OVERTOURISM: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS

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Abstract: *Overtourism is not a novelty in tourism, but the literature dedicated to it is recent. Overtourism is an antithesis of responsible tourism, a complex and multidimensional issue, an evolving phenomenon, and a situation impacting economically, environmentally, socio-culturally and touristically both tourists and locals in tourism destinations. This study defines overtourism, differentiates it from what it is not, presents its indicators and causes, and the theories explaining locals' anti-tourism feelings because of overtourism. It also presents an inventory of positive and negative impacts of overtourism, together with solutions / strategies for countering overtourism.*
Keywords*: overtourism, positive impacts, negative impacts, solutions, strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Overtourism is defined by English language dictionaries as "the phenomenon whereby certain places of interest are visited by excessive numbers of tourists, causing undesirable effects for the places visited" (*Lexico*). It was defined as "the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds" (Peeters *et al*., 2018), as "a multidimensional and complex issue" (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018), as "the antithesis of Responsible Tourism" (Goodwin, 2019),as "an evolving phenomenon" (Milano, Cheer & Novelli, 2019), as "(Cognitive desire x Low cost of travelling) + (Cognitive desire x Marketing strategies) + (Cognitive desire x Growing trend to change life / self-fulfilment in developed countries)" (Seraphin *et al*., 2019).

To better understand the nature of **overtourism**, one needs to know what it is not (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018):

- Overtourism cannot be solved by technological or smart solutions alone because "the issue of overtourism is largely social in nature";
- Overtourism cannot be solved with a one-size-fits-all solution but with inclusive solutions;
- Overtourism impacts are not city-wide, it can be perceived in areas with limited tourism activity;
- Overtourism "is not a recent phenomenon: the attention paid to it is recent";
- Overtourism is not a tourism-only problem, it is also a problem of "overuse of the facilities, infrastructure, or resources of a destination, or of parts thereof";
- Overtourism is not just an issue in cities, it is an issue in island or rural destinations;
- Overtourism (which is about environmental changes, infringements on people's lives, and perceived tourism encounters) is not the same as mass tourism (which is about large numbers of tourists).

Overtourism – whose antonym is **under-tourism** (Gowreesunkar & Thanh, 2020) – causes **tourism saturation** (e.g., the Venice Syndrome) and **tourism saturation** causes **tourismphobia** (a term concocted by the Spanish media) wherever it occurs. **Overtourism** as a term is a new-born sub-type of **mass tourism** considering the studies carried out and the articles written about this topic – tens of them starting with 2017. Overall, **overtourism** manifests itself as:

- "Spread of urban tourism to residential neighbourhoods that were not previously visited much by tourists;
- Transformation and changes in the everyday lives throughout the neighbourhoods."

Are considered **indicators of overtourism** (Peeters *et al*., 2018):

- "Air travel intensity (arrivals by air divided by number of residents);
- Closeness to airport, cruise ports and UNESCO World Heritage Sites;
- The share of Airbnb bed capacity of the combined Airbnb and booking.com bed capacity;
- The share of tourism in regional Gross Domestic Product;
- Tourism density (bed-nights per km^2) and intensity (bed-nights per resident)."

Goodwin (2019) identified the **causes of overtourism**: difficulty to demarket honeypots; disintermediation; economic importance of tourism; free of charge public realm; "high propensity to consume travel, to

experience other peoples' places, amongst the emerging middle classes"; increased tourism impact because of distribution strategies, "efforts to disperse tourism pressure, and initiatives to spread tourists to less-visited residential neighbourhoods"; large scale transport; low cost of travel; and seasonality bunching tourism and concentrating numbers. Seraphin & Ivanov (2020) added one more cause: revenue management.

