Article

The Socio-Economic Significance of Overtourism and Strategies for Mitigating Its Impact (2018–2024)

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Abstract: Tourism is now a key factor in the growth of the global and regional economy; nevertheless, the sheer acceleration in the development of tourist flows has led to the emergence of the so-called overtourism phenomenon, which causes huge socio-economic pressures on destinations. This paper analyses the socio-economic importance of overtourism and evaluates strategies designed to curb the undesirable effects of overtourism within the timeframe of 2018-2024. Although there is an already existing literature that recognizes the advantages and disadvantages of tourism, there has still been a gap regarding the systematic association between economic benefits and social costs and policy efficacy of various destinations. In order to fill this gap, the article employs a comparative and qualitative approach to analysis by synthesizing secondary data on international organizations and scholarly research and recorded case studies in Europe and Asia. The indicators of economic parameters, housing markets, infrastructure load, quality of life, and the governance responses are analyzed. The results show that despite the significant role that tourism plays in terms of GDP, employment and fiscal revenues, there is overconcentration of the visitors resulting in increased cost of living, scarcity of houses, overload of infrastructure, social conflict, and the increase in susceptibility to external shocks. The measures, in the form of regulation of short-term rentals, taxes imposed on the tourist, visitor numbers, redistribution of space and seasons, reforms in destination management, have proven to be successful at least partially, especially when combined and not used independently. The findings suggest that quality-based policies in tourism that focus on quality but not quantity can alleviate the social pressure but leave the economic value. The paper concludes that to ensure sustainable tourism development, adaptive and data-driven governance and engagement of local communities is necessary. The implications can be applied to the policymakers who wish to strike the right balance between economic gains and social welfare and long-term resiliency of destinations.

Keywords: Overtourism, Socio-Economic Impact, Sustainable Tourism, Destination Management, Tourism Policy, Urban Tourism

1. Introduction

Positive Effects of Tourism. Tourism is among the biggest industries of the world economy and a major earner to most nations. By 2024, the tourism industry is projected to contribute about 10% of world GDP (estimated at USD 10.9 trillion) and 357 million jobs in the world [1]. To most developing regions, tourism offers inflows of foreign exchange, an impetus to infrastructure development, and a job source to the related sectors (transportation, trade, making souvenirs etc.). As an illustration, in Catalonia (Spain), tourism contributes approximately 12 percent of the GDP in the region and most of the

local people recognize that the industry has economic advantages [2]. Increase in tourist demand has the potential to increase household incomes, increase the tax base locally, and fund conservation of cultural and natural heritage. In general, before the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist flows in the majority of cities and countries grew at a significant pace, and it had a positive impact on the GDP indicators and the employment levels in the short term [3].

The Overtourism Negative Socio-Economic Consequences. Unregulated increase in the tourist traffic might make tourism an issue that becomes a curse on local economies and communities. To begin with, over-tourism which is brought about by high tourism increases the inflationary pressures on the local levels. The increase in the demand of solvents by tourists contributes to the fact that the housing, goods and services offered in tourist destinations are more expensive. Rental and home ownership is no longer affordable to local residents: in Barcelona, residential property prices have grown by an average of 38 percent in the last ten years, mostly because of the transformation of apartments into short-term tourist accommodation [3]. The likes of Airbnb have encouraged property owners to turn accommodation on a short-term basis to visitors at the expense of long-term accommodation to residents and re-housing many of the city centers with residents [3][4]. The same concerns many European cities: OECD researches prove that massive inflows of tourists may lead to increased living expenses and housing prices, and gentrification of the center areas [4].

It is also important that the infrastructure and services are overloaded. Transport systems, infrastructure, and urban areas catering to the local communities are overstretched during tourist seasons. This causes congestion in the transportation system, road congestion, waiting periods and congestion in tourist attraction sites [4]. An example is that Venice was getting 30,000-40,000 day-trippers per day and its permanent population is not more than 50,000 residents on a daily basis [3]. These day tourists consume the infrastructure of the city (streets, transport, public utilities) and bring rather minimal contributions to the local economy (they do not use hotels and spend less money on food), which makes an imbalance: municipal spending on the service of visitors increases, and the revenues do not cover the wear and tear of the infrastructure [3]. This creates an invisible load on destination budgets, invisible costs to destinations of cleaning, repairing, and providing public safety, which frequently is not paid by tourist fees [4]. This causes the governments to divert funds allocated to other areas or to create new taxes and levies on the visitors to fund infrastructure.

