

Chapter 7

Changes in the Role of Heritage in Historic Centres: The Mutation of Historic Buildings into Tourist Accommodation



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Abstract Cultural attractions in the tourism sector are becoming increasingly important in many countries. In recent years, historic centres have undergone an intense process of “touristification”, generating economic development and driving new urban dynamics that are rooted in the monumental wealth of cities. In this context, this chapter aims to determine the extent to which historic buildings are integrated into new urban processes and transformed into boutique hotels, in order to put the interest cultural tourists show in heritage to full benefit. To this end, we have analysed the case of the city of Palma (Mallorca-Spain), considering those characteristics common to this new type of accommodation, the protection of buildings, their location, degree of adaptation to their new function and the role that these establishments can play in the post-COVID future of tourism. Our findings highlight the possibility of bringing the buildings back into use and giving them a new life, although the expansion of boutique hotels influences destination dynamics, exerting high tourist pressure on the historic centre and causing conflicts with local residents.

Keywords Boutique hotels · Palma · Heritage dissemination · Historic buildings · Post-COVID tourism

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7.1 Introduction

The early twenty-first century has brought with it the revival of the historic centres of numerous cities, coinciding with the repurposing of cultural heritage. Generally speaking, they are urban areas with a high concentration of historical and cultural assets, many of which have been affected by a procession of functional upcycling (new domestic, institutional, cultural or accommodation uses) despite attempts to maintain those elements that are most representative of their origins and which form part of the collective memory. Francois Choay (2007), Pierre Nora (2009) and Mathieu Dormaels (2012) have considered this issue from the perspective of the connection between memory and heritage as complementary concepts, even though considerations regarding the extent and nature of this relationship have varied throughout the history of heritage studies (Zúñiga 2017, p. 189). Angeles Querol (2010) claims that memory, identity and territory are inextricably linked to cultural heritage, which in turn is directly associated with the identity and memory of a culture within the boundaries of a specific territory. In turn, Gilberto Giménez (2005) and Olga Lucía Molano (2007) believe that identity is expressed through cultural heritage and is linked to memory, whilst the hallmarks of culture are ingrained on the territory through the actions of the communities that live there. In Spain, Manuel de la Calle (2002, 2008) and Miguel Ángel Troitiño (1998, 2003) highlight the key role cultural assets may play in the territorial and strategic planning of cities, analysing tourist dynamics and their influence on the heritage of historic centres.

Taking these reflections as our starting point, we have observed how, since the turn of the twenty-first century, the city of Palma has undergone a reconfiguration of its space, attributable to the introduction of neoliberal policies that have paved the way for a new city whose rich heritage is not only considered a historical and artistic asset, but also an economic resource. Palma's walled historic quarter covers an area of just under 125 hectares and is home to 23,955 residents (2021), 21.03% of whom are of foreign citizenship. In turn, 34.86% of these are from EU-15 countries. Social change and the increasingly elite nature of foreign groups is a key indicator in explaining the changes to the historic heritage and the process of gentrification this area of the city is experiencing (González-Pérez 2020).

These new dynamics drive changes in the use of monuments, residents' profile and the shift from the traditional usage of land towards a spatial configuration based on private logic, which in turn lead to the banalisation and loss of identity of the affected districts that are swept up within a process of touristification. There is a wealth of scientific literature addressing the touristic gentrification of Palma (González-Pérez 2020; Franquesa 2010), in which authors attribute this development to the entry of foreign property investors from central and northern Europe (Novo 2019, p. 86). As in other locations, the touristification of Palma has meant the progressive encroachment of hotels and visitor amenities, sparking debate on the urgent need to reconsider a model that highlights the dilemma between economic growth and social sustainability (Vila 2016, p. 285). Fernando Carrión, who has studied these processes in the historic centres of Latin America, considers that one of the greatest dangers of applying these

policies is the adoption of monumental measures that privilege physical heritage, yet which detract from its authenticity and therefore lead to the loss of its true essence (Carrión 2007, p. 11).