There are at least three theories explaining the evolution of the anti-tourism feeling among locals in a tourism destination – the *Tourism Irritation Index*, the *Tourism Carrying Capacity*, and the *Tourism Area Life Cycle*:

- The **Tourism Irritation Index**, developed by Doxey (1975, in Milano, 2017), is a theory on the development of locals' perception of tourism in a tourism destination – *euphoria* (tourists are welcomed, locals are extremely happy to receive them), *apathy* (tourists are increasingly numerous, locals are decreasingly happy to receive them), *irritation* (tourists are reaching the saturation point, locals are reaching the caution point about possible dangers or problems), and *antagonism* (tourists "are seen as the cause of all the problems, locals start to express irritation");
- The **Tourism Carrying Capacity** takes into account five variables: "the maximum **number of people** that could visit a location within a given period, such that local environmental, physical, economic, and sociocultural characteristics are not compromised, and without reducing tourist satisfaction" (WTO, 1981, in Milano, 2017), and *visitors' distribution in the area*, *activities*, *behaviour*, and *state of tourism infrastructure*;
- The **Tourism Area Life Cycle**, a concept developed by Butler (1980), has four stages – *introduction* (slow growth in sales and high promotion costs), *growth* (steeper sales and profit curves), *maturity* (stepping up advertising to tackle the competition), and *decline* (one's tourism product is replaced by the competition).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The material used in this study consists in articles, books, and reports on overtourism – all of which are as recent as 2017. The research method used is that of content analysis, with which authors defined overtourism, identified both positive and negative impacts, as well as solutions / strategies to counter overtourism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is no doubt that overtourism is a reality. Literature in the field has focused on both overtourism impacts and on solutions / strategies to manage it.

1. Impacts of Overtourism on Tourism Destinations

Because of the Janus-faced character of overtourism (Avond *et al.*, 2019), there have always been positive and negative impacts on tourism destinations. In some cases, one and the same impact can be both *economic* and *socio-cultural*.

1.1. Positive Impacts of Overtourism on Tourism Destinations

Though from far fewer than negative impacts, positive impacts on tourism destinations are mainly economic and social:

- *Cultural impact* (Trancoso González, 2018): endangerment of architectural and cultural heritage;
- *Economic impacts* (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Martín, Guita Martínez & Salinas Fernández, 2018; Kruczek & Szromek, 2020): enough good jobs for residents; fair price for apartments rentals; fair prices for goods and services; increase of online shopping; increase of residents' income; job options for young people; opportunities for small and medium enterprises; price of real estate is rising; rising costs of living; stores and restaurants owned by local residents; strength and diversity of the local economy; tax revenue; and value of one's house and/or land;
- *Social impacts* (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Martín, Guita Martínez & Salinas Fernández, 2018; Trancoso González, 2018): availability of retail shops; city modernization; flexible work arrangements; greater connectedness of residents due to social media; "increase of online shopping"; "increase of residential leisure"; increase of the number of residents and commuters; "increased costs of city amenities"; "limitations on restrictions of urban planning"; peace and quiet; popularity of Instagram and social networks; preservation of cultural/historical sites; preservation of one's way of life; prestige and image of the city; residential gentrification; urban sprawl and population growth;
- *Tourism impacts* (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018): cheaper flights; increase of cruise tourism; increase of internet holiday booking; increased dominance of large tourism businesses; rise of online platforms like airbnb; rise of tourist numbers; tourism spreading policies; and "tourists moving deeper into city in search for authentic experiences".

1.2. Negative Impacts of Overtourism on Tourism Destinations

Overtourism has had a large number of negative impacts on tourism destinations:

- *Economic impacts* (Milano, 2017; Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Martín, Guita Martínez & Salinas Fernández, 2018; Peeters *et al*., 2018; Szromek, Kruczek & Walas, 2020):
    - "Economic dependence on tourism, including being strongly impacted by seasonality and the degradation of other sectors/types of employment;
    - Increased (sometimes sudden) demand for and usage of (tourism-directed) infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities;
    - Inflation of prices and reduction of the availability of certain goods, services, and factors of production aimed at inhabitants and for other sectors and functions (industry, agriculture, housing, etc.)";
    - Loss of residents' purchasing power;
    - Privatization of public spaces;
    - Real-estate speculation;
    - "Reduced accessibility of infrastructure, sites and facilities for both residents and visitors", inhibiting the regular performance of activities of both residents and visitors may not be able to reach for instance shops or work in their daily local travel;
    - "Reduction of the quality and increase in the maintenance cost for infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities specifically directed at inhabitants;
    - Rise in housing prices (rental and purchase by square metre);
    - Tourism-generated investments in tourism-specific infrastructure impair the investments in infrastructure needed by residents and the wider destination community";
- *Environmental impacts* (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Martín, Guita Martínez & Salinas Fernández, 2018; Peeters *et al*., 2018; Trancoso González, 2018; Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019; Szromek, Kruczek & Walas, 2020; Constantoglou & Thomai, 2021; Vagena, 2021)
    - Alteration of natural heritage;
    - Alteration of the environment;
    - Conflicts over zoning/land use;
    - Crowding and congestion;
    - Damage to natural sites;
    - Endangerment of environment;

