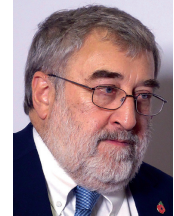# Overtourism: Causes, Symptoms and Treatment

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Harold Goodwin (haroldgoodwin.info), Leiter Responsible Tourism im Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University, ist einer der weltweit führenden Wissenschaftler, die sich mit verantwortungsvollem Tourismus auseinandersetzen. Er ist unter anderem Director of the Responsible Tourism Partnership, Gründungspräsident des Internationalen Zentrums für Responsible Tourism (2002) und Berater des World Travel Market (WTM) in London, Kapstadt, Dubai und Sao Paulo für diesen Bereich. Neben vielen weiteren Funktionen ist er Mitglied der IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas. Exklusiv für TourismusWissen-quarterly hat Goodwin, der bereits mehrfach in TourismusWissen - quarterly veröffentlichten Arbeiten zitiert wurde, diese Arbeit erstellt, die wir selbstverständlich in der englischen Originalfassung belassen.

Overtourism describes destinations where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the quality of life in the area or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably. It is the opposite of responsible tourism which is about using tourism to make better places to live in and better places to visit. Often both visitors and guests experience the deterioration concurrently and rebel against it. (i)

First used on twitter as #overtourism back in August 2012 the word is widely used, from the perspective of hosts and guests, as it conveys their sense that the quality of the residents' life or the visitor experience has declined; often both occur concurrently.

The meaning of the word is clear without definition, tourists and residents use the word because it so eloquently conveys what they feel. The first academic usage appears to be in 2008 in the Integrated Coastal Zone Management literature where there is a conceptual echo of overfishing. (ii)

Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) (iii) recognised that destinations are discovered and then developed, and that, as tourism peaks, consolidation and stagnation ensue unless managed well. There is an extensive literature on carrying capacity in protected areas management and in the nineteen-nineties Boissevain; Tyler, Guerrier, & Robertson, and Bosselman, Peterson, & McCarthy were writing about coping with mass tourism primarily in cities (iv). The word overtourism has entered the Oxford English Dictionary having been shortlisted for its 2018 Word of the Year. In tourism, it was, and is, the word of the year. Euphemisms like „coping with success" will not crush it. Overtourism is here to stay.

Causes

Overtourism is the antithesis of Responsible Tourism; it is the consequence of paying little more than lip service to sustainability and assuming that there are no limits to growth. It was in 1972 that the landmark Club of Rome report was published on The Limits to Growth. (v)

Work by Turner in 2008 (vi) comparing their forecasts with what happened in the next thirty years found that they were remarkably accurate. In 2005 Hirsch published on the Social Limits to Growth. (vii)

Overtourism is but one example of what happens when more and more seek to consume a common resource, particularly when that resource is a finite common property resource, many honeypot destinations are just that. Only so many people can be packed into Venice or the Ramblas in Barcelona, there are limits to growth. There are multiple causes of overtourism.

1. There is a high propensity to consume travel, to experience other peoples' places, amongst the emerging middle classes – overtourism is not only a European phenomenon. It extends to Asia and many developing countries.

2. The low cost of travel – the rise of the budget airlines and cheap coach travel have all made it easier for people to pay the price of the journey. Where holiday time and holiday pay are constraints, more people are taking city breaks, often multiple short haul flights each year. Flights are very frequently cheaper than rail because aircraft fuel is untaxed and the polluter is not paying for the environmental impacts of greenhouse gas emissions.

3. Disintermediation and P2P platforms are creating problems in the housing market, forcing up rents, displacing those on low incomes and creating disturbance in residential neighbourhoods. Airbnb and similar portals have made it easier to find affordable accommodation enabling more people to travel. Often that accommodation is in more residential neighbourhoods; they are in much closer proximity to residents.

4. The public realm is free – tourists do not pay for their trophy photo in Trafalgar Square or St Marks, maintenance and repair costs have to be met by local taxpayers.

5. Ironically, efforts to disperse tourism pressure, distribution strategies, initiatives to spread tourists to less-visited residential neighbourhoods increase tourism impacts adjacent to peoples' homes. Crowding, queuing and congestion impact residents. Many European cities are experiencing alien binge drinking and hen and stag parties.

