

Perspectives

Saturation and Rejection of Tourism in Travel Destinations

Saturação e Rejeição ao Turismo nas Destinações Turísticas

Saturación y rechazo al turismo en destinos turísticos

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Abstract

Tourism is a multi, inter, and transdisciplinary phenomenon in higher education and public management. In addition to these characteristics, tourism is also transversal and intersectional. Because of such features, changes occur continuously, whether in the behavior of tourists or residents. In the last decade, two new and challenging problems have arisen, namely: saturation and rejection of tourism in tourist destinations. Therefore, this article will focus on such issues of concern.

Resumo

O Turismo é um fenômeno multi, inter e transdisciplinar na sua formação superior e na gestão pública. Além dessas características, temos que considerar ainda a transversalidade e a intersectorialidade. Em virtude dessas características, mudanças ocorrem continuamente, quer sejam no comportamento dos turistas quer sejam com os residentes locais. Nesta última década, nos deparamos com dois novos e desafiantes problemas: a saturação e a rejeição ao turismo nas destinações turísticas. É sobre este assunto preocupante que iremos tratar neste artigo.

Resumen

El turismo es un fenómeno multi, inter y transdisciplinario en su educación superior y gestión pública. Además de estas características, también tenemos que considerar la transversalidad y la intersectorialidad. Debido a estas características, los cambios ocurren continuamente, ya sea en el comportamiento de los turistas o con los residentes locales. En la última década, nos hemos enfrentado a dos problemas nuevos y desafiantes: la saturación y el rechazo del turismo en los destinos turísticos. Es este tema de preocupación el que abordaremos en este artículo.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a multi, inter, and transdisciplinary phenomenon in higher education and public management. In addition to these characteristics, tourism is also transversal and intersectional.

Tourism is subject to drivers of change from different sources. Important and current developments in the field of tourism show consumer trends driven by new patterns and values in society and family, technological innovations, globalization, or as a result of the necessary adaptation to climate change, economic contraction, social upheavals, mass immigration, political instability, transport uncertainty, weather and geological hazards, epidemic and pandemic events, terrorism and, more recently, changes due to a significant increase in international demand. In the last decade, we have been faced with two new and challenging issues: saturation and rejection of tourism in tourist destinations. This article will address such issues of concern.

Management strategies in this ever-changing environment are challenged by the systemic interdependence, both in terms of direction and confrontation at enterprise levels, and at the political and institutional levels of management of the activity.

Considering the amplifying effects of globalization, the state in partnership with the private sector began to make and implement strategies to identify, develop, and market local-based tourism in clusters and corporate networks, adding value to the production chain.

The growth of tourism generates positive and negative externalities in society, the economy, and the environment—strengthening or weakening growth in terms of systemic feedback—raises an important question: what level of growth can be considered ideal and sustainable for a given region?

Almost forty years ago, when I published my first book "Análise Estrutural do Turismo" [Structural Analysis of Tourism]—with fourteen editions with more than 100,000 copies sold, currently updated and available in digital format (e-book)—I had already foreseen in the chapter on development strategies model the different stages of evolution of tourist destinations: from the early stages of potentiality and beginning of the production process; expansion and development; balance; maturity, stability; decline or resurgence or stagnation; decay and dissolution.

Since the second-half of twentieth century, some international tourist destinations — particularly, urban destinations—have experienced an unstoppable process of increasing demand, and consequently, of supply of accommodation, food, leisure and entertainment services, events, conferences, trade fairs and exhibitions.

The terms now familiar: "overtourism" and "tourism-phobia" in tourist destinations emerge and are directly related to the rapid evolution of unsustainable practices of modern mass tourism in some prominent tourist destinations, mostly in Europe. We must remember that the boom in the use of the term "tourism-phobia" is perhaps explained by the inaccurate use by the media to refer to manifestations of great social unrest against tourist saturation in certain destinations. That is, the popular outcry or, rather, the public condemnation by social movements was disqualified and this social discomfort was "pathologized".