Social Costs and Quality of Life. There are also severe social impacts on the local communities that are involved in excessive tourism. Overcrowding of visitors deteriorates the daily lives of the residents: the transit may be hard to utilize, the streets may be crowded with the noisy people, and the streets and landmarks may be turned into the not locals-place. The citizens of major urban areas are becoming more irritable and even hostile to the tourists [4]. Mass tourism can destroy the cultural identity of the historic city centers: the shops and restaurants are focused on visitors, replacing services that are important to local people, and traditional manifestations and everyday life are modified to meet the needs of tourists, losing their authenticity [4]. Some of the graffiti and slogans in the European cities include " Tours go home! " have emerged as one of the reactions of the residents to the fact that their home towns have been turned into tourist attractions.

Besides, the destinations are exposed because of the economic reliance on the tourism sector. In a situation where tourism is the main part of a regional economy, any external shocks (crises, pandemics, natural disasters) may pose a threat of a local GDP and employment collapse. This weakness was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic: in tourist destinations, like Bali, where over 50 percent of the economy is tied to tourism, travel restrictions caused gross regional product to drop by 9.3 percent in 2020 and the mass unemployment [3]. Equally, in Southeast Asia, Southern Europe, and the state of

islands there was a hemorrhage in revenues in the period 2020-2021 a sort of under-tourism shock, the consequences of the unilateral openness to tourism was revealed [3]. In this way, excessive tourism implies both local issues (high cost of living, overcrowding, degradation of environment) and strategic threats to the sustainable development of destinations.

2. Methodology

The research design to be used in the presented study is a descriptive-analytical qualitative research study to investigate the socio-economic effects of overtourism and the efficacy of mitigation strategies between 2018 and 2024. The approach relies on the systematic study of secondary data gathered in the form of international organizations, scholarly literature, policy documents, and case studies of large tourist destinations stored in the literature. Reported materials on the world and regional organizations, peer research, and government statistics available cover the contribution of tourism to the GDP, its impact on employment levels, housing sector, infrastructure strains, and social welfare. The study deploys the comparative analysis approach in revealing the similar patterns and divergences in the destinations like major European cities, island, and selected Asian tourism hubs. Special care is taken concerning policy measures that are put in place to control the high tourist numbers such as regulatory, economic, spatial and governance based measures. The paper combines theoretical frameworks of sustainable tourism, carrying capacity, and destination management in order to derive meaning to empirical findings and evaluate the policy outcomes. Triangulation of data is also used to increase the reliability through cross-validation of the information across sources and location. The study also relies on the contextual interpretation instead of quantitative modeling to learn intricate social and economic interactions that are difficult to measure in a simple statistical model. This approach of methodology enables the comprehensive perception of overtourism as a multidimensional process and helps to determine the optimal practices and restrictions in the existing management practices. The selected design suits well to generalize the experience of the world and come up with policy-related information that can be used in relation to various tourism destinations.

3. Results and Discussion

Examples of Regions Affected by "Overtourism" (2018–2024)

The issues mentioned above were experienced in many popular tourist destinations around the world in 2018-2019, when the tourism industry was at the height of its global growth before the pandemic, and in 2022-2023, when travel was coming back and revitalizing the industry. The following are some of the examples of such: corroborated by statistics in official reports and scholarly studies:

Barcelona (Spain)

Barcelo has turned into a representation of European tourist overload. Every year, it welcomes a number of about 30 million tourists to the city, and the permanent population of the city is merely 1.6 million people [2]. The sheer traffic of people has caused enormous strain in the city: house prices have shot up (by about 38% in the last decade) [3], and lots of local people simply needed to move to outskirts. Approximately fifty percent of the total number of visitors are day-trippers and cruise ship passengers who have a few hours in the city and they create congestion, garbage in the streets, but they do not add a lot to the local economy [5].