In Palma, one of the key indicators of the touristification of the historic centre is the proliferation of luxury hotels that are often housed in monumental buildings whose heritage recovery is seen exclusively from a commodified perspective: a business that caters to visitors' needs and their enjoyment. These hotels are generally referred to as "boutique hotels" and fall within an urban category of buildings with a heritage value that have been functionally upcycled. Common factors include their location in the most monumental districts, their wealth of built heritage and the luxury facilities they provide, whilst also representing a good example of reuse and sustainability, in contrast to new-build hotel developments. Eighty percent of all luxury hotels (four-star, four-star superior, five-star and five-star luxury) and all those classified as boutique hotels are located in the most emblematic districts (Fig. 7.1). Average occupancy stands at 70% and guests stay for an average of three days. Given their rapid spread, we can establish a connection between tourism-based gentrification and/or touristification and the architectural mutation of heritage. This association is no coincidence, as the recovery of the monumental heritage was a strategic goal of urban planning and policy aimed at revitalising tourism (Novo 2019, p. 86).

Despite the positive connotation implicit in the heritage recovery of the former fabrics that house these hotels, we question whether these rehabilitation actions

Fig. 7.1 Location of the 4- and 5-star hotels currently operating in Palma's historic quarter. *Source* Authors' own, drawn from the *Catàleg d'establiments d'allotjament turístic de Mallorca* (Vicepresidència i Conselleria d'Innovació, Recerca i Turisme, 2018)



have destroyed the original essence of these buildings. A further concern is whether they have undergone all phases of the heritage management process: research, cataloguing, protection/conservation and finally dissemination. The common characteristics these buildings share also point to a third issue for consideration, namely the difficulties implicit in their lack of definition as a homogenous group, as Balearic Island legislation does not contemplate a specific category for “boutique hotels”.

In the light of the questions we have posed, the aim of this communication is to determine the extent to which historic buildings are integrated into new urban processes and transformed into boutique hotels. Further objectives include identifying their characteristic elements, shared values and whether their developers encourage their cultural dissemination. We end by considering the role these properties may play in the post-COVID future of tourism, which would appear to prioritise more intimate settings that shun massification.

Our study of these issues allows us to conclude firstly that the repurposing of these buildings is essential for their continuity, even though this may imply the loss of their traditional functions. A further conclusion is the benefit of repurposing for their external dissemination, which to date has focused exclusively on their promotion as an accommodation option.

7.2 Methodology

For the purpose of our research, we conducted an initial qualitative study in order to define the characteristics of properties of this type, followed by a quantitative study based on official data.

The scope of the study comprises Palma’s intramural historic quarter, as this is where practically all the properties of this type are located. The timeline extends from 2002, when the first of these hotels appeared in the city, until the present day and a scenario in which the debate surrounding the challenges of expansion has moved beyond academia into social and political spheres.

The initial intention was to locate all boutique hotels in order to determine the characteristics of this type of properties and their action frameworks. The next stage consisted of compiling data relating to the projects, their architects and the media coverage given to their rapid expansion. The analysis of the project reports revealed that the architects sought advice from trans-disciplinary sources, as well as the progress and evolution of heritage conservation knowledge and awareness, resulting in interventions that demonstrate the necessary criteria and responsibility required for intervention on historic buildings.

The corresponding fieldwork was also carried out, based on direct contact through a series of semi-structured interviews with managers and staff at these properties, as well as the President of the Palma’s Hoteliers’ Association and architects involved in the restoration and refurbishment projects, in order to discover the nature of the conservation work in keeping with the principles of authenticity and identity, as

well as to determine whether the construction programmes were conditioned principally by investors' profitability goals or the real needs of the buildings. The aim of the interviews was to obtain information related to the adaptation of the buildings, management of the properties and the dissemination of their historical and artistic values.

7.3 Results and Discussion

7.3.1 *The Precedent of the Paradores Nacionales de Turismo*

Palma's boutique hotels are the true reflection of the ties that bind heritage and tourism, as they are housed in buildings of historical and artistic value. From 2010 onwards, their number has risen considerably, due to the rapid growth of urban tourism.