In the last decade there has been evidence of social discomfort produced by tourist saturation, especially in Europe, which receives almost 60% of global tourism demand, around 600 million tourists per year. Since then we are witnessing a proliferation of different manifestations of this social unrest and dissatisfaction.

These manifestations of discomfort and dissatisfaction—sometimes leading to protests—depend fundamentally on international public policies, mediated by the UNWTO with the assistance of the UN and local public and private institutions. In destinations already hopelessly compromised and saturated in result of new digital platforms and global and structural transformation in travel, the problem can only be addressed by building urgent public-private partnerships.

The practices previously mentioned produced different responses and consequences that scholars would call forms of early politicization. Nevertheless, the reactions to tourism pressure that we are witnessing and, at the same time, carefully investigating and analyzing, are observed in different places and are based on claims for the care of the resident community. In this collectivity, we notice a growing resilience.

On the other hand, more and more residents and local groups are influencing the political agenda of municipal governments on tourism issues. Still, different urban destinations around the world began to face and see tourism as a social problem. By the mid-1990s local reactions against mass tourism were already taking place in different European contexts such as Spain, Italy, Malta, and France. Today, many different European and global destinations have come face to face with what scholars had already worried about in their investigations, fearing what inevitably occurred on a growing and worrisome scale they called overtourism.

Some examples can be highlighted, such as:

- Anti-gentrification protests in Berlin;
- Complaints of neighborhood associations in Lisbon;
- Demonstrations of various local movements in the Balearic Islands;
- A referendum against sea cruises in Venice;
- Proposals for areas of limited tourist traffic in some Italian cities;
- Claims against Chinese shopping tourism in the main European capitals and in Hong Kong, also known as low-cost shoppers;
- The critique of New York City's reconversion into a tourist-branded product and the resulting real estate speculation as the economy's main driving factor.

In many destinations the high number of tourists, the occupation and privatization of public space led to different kinds of discomfort and growing protests. In many highly tourist cities—such as Venice—we are witnessing a rapid and increasingly fierce resistance of residents to tourists, even in the offseason, both in southern and northern Europe, showing a worrying rise in politicization and, in some cases, explicit rejection of temporary visitors. Overtourism, thus, becomes a problem for all stakeholders in the tourism industry.

This politicization manifests itself in different ways. In some contexts, residents and other stakeholders react strongly, opposing tourism growth in itself and its impacts on their cities; in other cases, some forms of tourism and its effects are disputed or criticized. Given its many configurations, discussions revolve less about tourism and much more about broad and complex political-social processes and planning forces and changes in the urban fabric that seem to store the right to want to stay in the city, whose quality of life is affected and threatened by overtourism.

Tourist pressure is evident particularly in two fundamental aspects:

1. The grow of urban tourism in residential neighborhoods usually little visited by tourists.
2. The transformations and changes in the daily lives of local inhabitants.

One of the most common and persistent complaints from local people is Airbnb, which—not yet regulated by host countries—has turned out to be a lucrative business for some residents, retirees, or unemployed people who make their own real estate available, many or most of which is located in historical centers or strictly residential neighborhoods. In fact, what is really missing is local governance, public policy, regulation, legislation, and ongoing monitoring of the carrying capacity and sustainability of a destination's business activity that has gone out of control.

2 OVERTOURISM IN THE CLUSTERING PROCESS — POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION TO ADDRESS OVERTOURISM

In the tourism system, although the concept of sustainability is widely used by academia—and to a lesser extent by business and governments—it has only been associated with the environment. More recently, culture, society, and economy have also been considered indispensable elements for the construction of the concept. Not forgetting that the scientification and academicization of tourism with research and scientific solutions developed intensely in the last decade of the twentieth century with undergraduate and graduate programs. However, even though it is unquestionable that, eventually, the development of tourism will

depend on environmental conservation, the enhancement and strengthening of local cultures and the economic development of tourist-sending and receiving localities, these conditions are a suppositions and not a guarantee of sustainability in tourism.