The people of Barcelona have conducted several demonstrations against mass tourism in the city and demanded measures to be imposed on the short-term rentals and the numbers of tourists. Despite the surveys that show that the general perception of 75 percent of the residents in Catalonia about tourism is largely positive in regard to income

generation, almost all the inhabitants confirm the adverse impacts of the tourism industry that encompass high costs of living, pushing out of the city center, noise and pressure on the provision of services [2]. Local authorities have had to intervene forcefully in order to address this situation (see the section below on policy measures). Barcelo is therefore a good example of how the inadequate management of tourism may cause a social tension despite economic gains.

Figure 1. Protests Against Mass Tourism in Barcelona.

Protests against mass tourism in Barcelona illustrate the social tensions that have emerged as a result of the influx of visitors (Barcelona, July 2024).

Venice (Italy)

The historic centre of Venice occupying 7.6 km2 has been found to be unable to comfortably host millions of visitors. It is estimated that nearly 30 million tourists visit Venice annually and most of them do not spend the night in the city but spend a few hours [6]. Relatively speaking, more recently the permanent population of historic Venice has dropped to less than 50,000 inhabitants [6] as the city is losing local inhabitants and increasingly becoming a museum city. Overtourism, in this case, does not only lead to the familiar congestion in St. Marks square and the narrow streets, but it also causes physical hazard to the sustainability: waves of the large number of motorboats hitting canals and building foundations cause wear and tear, pollution of the lagoons, and it makes rental accommodations around the city center practically unaffordable to the Venetians.

The issue of cruise ships has been especially sharp. Until a few years ago, thousands of visitors were transported daily on big ships in the peak of the season, which was a visual and environmental degradation of the lagoon. In turn, Italy prohibited large cruise ships to enter the historic center of Venice starting in 2019 and forcing to turn to more remote harbors. An experimental entry fee was also the first in the world to be introduced by the city authorities: tourists who do not stay overnight in the city were made to pay EUR3-5 on specific days in 2024 [3]. During the first year, this measure resulted in a budget income of about EUR2.4 million [6] but failed to cause a major decrease in tourist flows, by the spring of 2025 Venice was filled with people again [6]. However, the authorities believe that the online reservation system with online payments is a source of useful information

about the visitor dynamics and a significant management resource [6]. Venice is a great example of a situation when tourism is a threat to specific cultural heritage, and it is necessary to find a complex of solutions to avoid that the city will die of its fame.

Amsterdam (Netherlands)

Amsterdam had a population of about 850,000 people, and the city was getting approximately 18-19 million visitors every year, before the pandemic [7]. Mass youth tourism (including tourists visiting popular districts and cafes) especially impacted badly on residential neighbourhoods in the Dutch capital. The city already initiated the program City in Balance in 2018-2019, which abandoned the promotion of tourism and focused on its management. The measures they implemented were restrictions of short-term rentals through Airbnb (not more than 30 days per year) [4], a ban on new souvenir shops and hotels opening in the city center, and even a ban on guided tours made by the Red Light District (since 2020) [7]. Amsterdam also increased accommodation tax and introduced a special charge on cruise tourists who arrive on a day basis [7]. The policies were to ease the low-end mass tourism and its related nuisance to the locals. By 2020, the government has stated that the number of illegal tourist apartments has decreased slightly and the number of visitors has not grown [4]. The Netherlands implemented the strategy of Perspectief 2030 at the national level according to which the nation stopped promoting international tourism and shifted its focus to redistributing tourists to the less popular areas and off-season times [7]. The case of Amsterdam also emphasizes the role of proactive governance: the city does not want to be unattractive by sacrificing the quality of life of its residents to the incomes gained through tourism.