- Greater use of resources (energy, land, water) per tourist;
- Increase of extreme weather events;
- Litter;
- Overcrowding at natural sites;
- Pressure on local environment (increased air pollution, noise, waste, water pollution / use);
- Traffic;
- ***Socio-cultural impacts*** (Milano, 2017; Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018; Peeters *et al*., 2018; Trancoso González, 2018; Kuščer & Mihalič, 2019; Escudero Gómez & Martínez Fernández, 2020; Szromek, Kruczek & Walas, 2020; Diaz-Parra & Jover, 2021; Vagena, 2021; Jover & Diaz-Parra, 2022):
  - Alteration of cultural heritage;
  - "Congestion of public spaces in city centres" (heavy traffic, loss of local identity, pavements, public transport, streets);
  - Damage to historical and architectural sites;
  - "Degradation of (perceived) safety due to increased crime and violence and problems related to uncivilized behaviour, alcohol usage, prostitution, gambling and drug trafficking;
  - Degradation of destination image as perceived by visitors;
  - Degradation of infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities specifically directed at residents";
  - Drug and alcohol abuse;
  - Endangerment of citizenship;
  - "Growth of cruise tourism and the consequential seasonal congestion;
  - High risk of misunderstanding, leading to varying degrees of host/visitor hostility (conflicts, protests, etc.), more pronounced with higher 'exotic' visitor shares";
  - Increased number of arrivals;
  - "Marginalisation of resident population (excessively high number of tourists per resident);
  - Modification of events, activities, and architectural and historical sites to accommodate visitors and based on commercial interest";
  - One's personal life quality;
  - Overcrowding at historical, and architectural sites;
  - "Overcrowding of infrastructure (congestion), facilities and at (commercial) activities";

- Physical touristification of city-centres (e.g., of Venice, Italy) and other often-visited areas;
- Platforms of vacation rentals;
- "Reduced accessibility of infrastructure, sites and facilities for both residents and visitors, inhibiting the regular performance of activities of both residents and visitors may not be able to reach for instance shops or work in their daily local travel;
- Relinquishment/weakening of cultural traditions, values and moral standards leading to a loss of community spirit and pride and a loss of cultural identity;
- Residents pushed out of residential areas because of accommodation platforms (less availability of housing, loss of sense of community and security);
- The character of residential areas changes in such a way that they become less suitable for residents";
- Unbalanced number of locals compared to visitors;
- Visitors' inappropriate behaviour (alcohol consumption, disturbance, loss of local identity, noise);
- Visual (aesthetic) pollution of natural or cultural landscapes.

"The most vulnerable population groups are those who manifest a stronger rejection" (Martín, Guita Martínez & Salinas Fernández, 2018):

- "Citizens with a low/medium income, who perceive rises in the prices and a change in the market focus to a larger extent";
- Tenants of apartments in city centres.

Seraphin *et al*. (2020) analysed the locals' attitude towards overtourism in their tourism destination and found that, between exploitation and exploration of a negative situation, there are four archetypes of locals – "victims, peaceful activists, vandals, and resilient locals".

2. Overtourism Management Solutions / Strategies

WTO *et al*. (2018) suggested *11 Strategies to manage visitor flows in urban destinations*: "promote the dispersal of visitors within the city and beyond; promote time-based dispersal of visitors; stimulate new itineraries and attractions; review and adapt regulation; enhance visitors' segmentation; ensure local communities benefit from tourism; create city experiences for both residents and visitors; improve city infrastructure and facilities; communicate with and engage local stakeholders; communicate with and engage visitors; set monitoring and response measures."