It is against this background that the discussion on the market dimension of sustainability arises, be it in terms of tourism development or mitigation of declining or already hopelessly saturated destinations. Considering also the conditions necessary for attraction, retention, loyalty, satisfaction, as well as the possibilities to ward off the negative effects and dissatisfaction of the host community due to the saturation of demand. Always seeking to obtain the best cost-benefit ratio of harmonious tourism development for local communities by public authorities, and the private sector.

For the experiences to be well structured and communicated, it is necessary to implement the guidelines of regionalization and clustering of tourist destinations. Regionalization is to wipe out territorial, political, and economic barriers between different areas that can be grouped together into an offer of different tourism experiences, focused on individual needs. For this to happen, destination clustering must be performed, in which companies and people establish strong interpersonal and inter-organizational relationship networks.

This network makes it possible to offer a multiplicity of differentiated and identity-oriented tourism experiences (horizontal clustering), with a low cost of production being able to generate a wider multiplier effect on local economies (vertical clustering), as well as increasing the reach of destination communication, resulting in the market attraction of geographically distant consumers (expanded clustering) (Moraes, 2012).

Given the very large number of stakeholders capable of influencing the outcome of destination development and/or control of saturated tourist destinations, these can be better understood as complex adaptive systems. The control of this process tends to be highly dispersed, with any coherent behavior of such systems emerging from competitiveness and cooperation among their different agents—in its broadest sense any individual or organization involved in tourism and not just travel agents. In this sense, underpinning the clustering process of tourist destinations, there are two main types of inter-organizational and interpersonal relationships: competition and cooperation between the agents in the system.

Please, pay close attention to the text. Just as we are using the clustering process for the harmonious and sustained development of tourism and consequent demand growth, the process here will be used inversely, in the tight control of already saturated destinations such as Venice and Barcelona, among others, in the control and monitoring, slowdown and demand-reducing actions. For further discussion of the topic, interested readers are referred to Beni (2012) and Beni and Curi (2012).

Different types of competition and cooperation may foster or hinder the clustering process. Cartel formation among operators in destinations, for example, is a type of cooperation between organizations that results in artificial prices and, at the same time, in stagnation in supply quality improvement, undermining the competitiveness of the destination vis-à-vis its competitors—with the advent of Airbnb this problem has become even more complex due to the lack of regulation. On the other hand, joint investment in destination promotion reduces costs for the parties involved, resulting in an increase in the quantity and/or quality of the tourist flow to the destination. Although both cases are of inter-organizational cooperation, the former hinders the clustering process, while the latter promotes it.

Horizontal clustering occurs by fostering the creation and dynamization of relationship networks between those organizations/individuals directly involved in the provision of services and products to the end consumer. These networks can bring together both those from the same sector (hospitality, Airbnb, for example) and those from complementary sectors (receptive operation, among others). The case of the unique voucher for the tourist destination of Bonito (MS) is an interesting example of a tool capable of promoting the horizontal clustering process.

In turn, vertical clustering is the result of the relationship of competition and cooperation between the different agents of the tourism production chain. If implemented properly, this dimension of clustering can promote greater internalization of the sector's production chain in the destination or region to which it belongs, increasing the multiplier effects of tourism in the local and regional economies, and at the same time reducing production and differentiation supply costs. (Moraes, 2012)

Finally, expanded clustering presupposes the creation and dynamization of a network of interpersonal and inter-organizational relationships between destinations and the centers sending, distributing, and receiving

tourists. Expanded clustering depends on vertical and horizontal clustering processes, since the formation of inter-organizational and interpersonal networks in the destination allows for the establishment of relationships with global markets; also, such relationships create a mobilizing and integrating process that enables an easy and prompt supply and demand monitoring in different tourist destinations at the global and regional level. This allows balancing the increase or reduction of traffic and global tourist flow, and achieving economies of scale necessary for the implementation of input production internalization processes. When I launched the book "Turismo: Planejamento Estratégico e Capacidade de Gestão" [Tourism: Strategic Planning and Management Capacity] in 2012, we still lacked the capacity of the information technology we have today, in digital platforms that have changed the the tourism industry with impacts never before imagined.