Santorini and Other Islands

The situation is especially susceptible to overtourism in small island destinations. Santorini is a Greek island that became famous around the world due to its picturesque landscapes, and in the 2010s the tourist base grew by 66% [8]. Even on the busiest summer days, 17,000 cruise passengers came to the island (the population of which is about 15,000), which led to transport breakdown and overcrowding of villages [9]. In 2018, local jurisdictions had implemented an 8,000 cruise tourists per-day cap in a bid to reduce inflows [8]. Nonetheless, the infrastructure (roads, water supply systems) of Santorini became overloaded, and the prices on housing were higher thanks to Airbnb rentals- some businesses had to construct dormitories to accommodate their staff who could not afford the housing in Santorini [8]. According to EU reports, unless its management is improved, Santorini will lose its appeal and become a victim of its own success [8]. The same has been experienced in other Mediterranean islands (Mykonos, Malta, the Balearic Islands), where the population is heavily outnumbered by the numbers of tourists who visit the islands during summer. To illustrate, prior to the pandemic in Malta (population 475,000), the country was receiving more than 2.7 million tourists each year, which places a huge strain on the resources [4].

Indonesia and southeast Asia: Bali

Overtourism has also had its negative impact on a number of popular resort destinations in Asia. In 2019, Bali received as many as 6.3 million international tourists as well as large volumes of domestic tourism and tourism contributed to over 50 per cent of the gross regional product of the island [3]. Together with economic prosperity this dependence resulted in overcrowded beaches, traffic congestion, waste management issues and increasing prices. The Indonesian government started to control the uncontrolled development and focused on alternative destinations, but the 2020 pandemic was the fatal impact of the tourism-related economy, and the output in the region dropped by almost 10 per cent [3].

In Thailand and Philippines, governments had to resort to extreme action. In 2018, the renowned Maya Bay beach (Phi Phi Islands, Thailand) that used to accommodate over 5,000 visitors daily was shut down due to the fact that 80 per cent of its coral reefs were

killed [10]. Only in 2022 the beach was reopened after their ecological recovery and now has a severe visitor restriction (not more than 375 people simultaneously) [11]. In 2018, the Philippine island of Boracay was also closed down in six months following an environmental crisis occasioned by over flows of tourists. These examples emphasize the fact that the ability of the environment to sustain itself is an extremely important aspect: local communities and natural environments cannot persistently support the exponential increase in the number of visiting tourists without adaptive management.

Theoretical Approaches to Managing Tourist Flows

The issue of overtourism has aroused the elaboration of a number of concepts and models of sustainable tourism management. There is broad consensus among experts that it needs a holistic solution, the solution that should consider the economic, social, and environmental aspects of tourism [4]. The main approaches and strategies of redistributing tourist flows that are discussed in the period of 2018-2024 are as follows:

Sustainable tourism models

The idea of sustainable tourism is a trend of sector development, which leaves the environment and the social fabric intact, thus providing a good relationship between gains or advantages and losses to the local population [4]. Sustainable tourism has its theoretical basis on the concept of carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change of a destination. This suggests that when there is a destination to any destination, it is possible to determine thresholds beyond which tourism starts degrading resources (natural or cultural) and worsening quality of life. Other models like the Tourism Area Life Cycle by Butler explain how a destination will evolve, starting with the emergence stage through the mass tourism to the decline stage and how early intervention is crucial to avoid saturation. According to the reports made by UNWTO (2018, 2019), sustainability cannot be considered a niche, but it should serve as the development goal of all the types of tourism, and all stakeholders should be involved in its management, which is associated with constant monitoring of the impact and the necessity to engage all stakeholders in the development management process. Therefore, the long-term sustainability-focused theoretically-based tourism master planning is a step towards going about the concept of overtourism.

