



THE ROLE OF PASSAGES IN URBAN TOURISM: TRABOULER IN LYON

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Abstract:

Cities have always been the focal point of cultural tourism, and urban areas are nowadays more easily accessible than ever before. However, tourists tend to concentrate on confined attraction-filled spaces, challenging cities' logistics in terms of crowd management. One way to negotiate tourism traffic is by using the existing city architecture to slow down tourists while showcasing those structures as unique tourism destinations. This paper aims to explore the tourism use of passages in historic centers, using the city of Lyon as an example. Those urban passages used to speed up human traffic in the past, while nowadays they might serve the opposite purpose: to slow down the visitors. They are also authentic and non-staged attractions enriching the tourism offer of the given city, boosting the synergy effect and creating more memorable experiences for visitors. The research involved 166 domestic and foreign visitors who filled in the 4-language (English, French, Italian and Spanish) questionnaire inquiring about their attitudes and satisfaction. Research findings confirm that the passages were considered an integral part of the tourism palette in Lyon. They also lengthened the time spent on walking in the city centre. Also, the findings show that the great majority of tourists were satisfied with their overall experiences. The conclusion can be drawn that historic cities are endowed with excellent functional architecture that can be put into tourism use.

Key words:

urban tourism,
city break,
tourist flow,
passages,
Lyon.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study aims to present the role of urban design, specifically passages in urban tourism and tourist flow management. There is ample literature focusing on urban tourism (Biczó, 2011; Jensen, 2009; Michalkó & Rátz 2009; Puczkó & Rátz, 2003; Senneth, 1994; Szijártó, 2011), where both the supply and the demand sides have already been dissected. The second strand of literature is linked to crowd management in urban settings (Bryon, 2005; Bryon & Neuts, 2008; Popp, 2012; Selby, 2004). However, the relationship between the functional architecture of cities and tourist interaction within the context of tourist slow mobility has been neglected. As each destination has its own spatial and temporal pattern influenced by architecture, directly impacting tourist circulation, this theoretical hiatus should be filled.

Cities serve as residential, industrial and commercial areas for locals, while being the epicenter for urban tourism. Consequently, they have always been a battle-ground where locals and tourists stake their claims. Today, cities are easily accessed by both low-cost airlines and superfast trains, and a haven for weekend breakers. So, locals and

visitors are intimately linked by motion and have to negotiate their relationship on a daily basis (Jensen, 2009). Furthermore, tourists themselves fight for the same, often congested space. The study explores some of the contemporary thought-provoking literature on urban tourism, followed by the analysis of the survey conducted among tourists in Lyon. It aimed to find out the visitors' attitudes and satisfaction concerning passage visits, as well as to prove that passage visits are an integral part of their sightseeing and lengthen their time spent on walking tours.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) refers to urban tourism "as trips taken by travelers to cities or places of high population density. The duration of these trips is usually short (one to three days), and therefore, it can be said that urban tourism is closely linked to the short – breaks market" (Tourism 2020 Vision, UNWTO, 2002).

Urban tourism became an area of interest during the 1980s, and the concurrent emergence of low cost airlines and the Internet has brought it even more afore. Puczkó and Rátz (2003) argue that the attraction of cities derives from the fact that as complex, sophisticated tourism products, they appeal to a broader market. Furthermore, the lack

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of seasonality is also a draw card. Since the service economy has given way to the experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), metropolitan areas with a high concentration of sights represent an unmatched good value among tourism products. Due to this concentration, the synergy effect intensifies. Michalkó and Rátz (2009) point to the fact that simultaneously with the urban tourism boom, a fall in demand in seaside holidays might also be observed, because an SSS (sea, sun and sand) holiday with a narrower range of offerings cannot compete with the historic cities bursting with culture. Biczó (2011) picks upon the aspects of familiarity, saying that urban tourism provides lesser challenge to visitors who are mostly city dwellers themselves, even though leaving their home behind always poses some risk. So, the primary motivation of urban tourists is not necessarily the longing for the unknown and exotic, but the move from the everyday drag and schedule. Niedermüller (2000) seconds to that by saying that urban tourism for city dwellers is a mishmash of the well-known and the unknown, since each city has familiar non-places such as movie theatres or ATMs, the everyday and the profane, where tourists feel at home and at ease.

