Over-Tourism and Anti-Tourist Sentiment: An Exploratory Analysis and Discussion

Papathanassis Alexis
Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences, Germany
apapathanassis@hs-bremerhaven.de

Abstract

The externalities of tourism have become increasingly visible over the last decade, manifesting themselves in anti-tourism demonstrations in popular destinations such as: Venice, Dubrovnik, Santorini, Barcelona and Amsterdam. These reactions, in conjunction with the corresponding press attention, have led to a variety of proposed measures by tourism stakeholders and decision-makers, aimed at controlling tourism development and restricting incoming tourism. This paper aims at: exploring the root causes of the over-tourism phenomenon, critically assessing the mainstream theories behind it, and questioning the effectiveness of the current measures proposed.

Key words: tourism, antagonism, destination, sustainability, externalities
J.E.L. classification: L83, D73

1. Introduction: 'Tourists Go Home'

In the side-streets of Barcelona, one comes across paint-sprayed messages such as: "If it is tourist season, why can't we shoot them?" or "Tourists go home" with the follow-up comment: "Refugees welcome". Anti-cruise protests in Venice and polemical statements by mayors in Dubrovnik and Santorini, proposing draconian measures to control tourist-inflow and regulate visitor behaviour, come in stark contract with the banners of hospitality and tourism-induced economic prosperity. For several years now, tourism academics and researchers have repeatedly highlighted the externalities and infrastructural challenges posed by (cruise-) tourism, adding a critical note to the optimistic outlook of the tourism-business and public sector's stakeholders. Yet, it is only over the last couple of years that this issue has received public attention - following the anti-tourism demonstrations in some popular tourism destinations, rendering it – rather quickly – a central topic and priority in tourism research. In this paper, the notion of 'over-tourism' is explored and critically discussed, in an attempt to clear potential misconceptions and provide a basis for effective counter-measures.

2. Inevitability of the Tourist Area Life Cycle? Tourist Development and the Tourist Density Indicators

The generic product life-cycle concept (abbr. PLC) predicts a decline phase after the maturity of a particular market and / or sector. The decline phase is characterised by intensified competition and low profit margins within a product-sector. Since, Butler (1980) adapted the PLC concept for tourist areas (abbr. TALC), it has been frequently-applied to explain the evolution and implications of tourism in destinations and has served as a management guideline for the different phases:

1. Exploration: Small number of adventure-seeking visitors, limited information and infrastructure. In this stage, some locals may feel uncomfortable with tourists.
2. Involvement: The local community discovers its potential and participates in the development of tourism by developing basic infrastructure (i.e. small accommodation and catering facilities).
3. Development: Local authorities and investors notice the development of visitor numbers and initiate larger-scale and more sophisticated infrastructure projects. At this stage, some locals

may feel excluded from the developments whilst others may feel alienated from the involvement of external entities in their locality.

4. Consolidation: At this stage, big players (i.e. Holiday-conglomerates) enter the competition and larger units replace small facilities. This is the start of mass-tourism. Locals feel overwhelmed with the increasing tourist numbers and the impact of developments in their daily lives.
5. Stagnation: Here the destination has lost its novelty status, the tourist numbers are stabilised and the area has reached its carrying capacity. Locals are negatively predisposed and antagonistic towards the tourists.
6. Decline / Rejuvenation: The environmental and socio-cultural externalities of tourism development begin to show and degradation of the destination's resources and infrastructure drives visitors away. The irritation of locals becomes even more evident.

In a similar manner, Doxey (1975) associates tourism development with the sentiment of locals evolving from euphoria and apathy during the initiation of the life cycle, to annoyance and antagonism in the latter phases. Setting aside the criticisms and extensions of such models, their key assumption is that tourism development, measured by increasing tourism numbers is associated with locals' deteriorating sentiment and corresponding reactions to tourism. On this premise, it logically follows that 'over-tourism' and its presence in the media is the expected result of certain destinations reaching the last two stages of their Tourist Area Life-Cycle' (TALC). Tourist numbers exceed the carrying capacity of the destination and its infrastructure, while the locals feel overrun and displaced. As obvious as this hypothesis may seem, an examination of the corresponding tourism-density metrics casts doubt on its validity; or at least its completeness.