Remembering that we are on the threshold of 5G technology, I believe that we will finally able to monitor and correct the worldwide tourist traffic boom, with greater control over the distribution of regional flows.

3 OVERTOURISM – POSSIBLE COURSES OF ACTION AND ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES

Within the guidelines outlined above, several possible courses of action can be taken, such as: regulation and supervision, certification, classification, prioritization, selection, awards, contests, and competitions, as the illustrative examples provided in the following show. It is important to implement a culture capable of creating and innovating digital IT that use specific management and control programs, 24/7 monitoring that can highlight the status quo of each destination at the time of consultation by any tour operator and tourism development agencies working on the PPP system. Such a computational tool in a digital network would ensure the motivation of federal, state, regional and local governments—in partnership with tourism entrepreneurs and through cooperative governance with all third sector and communities—to invest financial and temporal resources in the search for creative solutions to satisfy both the needs of tourists and residents. Some examples of this course of action include globally: the Seven Natural Wonders contest, the competition process for hosting the Olympic Games and the World Cup, the UNESCO World Heritage List; in Brazil: the identification of the 65 key destinations of Brazil (a much-questioned method) and the new classification of the accommodation facilities, in 2010 (incomplete and equally questionable).

Of course, all this concern and technicality of research and precision of results sometimes does not resist to political interference.

4 OVERTOURISM IN THE DEFINITION OF TOURIST CARRYING CAPACITY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF VISITOR MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Unique experiences are experiences that are different. Both the monitoring of the tourist carrying capacity and the proper management of visitation ensure not only the conservation of the natural environment, but also that the individual needs of visitors are taken care of, bearing in mind that individuals have different levels of physical and psychological carrying capacity.

Likewise, local population must always be spared any disturbance and discomfort by the presence of tourists in their daily spaces; their habits and customs must be strictly saved. Tourism cannot and should not radically alter the daily life of the destination, causing any discomfort to its population. Examples include the Lord Howe Islands in Australia with an established tourist carrying capacity of 400 beds and the Fernando de Noronha archipelago in Brazil with a capacity of 450 simultaneous visitors controlled by the average daily limit of 130 tourists with access to the archipelago by air, considering the length of stay on the island of 3.4 days in 1999.

The emphasis is placed on the essentiality of an efficient and effective governance model to manage the complex set of different elements, including in the production network, services provided by tourism companies or businesses: accommodation, restaurants, tour agencies and operators, transportation, nature and theme parks, events, trade fairs and exhibitions, congresses and conventions, leisure and entertainment, in short, the wealth generated by the tourism industry; the multidimensional meeting between companies and industries related to communication and transportation infrastructures, complementary activities, support services (training and information), and natural resources and institutional policies.

5 TOURISM—INTEGRATED, SYNESTHETIC, AND INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

Access to information should cease to be a barrier to consumption of tourism experiences; rather, information should become its main driver both for already saturated destinations or developing ones. In case of overtourism, information is the solution to control and regain demand and for destinations that have reached maturity, it is a way of maintaining, and prevent undesirable saturation.

To this end, the integration between different means of communication and the use of different media capable of exploring the human senses is essential. It is through the use of synesthesia and immersion that communication will be able, at the same time, to inform and anticipate what may be enjoyed by visitors through the adequate semiotics of communication in the tourist experiences usually offered or to balance the visit in saturated destinations avoiding periods of full occupancy and consequent discomfort. The more interactive the communication is, the more the potential tourists will perceive it as part of the experience at the destination, since it becomes the subject and not just the receiver. If we consider that the construction of a destination in consumer markets is something that occurs in the human imagination through the perception of certain territories through lived experiences, we can understand that the experience can, and must, overcome the spatial barriers that separate tourists from destination in pre and post travel experience, as a form of communication, especially in those saturated destinations. It is in this sense that experiential communication fulfills its essential role.

