29

OVERTOURISM IN COMMUNITIES

Günay Erol and Ebru Düşmezkalender

29.1 The overtourism concept

Tourism is considered a topic that has come to the forefront with changing trends, diversity, new social practices and sometimes conflicts among stakeholders all over the world. Especially in the last 50 years, the increase in the number of tourists, tourism incomes and investments has grown considerably on a global level, with efforts spent on the development of destinations. Throughout this period, the world population has increased by 148% while the number of people traveling has increased by 5192% (Milano, Cheer and Novelli, 2019). Today, the number of people traveling around the world has reached 1.4 billion (UNWTO, 2019) and it is predicted that 1.8 billion people will participate in international tourism mobility by 2030 (UNWTO, 2017). The development in tourism and the rapidly growing number of visitors, driven by individuals’ growing desire for travel, has led to this development being a subject of discussion. The impacts of the increasing number of tourist visits on destinations, tourists and other variables and stakeholders has been a matter of discussion for a long while, as well. Thus, the increases and overcrowding driven by tourism continue to raise some concerns, particularly in the context of destinations (Milano, Novelli and Cheer, 2019). Excess carrying capacity, an extensive increase in the number of visitors and overcrowding in tourism destinations and their consequences have stimulated the emergence of the overtourism concept. Overtourism is defined by Milano, Cheer and Novelli (2018) as “the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have caused permanent changes to their lifestyles, denied access to amenities and damaged their general well-being”.

The word “overtourism” has comes to the forefront as a new concept in our day and age. For this reason, it does not exist in the most important dictionaries in the world. For instance, the Oxford English Dictionary (2019) does not include the word. In the Collins Dictionary (2019), overtourism is suggested as a new word and defined as “the phenomenon of a popular destination or sight becoming overrun with tourists in an unsustainable way”. On the other hand, the Macmillan crowdsourced Open Dictionary (2019) defines overtourism as “a situation where the number of tourists visiting a place causes significant problems”. It is also indicated that overtourism is a new word and thus should be included in dictionaries and that it is among the most popular words searched on Google, especially after
2018 (Dickinson, 2018). On the other hand, until 2016, the term overtourism was hardly searched, especially on Google. It became one of the most popular words in 2018 and 2019 (Google Trends, 2019). First attempts to define overtourism were realized by Ali (2016). In his definition, overtourism is expressed as “a potential hazard to popular destinations worldwide, as the dynamic forces that power tourism often inflect unavoidable negative consequences if not managed well. In some countries, this can lead to a decline in tourism as a sustainable framework is never put into place for coping with the economic, environmental, and sociocultural effects of tourism. The impact on local residents cannot be understated either”. Ali considers overtourism a threat, especially to popular destinations, and suggests that the actors directing tourism mobility should put sustainable policies into practice. Otherwise, the negative effects of tourism mobility on destinations may harm local residents, environments, tourist attractions, social structures and other variables.

Tourism mobility that cannot be managed in a sustainable and adequate manner causes some damages to and setbacks in destinations, and, thus, tourism is sometimes considered an undesirable phenomenon. Although the negative effects of tourism mobility on the local population in the destination and the anti-tourism movement have been on the agenda for a long time (Routledge, 2001), the problem escalated considerably towards the end of 2010, especially in major destinations in Europe (Coldwell, 2017). In this case, the excessive increase in the number of tourists adversely affected the life of the local residents, the cultural and physical heritage of destinations, environmental sustainability, local economy and local stakeholders. Therefore, residents focus on the damages rather than the gains of tourism and assume a more defensive attitude (Seraphin, Sheeran and Pilato, 2018). Overtourism is considered a concept that questions, under the same umbrella, residents’ quality of life and the quality of tourism mobility in the destinations, characterized by an excessive tourist population (Goodwin, 2017). As a result, overtourism brings to the forefront the fact that tourism mobility should be realized in more responsible and sustainable way.