According to Eurostat's (2017) GIS, during 2015 the average indicator for European countries was approximately 5,200 bed-nights per 1,000 inhabitants. As a comparison, for mainstream tourism regions (table below), this indicator is eight- to ten-fold the European average. With regard to geographical density, the European average is approximately 592 bed nights per square kilometre (KM2).

Table no. 1: Top 10 European Tourism Regions - Bed-Nights per Inhabitant and KM2

	Region (Bed nights per 1,000 Inhabitants)*	**Country (Bed nights per 1,000 Inhabitants)***	**Region (Bed Nights per KM2)****	**Country (Bed Nights per KM2)****
South Aegean Islands (Greece)	69,776	9,082	4,463	771
Balearic Islands (Spain)	57,992	9,090	14,007	899
Bolzano (Italy)	56,777	6,460	4,233	1,333
Adriatic Croatia (Croatia)	48,578	16,883	N/A	887
Tirol (Austria)	48,536	13,218	3,165	1,406
Canary Islands (Spain)	44,219	9,090	13,791	899
Algavre (Portugal)	42,731	5,727	4,189	715
Crete (Greece)	36,826	9,082	3,013	771
Trentino (Italy)	29,903	6,460	2,727	1,333
Corsica (France)	29,837	(6,174)	1,649	(639)

**Source:* Eurostat data for 2015
** *Source:* Eurostat data for 2016

Examining tourist-ratio for the regions, where the anti-tourist sentiment has peaked over the last years, the hypothesis of imbalance between tourist and local population becomes questionable. When looking at the Venice (13,837 Bed nights / 1,000 Inhabitants) and Catalonia (10,209 Bed nights / 1,000 Inhabitants) regional indicators, one cannot help but to observe that in terms of bed nights per 1,000 inhabitants, they are significantly lower than other popular tourist regions (see Table 1). With regard to bed nights per KM2, both Venice (3,437 Bed nights / KM2) and Catalonia (2,253) are comparable to other tourist regions.

It seems that increasing tourist numbers and crowding do not adequately account for the increasingly loud anti-tourism sentiments in some popular tourism destinations. Perhaps the key variable here is the management effectiveness of a destination's carrying capacity and of its seasonality. Indeed, the proportion of organised tourism in the southern Aegean Islands, the

Canaries and the Balearic islands is larger than in city destinations such as Barcelona or Venice. Organised tourism entails packaged holidays assembled, priced and sold by large, vertically-integrated tourism groups such as TUI and Thomas Cook. Such tourism multinationals control capacities during the entire value-chain from flight seats and hotel beds to transfer buses and have a strong interest to maximise yield in their destination capacities. Hence, they have the capability (i.e. control over the entire value-chain) and motivation (i.e. maximisation of yield and profit) to effectively regulate and redirect tourism flows. This raises the question of tourism privatisation and its economic impact on the local communities; but it may also reflect the risks of tourism communisation. Barcelona and Venice may not be dependent on large tourism conglomerates, but their local tourism authorities have limited control over the tourism value-chain (esp. at the source-markets) and the direction of independent traveller flows (e.g. hotel tax may render accommodation more expensive, but low-cost flights absorb the extra cost for the individual tourist).

3. The Broken Promise of Tourism? Economic Impact and Expectations

The UNWTO (2017) (abbr. World Tourism Organisation) reports that tourism, corresponds to 9% of the worldwide GDP, reflects 1 in every 11 jobs and amounts to 1,3 Trillion Dollars in exports. The WTTC (2017) (abbr. World Travel and Tourism) reports that tourism outperformed the global economy with a GDP growth of 3,3% and contributed 1,96 trillion dollars to European economies. In a similar manner, the CLIA (2016) (abbr, Cruise Lines International Association) reports 40.2 billion Euro in total business output for the economies of Europe. From this output, 16.6 billion euro reflect direct spending by cruise lines, their passengers and crew.

Over the last years, the tourism (and cruise) sector and its representatives have been very effective in raising public awareness for the tourism sector, its growth, economic significance and developmental potential. Whilst this may have positively contributed to the image and professionalization of tourism, it may have also generated rather simplistic expectations; particularly for those not familiar with the intrinsic systemic complexities and dependencies of this business domain.