Space and time load-distribution models

Among its fundamental strategies is the spreading of the tourist flows around the various destinations and seasons so that they can level the peak season. Theory and practice both offer solutions related to the decentralization of tourism: they involve creating alternative tracks and sites beyond congested centers, enhancing the development of secondary cities and the countryside, and the creation of novel theme parks or cultural neighborhoods so that pressure is not concentrated on the main attractions. The temporal differentiation is also essential and consists of promoting off-season travel, extending events and festivals in low seasons, and developing scheduled visiting systems of the well-known attractions (e.g., hourly time slots). Mckinsey and WTTC (2017) propose attracting tourists during low seasons, i.e. avoiding taking them to congested areas at the busiest periods of the day, as well as implementing online purchasing of tickets [12]. By 2019, this method was already practiced by numerous European cities: in Rome, they started to offer the online ticket option to visit the Pantheon; in Amsterdam, they started to attract tourists to book their visits to museums at the very beginning of the day or in the very end of the day; in the Cliffs of Moher, Ireland they came up with dynamic pricing, where they can offer discounts during the off-peak hours [4]. Hypothetically, space and time distribution of demand enhances capacity of the system without reducing tourist and resident experience.

Monetary tools: taxes and prices

Tourism taxation is highly considered to be a significant regulatory tool. Price signals can help the policymaker to curtail the high demand but he/she can also raise funds to pay

the external cost. This is in theory based on the principle of the visitor pays: the tourists are supposed to pay the price of using the public goods that they consume. Practicality tools encompass tourist taxes and tourist charges, which comprise accommodation (bed) taxes, resort taxes, environmental charges to entry natural parks, and urban taxes to day visitors. The previous year experience shows that such types of measures are increasingly used: in most large cities of Europe, tourist levies per night have already been introduced (in Rome, Paris, Amsterdam, and other cities, they are often several euros each per person per night). A pilot EUR5 entry fee to day visitors has been introduced in Venice as indicated above [6]. Different countries use differentiated pricing, which is increased during the peak and reduced during the off-season. According to the economic demand theory, it is possible to moderate the reduction of the flows by increasing the cost of visiting the most visited destinations (by the product price of tickets or taxes) so that the most price-sensitive tourists are deterred [4]. Moreover, the generated revenues are usually used in infrastructural and environmental development. The International Visitor Levy, which is an example of such a tax but was introduced in 2019 by New Zealand (around USD 35 per incoming foreign tourist), was used to fund tourism growth and the preservation of nature. Access fees are controversial yet efficient: they internalize negative externalities (i.e. wear and pollution of infrastructure) by converting them into financial liability of visitors.

Reducing the number of visitors

A more focused solution is administrative restrictions of the number of tourists. They can take the form of quotas to visit very popular locations, daily limitations, or pre-obligatory permits. This is often used to preserve natural sites: since the Galapagos Islands and U.S. national parks historically limited their visitors daily, and Peru has established maximum daily capacities on the Inca Trail and Machu Picchu (2,500-4,000 tourists per day, divided into shifts). Quota systems are more complicated in urban tourism, but there are a few cases where they have been used: the authorities of the city of Dubrovnik (Croatia), based on the recommendations of UNESCO, restricted the number of tourists in the historic center at any given moment so that the monitoring systems were installed at the gates of the city. Cruise tourism regulation can also be viewed as a quota management as the case of Santorini which has a daily limit of 8,000 cruise tourists [8]. Theoretically, restrictive limits represent last resort, used when other tools have been exhausted and where permanent destruction or degradation of heritage or status is in danger. This was implemented on Thai and Philippine islands which were shut down temporarily to enable ecosystem to heal. According to the experts, visitor caps are eco-friendly but might be opposed by businesses and have to be strictly implemented. However, the idea of limits to growth gains the centre stage: it prioritises the conservation of destinations despite the loss of the seasonal tourist incomes.