In Spain, the first references to the convergence of both sectors date back as far as 1911 and the creation of *Comisaría Regia de Turismo y Cultura Artística y Popular*. One of the greatest achievements of this Royal Commission for Tourism and Artistic and Popular Culture was the creation of a "type of hotel for travellers tailored in accordance with the regional styles and needs of each location, known as a *parador*" (Lorenzo 2017, p. 674). Since 1928, the *paradores nacionales* have formed a growing network of hotels housed in historic buildings, preferably in old quarters (Eslava and Ontañón 1997, p. 12). This pioneering initiative, which successfully combined hotel and heritage management (Cupeiro 2019, p. 118), attempted to converge the protection and conservation of monumental heritage sites and the promotion of the tourism industry (Lorenzo 2017, p. 674), forging ties between both spheres which had previously shared very little common ground (Cupeiro 2019, p. 127).

The *parador* model can be considered the forerunner of boutique hotels in the sense that they both commonly reuse historic structures and that the revenue generated is the result of the commodification of heritage. However, there are also major differences between these two business models: the former are a state-owned hotel chain (Paradores de Turismo de España S.A.) whilst the latter are private enterprise.¹ Another fundamental difference lies in the manner in which their heritage is promoted and disseminated: the *paradores* also tend to include collections of movable property (Lezcano 2019, p. 218). In recent years, the hotel industry has also witnessed the emergence of other regional private initiatives for the reconversion of numerous types of historic buildings (convents, manor houses, lighthouses, country estates, factories, etc.) into various types of accommodation which are generally promoted online under the umbrella term of "singular properties".

¹ Paradores de Turismo (2022) is a Spanish state-owned hotel chain that operates just under one hundred hotels located throughout Spain and, since October 2015, franchises in Portugal. <https://paradores.es/>.

The evolution of both options has benefitted from favourable international tourist regulations, with an increasing focus on the potentially beneficial impact of tourism on heritage conservation. Examples in this sense include the *International Cultural Tourism Charter* (1999), the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* (2001) or the *World Charter for Sustainable Tourism +20* (2015) (Adams 2021, p. 3).

7.3.2 Boutique Hotels: Concept, Values and Characteristics

The first boutique hotels appeared in England in the 1980s (Agget 2007) as a reaction against the standardisation of accommodation (Elliott and Chan 2012) together with the demand for differentiated services. They were marketed as unique properties housed in singular buildings, which Jones et al. (2013) define as small hotels offering first-class services and authentic cultural and historical experiences. They are characterised by their prime locations, outstanding architecture, welcoming settings and a high standard of service. In addition, the architecture and brand focus create a unique identity for each property, setting it apart from the rest (de Oliveira 2018). Following Anhar (2001), architecture and design are key elements within the boutique hotel concept, whilst McIntosh and Siggs (2005), as well as Khosravi et al. (2012), highlight singularity as the main differentiating feature. In turn, Wheeler (2006) and Rogerson (2010) argue that in addition to the core concepts of architecture and elegance, a prime urban location is also a crucial factor, together with the reduced number of rooms, which allow the hotels to deliver personalised customer service and unique experiences.

In short, the review of literature in this area enables us to conclude that the key characteristics that set boutique hotels apart are their size, design, location and personalised service. Architecture is another principal differentiation factors.

7.3.3 The Problems Surrounding the Expansion of Boutique Hotels in Palma

Boutique hotels are an increasingly essential part of Palma's image as a tourist destination. Their common characteristics and design criteria shed light on how the urban tourist territory is constructed and the architectural conditions, which form a clearly differentiating element for tourism products. Renovation and repurposing actions are the response to a strategy driven by the private sector, which is increasingly providing a dynamic model for urban and heritage renovation. Albeit with varying degrees of success, these hotels have contributed to the renovation of the city based on the use of its built heritage.