A number of tourism academics (e.g. Klein, 2009; Larsen et al, 2013; Papathanassis, 2011; 2014; 2016) have consistently expressed scepticism regarding the conceptual rigour, methodological limitations and motives behind such studies, while expressing doubts regarding their results and their misinterpretation by public authorities, political stakeholders and public opinion leaders (Papathanassis, 2017). Yet, critical voices and 'academic Cassandras', are overshadowed by the promise of tourism-led prosperity and its political appeal. At the end of the day, the delivery failure of such a promise leads to expectation failure and disappointment in the local communities; who experience the downsides of tourism, without perceiving the propagated benefits.

The question here is: "To what extent do the benefits of increasing tourism-generated income reach the local economies and communities?" Assuming the growth and considerable contribution of tourism in the economies of Europe (and elsewhere), how is it that established and popular destinations such as Barcelona and Venice exhibit such high-levels of anti-tourism sentiment? According to Eurostat's (2017) GIS, during 2015 and when compared to other popular holiday regions, the inhabitants of Barcelona, Venice and Amsterdam have a relatively high and stable purchasing power. For example, in Barcelona the GDP per inhabitant in Purchasing Power Standards (abbr. PPS) is 106% of the European average and in Venice it is 109%. Comparatively, in popular tourist regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean (Corfu, Rhodes, Crete, and Cyprus) the GDP per inhabitant PPS ranges between 81-58% of the European average. In Portugal (Porto) it is 64% and in Southern France it was 98%; both below the European average.

Examining the change of purchasing power (measure as GDP per inhabitant in PPS) between 2007 and 2015 a similar picture emerges; The regions where the anti-tourism sentiment is peaking are not the ones with the highest loss of purchasing power (-10 to -15%, compared to -16% to -27% in other popular tourist regions). From what it seems, the inhabitants of the 'tourist-overrun' regions are neither the poorest, nor the most disenchanted. In fact, one could argue that, tourism development counterbalanced for them the negative impacts of recent economic crisis, acting as a

buffer. Therefore, it would erroneous to attribute anti-tourism sentiments solely to an economic overpromise.

Yet, tourism-led economic development and prosperity, under corrupt systems and/or ineffective governance (Papathanassis, 2016; 2017) may result to more social inequality and public disillusionment. In turn, this may create fertile ground for protest movements and populism (Heinrich, 2017). In such a context, tourism in general and foreign tourists in particular represent ideal 'scape goats' for wider socio-economic issues due to their visibility and lack of political representation. Harrill mentions (2004) geographical- as well as cultural-proximity as relevant factors affecting the perceptions and reactions of local populations to tourists. Faulkner & Tideswell (1997) as well as Ap & Crompton (1993) point towards the nature of the social exchange between locals and tourists and underline the aspect of seasonality. In this respect, the presence of in-group vs. out-group dynamics (e.g. Riek et al, 2006; Semyonov et al. 2004) and their impact on perceptions, potential stereotyping and prejudice, render tourism a convenient conflict arena for socio-economical issues. Stating it simply, tourists are visible, different, not politically represented and therefore, a convenient projection surface for disenchantment and populistic/demagogic motives.

4. Bad-behaving Tourists? Media Sensationalism

This is where the mass media, amplified by the inherent sensationalism and multiplication effect of social media, comes into play. On the one side, the hedonistic-nature and ubiquity of tourism provides ample incidents, capable of catching attention and triggering emotionality. On the other side, the coinciding between the so-called 'cucumber (media) time' or 'silly (press) season' and the holiday high seasons (i.e. summer holidays, Christmas / Easter holidays), possibly encourage an exaggeration of media coverage on frivolous incidents and news; turning them into medial events and coining terms such as 'over-tourism'. Although, this is arguably a rather presumptuous hypothesis, headlines such as the following suggest its relevance:

- "Auschwitz museum hit by thefts as visitors remove 'souvenirs' from Nazi death camp" (Telegraph)[1]
- "Chapel on Greek island Rhodes bans foreign weddings after British couple's 'sex' photo goes viral: 'We cannot allow this disgusting behaviour to prevail" (Independent)[2]
- "'Ding Jihao was here': Chinese tourist, 15, defaces 3,500-year-old Egyptian temple and his family issue national apology" (Daily Mail)[3]
- "Easter Island fines ear chipper" (BBC)[4]

This type press coverage utilises sensationalism and emotional headlines, describing isolated incidents of tourist misbehaviour, and generalising them. This is not to assert that such misbehaviour is an exception, as tourists are more likely to engage in questionable behaviour during their holidays than at home (Tolkah et al 2017); but generalising and isolating such incidents in the context of tourism is perhaps misplaced.

Nonetheless, it may well trigger local discontent, feeding anti-tourist sentiments and stereotypes and creating a bandwagon for political opportunism. Tourism stakeholders, private (e.g. tour operators or cruise operators) and public (e.g. tourism trade associations), with their corresponding public-relations departments, tend to focus on a one-sided promotion of tourism, whilst superficially handling externalities and critical aspects. By incorporating a more transparent, balanced and critical approach to the promotion of (cruise-) tourism, and a more active support of sustainability initiatives (beyond the acclaimed 'Green-washing'), the tourism sector could increase its credibility and reputation in the wider public, while 'educating' political decision-makers on the

[1] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/poland/10808868/Auschwitz-museum-hit-by-thefts-as-visitors-remove-souvenirs-from-Nazi-death-camp.html
[2] http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/rhodes-chapel-foreign-wedding-ban-sex-act-photo-british-couple-greek-island-a7998226.html
[3] http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2331613/China-disgraced-tourist-vandal-engraved-Ding-Jihao-hieroglyphics-Egyptian-temple.html
[4] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7337927.stm

potential and complexity of tourism development. Such a change of public-relations strategy is diametrically different from the traditional defensive stance and 'stone-wall' strategy of the (cruise) tourism sector.

5. Conclusions: Synthesising 'Over-tourism' and the Way Forward

In this paper, the reported issue of 'over-tourism' and the resulting anti-tourism sentiments, have been critically examined and discussed with the purpose of setting a frame for a more constructive discussion and effective measures. Neither of the theses presented here are sufficient to illuminate the full spectrum of tourism externalities, nor are they applicable to all case studies. While tourism-density may be more relevant for explaining the locals' reactions in Dubrovnik, it may not be as applicable in Barcelona, where the socio-economic aspects appear more pertinent. In a similar line of argumentation, the reactions in Amsterdam could be primarily associated to tourist misbehaviour and political calculation. Differentiating between the different destination cases and taking into account the complexity and specifics of each case, could presumably lead to the development of effective counter-measures and a more sustainable tourism development in those regions.

Proposed measures such as behavioural guidelines/regulation for tourists, or limiting licences for tourism accommodation and other service providers, to counteract over-tourism, can be at best described as simplistic. Addressing a growth of demand and capacity strain, with capacity limitation measures is somewhat paradoxical.

Ultimately, the failures of a tourism-system does not necessarily lie in its elements (i.e. tourists, transport carriers, accommodation providers) but on the governance of the interactions between them. Who is accountable for the management of a destination's carrying capacity? Is it merely a question of tourism inflows or is it an issue of seasonality, logistics and crowd-control in heritage sights? Are tourists responsible for tourism-income leakages and socio-economic divide in local societies? What have tourism-sector associations done to address anti-tourism sentiments?

As provocative as such questions may be, they address the key challenges facing tourism development and the sustainable evolution of the sector. An institutionalised involvement of tourism academia in policy-making and the corresponding exploitation of an underutilised body of knowledge in this interdisciplinary scientific domain, could be a first step towards the right direction. Extending tourism education programs, beyond hospitality-training and vocational training would further contribute to its professionalization; not just for service-levels, but also for their management. As the tourism sector is reaching maturity in many parts of the world, adaptations the in educational infrastructure, political institutions and communication structures are becoming vital for a sustainable and socially responsible development.

The term 'over-tourism' entails a number of tourism-related developmental externalities and is therefore is a complex and multi-faceted topic, which is neither novel nor under-researched. Oversimplifying the arguments presented in this paper, 'over-tourism' is mainly about 'under-management' of tourism and the subsequent plea to tourism policy-makers is:

'Manage destinations and educate tourists; not vice versa!'