Overtourism is generally perceived as a negative concept. This idea, whose definition has been attempted for a very short while, is related to the number of tourists, the type and duration of the visits paid by tourists and the carrying capacity of the destination. From this point of view, overtourism is a matter of interest to many stakeholders, such as enterprises, tourists and local residents in the destination. Overtourism is seen as a situation where the impact of tourism exceeds the limits of physical (e.g., infrastructure, area), ecological (e.g., noise, pollution, consumption), social (e.g., residents, guests, citizens), economic (e.g., commercial tourism areas), psychological (e.g., local community, other visitors) or political (e.g., failure to manage problems resulting from tourism development and jeopardizing the residents’ quality of life) capacity at certain times and in certain places (European Parliament, 2018). These limits are generally challenged by an excessive increase in the number of visitors in destinations. The excessive number of visitors inevitably forces not only people who are involved in tourism activities but also those who reside in tourism destinations to cope with this problem.

29.2 Causes and effects of overtourism and preventive measures

There are some reasons underlying the emergence of overtourism in destinations. In many studies, it has been revealed that the increase in the number of tourists driven by tourism development may affect a wide range of variables in destinations. Specific variables may cause overtourism, which ignites a number of effects on local residents, tourists, enterprises and other stakeholders. The causes and effects of overtourism in destinations have been discussed
Overtourism in communities

in several studies (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Goodwin, 2017; Jordan, Pastras and Psarros, 2018; Milano 2017). The causes and effects in question are listed below.

**Increase in international tourism mobility:** The increase in total number of people travelling all over the world results in more travels by more people. In addition, travel has become a priority activity for people. In this case, the excessive growth of visitors in certain destinations overruns the population of local residents and this distorted balance brings along negative effects. In fact, some destinations even take measures to stop tourist arrivals due to concerns driven by overtourism (Seraphin et al., 2019).

**Decrease in travel costs:** The increase in the number of discounted and low-cost airlines and bus companies helps people cover their travel expenses. Thus, economically affordable travel becomes accessible. The increase in number of short-haul flights, no extra charges on customers for environmental impacts of aircraft fuels or particular tax exemptions render flights much cheaper than travelling by other transportation vehicles such as trains. Particularly, time and budgetary limitations for vacations can be overcome thanks to such amenities, and people find more opportunities to go on short vacations. It is reported that airline ticket prices have dropped 50% in the last 50 years, covering the period until 2013 (Thompson, 2013). However, the increase in the number of low-cost airlines today has brought along some problems and restrictions, as well as over-intensity (de Wit and Zuidberg, 2012).

**Elimination of intermediaries:** P2P channels or websites create problems in the household market, raise rental prices of homes and cause discomfort in the areas where local residents reside. Online platforms such as Airbnb allow people to find accommodation for more affordable prices and pave the way for more people to go on a vacation. As of 2020, Airbnb has 2.9 million hosts and books 800,000 overnight stays per day, and it incorporates 14,000 new hosts every month (Airbnb, 2020). This situation not only contributes the accommodation market economically but also allows the community to participate in tourism activities and is beneficial for the accommodation of people on a limited budget. On the other hand, it may also cause some casualties (Guttentag and Smith, 2017; Lalicic and Weismeyer, 2018). Household owners also rent out their private properties to tourists. As a result, the property of the local residents gains value and their income levels increase. Tourists become much closer to local residents and this affects the occupancy rate and the prices of the hotels in the region. On the other hand, the rental and sale prices of the houses in destinations may increase and impose a negative impact on the budget of residents. Thus, increased prices lead to a decrease in the purchasing power of local residents.

**Free public spaces:** In destinations, tourists can visit and take photographs without any charges in some public places where significant attractions are located; however, the maintenance and protection costs of these public spaces are covered by the taxes paid by local residents. In this case, the local community is faced with higher costs resulting from the intensity of tourism. This situation also brings about overcrowding especially in public spaces in city centres. As a result of urbanization and a growing population, public spaces in cities may suffer from spatial pressure. In this case, as highlighted by Hospers (2019), public spaces in the city are used by lots of people and, as a result, local residents may have to pay for the costs of infrastructure, pollution and other burdens arising from overcrowding.