The rise in the number of these hotels located in Palma's historic centre dates back to 2010, following the introduction of new urban policies designed to promote

the city as a tourist destination (Melo et al. 2021, p. 98) that triggered complex processes of touristification and gentrification (Novo 2019, p. 92). However, just a few years later and due to the dramatic rise in applications for opening licenses, the public administrations that had indirectly encouraged their appearance decided to limit future growth by imposing a moratorium on the urban plan between 2017 and 2019, based on a joint agreement with Palma's Hoteliers' Association. Today, licences are subject to a series of conditions: the hotels must be located in listed buildings that have been declared Assets of Cultural Interest (BIC in the Spanish initials), hold a five-star category and have no more than twenty rooms. Furthermore, they must comply with the terms and conditions stipulated in the modified General Urban Ordinance Plan (PGOU in its Spanish initials).

A further complication is their category, which is not contemplated in the legislation currently in force. In other words, in accordance with the current regulations (Decree Law 3/2022 of 11th Febrero on urgent measures for the sustainability and circularity of tourism in the Balearic Islands) instead of being listed as Boutique Hotels, the majority are classified as City Hotels (H) or Inland Tourism Properties (TI) or, albeit to a lesser extent, under small-sized categories with a high degree of product differentiation (Casañas and Blázquez-Salom 2021, p. 101). City Hotels provide better quality services and amenities, and generally occupy listed buildings in the historic quarter. The General Urban Ordinance Plan (PGOU in its Spanish initials) determines where these hotels may be located (Casañas and Blázquez-Salom 2021, p. 105). These classifications are an indicator of how tourist legislation has sought the reactivation of the historic quarter through the commodification of its heritage.

In 2022, 40 City Hotels and 2 Inland Tourism hotels are operating in the historic quarter, although just 26 of these can be considered truly singular and comply with all the characteristics that define boutique hotels. They include five-star, five-star luxury, four-star luxury and four-star properties, offering a total of 1,320 beds. More than half of these are included in the upper-upscale category: 16 have five stars and two are classified as five-star luxury, accounting for a total of 816 beds. All the properties are listed and a number have also been declared Assets of Cultural Interest (BIC in the Spanish initials). In chronological terms, this phenomenon is extremely recent, as the majority of these hotels have opened in the last five years. Nine opened following the passing of the moratorium in 2017 (Table 7.1) and a further 8 are scheduled to open between 2022 and 2023. These correspond to licences granted previously and will add a further 313 rooms.

These hotels are relatively small and have an average of 25 rooms and 50 beds per property. Of the five-star hotels, the only one that exceeds the average is the Es Príncipe Hotel, which has 68 rooms and 163 beds, yet which is included in this classification as it complies with all the conditions that define boutique hotels (Fig. 7.2).

The guest profile for these hotels is an international tourist aged between 45–54 and 55–64, with a high purchasing power and awareness of cultural issues, combined with the desire to experience the city. They stay mainly from Thursday to Sunday (city breaks); from Sunday to Thursday there are growing numbers of cruise tourists who opt to spend one or two nights in the city before embarking or after disembarking in Palma's port. As for nationalities, Germans comprise the largest group, followed

Table 7.1 Five-star and five-star luxury boutique hotels by year of opening (Palma)

City hotel	Category	Number of rooms	Number of beds	Year of opening
Hotel Ca Sa Galesa	5-star luxury	12	24	1995
Can Bordoy Grand House and Garden	5-star luxury	24	48	2018
Es convent de la Missió	5 stars	27	54	2003
Can Cera	5 stars	30	14	2011
Calatrava Mediterranean Sea House	5 stars	32	16	2017
Can Alomar Urban Luxury Retreat	5 stars	32	16	2014
Sant Francesc Hotel Singular	5 stars	42	88	2016
Boutique Hotel Sant Jaume	5 stars	36	72	2017
Summum Prime Boutique Hotel	5 stars	18	36	2017
Hotel Gloria de Sant Jaume	5 stars	14	28	2018
Es Princep Hotel	5 stars	68	163	2018
Hotel Mamá	5 stars	32	64	2018
Antigua Palma	5 stars	27	54	2019
El Llorenç Parc de la Mar	5 stars	33	66	2019
Concepció by Nobis	5 stars	31	62	2021
Nivia Born Boutique Hotel	5 stars	24	48	2021
Palma Riad	5 stars	11	22	2021
<i>Inland tourism</i>				
Palacio Can Marqués (T	5 stars	13	32	2018

Source Authors' own, based on data from the General Directorate of Tourism. Open Data Team. Government of the Balearic Islands. <https://catalegdades.caib.cat/Turisme/Mapa-Allotjaments-turistics-Mallorca/4wg5-per5>

by Britons and Scandinavians, although over the last year there has been a sharp rise in the number of French visitors. In 2022, bookings by US visitors are expected to rise, following the start of three weekly flights between New York and Palma. Staff numbers in these hotels are high, with an average ratio of 1.5 per room.