Management of destinations and community

The schools of thought highlight the significance of the overall management of the destination instead of the conventional destination marketing. This means that the local government, business and residents are able to plan tourism development collectively in a common strategic vision and communal interests. The main factors are the formation of destination management bodies (DMOs), the control of pressure indicators, land use management and control over real estate, and investment in infrastructure in advance before it becomes overloaded. The term smart tourism implies that data (telecommunications, payments, sensors) is used to monitor flows in real time and allow to manage them in real time (such as redirecting tourists in case of congestion). Education is also mentioned as a crucial one: creating respect towards the local modes of life in the visitors and developing the tourism-related skills in the residents. To make tourism inclusive and equitable, UNWTO suggests participatory governance, which involves locals in the decision-making process and the equitable distribution of benefits

(employment of locals, promotion of small business) among others (UNWTO 14). Another concept that is being propagated by scholars is that of quality or responsible tourism rather than volume expansion. This is aimed at attracting more valuable tourists, the ones that value the local culture, those that spend more in the local economy and have lesser adverse effects. The ability to reposition the marketing discourse as a shift between more tourists and better tourists is one of the main characteristics of modern approaches (as observed in Barcelona and the Netherlands) [7][2]. On the whole, destination management attempts to mediate interests: contributing to the protection of the rights of the residents, to the safeguarding of heritage, and to the maintenance of economic gains of tourism. In 2018-2024, theory and practice are more oriented to the trend of abandoning the increase in the number of visitors in favor of the controlled and responsible development of tourism.

Measures to Reduce Tourism Pressure (2018–2024) and Assessment of Their Effectiveness

As a measure to counter the challenges of excessive tourism, a broad portfolio of measures to reduce its adverse effects was experimented across the world during 2018-24. The key categories of measures taken both at the global and local levels, along with examples and initial results are shown below:

Limitations on temporary residential property rentals

Several cities enacted stringent measures against such websites like Airbnb in the bid to bring back housing to the locals and reduce the prices. In 2017-2018, Barcelona increased its checks and requested that 2,500 illegal tourist apartments be taken off the platform [4]; and in 2023, it declared that by 2028 it would prohibit the rental of tourist apartments altogether [3][2]. Amsterdam was progressively lowering the annual cap on rental since 2014 (starting with 60 days per year, to 30 days in 2019) [4], and certain districts had placed a complete ban on new licenses. Paris, London and San Francisco restricted the short-term rentals to 90-120 days annually [4]. These steps led to a mixed result: the supply of tourist accommodation grew more slowly, in those cities where registration and a 180-day limit were established in 2018, such as Tokyo, the Airbnb listing dropped significantly, and thousands of apartments returned to the long-term rental market [4]. Nevertheless, an entire prohibition, which is to be introduced in Barcelona, is a controversial one: it would make some tourist segments less attractive as a destination and deny owners of small properties income. However the city has been strongly dedicated towards the recovery of residential role of its center [3].

Raises in tourist taxes and charges

There was the prevalence of financial instruments in limiting tourist inflows and to offset the associated expenses. Amsterdam was made one of the most taxed cities: besides a 7% accommodation tax, it also added a fixed EUR3 per capita and per night in 2020, and an EUR8 levy on each cruise taking on or off in the city [7]. The city of Venice introduced a pilot EUR5 day visitor fee in 2024, which was introduced through online reservation following a long discussion [6]. Within the first few months, the scheme earned millions of euros in turnover without discouraging the majority of tourists hence is seen as more of a source to fund city upkeep and a visitor tracking device [6]. Bali intends to impose a tax on tourism of IDR 50,000 (or approximately USD 3.5) starting 2024 to fund environmental initiatives, and Thailand passed a 300-baht (or approximately USD 9) entry fee to foreigners in 2022 to fund tourism infrastructure. In general, small taxes have not proven so effective: these sums of money are hardly going to decrease the number of visitors, and tourists are often ready to pay such, however, they give budgetary funds to better management. The more assertive course of action includes increasing the prices of major attractions. As an example, Bhutan has long levied a high daily charge (up to USD 250) on tourists, low in number and exclusivity, which in 2022 has had to impose more rigidly on tourist numbers, introducing an additional USD 200 per day fee as it opens its borders to tourism after the pandemic. The case shows that price barriers can be effective in limiting

mass tourism however does not apply to all destinations since it is a premium market approach.

Restricting quota and tourist flows.