**Distribution strategies:** Directing tourists to less-visited places in the destination and bringing them closer to the resident places of local community increases the impact of tourism on the region. Both tourists and residents may suffer from crowds and throngs. Individuals who come to the destination for the first time surely would like to visit the must-see places, and those who have the intention of revisiting places may impose a negative impact on the volume of the crowd. In addition, the popular attractions in destinations will suffer from
overcrowding, while the less common ones will be brought closer to this threat. As a result, both the travel quality of the tourists and the quality of life of the residents in the region might be negatively affected. Furthermore, such developments may lead to a decrease in the sustainability of tourist attractions, and historical and natural assets may be damaged.

Consequences of the behaviour of local administrations or P2P rental practices: Many European cities experience very different and unfamiliar parties, excessive drinking and other effects. It is believed that the spread of foreign practices and their effects on the local community may result from the practices of local administrations and online rental practices. Thus, the local residents encountering foreign cultures and the loss of spiritual values could be included in the negative effects in question. Also, local people may be disturbed by certain tourist behaviours. Moreover, there are practices that encourage holding tourists who do act inappropriately and do not respect the living style of local residents, making them liable to pay a certain fine or even banning them from visiting the city (Turner, 2019).

Seasonality: Seasonality increases the intensity of tourism activities. For some destinations and enterprises, the low season is more suitable. Prolonging the season in tourist destinations seems to be desirable for enterprises. Nevertheless, it does not work for all tourism stakeholders. This intensity may have a negative impact on the quality of the service and on the benefit that the local people derive from the presence of enterprises in the destination. In addition, local authorities charge extra taxes from tourists visiting the destination and may adopt a tariff system that is low in low season and high in peak seasons (Turner, 2019).

Cheap and inefficient employment: The tourism industry provides various employment opportunities, but these are generally considered to be low-paid, temporary, insecure and unpromising. A low-cost labour force may be a positive thing for some enterprises. However, insecure employment is not a positive development for local residents.

Emergence of new market segments: A significant number of new markets are emerging as a result of additional tourists traveling in and out of the country. The improvement in living standards, the developments in human rights and the increase in the durations of vacations have rendered travel much easier. Thus, this market, which is formed by new middle-class and rich people, has a high potential for travel.

Destination attractiveness: Successfully marketed and established destinations that attract more tourist attention can increase the travel potential of people. Familiarity of the destination, the attractions it embodies and the impact of attractions on people are of great importance. In particular, destinations that attract great attention from tourists may suddenly face an unplanned and disproportionate number of tourists, and this may cause the reaction of local people (Insch, 2019).

Destination-marketing organizations: Destination marketing can be carried out by both private and public institutions. These organizations market specific, authentic and well-known attractions in destinations. In fact, this is considered a less costly and more successful marketing strategy. Furthermore, the marketing performance of a destination is measured by the number of tourists rather than the economic impact of tourism. In particular, the conventional understanding is focussed on increasing the volume rather than quality.

The size of transportation vehicles and large tourist groups: The capacity of transportation vehicles such as buses, airplanes and ships has become more able to carry more passengers than in the past and the number of people transported at one time has increased gradually. The increase in the number of voyages and the expansion in the volume has led to overcrowding in destinations and attractions, at the same time. Especially the development of cruise tourism and the increase in the number of people traveling on tour trigger overcrowding. Besides the increase in the number of cruise ships, their size has grown, as well, which has
resulted in an increase in the number of travel routes and passengers. 17.8 million passengers in 2009 and 26.7 million passengers in 2017 travelled via cruise ships, and this number was expected to increase over the years (CLIA, 2018). Local authorities take measures such as parking restrictions and traffic fees for vehicles to avoid possible overcrowding in the area.

**Social media and other mediums:** Social media platforms evoke and increase people’s interest in destinations and stimulate their desire to travel. In certain destinations that are popular on social media, overcrowding and excessive number of visits may occur. In addition, the enterprises in destinations, as well as the official institutions, carry out marketing activities through social media and increase the interest in destinations. Emphasizing that the information system in tourism has transformed with the use of the internet, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) claim that the internet and social media have become important sources of information for those who are going to travel. Pointing out the fact that the number of social media and internet users has increased more than two times between 2012 and 2019, Erol and Ülkü (2019) report that social media platforms have become an important factor in the tourism market and are a powerful travel information source due to the content they provide. In addition, the digital travel market is growing day by day and the internet plays an important role not only in information acquisition but also in purchasing. The figure of digital travel purchases, which was approximately $470 billion in 2014, reached approximately $755 billion in 2019 and is expected to reach approximately $817 billion in 2020 (Statista, 2019). This matter plays a particularly important role in assessing the impact of the internet and social media on tourist mobility and overtourism.