Due to the popularity of city breaks, local governments, urban planners and designers face an unprecedented challenge. Having recognized this, the Global Report of City Tourism 2012 prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) identified the following set of key issues in relation to urban tourism:

- ◆ How to manage the increasing number of tourists arriving to cities in a responsible and sustainable way?
- ◆ How to use urban tourism to improve the quality of life of the local population?
- ◆ How can we make sure that tourism action plans and the city development are part of the decision making process?
- ◆ How can we incorporate available information and communications technology (ICTs) to develop smart cities that are more competitive, sustainable, accessible and human?
- ◆ How to measure the economic impact of tourism for the cities?
- ◆ How can cities take practical steps to reduce impact on the environment and promote the benefits of greener tourism?

The subject of the study is Lyon, the capital of the Rhône-Alpes region and Rhône country, situated 460 km from Paris and 314 km from Marseilles. It is home to 1.3 million people. Lyon was the first city to be connected with TGV (Paris-Lyon), which started operating in 1981. The city boasts 2 airports: Lyon-Saint Exupéry and Lyon-Byron with a passenger turnover of 8.5 million and the revenue of 158.4 million realized in 2013 (Insee, 2014). Moreover, 8 million tourists arrive to the city each year and owing to its hub status, business tourism performs much stronger than leisure tourism. However, a slight shift has been palpable of late. In 2013, business travelers made up 63% of all arrivals, while it was 65% a year earlier. On the other hand, leisure tourism expanded by 14% and reached 33% of all hotel guests. Lyon boasts 115 hotels, of which 64% are 5, 4, or 3 star-rated hotels. In 2013, the average occupancy rate was at 64.2%, up by 0.2% compared to the figure recorded in the preceding year (Insee, 2014).

The city is multidimensional, famous for its architectural heritage, food and wine. It is the gastronomic capital of France, the base of the world-famous chef, Paul Bocuse. The Beaujolais wine region lays a stone's throw, as the best wine producing region in the world. The city has also been the centre of the silk industry in Europe since the 16th century, and passages were used as a shortcut in the past for silk painters to take their goods to merchants. The Lumiere brothers, Louis és Auguste made their first motion picture there in 1895. In 1998, the UNESCO inscribed the city centre including its passages on the World Heritage List (CCI Lyon, 2014).

The French word "trabouler" comes from Latin where "trans" means through and "ambulare" means go round. Its French meaning is "to use shortcuts by going through a building". The first passages appeared in the 4th century, although the majority was built during the Renaissance. The most remarkable ones are located in the old centre and the La Croix-Rousse district. In the past, the main purposes of passages were to speed up human traffic and enable delivery of goods, as well as to protect people and their wares from the elements. Today, their function is quite the opposite: as tourism attractions they manage the tourist flow by slowing down tourist mobility, and thus enhance tourists' experiences. Out of 230 passages, 40 stay open each day from 8 am to 7 pm and allow tourists to look around inside. Residents pay lower rent, and in return, they agree to let the visitors peep into their private areas. The city council is in charge of the cleaning, maintenance and renovation.

There are mutual benefits of opening up traboules for tourists:

- ◆ widens the tourism supply with a non-staged tourism product,
- ◆ no financial investment needed since authenticity is the key,
- ◆ low maintenance, long-term sustainable tourism product,
- ◆ contributes to longer sightseeing tours,
- ◆ contributes to temporal and spatial tourist flow management,
- ◆ protects from the elements,
- ◆ provides calming effects - quiet and cool temperature,
- ◆ offers history and culture from a different angle,
- ◆ gives insights into the everyday life of locals,
- ◆ creates deeper experiences,
- ◆ can be thematized - generates extra tourism income
- ◆ flexible thematic walks, tourists can pick and choose their starting and finishing points,
- ◆ encourages cooperation among the council, locals and tourists,
- ◆ old buildings of the city centre remain occupied

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected in the spring of 2014 at the entry of two different passages: the oldest and the longest one, where 166 tourists were selected by using the convenient sampling method. The preliminary surveying suggested that a four-language questionnaire in English, French, Italian and Spanish would be necessary to gauge a bigger response rate:



Table 1. Gender and Age of Respondents

Gender of Respondents	N=166	%
Female	95	57
Male	71	43
Age of Respondents	N=166	%
18-24	6	4
25-34	22	13
35-49	51	30
50-64	66	40
65+	21	13

Source: own collection

Table 1 shows the gender and age of respondents. The difference between the age groups is confirmed by recent American and European studies, which state that baby boomers have been responsible for the remarkable tourism expansion over the last 40 years (Intel, 2011; McGuckin, 2012). In this case, seniors (40%) were followed by the X generation with 30%. The age group between 25-34 and the 65+ cohort both had the same share of 13%. The youngest age group was negligible, people aged between 35-64 years, made up 70% of respondents.