Fig. 7.2 Es Príncipe Hotel. *Source* Authors' own

7.3.4 *The Architectural Singularity of Palma's Boutique Hotels*

Palma's boutique hotels are housed in emblematic and singular historic buildings (former stately homes, palaces, convents or other types of fine residential buildings), in which contemporary interior design blends with an intimate and historic setting, producing a sense of contrast that is further enhanced by the inclusion of avantgarde furniture, occasionally designed by the architects themselves or specialised interior designers (Fig. 7.3). Their historic nature provides added value and is part of the experience guests seek.

The developers' objective was to ensure a harmonious balance between the existing architecture and the definition of the new use through the inclusion of the cutting-edge techniques and technologies demanded by modern-day society, whilst at the same time minimising their impact on the buildings' identity (Gutiérrez 2013, p. 722). In this sense, the greatest difficulty lay in harmonising the traditional fabrics, one of the greatest assets of this new business model, with the new needs, whilst also taking into account the singular features of the urban setting.

Our analysis of the works' studies and reports revealed that the architectural restoration projects have striven to conserve as far as possible the buildings' historical memory and their authentic significance, on the understanding that the priority was to combine this objective with the demands of their repurposing as hotels. An example of these efforts is the corridor leading to the rooms in the new wing of the Hotel Es Convent de la Missió. Renovated in 2019, the current setting is fairly similar to that of the original. The same is true of the current state of the Casa Misión de San



Fig. 7.3 Hotel Icon Rosetó. *Source* Authors' own

Vicente de Paúl, which is adjacent to the hotel, and specifically the corridor where the monks' cells were located (Fig. 7.4).

All the properties in the city that have been converted into boutique hotels have set up complex integral restoration programmes that include the use of contemporary materials and recent building innovations. Most of the alteration work has been carried out inside the buildings, in contrast to the less invasive architectural solutions applied to the façades and exteriors that have mostly conserved their original appearance.

The interventions have turned the architecture into one of the tangible attributes guests value most highly. The intangible characteristics include the amenities,



Fig. 7.4 Casa Misión de San Vicente de Paul and Hotel Es Convent de la Missió. *Source* Authors' own

customer service and character, atmosphere or charm, which in the majority of cases is also associated with the architecture and its personality (Fuentes et al. 2014, p. 635). After cataloguing and analysing the properties in Palma, we have identified a number of concurring elements (Table 7.2) that position them as locations of major value, attributable to a considerable extent to the actual buildings. The interviews with the hotels' managers and staff provided us with detailed insight of the terms and circumstances surrounding their cultural dissemination.

The greatest alterations to the original building fabrics were the structural changes necessary for the luxury facilities the categories of the new establishments require, such as lifts, swimming pools and sun terraces, function rooms and the design of large guest rooms (Fig. 7.5).

Actions to disseminate the built heritage target the hotels' clientele, stemming mainly from guests' requests for information. Actions to disseminate the cultural values vary in intensity, although some properties are now attempting to connect with the general public. An example of this is the Summum Prime Boutique Hotel, whose employees provide information on request to the public as a complement to the information included on Perspex panels and the photographs that can be seen at various points of interest around the building. This hotel has also created an

Table 7.2 Elements common to Palma's boutique hotels and their dissemination characteristics