In addition, overtourism can lead to a loss of local identity and authenticity, an increase in inequality among local people, excessive consumption of energy resources and environmental pollution and congestion. Williams and Lawson (2001) stated that tourism development may negatively affect local people’s perception of tourism and the community may exhibit different reactions as a result of this interaction. Successful and sustainable management of tourism development can be achieved through a good understanding of the community’s view of tourism. The fact that the residents’ quality of life is positively affected by tourism mobility and that they have a positive image of the tourism industry is ensured via minimizing the negative effects of tourism. Therefore, it is stated that enterprises, local administrations and other stakeholders should take into consideration the local residents in tourism development and that the residents’ quality of life is of great importance (Williams and Lawson, 2001). In the context of tourism mobility, the rights of people participating in tourism activities as well as the rights of the residents come into the forefront as a matter of discussion (Perkumiene and Pranskūnienė, 2019). The overcrowding driven by tourism activities causes a number of costs. At this stage, some administrative measures need to be taken in order to minimize the possible negative consequences of tourism without disrupting tourism mobility. Reducing traffic flow, minimizing pollution, identifying different tourism routes as an alternative to densely populated areas, encouraging visitors to visit the busy places at different visiting hours, promoting activities in the low season and marketing different attractions are among the measures in question (Van der Borg, Costa and Gotti, 1996).

In addition, the behaviour of tourists and their participation in activities in destinations also affects overtourism. To this end, it is indicated that measures such as getting information about destinations in advance, using technology, being knowledgeable about the rights and culture of residents and acting accordingly during the visits may limit the effects of overtourism (Pearce, 2018). In this regard, tourists identifying which places are crowded and quiet at what hours and setting their travel routes accordingly, finding new solutions to move faster, utilizing the internet and technology, reading reviews, getting familiar with weather
conditions at the destination, prioritizing the attraction points to visit in the destination, good time-planning, respecting the rights of residents and acting accordingly are suggested as the variables limiting overtourism (Pearce, 2018).

The concept of overtourism brings into the forefront the notion of optimizing the number of tourists rather than maximizing it. In this regard, optimization refers to a management strategy that aims for striking a sustainable balance in the number of tourists and even reducing it, if necessary. For instance, it is suggested that the prolongation of tourists’ duration of stay will reduce costs, which may result in reduction of overcrowding in certain places (e.g., airport, main tourist attractions, etc.). In addition, tourists with long-term stays may participate in environmental activities and have a positive contribution to climate change, while tourists with short-term stays may contribute more economically, but that this may result in an increase in the number of tourists, especially in the peak season (Oklevik et al., 2019). It has been discussed that overtourism is not only about the number of tourists and tourism development but also about how to manage this number (Fletcher, Mas, Blanco-Romero and Blázquez-Salom, 2019). Hence, it is argued that tourism development would bring along negative consequences if not managed well; however, its positive effects will grow when it is managed successfully. Koens, Postma and Papp (2018) emphasize that overtourism is a new concept, but it is not new in terms of its content. Accordingly, it can be suggested that the overtourism concept has a very wide scope that cannot be explained only in the context of tourism and, thus, it should be further explored by academicians for better analysis and understanding. In order to cope with overtourism and to fully understand the driving forces behind it, management strategies that promote a holistic approach in which local residents and internal and external stakeholders in the tourism industry closely cooperate are needed. Overtourism is considered a matter that concerns not only a specific region or specific part of destination but also society at large.

29.3 Overtourism at destinations

Despite the fact that tourism is an industry that plays a major role in the development of countries and regions, it may lead to the rapid consumption of destinations’ resources. The increase in consumption renders it difficult to regulate and manage the destinations. In cases where consumption cannot be controlled, large mass movements, outcries and demonstrations take place. The action of outcry in question is reflected in literature as “overtourism” or “tourismophobia”. In many destinations that attract a large number of tourists, local stakeholders and the community raise their voices to cope with the consequences of tourism development. Since the balance between the expectations and wishes of residents is ignored while satisfying tourism-oriented demands in the region, local residents show excessive reactions towards tourism.