Table 2. Nationality of Respondents

Total Respondents	%
French	54
Foreign	46
Country of Origin	% of total foreigners
Italy	26
Spain	13
Belgium	9
USA	8
United Kingdom	7
Canada	7
Brazil	5
Russia	5
Switzerland	5
Australia	3
Argentina	3
The Netherlands	1
Japan	1
Luxembourg	1
Germany	1
Sri Lanka	1
Thailand	1
Turkey	1

Source: own collection

France has strong domestic tourism, and thus a great turnover of French respondents (Table 2) was anticipated. In fact, 54% of all respondents were French. Among the foreigners, Italians and Spanish were the most prominent, with 26% and 13% respectively. Not surprisingly, people from the neighboring Mediterranean countries outnumbered everyone else. This might be due to a combination of reasons. Firstly, easy accessibility plays an important role. Secondly, each country has a rich cultural heritage, in the sense that its residents grow up in similar but not identical environments. Thirdly, their language also has common roots, which makes travelling a bit easier. This familiarity, coupled with easy accessibility, makes France even more attractive to their neighbours. The proportion of other nationalities did not exceed 10%. Overall, respondents came from 4 different continents (Europe, America Asia and Australia) and 18 different countries. It was expected that Europe would be the most highly represented, with 53 participants, followed by the American continent, people came from the USA, Canada, Brazil and Argentina, altogether 17 visitors.

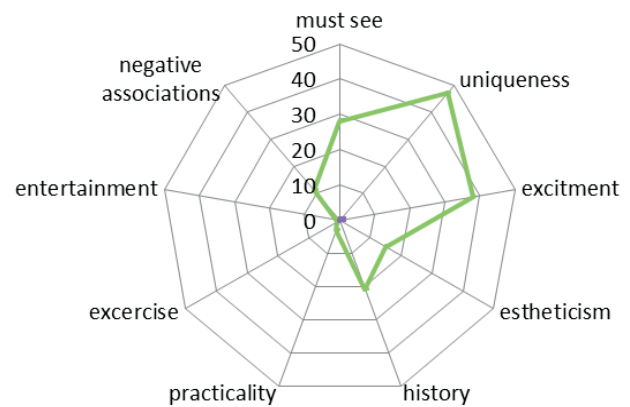


Figure 1. Dominant Associations

Source: own collection

Respondents were asked to make free associations regarding their passage visits. The associations mentioned were grouped into 9 distinctive categories as shown in Figure 1: must see, uniqueness, excitement, aestheticism, history, practicality, exercise, entertainment and negative associations. Figure 1 clearly illustrates that five categories were often mentioned, while the others appeared in an insignificant proportion.

Table 3 presents a more detailed analysis of the results. Interesting was the most commonly used adjective by 24 people, more foreigners than French. All other adjectives appeared half that much. For foreigners, traboules were also historic, must see attractions. French responses differed in a sense that for domestic travelers, passages were the first and foremost must see, typical attractions in Lyon, a kind of anti-ethno spaces which still have a unique Lyon flair to them. French also thought that passages were mysterious and adventurous places. Strolling aimlessly is a non-alienated right for the French, they gave the notion of “flaneur”, the character of idle stroller to the world who has featured countless times in literature and social sciences. However, foreigners found passages rather unique and more of them felt a bit disoriented. In hindsight, some of them would have



chosen an organized tour if they had been given such an option. It is interesting to note that the role of protection from the elements came up only a few times. Two foreigners mentioned that passage tours might be a great activity in rainy periods, while one French respondent highlighted the benefits of the cool climate of passages during hot weather. Negative adjectives were used only by foreigners and those included: difficult orientation, boring and neglected. Out of 76 foreign respondents, only 8 had negative associations about passages as tourism sites.