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6. Seasonality bunches tourism and concentrates numbers – but then there is a quieter season which suits some destinations and individual businesses. Extending the season is seen as desirable for some businesses but not for all, for businesses and communities alike there is no respite.

7. Tourism industry businesses and trade associations assert the economic importance of tourism and point to the large numbers employed in the industry. However, tourism and hospitality jobs are often relatively low paid and seen as temporary, casual, insecure and without prospects.

8. Honeypots are difficult to demarket. Tourists are motivated to travel to see the sights and to collect the selfie. The destination marketers rewarded for their success in securing arrivals use the honeypot attractions to achieve their targets.

9. Transport is larger in scale than it was ten years ago. Aircraft, coaches, trains and cruise liners deposit more passengers with each arrival, and they arrive more often. It is very difficult for destinations to impede these flows; national authorities with different priorities manage the facilities, they are independent of control by the local authority or national park. There is usually more opportunity to control cars through local congestion charging and parking restrictions.

Destinations are common, public goods; they are victims of Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons. (viii) The consumption of public goods is non-rival; someone else enjoying the good does not prevent me using it too. The arrival of 15 coaches carrying tourists at the top of La Rambla does not preclude my being there too, but it may ruin or degrade my experience.

The second characteristic of a public good is that it is non-excludable unless a local authority decides to gate the public realm space charge for admission as has been trialled in Venice.

The visitors and tour companies are free riders; they can use the resource or sell it as part of an itinerary for free. Piazza San Marco is not infini-

te, it has a finite carrying capacity, in larger numbers tourists „deplete the resource". As Davidson and Maitland put it "views are spoilt, picturesque village streets become crowded with people and tour buses, peace-and-quiet becomes noise and bustle."

Symptoms

Overtourism is simple in a fundamental sense. It describes a situation where residents or guests, locals or tourists feel that the character of the experience of the place and the place itself has been degraded by too many tourists. Doxey's irridex (x) described the different stages of the hosts' attitude to visitors moving from euphoria, through apathy and annoyance to antagonism. This is obviously an oversimplification. Different people in different parts of places and with different forms of engagement with tourism experience the impacts of tourism differently and move through the stages at different paces. The irridex did not provide sufficient means of understanding the views of the residents as a whole. Relatively few destinations regularly survey residents to ascertain their views.

Tourists, too, will have different perspectives on whether or not a place is suffering from overtourism. Nationality and cultural backgrounds are significant influential factors in determining perceived crowding. (xi) In general, people's tolerance of crowding is specific to the context. We expect markets to buzz and be busy. Some beaches are enjoyed because the crowds on them are part of the experience, others are abandoned because they are spoiled when a tipping point is reached, and a lively beach becomes overcrowded and then, overtouristed. But tipping points vary from place to place and between individuals.

There is also a ratchet effect: our concept of overtourism, like crowding, is relative. If we have no memory of standing with a small group in Old Town Square in Prague to watch the Astronomical Clock on a winter night, we do not miss that experience. The crowds, common today, are accepted as the norm, the tourists become the experience. In Barcelona, Barceloneta, La Rambla and other honeypots are increasingly described as "no-go zones for residents" (xii) – places with a thin veneer of local culture, tourist places devoid of any authenticity other than that of the tourists.

As with Responsible Tourism, the issues arising from overtourism vary from place to place. None of the issues is new, most of the negative impacts were listed in Mathieson and Wall back in 1982. (xiii)

Back in 2005, Archer, Cooper and Ruhanen could credibly express the opinion that the question of whether tourism was a "blessing or blight" was "now essentially academic, given the value of tourism as the world's largest industry…".(xiv) This was the prevailing view amongst destination managers and academics until those "rebellious tourists and rebellious locals" (xv).

The case for addressing the challenge of ensuring that tourism is sustainable emerged in the late nineteen eighties (xvi) and there have been many conferences, reports, policy documents and academic papers – but little action. As with Responsible Tourism, the issues vary from place to place and it is important to focus on what matters locally and can be addressed locally.

For example, in Barcelona overtourism is to a significant extent a consequence of the ease of arriving in the city by plane, sea, rail or road. The city authorities are not able to manage arrivals through the port, airport or railway station. All of these points of entry are managed for growth by organisations over which the city has no control and very little influence. Barcelona is better able to manage arrivals by road once the traffic arrives within the city boundary through parking and route management. As in other city destinations, Barcelona's management of tourism in the city is limited by the presence to the southwest of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, a major densely populated city which functions as an urban extension of Barcelona but with a separate administration.

