

What smart and sustainable strategies could be used to reduce the impact of overtourism?

In an article entitled *Overtourism in 2019: How can popular cities cope with tourist hordes?* Traveller.com.au cites a report published in 2018, by the European Union about the increasing list of destinations that are struggling to cope with growing numbers of tourists. Predictably, they include Venice, Prague, Paris and Barcelona but also destinations such as the Isle of Skye, Copenhagen, Sintra in Portugal and the centre of Warsaw that attract fewer tourists than better known destinations, but are less able to deal with the inflow. As the numbers of tourists increases so will congestion and the environmental impact of tourism. In response, I am delighted to welcome back theme editors Vanessa Gowreesunkar and Hugues Séraphin who assembled a team of 24 contributors from industry and academia to review the nature of the problem and the action that could be taken to overcome it. I would also like to thank the theme issue reviewers Rita R. Carballo, Kamila Ghidouche Ait-Yahia, Vanessa Gowreesunkar, Shem Wambugu Maingi, Rami Mhanna, Hugues Séraphin, Anca C. Yallop and Mustafeed Zaman.

Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes (WHATT) aims to make a practical and theoretical contribution to hospitality and tourism development, and we seek to do this by using a key question to focus attention on an industry issue. If you would like to contribute to our work by serving as a WHATT theme editor, do please contact me.

Richard Teare
Managing Editor, WHATT

What smart and sustainable strategies could be used to reduce the impact of overtourism?

Traditionally, tourism was regarded as an activity that took place at a destination, but now it is increasingly infiltrating into specific spaces and places. This process of “tourism territorialisation”, when analysed from a wider perspective, shows an excessive concentration of tourists at a specific place and somehow causes perverse impacts to not only the destination and its people but also the tourists. Tourism is after all a triangular transaction involving the tourist, the host community and the service providers. With sophistication, globalisation and emancipation, people are increasingly indulging in tourism; tourism itself is not the issue but when it causes overtourism and leads to negative consequences, it becomes a major issue. Besides perverse impacts on the destination and its people, overtourism also causes a form of disequilibrium in the global tourism economy; when on the one hand, some destinations are receiving too many tourists and on the other hand, others are struggling to get some to kick start their tourism engine. Overtourism is paradoxical in nature and as it brings with it polarised and tricky consequences, it is necessary to come up with smart and sustainable strategies to mitigate its impacts.

What strategy to overcome overtourism?

In practice and in theory, the role of local people in tourism have evolved significantly over the past few decades. While earlier studies have focussed on the need to generate socio-economic benefits for locals when addressing intra- and inter-generational equity in tourism, today's more aware locals are discussing equity in terms of their quality of life in the overall tourism process. As such, many anti-tourism movements are now voicing their concern



regarding overtourism, a phenomenon defined as any destination suffering from the strain of tourism. The term is also related to what is more generally known as carrying capacity, that is to say the maximum limit to tourism development.

The reasons for the rise of anti-tourism are varied and mostly include the negative impacts of tourists on heritage, on the quality of life of locals and on the environment. From another perspective, a rich body of literature shows that if locals perceive tourism development as beneficial, they tend to be pro-tourism. The three main elements driving this decision are usually economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits/costs, but of late, it has been observed that savvy locals have shifted their focus towards the environmental perspective. Likewise, recent studies have cited the examples of Venice and the Niuhau Island to lend support to this claim and to address overtourism requires an ambidextrous approach. In other words, using existing strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism (exploitation) while developing a new one tailored to meet the needs of the destination (exploration). In this context, *Trexist* or tourism exit is not an economically sustainable decision. The ongoing ambiguity that drives this relationship of overtourism and anti-tourism calls for a more practical approach. Smart strategies are required, as tourists and residents (including relevant stakeholders) are sophisticated, emancipated and connected enough to understand the dynamism of overtourism.

Based on these observations, this theme issue seeks to shed light on the perverse impacts of overtourism with the aim of proposing smart and sustainable strategies with contextual and conceptual underpinnings. Enriched with a variety of case studies and empirical evidence, the articles in this theme issue offer readers a reasonable insight on the strategies used by destinations to fight overtourism in their respective contexts. The contributors (academics and practitioners) provide realistic solutions used by some destinations and that are likely to benefit others. For instance, the article on the dark side of technology in Barcelona clearly explains the dual aspect of technology; it may be used as a smart tool by tourists to spread negative publicity rapidly and also sensitise and guide prospective tourists about overcrowded destinations. Likewise, the article on Romania demonstrates that overtourism caused by tourists attending an event over a long duration leads to tourismphobia and this impacts negatively on the well-being of the community. When on the one side, the event is generating economic return to the destination and on the other side, it affects the well-being and quality of life of the locals. This paradox is particularly captured in the Janus-faced character of the industry elaborated in another article. The paper on community-based tourism in Algeria also supports this claim and proposes smart strategies, which integrate community and tourism stakeholders, to overcome overtourism for a sustainable future. The paper on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in East Africa takes a different perspective and argues that overtourism needs collaborative strategies and should include government and public authorities to oversee good governance and certification.

Ultimately, this theme issue addresses both a theoretical and practical gap and support the claim that smart and sustainable strategies to tackle the perverse impacts of overtourism requires the collaborative input of tourists, local people, government, NGOs, destination marketing organizations (DMOs) and service providers. It is also an early warning to destinations who do not monitor the consequences of tourism on its local people and the environment.

We hope that you will capitalise on the richness of this theme issue, which brings to the fore a variety of case studies, and adaptive strategies for destinations who are about to enter the phase of overtourism or are already enduring overtourism. We wish you pleasant reading with the hope that you will be able to identify strategies applicable for the management of your respective destinations.

Vanessa Gowreesunkar and Hugues Séraphin
Theme Editors

About the Theme Editors

Vanessa Gowreesunkar is a Senior Lecturer and she serves as Head of Department for Tourism and Hospitality at the University of Africa (Bayelsa State, Nigeria). Her research interest includes, among others, sustainable tourism, island tourism, tourism management and marketing, post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations.

Hugues Séraphin is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Event Management Studies at the University of Winchester. His research focuses on tourism development in post-colonial, post-conflict and post-disaster destinations; children in the tourism industry; and the applications of ambidextrous management/organisational ambidexterity to tourism (and related subjects).