The number of popular tourist destinations afflicted by overtourism, which is associated with legislation, regulation and taxes, is increasing gradually. This situation is undoubtedly related to a social trend and has escalated with the support of residents (Milano, Novelli and Cheer, 2019). Particularly, if mass tourism is practiced and cannot be controlled, as in Venice, Prague, Barcelona and Florence, it may turn into a double-edged weapon (González, 2018). Venice, Barcelona and other cities reflect different characteristics in terms of residents’ reactions and the variety of indications of overtourism. On the other hand, what is common for all cities is that tourism has reached the saturation phase and has evoked a lot of complaints regarding the discontent it creates (Milano, 2017). In regions characterized by
Overtourism in communities

Overtourism, the destination carrying capacity is exceeded due to the increase in the number of tourists and residents feel invaded and displaced (Alexis, 2017).

29.3.1 Overtourism in Venice

Venice hosts 66,000 tourists a day (González, 2018) and approximately 30 million tourists a year (Etherton, 2019). In a city where the number of tourists increases each and every day, the number of residents leaving the city grows as well. It is reported that only 53,000 inhabitants reside in Venice today, where 150,000 used to live 50 years ago (www.edition.cnn.com). Even though the growing number of tourists increases the income generated from tourism, the tourist movement have fully transformed into mass tourism, which is an unpleasant condition for the residents in the city.

One of the factors underlying the pressure that tourism creates on residents is price policies. In tourist destinations, conversion of local enterprises into tourism facilities and the setting of prices according to the tourist profile do not leave any room to manoeuvre and it becomes economically challenging for the residents. Another important matter is rental properties. In the past 20 years, owners have transformed their properties into hotels through platforms such as Airbnb, which has resulted in a reduction in the number of residences available for locals. This has led to a sharp increase in rental prices for the residents; Venice has become a place where only the rich can live (Stanchev, 2017). Many Venetians had to leave their houses due to the increase in housing prices driven by mass tourism. The city, visited by millions every year, also loses 1,000 citizens annually (www.newsvire.com). Consequently, Venetians no longer want to live in their own cities, instead they move to the city of Mestre nearby (González, 2018).

Demonstrations have been organized over the last few summers to protest against large cruise ships that block the city’s canals and overtourism (www.news.com). Venice, which has been struggling with the excessive number of tourists in the city for a long time, has started to take serious steps on this issue. Residents’ shouts such as, “Tourists Go Away!!! You Are Destroying This Area” have been taken into notice, and local administrations have started to take measures to reduce the number of tourists in popular attractions and explore less crowded places to direct tourist mobility (Modak, 2017).

A place that is attractive for tourists should be safe and habitable for the local residents and should not be disregarded for economic interests (Milano et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is challenging to create new job opportunities other than tourism in a city that is dependent on it. At this point, it should be noted that new job opportunities in addition to waitressing and selling tourist products should be provided so that residents find a reason to stay in the region (edition.cnn.com).

29.3.2 Overtourism in Barcelona

Barcelona, the victim of its own success, is the Mediterranean’s unique capital. According to a report from 2016 by The Guardian, the number of overnight stays in the city increased from 1.7 million in the 1990s to 8 million in 2016 (Ledsom, 2019). Barcelona has the largest port in the Mediterranean Sea and is the main stop-point for large cruise ships. In 1990, 115,000 cruise passengers arrived in Barcelona, which increased to 2.7 million in 2016 (www.thelocal.es).

In 2011, residents in Barcelona described tourism as the most serious problem in the city. Since then, the negative tourism perception has steadily grown among citizens. The increase
in sales and rental prices of households and overcrowding in public areas are examples of the factors leading to this negative tourism perception (Milano, 2017). According to Ledsom (2019), Barcelona as a city does not have any space to expand; yet people continue to come. The lack of affordable households, the second biggest problem in Barcelona, is also growing further, with the development of tourism.