Administrative constraints were also used in association with the use of pricing mechanisms. Since the year 2021, Italy has permanently prohibited large cruise vessels to enter the historic center of Venice and removed 2,000-3,000 passengers per ship daily. Santorini (Greece), since 2018 has limited cruise arrivals to 8,000 passengers per day [8], although it has been difficult to enforce. In Peru, Machu Picchu presented a system of three slots and guided tours to regulate the number of visitors entering the citadel at any time, to a maximum of 4,000 visitors daily in total [13]. Large museums (the Louvre, the Sistine Chapel, and many others) introduced an obligatory timed online reservation system that practically limited the number of visitors per hour and day. After the ecological recovery of Maya Bay, Thailand is planning a long-term capacity of about 2,000 visitors per day (out of over 5,000 in the past) [11], which will be closed again in case the indicators of degradation recur. These direct numerical boundaries have been effective impacts on the environment because of the pressure in the environment and the environmental quality. In economic terms, however, they mean the lost revenue and must be justified and strictly followed. Another problem with restricted access is that of fairness, including deciding on priority criteria (first-come-first-served, readiness to pay more, organized groups versus individual travelers). Nevertheless, quotas are an effective means of preserving overstressed sites and are bound to be extended in the future.

Time and space reallocation of tourists

A large number of destinations put into practice pragmatic projects which were aimed at putting the theory of dispersing tourist flows into practice. In 2019, the Netherlands changed its path off the slogan "Visit Holland" to a strategy of spreading and guiding tourists [7]. The lesser known provinces, small towns and themed routes are being marketed by the national tourism board (NBTC) (e.g. Van Gogh-related itineraries beyond Amsterdam). The same strategy was taken by Japan, which initiated programs on top of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics to stimulate travel outside the Tokyo-Kyoto Golden Route, with transport discounts and promotion of non-destinations. The policy of broadening the geography and calendar of tourism, which stimulated exploration of other geographic areas and not only during the summer season, was also adopted in Barcelona after the pandemic [2]. Tourism on the year round has been encouraged in Catalonia and Paris with special events in winter so that there are no seasonal peaks. Another example is Ireland, which in order to alleviate the congestion at popular tourist attractions like the Cliffs of Moher, has launched shuttle services and off-peak deals where tourists are encouraged to visit the areas at other times of the day and extend their stay in small towns [4]. The positive impacts of redistribution measures are hard to measure in the short term, but research indicates that it alleviates the issue of congestion in the locality. Research shows that carefully crafted information campaigns and incentives can shift a major portion of the visitors; an example is that Iceland boosted the number of people staying outside of Reykjavik by using specific discount programs. However, the patterns of traveling that are deeply rooted are hard to alter. Demand dispersion is time-consuming, coordinated, and a long-term effort, but it is often seen as one of the very brightest strategies of harmonization between tourism and local development.

The "quality over quantity" policy

A recent shift in tourism management shows that destinations are moving away from simply boosting visitor numbers and instead focusing on the overall value tourists bring to both the economy and local communities. For example, Barcelona has officially replaced its promotional slogan "Visit Barcelona" with "This is Barcelona," signaling a move away from mass tourism. The city now aims to attract what it calls "higher-quality" tourists—those who tend to spend more money and show greater respect for the local

culture and environment. To support this new direction, Barcelona has taken steps like promoting business and event tourism (such as conferences and sporting events) during off-peak seasons, limiting budget-friendly group activities like pub crawls, and encouraging family-friendly and cultural experiences instead of party-centric tourism. Amsterdam made a similar statement in 2018 by removing its famous "I amsterdam" sign, which had become a hotspot for selfie-seeking tourists. This symbolic action reflected a broader shift toward promoting more thoughtful and meaningful travel. Countries that rely heavily on tourism, like Thailand, have also announced plans to focus on attracting fewer—but wealthier—travelers in the post-pandemic era. The goal is to ease pressure on natural and urban resources while still maintaining economic benefits. Still, experts remain cautious. They warn that terms like "quality tourism" could be used as a cover for unchecked growth with little actual change. However, early signs are promising. In 2023, Barcelona saw fewer visitors compared to pre-pandemic times, but those who did visit spent more, leading to a rise in luxury tourism sectors such as high-end hotels and gourmet dining. This approach shows that focusing on value over volume can help reduce crowding and social strain while still supporting the local economy.