A quality architectural legacy is a key element for these hotels; it also offers guests the opportunity to experience emotions related to the buildings' idiosyncrasies
They are all located in the historic centre
Each hotel has architectural features that define and differentiate it, although the contemporary design of the furniture and fittings and the communal facilities (sun terraces, swimming pools and meeting rooms, etc.) contribute a globalised character to this type of property. Despite the differentiating features, the end product is standardised
The décor and furnishings contrast with the architecture and tend to be exclusive to each particular hotel. Efforts are also made to acquire contemporary works of art and the majority take part in the <i>Nit del Art</i> event by organising exhibitions
All the buildings are listed and some have even been declared Assets of Cultural Interest (BIC in the Spanish initials), highlighting the fact that they are properties with character and added value
The hotels blend into the quarters and the urban landscape. There is no volumetric or formal-aesthetic impact, at least in terms of the exterior façades. The swimming pools, sun terraces, patios and other new elements cannot be seen from the exterior
Sustainability is sought by optimising resources and energy self-sufficiency. This has required the inclusion of geothermal resources and the use of renewable energies, recyclable and prefabricated locally sourced materials, suitable plants, thermal insulation, natural light and LED lighting, etc.
Most of the alterations to the original structures were designed to be reversible. This is a requirement for listed buildings, and in many cases required a reduction in the number of rooms originally planned
Dissemination of this architecture and its associated heritage is targeted exclusively at customers and there are practically no external communication actions in this sense

Source Authors' own



Fig. 7.5 Solarium Hotel Cort. *Source* Authors' own

Experiences Department which, despite focusing on sales and marketing actions, has proposed the publication of a monographic study on the former palace which houses this hotel. Nevertheless, in spite of these advances, it can generally be claimed that there is a need for new formulas capable of combining the hotels' private nature with the external dissemination of their heritage.

7.4 Conclusions

The construction of boutique hotels in historic buildings in the city of Palma is the direct consequence of the introduction of public municipal policies for the development of cultural and urban tourism, which in turn have driven the recovery of the local heritage. In this case, tourism as a contemporary activity has contributed to the continuity and improvement of a considerable number of buildings, some of which had fallen into disuse and oblivion, through a process of repurposing and a new form of inhabitation. In all likelihood, the most pressing topic of urban debate refers to the new uses of this heritage, and therefore the impact of touristification on the city, displacing other issues such as the environment (1980s) and territory (1990s and 2000s) which were predominant in previous decades.

Actions programmed in certain buildings in Palma's historic centre to convert them into boutique hotels are in line with the conservationist philosophy of the *paradores nacionales*, a model that drove monumental intervention in order to repurpose them as hotel accommodation. As with the *paradores*, the intention was to create an image of exclusivity based on the singular nature of the architecture, which in turn has become a source of revenue. In 2021, the results exceeded pre-pandemic performance levels,

indicating a favourable post-COVID tourist scenario that prioritises more intimate and less crowded settings.

From a historical and artistic perspective, we consider that the restoration actions have had a positive impact, revitalising historic building fabrics, which in some cases were in a severe state of deterioration. However, we are aware that the new uses also imply a loss of significance and the commodification of heritage. This is the price that must inevitably be paid if we consider that the architects' aim was not to restore a convent, factory or former palace, but rather to construct a hotel by taking advantage of the historic structures and/or recovering existing ones as far as possible, considering that the directives are not determined by the actual buildings but rather by the requirements of a hotel.

Nevertheless, and despite the losses and disappearances, this heritage retains its documentary nature, from which we can glean the messages transmitted by the original architecture and indirectly grasp its intangible messages, albeit to varying degrees of intensity. Ideally, these messages, which can be perceived by the guests, should be shared with the local community through the introduction of mechanisms that would not interfere with the logical privacy demanded by guests staying at this type of accommodation. This would not only enhance the documentary value of the monument in question, but would also complete the management process that should form the part of the trajectory of all cultural assets.

We also consider that this dissemination could forge links between the hotel, tourists and the local community. This spirit of cooperation would not only prove beneficial for the heritage assets, which would become more familiar and more appreciated by citizens, but it would also strengthen the tourist image of the brand in particular and the city in general. The dissemination strategy deployed by *paradores* could provide a model for boutique hotels, as their commitment in this sense has allowed for the promotion and later appreciation of the inherited architecture.

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