to unfold since the market and the passengers' needs are constantly evolving. Implications for airlines and destinations will be discussed, outlining the trends which are dominating the industry in terms of connectivity and its relation to tourism destinations.

Keywords:

Air connectivity, tourism destinations, air transport, tourism

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the connectivity issues that have developed over the last decades following the boost of air traffic movements and the relationship with tourism. There is reference to airline business models and connectivity models, followed by proposals on the future development of connectivity patterns for air traffic passengers. The latest developments, related to the global pandemic make predictions more difficult, however, technological improvements and changes in the passengers' behaviour might affect the future decision making of airlines as well as the shape of the connectivity networks.

Connectivity networks have existed for many centuries; originally known as trade routes both by sea and land, then they expanded to rail networks followed by road networks and finally by air connectivity networks (Morrison & Winston, 1995; Guimera et al., 2005; Cheung et al., 2020). The common characteristic of these networks is that they all need a significant and substantial degree of infrastructure to make the network feasible. In the beginning it had to do with the size of the ships and the ports, followed by the size and carrying capacity of the rail engine and the carriages and connectivity points of the railway tracks and railway stations. When automobiles were invented, the width of the roads and the load capacity of the vehicles determined the volume of people and goods that could be carried. Over the last hundred years, with the evolution of commercial air transport, connectivity networks are determined by the airport size, the airways' capacity and aircraft size.

The common denominator in the development of all the above networks has been trade, which has been the driving force. Since the introduction of the railway, people started travelling more for leisure purposes, which led to the development of tourism as it became further affordable. The massive expansion of tourism is linked with the introduction of air services where high volumes of leisure passengers travelled domestically or internationally. In 2018, international tourist arrivals exceeded 1.4 billion (UNWTO, 2019a) out of which 58% travelled by air, 37% by road and the remaining 2% by train and 4% by water. In 2000, the share of air travel was 46% and road 58% which reflects the increasing trend for air transport demand and connectivity. In 2019, UNWTO published a press release stating that:

> *"the stability of fuel prices tends to translate into affordable air travel while air connectivity continues to improve in many destinations, facilitating the diversification of source markets. Trends also show strong outbound travel from emerging markets, especially India and Russia but also from smaller Asian and Arab source markets"* (UNWTO, 2019b).

Despite extensive research in the area of air connectivity, there is limited research in a combined approach taking into consideration both air transport and tourism related (leisure) connectivity. It is widely accepted that air connectivity results in the financial prosperity of regions and areas that are served by direct international flights. This chapter aims to address the new challenges and applications in air connectivity between tourism generating and tourism receiving destinations around the world. Given that air connectivity is crucial for leisure tourism, the contribution of this chapter mainly covers the area of mobilities in tourism, and partially elements of destinations' competitive advantage and global travel patterns. Mobility has been associated with components of geography, place and space (Coles & Hall, 2006) although emphasis has been mostly on branding and marketing at destination level. This chapter highlights that despite socio-political boundaries that dictate human mobility across regions, territories and countries, technological developments and enhancements, facilitate human mobility beyond the aforementioned boundaries (Coles, et al., 2004; Hall et al., 2019). There are approaches, including this chapter, which cross disciplinary boundaries, as well as more traditional geographical perspectives on tourism and mobility (Coles & Hall, 2006). New aircraft technology in line with developments in marketing, distribution, accessibility, visa restrictions and unexpected events like the Covid-19 pandemic, reshape the way people travel.

Accessibility measures how people and activities between different locations can be reached through a transport network, an air transport one in that instance (Rendoni et al., 2013). The development of air transport networks has increased connectivity around the globe, with more city-pair and origin-destination connections, which result in the formation of a worldwide air transport network, with a shape similar to the one shown in Figure 4.1. The most interesting finding of this research is that despite their complexity, networks ranging from global air traffic to neural ones share very similar backbones made of essential nodes and