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17 The roles of policy, planning and governance in preventing and managing overtourism

Introduction

Without a doubt, the backlash against tourism – whether due to overcrowding or an overabundance of negative impacts on residents such as rising costs, the disappearance of rental accommodation, or the spread of low quality jobs – is at least partly the result of a lack of political vision and will. Although many of the goods and services provided to satisfy tourism demand are delivered by the private sector, the public sector – composed of elected and appointed officials as well as bureaucrats – plays a key role in fostering and controlling the movement of tourists and the activities of the businesses that provide goods and services to tourists.

Balancing the needs of businesses, tourists and residents is the function of planning, and the decisions related to determining goals and selecting the methods to achieve them constitute policies. How decisions are reached, the processes used and the inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders is referred to as governance. This chapter will examine the role played by national level governments in addressing and preventing overtourism.

The growth of tourism

The 1950s saw the beginning of strong economic growth that led to a rapid expansion of the middle class, particularly in the United States. These middle class consumers were a key source of demand for travel-related services in the global economy over the next 50 years. International arrivals worldwide grew rapidly, rising from 25 million in 1950 to 166 million in 1970. As of 2018 we have surpassed 1.3 billion international visitors, with predictions of 2.4 billion by 2030 (Euromonitor International, 2018).

Today, 3.6 billion consumers are considered middle class, and this group is projected to reach 5.3 billion by 2030, with the growth occurring almost exclusively in Asia (Kharas and Hamel, 2018). With India and China accounting for half the middle class by then, it should not surprise anyone that these countries will dominate tourism demand in the years to come. As these new consumers join the ranks of international travellers, attracted by many of the same top destinations, it is little wonder that the pressure is often becoming too much for the local populations at those destinations.

In 1970s scholars began to speak out about the negative impacts of tourism. George Young, for instance, observed that a result of the over-development of the coast for tourist purposes was that the Mediterranean Sea had been damaged to the extent that in 1973 "every one of the 6,000 registered beaches in Italy was dangerously polluted and some beaches had bacteria counts five times higher than the safety limit" (1973: 157). Today, European cities are particularly impacted by tourists; their major attractions tend to be the historic centres, with their concentrations of old – even medieval – buildings and monuments, and plazas and narrow streets, which are quickly inundated by large crowds. This is the case of Barcelona, Venice, Prague and Lucerne, as described in the case studies (Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12).

Whether listed in the Michelin Guide, Frommer's, Fodor's, Lonely Planet or any other off and online travel guides, the "must see" sites tend to be very similar. Word-of-mouth recommendations have always played a large part in tourism promotion and helped to put many "undiscovered" destinations on the dream list of visitors; electronic word-of-mouth recommendations on social media are no exception (see Chapter 5). Social media fuels travel and increases the desire of travellers to "discover" out of the way places, be the first to post about an achievement, connect with local residents or duplicate a famous image. Today, the amplification through social media of lesser-known destinations can have devastating consequences as such destinations are rarely equipped to handle a sudden onslaught of visitors (see Chapter 14).

The forces behind tourism policy

Since the early days of modern tourism, its development has been almost exclusively driven by the positive economic impacts associated with it. Therefore, at the national level the primary motivation for governments to foster tourism has tended to be to take advantage of tourism's prodigious ability to attract foreign exchange and investment, generate employment, provide tax revenues and assist with regional development. In post-war Europe, for example, governments incentivised the construction of high-end tourist accommodation to boost exports.

Although the primary motivation for governments to promote tourism is for its economic benefits, tourism is also recognised as a means to foster better mutual understanding and is therefore seen as contributing to preserving peace. "Peace", "security" and "quality of life" are the recurrent themes of declarations, treaties, acts and agreements at the international level. An example of this is the 1975 Helsinki Declaration (OSCE, 1975), which explicitly stated that the participating governments considered tourism as something that contributes to improving understanding among people, to increasing knowledge of the achievements of other countries and "to economic, social and cultural progress" (OSCE, 1975: 35). All politicians – regardless of

political affiliation – ultimately promise their electorates that their policies and initiatives will improve their quality of life, whether they believe this can be achieved by easing the burden on corporate and individual taxpayers, investing in the creation of more jobs, or by creating support programmes for the more disadvantaged groups in society.

Since governments at all levels value tourism's economic contributions, they focus on increasing visitor numbers, specifically the figures for international overnight tourists, and on maximizing revenues derived from them. Tourism sector growth rates regularly exceed those of the global economy, and these are gleefully vaunted by all and sundry in the industry. For example, the World Tourism Organization noted that "International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) increased 6% in January–June 2018 compared to the same period last year. [. . .] This represents a continuation of the strong results of 2017 (+7%) and exceeds the rate of 4% or higher growth recorded every year since 2010." (UNWTO, 2018b) Since both spending and length of stay can be directly correlated to distance travelled by source markets, tourism marketing plans tend to target long-haul tourists. Indeed, Weber et al. describe ideal tourists as "individual guests who stay longer, spend more, visit different areas and interact more with the local people" (Chapter 12: 179). Domestic tourism is also growing, and is easily five or six times as large as international tourism in terms of arrivals (Kester, 2013), and the combined pressure on societies and the environment of all these trips is making itself felt in every corner of the world.