Tourism is what we make it, Barcelona and Venice do not inevitably have to be dominated by tourism, victims of mass tourism. Increasingly, residents are raising the issues and it is moving up the political agenda in the city governments. What can be done to manage tourism so that it does not overwhelm the cities – Venice, Barcelona, Paris, London, New York City, Prague, Berlin, Rome – where the sheer mass of tourism is beginning to be seen as a problem. In rural areas, there are similar pressures with trampling and litter, congestion and pressure on housing availability for residents caused by holiday letting, second home ownership and inward migration by retirees.

Treatment

There is little that a destination can do to deter travel by increasing taxation on air travel, however, they can think carefully about the incentives they may give to budget carriers. Tourism is a social activity which can be managed in the destination but generally is not. Effective management requires objectives and agency.

The dominant objective is international arrivals because national governments have a major interest in foreign currency earnings and because it is easier to count these at immigration. This is the wrong metric for sustainability. Businesses at the destination level are generally as interested in domestic tourists as international ones.

From a local economy perspective length of stay, bed occupancy and yield are the metrics that matter most. For residents attracting tourists who "fit in" matters. Since 2004, Barcelona has sought to make tourist activities more sustainable, to increase the positive impacts of tourism in the city and to integrate visitors fostering coexistence, Barcelona aspires to treat visitors as temporary residents. The city is working to ensure that there are no tourist ghettos and that tourism contributes to the improvement of the quality of life and social cohesion in Barcelona. (xvii)

> **We can make tourism better and counter overtourism but there are limits to growth.**

In many places, there is confusion about the roles of DMOs. The same acronym is used for both Destination Management Organisations and Destination Marketing Organisations with bodies composed primarily of private sector representatives spending private sector and public money on destination promotion. In Barcelona, the management of tourism is now unequivocally the responsibility of the city council. It is significant that the "objectives and strategic lines" of Turisme de Barcelona, the public-private partnership organisation which markets the city include public policy objectives. (xviii)

The effective management of tourism in destinations can only be dealt with by local authorities, although changes in national legislation may be re-quired to provide local powers. New business models, for example, Airbnb and Uber, often emerge rapidly benefitting from an unregulated and lightly regulated environment. Government has to evolve and implement a regulatory response, and that takes time. Regulatory lag is a significant challenge in addressing overtourism. Generally, the local government has not seen the problem coming. There are two dimensions to the problem: the local government department or agency may not regard managing tourism as its responsibility or it may not have the powers and resources to do so.

There are many examples of management interventions which are being tried in places experiencing, or preparing for the challenge of overtourism. There is a directory developing on the Responsible Tourism Partnership website; more detail and links can be found there; further contributions are welcome. (xix)

The links and references for the management interventions listed here are on responsibletourism-partnership.org/solutions/.

Effective management requires reliable shared information about tourism, its scale and impacts. Only with good data is it possible to identify benefits and costs and develop management strategies to ensure that it is sustainable. Barcelona surveys its residents regularly to determine their views about tourism and other problems in the city and it publishes monthly forecasts of volumes of visitor numbers for each day, enabling locals to avoid the most heavily congested days in the city.

Supply-side Initiatives

» 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.
» Distributing tourism more evenly, spatially and temporally to reduce ghettos and hotspots
» Increasing the supply of public transport and rerouting 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.
» Arrivals in Dubrovnik have been capped by restricting cruise arrivals to two per day.

Demand-side Initiatives

» Demarketing to deter particular market segments or reduce demand pressure.
» Use marketing to change the destination image and attract more compatible market segments.
» Use marketing and regulation to change tourist behaviour.
» Tourist taxes

Managing activity in the destination

» Using municipal regulation to ensure that pavements are kept clear and to control parking.
» Banning segways, paddling in the fountain or eating picnics on church steps.
» Using planning regulations to control the location of shops and the retail offer.

Tourism is a social phenomenon although it has some serious environmental impacts. Tourism is what we make it: hosts and guests, the industry and government, we can make it different. We can make it better and counter overtourism but there are limits to growth. ∎

Notes

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(xviii) ibid
(xix) https://responsibletourismpartnership.org/solutions/