6 GOVERNANCE AND TOURISM CLUSTER MANAGEMENT

Once the tourism cluster is formed and structured within a sustainable territory development, it is necessary to consider governance and the correct management and operation of these destinations planned and organized for their hosting mission and true tourism enjoyment. In this sense, it is appropriate to go through the experiences of some European countries, notably in Scandinavia.

Hypermodern consumers have long ceased to be those of postmodernity; they are becoming increasingly hyper-transformative, computerized, with their smartphones at hand and almost all the information needed: booking sites, maps, location, and the like, not to mention what is about to happen with 5G technology. Therefore, those who seemed to have reached the end point are still reaching the starting point, which requires network organizations to make an even greater change in the availability of data and information, which are not yet available due to negligence on the part of local governance and public-private policies.

A preliminary effort has been the catalyst for the sustainable growth process and governance organization. However, we observe, even in more advanced regions of Europe, the absence of this organizational and catalyst effort for the establishment of cooperation networks. These networks started following initiatives agreed upon by public-private governance and implemented along with tourism service providers. It is important to note about these successful organizations, especially in the Nordic countries, that the leadership is critical. Top managements must oversee changes in the system, organizational structure, and culture of stakeholders that are part of the information and service network.

The most important task to undertake is, however, stakeholders' cultural change in line with the destination marketing organizations (DMO) that play an important role in guiding agents throughout the change process.

It is essential to understand and correctly interpret the role of DMOs that oversee network members and changes in tourism-oriented regions and their surroundings, as well as those in development, already developed, in equilibrium, stagnation, decline, resurgence or saturation, and dissolution.

7 DMOS: KEY MONITORING TOOL FOR TOURISM CLUSTERS

A destination marketing organization still seems to be the most complete tool—with an aggregating and conciliatory structure—to aggregate the dynamics of all social actors and institutional agents that act politically and operationally in a tourism cluster. The DMO—by its very nature resulting from a strong institutional combination of public, private and third sector governance—can support outstanding development, aggregating the strengths necessary to ensure the management, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as the stability and sustainability of the tourism cluster. The DMO should gather—and soon with the help of 5G technology—all the tools for controlling, evaluating, and generating simultaneous, real-time information about the carrying capacity, from check-in to check-out, monitoring the density of floating population and signaling the imminence of saturation and forecasting the length of stay. Likewise, global networks connecting source countries and regions and tour operators, such as airlines, water, road, and rail transportation, hotels and Airbnb, the daily occupation of these already saturated clusters—e.g. Venice, Barcelona, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Prague, among others—could be managed. We would not have imagined that one day this could happen, but the "red alert" is already on our smartphones and those of service providers with booking forecasts and demand reduction.

The structure and skill base of many DMOs must support outstanding development, to reconcile rigid changes, assumed or not, and to benefit from other new opportunities. Organizations that previously have carried out traditional goal-setting functions, such as advertising and promotion, useful information and development in distribution channels and services—which, in turn, have been the link to the community—must continually renew maintenance and innovation efforts from the bottom to the top. Therefore, several scholars emphasize the key role of DMOs in implementing a much-needed permanent dialogue and the convergence of these tools to assist the governance body in the process of management, innovation, and sustainable development of the destination.

It is important to highlight that the DMOs are tools for managing, monitoring, evaluating, and controlling within local or regional production networks composed of companies, but DMOs do not replace the governance of the tourism cluster, albeit being a decisive partner in evaluating the socioeconomic and productive performance within the scope of their political and institutional responsibilities.

Another key feature for the sustainable development of tourism supported by the DMOs is the central role the entrepreneurial character—always renewed in the development of goals—assumes in the companies that are part of the production network, giving them the ability to face sudden changes and market turbulence that can disturb destinations, such as the threat of decline and saturation.

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