Tourism-oriented conflicts in Barcelona have also been on the agenda of the international press. Since the expression “Tourism kills neighborhoods” was painted on the glass of a bus near Camp Nou, Barcelona, prominent British newspapers such as The Daily Express, The Daily Mail and The Guardian have been publishing articles about the residents’ reactions towards tourism (Milano, 2017). Another measure is the increased frequency of controls. According to Coldwell (2017), the number of inspectors checking properties in Barcelona has increased and strict measures have been taken for Airbnb rental houses operating without a license. It is stated that 7,000 of the 16,000 rental houses in the city have no license.

29.3.3 Overtourism in Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik, known as the city of poets, writers and scientists, has a long history of tourism. As the development of the ferry and railways and technological advancements have made traveling easier, the number of tourists has increased and the tourism infrastructure has been further developed (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). Dubrovnik, on the other hand, has been a victim of its own popularity due to the fact that it is included in UNESCO World Heritage List and it hosted the filming of some episodes of the TV show Game of Thrones (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). The constant increase in the number of tourists and the intensity of tourism activities have become a problem that the city has to cope with. In this regard, the city is an outstanding example of the devastating effects and problems resulting from overtourism (Benner, 2019). As a matter of fact, after the 2000s, tourism development has made good progress and tourists have begun to occupy areas used by the residents. Thus, these areas have developed into places that cannot be utilized by residents anymore (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). In the peak season, the commotion/overcrowding in the city and the blockage in the streets complicate residents’ daily lives, which drives them to overreact towards tourism.

29.4 Conclusion

Low-cost flights, developments in marina and cruise ships and economic initiatives such as Airbnb have increased the number of tourists and the volume of participation in tourism activities in the streets of cities such as Barcelona, Venice, Dubrovnik (Panayiotopoulos and Pisano, 2019). In addition, specific destinations are overwhelmed by excessive number of tourists due to the widespread use of social media platforms and thus increased awareness of destinations. While the increasing number of tourists has been highlighted as the main driving force behind the tourism development for many years, the concept of overtourism has begun to come to the forefront recently. In popular tourist destinations, community resistance to overcrowding and tourist behaviours has erupted (Benner, 2019). Residents cannot enter some areas where they used to live and enter before tourism activities in the destination became overwhelming or when they were under more control. The excessive number of tourists causes congestion in these areas and residents feel trapped in their living spaces, which results in material and spiritual burden on them.
Residents in overcrowded destinations not only put the blame on tourists but also are aware of the fact that authorities must take strict measures to control the situation. Therefore, the private sector and public administrations should cooperate in planning and management for a more sustainable tourism development (Stanchev, 2017). At this point, the motivation of destinations to attract more tourists has transformed, and governments and local administrations have now started to come up with novel ideas on how to shift tourists from the most crowded areas to different destinations. Nevertheless, the discomfort and negative reaction of residents causes contradictions at some points. It is desirable for the residents, who earn income from tourism activities, that tourism grows and develops, whereas it has also become an undesirable development for some parts of the local community, who feel trapped in their living spaces, cannot travel into some areas due to the overwhelming number of tourists and suffer from price increases. At this point, the carrying capacity should be taken into consideration in order to measure the positive or negative effects of tourism. The spread of tourism activities to every region and every season, not to be limited to a specific period, can also be an important step in reducing the overcrowding in destinations during certain periods of time.

Another issue that drives local residents not to welcome tourists in the destination is tourist behaviour. Despite the fact that overcrowding, which is one of the critical problems, can be measured and monitored to some extent, it is not easy to measure the effects of inappropriate behaviours of tourists (Koens et al., 2018: 6). Taking into notice that the best observers in this case are local residents, more detailed information on the subject can be obtained through surveys and interviews with the residents and long-term measures can be implemented, accordingly.

In the context of overtourism, it would not be correct to attribute the reaction of all destinations toward tourism to the same reason. Distinguishing the cases in different destinations and taking into account the complexity and unique characteristics of each case will ensure the implementation of more effective measures and a more sustainable tourism development in the destinations (Alexis, 2017: 292). Anti-tourism and anti-tourist demonstrations are observed to be serious problems that are growing day by day. Observing the protection balance and conducting tourism activities with the right plans and policies will bring the support of the local people. Considering that local people are an important tourism stakeholder, it should be remembered that their satisfaction may affect their support for tourism.

References

Overtourism in communities