Discussion

Researchers, international organisations, and local governments have been paying close attention to overtourism from 2018 to 2024. This shows that people are starting to understand that tourism can have both positive and negative effects on development. Tourism is a strong driver of job growth, economic growth, and tax revenue generation. On the other hand, the large number of tourists in one place at one time creates a lot of negative externalities that make it harder for destinations to stay open in the long run. These include rising costs of living and housing that is becoming less affordable for residents, overloading of infrastructure and public services, worsening social tensions, and making local economies more vulnerable to shocks from outside. The increasing awareness of these costs has led to a reevaluation of tourism-driven development models and catalysed a transition towards governance frameworks based on sustainability principles.

A comparative analysis of international experiences reveals that there is no singular, universally applicable solution to overtourism; instead, effective responses necessitate a context-specific amalgamation of policy instruments customised to the unique attributes of each destination [4]. By 2024, a fairly consistent set of strategies had developed in both academic discussions and policy implementation. Some of these are rules (like limits on the number of visitors, quotas, and bans on short-term rentals), economic tools (like tourist taxes, fees, and different prices), moving visitors around in space and time, and long-term strategic planning with real input from local communities. International organisations, such as the UNWTO, OECD, and World Bank, have consistently stressed the necessity of recognising, quantifying, and incorporating tourism-related externalities in cost-benefit analyses of sectoral development [4].[15]. Adding environmental damage, wear and tear on infrastructure, and social costs to economic assessments makes the case for regulatory action stronger from both an empirical and political point of view. For example, when environmental damage is measured as a percentage of GDP, arguments for limiting tourism growth become stronger [15].

The evidence also shows that these measures only work if they are constantly monitored and the government is flexible. Tourism is a very dynamic industry. After the sharp drop in 2020–2021, demand quickly and unevenly rose again, often going above pre-pandemic levels in popular places. Case studies of Venice, Barcelona, and Amsterdam illustrate that governance models solely aimed at maximising tourist arrivals have encountered structural limitations. Emerging practice increasingly endorses a paradigm wherein destination success is evaluated not merely by visitor numbers, but by the quality of economic, social, and environmental outcomes produced by tourism [4].

From this point of view, the strategic goal is to change tourism from a source of systemic pressure to a driver of sustainable development. This means encouraging a balanced coexistence between tourists and locals, protecting natural and cultural resources, and making sure that benefits are shared more fairly. The years 2018 to 2024 show that the best results come from using regulatory, economic, and managerial tools together in a flexible governance framework. In the end, the only way for destinations to avoid the overtourism trap and follow a truly sustainable development path is to find a balance between economic incentives and social and environmental limits [4][14].

4. Conclusion

This study shows that overtourism from 2018 to 2024 is a structural problem for modern tourism development because of the conflict between tourism's big economic benefits and its rising social, environmental, and infrastructural costs. The results show that tourism is still a big part of GDP, jobs, and government revenue, but too many tourists can make housing less affordable, put more strain on infrastructure and public services, raise social tensions, and make a destination more vulnerable to outside shocks. International case studies show that mitigation measures like regulating short-term rentals, tourist taxes, visitor caps, spatial and seasonal redistribution, and destination management reforms work best when they are used together and in a flexible way, rather than on their own. Strategies that prioritise "quality over quantity" of tourism have the potential to reduce social pressure while maintaining economic value. This suggests a change in how we should measure the success of a destination. Policymakers need to make decisions based on data, take into account the effects of their actions on others, and get local communities involved in a meaningful way in order to balance economic growth with social welfare and environmental limits. The study simultaneously underscores the necessity for additional research, specifically quantitative evaluations of long-term policy effects, comparative analyses of governance models across regions, and more profound investigations into social equity outcomes for residents. Future research should investigate the influence of digital technologies and real-time data on the efficient management of tourist flows, thereby facilitating resilient and sustainable destination development.

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