Table 3. The number of mentions according to dominant associations

Mentions	French	Foreigners	N=166	%
Must see			28	16.87%
• compulsory	14	7	21	
• worthy	2	5	7	
Uniqueness			47	28.31%
• typical Lyon	10	4	14	
• interesting	9	15	24	
• uniqueness	3	6	9	
Excitement			38	22.89%
• adventurous	9	1	10	
• mysterious	9	5	14	
• get lost in space	4	4	8	
• surprising	3	3	6	
Aestheticism			15	9.04%
• beautiful	7	5	12	
• picturesque	2	1	3	
History			21	12.65%
• connection with the past	11	8	19	
• heritage	2	0	2	
Practicality			3	1.81%
• against rain	0	2	2	
• against hot	1	0	1	
Exercises			1	0.60%
• good walk	1	0	1	
Entertainment			2	1.20%
• genius	1	0	1	
• entertaining	0	1	1	
Negative associations			11	6,63%
• boring	0	3	3	
• hard to find direction	1	5	6	
• touristy	1	0	1	
• neglected	0	1	1	

Source: own collection

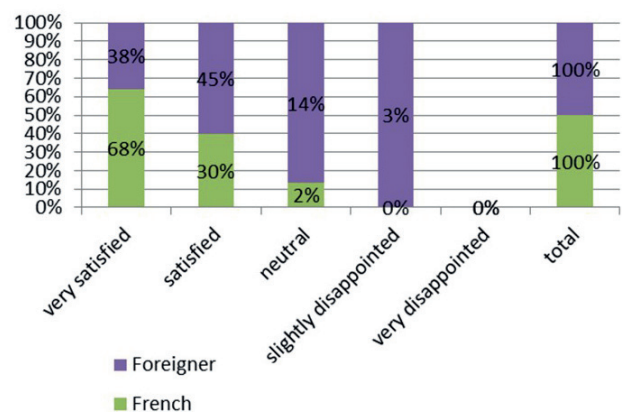


Figure 2. Visitor Satisfaction

Source: own collection

Figure 2 deals with the level of satisfaction among visitors. The satisfaction rate was examined by separating French and foreign respondents in order to determine any differences. By comparing the satisfaction rate of the two groups, it might be concluded that French respondents were more satisfied with their visits than foreigners. No French visitor was disappointed and only 2% were neutral. All in all, 98% of them were satisfied with their overall experience. As regards foreigners, the figures are not so favorable. Namely, the difference in opinions between the two groups might be caused by several reasons. French visitors stated that passages are compulsory, historical sites, part of the French heritage and therefore, they are supposed to visit them. Consequently, they had much lower expectations, and voiced much less criticism. In contrast, foreigners considered passages one of the main attractions, so they had the same high level of expectations as for other attractions. Therefore, passages had to compete with other sites for attention. Emotional factor did not play any role. Since passages are incorporated in residential buildings, they are non-staged sights, and they do not have as many “munitions” as commercialized, well-marketed tourism attractions.

Finally, questions were imposed concerning the number of passages and time spent on visiting them in order to decide whether passages play any role in managing tourist flows. The survey revealed that tourists visited 12 passages on average and spent 60 minutes more on sightseeing due to passage visits. In comparison, hop-on hop-off bus tour makes one-hour-15-minute round, which means that passage visits can lengthen significantly the time allocated to sightseeing.

3. SUMMARY

Passages constitute an integral part of Lyon's tourism supply and tourists tend to include some of them in their itinerary. The great majority of visitors were satisfied with their visit. However, French tourists were more satisfied with their overall experiences than foreign visitors. It was confirmed that the visit of passages lengthened the time spent on sightseeing. This suggests that tourists might have slowed down their speed and dispersed more evenly in the city centre. As for recommendation for other cities, adaptation to local culture is important because tourists should see passages as unique, non-uniformed attractions



worth visiting. The study revealed some criticism concerning orientation. Therefore, signposts should be simple and straightforward, so that tourists with different backgrounds can interpret them. Furthermore, ample provision of multilingual e-guides and thematic maps is also necessary for those who are willing to make a passage tour on their own. Well-marketed, organized walks would bring extra tourism revenue and would bring benefits to those tourists who are short of time or yearn for deeper insights. On a final note, passages should remain authentic and non-staged, which is why commoditization and overmarketing should be avoided. There is a need to expand the research to include economic dimensions such as expenditure and find a link between the duration of sightseeing and spending.

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