6. References

- Ap. J. and J. Crompton (1993). "Residents' Strategies for Responding to Tourism Impacts", Journal of Travel Research. 32(1): 47-50.
- Butler, R.W. (1980) The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. Canadian Geographer 24 (1), 5–12.
- CLIA (2016). Contribution of Cruise Tourism to the Economies of Europe: 2015 Edition. Cruise Lines International Association Homepage. Online: http://cruising.org/docs/default-source/research/contribution_cruise_tourism_to_economies_of_europe_2015.pdf?sfvrsn=0. Accessed: 22/11/2017
- Doxey, G.V. (1975) A causation theory of visitor-resident irritants: Methodology and research inferences. In Travel and Tourism Research Associations Sixth Annual Conference Proceedings (pp. 195–98). San Diego, September

- Eurostat (2017). Statistical Atlas: Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2017. Online: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistical-atlas/gis/viewer, Accessed: 27/10/2017
- Faulkner, B. & Tideswell, C. (1997). 'A framework for monitoring community impacts of tourism', Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 5(1): 3-28
- Harrill, R. (2004). "Residents' Attitudes Toward Tourism Development: A Literature Review with Implications for Tourism Planning", Journal of Planning Literature. 18(3): 251-266.
- Heinrich, F. (2017). Corruption and Inequality: How Populists Mislead People. Transparency International: Politics and Government. Online: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_and_inequality_how_populists_mislead_people. Accessed: 2017/11/22
- Klein; R. 2009). Keeping the Cruise Tourism Responsible: The Challenge for Ports to Maintain High Self Esteem. Online: http://www.cruisejunkie.com/icrt2.pdf. Accessed: 22/11/2017
- Larsen, S. , Wolff, K. , Marnburg, E. & Øgaard, T. (2013). Belly full, purse closed: Cruise line passengers' expenditures, Tourism Management Perspectives, 6: 142-148
- Papathanassis, A. (2011). The cruise industry: the other side of growth, the third international cruise conference, Dubrovnik, Croatia 16 - 18 May 2011, International Journal of Tourism Research, 13(5): 508-510
- Papathanassis, A. (2014). Cruise Sector & 'Glocal' Corporate Citizenship: The 5th International Cruise Conference, Bremerhaven, Germany 24-26 January 2014. International Journal of Tourism Research, DOI: 10.1002/jtr.2006
- Papathanassis, A. (2016). Curing the 'Beach Disease': Corruption and the Potential of Tourism-led Transformation for Developing Countries and Transitional Economies. Ovidius University Annals Economic Sciences Series, 16(1): 75-80
- Papathanassis, A. (2017). A 'Bathtub Model of Over-Tourism: Exploring Causes, Challenges and Solutions, presented in the 25th World Travel Monitor Forum (Pisa, Italy). November 10th. Available URL: http://www.papathanassis.com/images/dlfiles/overtourism.pdf. Accessed: 22/11/2017
- Riek, B. M., Mania, E. W., & Gaertner, S. L. (2006). Intergroup threat and outgroup attitudes: A meta-analytic review. Personality and Social Psychology Review, 10, 336-353.
- Semyonov, M., Raijman, R., Tov, A. Y., & Schmidt, P. (2004). Population size, perceived threat, and exclusion: A multiple-indicators analysis of attitudes toward foreigners in Germany. Social Science Research, 33, 681-701.
- Tolkach, D. Pratt, S. & Zeng, C.Y.H. (2017). Ethics of Chinese & Western tourists in Hong Kong, Annals of Tourism Research, Volume 63: 83-96
- UNWTO (2017). Turning one billion tourists into one billion opportunities. United Nations World Tourism Organisation Homepage. Online: http://media.unwto.org/sites/all/files/images/unwto1billioninfographic1.jpg. Accessed: 22/11/2017
- WTTC (2017). Travel & Tourism: Economic Impact 2017. World Travel & Tourism Council Homepage. Online: https://www.wttc.org/research/economic-research/economic-impact-analysis/. Accessed: 22/11/2017