Benner (2019) suggested a shift from *quantitative growth* to *qualitative growth* through behaviour, institutions, organisations, and policies. García-Hernández, Ivars-Baidal & Mendoza de Miguel (2019) suggested, as response measures to overtourism pressure: "communication and integration of the local society in tourism development"; creating experiences that benefit residents and tourists; demarketing and better segmentation of demand; "dispersion of visitors in the city and its surroundings; follow-up and response measures to the evolution of the tourism activity; guaranteeing the benefits of tourism for the local community"; improvement of urban infrastructures; new tourist sites and itineraries; raising awareness among visitors; regulation of the tourist activities; and temporary dispersion of visitors. Goodwin (2019) suggested supply-side initiatives (capping arrivals by restricting cruise arrivals per day; "distributing tourism more evenly, spatially and temporally to reduce ghettos and hotspots; increasing the supply of public transport and re-routing it to reduce overcrowding and congestion and open new areas for tourism; matching supply and demand and reducing queuing by using timed ticketing and dynamic pricing; regulating licensed and unlicensed accommodation and using planning and building regulations to restrict the supply of accommodation; regulating the new disintermediated marketing and supply channels), demand-side initiatives (demarketing to deter particular market segments or reduce demand pressure; tourist taxes; use marketing and regulation to change tourist behaviour; use marketing to change the destination image and attract more compatible market segments), and managing activity in the destination (banning segways, paddling in the fountain or eating picnics on church steps; using municipal regulation to ensure that pavements are kept clear and to control parking; using planning regulations to control the location of shops and the retail offer) 'to treat' overtourism". Ivars-Baidal, García Hernández & Mendoza de Miguel (2019) suggested a few current or potential measures to improve overtourism management: de-concentration of flows, de-seasonalisation, improvement in mobility and information for users, raising awareness, regulatory measures, and research and analysis. Seraphin *et al*. (2019) warned that "*Trexit* (tourism exit) is not a sustainable solution to overtourism": it should be limited by addressing business, economic, sociological, and technological factors.

Bertocchi *et al*. (2020) suggested the use of the Tourism Carrying Capacity Model to simulate sustainable development scenarios in tourism destinations such as Venice, Italy. Kruczek & Szromek (2020) suggested the application of "a business model based on the acceptance of principles

in sustainable tourism development". Seraphin & Ivanov (2020) added one more solution: revenue management.

Calle-Vaquero, García-Hernández & Mendoza de Miguel (2021) analysed "the use of urban planning regulations as an instrument for containing tourism activity in situations of overtourism" and found imbalances between the economic and urban planning visions (e.g., in Barcelona, Spain). Vagena (2021) claimed that "avoiding overtourism requires custom-made policies in cooperation with stakeholders and policy-makers".

Majdak & Almeida (2022) suggested adopting "energy-saving projects and developing tourisms products that incorporate eco-friendly behaviours". Pérez Garrido *et al*. (2022) assessed overtourism in Budapest, Hungary, using density and intensity as indicators, and suggested using their findings to mitigate this kind of issue.

CONCLUSIONS

- Overtourism is not a novelty in tourism, but the literature dedicated to it is recent because of its dimensions in the past years.
- Overtourism has been defined as an antithesis of responsible tourism, as a complex and multidimensional issue, as an evolving phenomenon, and as a situation impacting economically, environmentally, socio-culturally and touristically both tourists and locals in tourism destinations.
- Overtourism can be identified due to its specific indicators.
- Overtourism has its own causes.
- There are special theories explaining the evolution of the anti-tourism feeling among locals in a tourism destination.
- Overtourism has both positive and negative effects on both tourists and locals in the tourism destinations.
- Overtourism negative impacts (economic, environmental, socio-cultural) are more numerous than positive ones (cultural, economic, social, tourism).
- The solutions / strategies aimed at countering overtourism make use of such theories as the *Tourism Irritation Index*, the *Tourism Carrying Capacity*, and the *Tourism Area Life Cycle*.

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