The degree of involvement and the role that governments play in developing the loosely defined "tourism industry" depends heavily on a country's history, socio-economic development, the maturity of the industry and the political ideology of the ruling party. These factors will determine the extent to which their involvement is active or passive, and whether their actions will aim to control, support (financially or managerially), orient and/or plan the tourism market. In general, national and regional tourism policies tend to focus on improving understanding of the tourist markets and their potential, catering to their needs, and devising strategies to attract them.

Since there is no one industry called "tourism" – in spite of efforts to define it through Satellite Accounts (see Chapter 2) – but rather a complex, self-organizing network of relationships, akin to a swarm of bees or a school of fish with hundreds of thousands of individuals, it is very difficult for government to engage with relevant stakeholders. Therefore, tourism stakeholders tend to take an "association" approach: working with sector and functional associations and associations of associations. The "relevant stakeholders", however, tend to prioritise quantitative growth of tourism, not qualitative improvements in the quality of life of the resident population or in ecosystem health.

Policy documents at times address the barriers to international tourism, including lack of sufficient infrastructure (e.g. roads, rail, ports and airports), insufficient attractions, restrictive visa regulations and access limitations, but the commissioning

organisation (ministry, department, etc.) actually has control over a very narrow scope of aspects. Therefore, tourism stakeholders have limited ability to influence policy in areas e.g. customs and immigration, health, education, economic development, transportation and natural resources remain marginalised

While tourism is seen as a tool in the arsenal for achieving policy goals, the policies that seek to increase the economic returns of tourism rarely seem to consider the downstream social and environmental consequences, such as congestion, undesirable tourist behaviour, crime, waste management issues and noise pollution, among others. While neoliberalism posits that the market will correct itself, an unfettered market can have devastating consequences when applied to tourism (Simmons, 2017). Examples of what results from ignoring or responding ineffectually to the fallout include the temporary closure by the Philippine government of the very popular Boracay Island (Chapter 7), the closure of Maya Bay in Thailand (Chapter 8) and the thousands of deaths annually during the Hajj in Saudi Arabia (Chapter 13). As long as success is measured in terms of increased visitors and receipts, one can expect more environmental damage and also more resentment, and even downright hostility, from local populations. Hence, tourism policy must include the checks and balances that allow the host community to share in the benefits to be derived from tourism, not just bear the costs.

Taking social and environmental factors into consideration in tourism policy making requires a "whole-of-government" approach, much as Barcelona has taken (Chapter 9), in which various government departments are brought together. This approach was recommended by the participants of the 2017 "High level meeting on tourism policies for sustainable and inclusive growth" hosted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017: 3). At this meeting, Portugal's Secretary of State for Tourism, Ana Mendes Godinho, stated that in her country, "'every minister is the minister of tourism' meaning [that] policy and regulatory decisions are considered carefully in how they might impact the tourism industry due to its vital importance to the country's economy" (TIAC, 2018). While a step in the right direction, this approach only considers the impact of each ministry on tourism and the actions by each ministry that will help sustain tourism, it does not consider the impacts of tourism on the other ministries and their portfolios.

The need for planning

Scholars have long identified the need for planning to ensure the integrated development of tourism that is responsive to community desires and needs, and the regular monitoring of key performance indicators covering all aspects of sustainability (see for instance Inskeep, 1991). While governments are increasingly happy to devolve tourism marketing to partnerships that involve public and quasi-public sector

organisations and tourism business interests, they tend to keep a much firmer control over tourism development, with upper tier governments frequently overriding the wishes of local governments and communities that face the brunt of the impacts. Perhaps the best known examples of this are the hosting of hallmark events that often require billions of dollars in public infrastructure, ignoring the resident opposition to this profligate spending of tax revenues, partly in the name of enhancing the nation's image and increasing tourism (Dunn and McGuirk, 1999; Gursoy and Kendall, 2006; Giulianotti et al., 2015).

Butler (see Chapter 6) distinguishes between overtourism and overdevelopment and observes that overtourism leads to both a loss in quality of the experience for visitors and a loss of quality of life for residents, and that overtourism is largely due to the inadequacy of infrastructure, facilities and services. Ensuring that infrastructure, facilities and services are adequate to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of domestic and international visitors and those of the resident population (in a context of accelerating urbanisation) requires long-term planning.

The highly seasonal fluctuations in demand for services and facilities, experienced by most destinations, can aggravate any inadequacies. Governments can help spread demand by staggering school vacations, as Germany's Länder (regions) do (see, for example, School Holidays Europe, n.d.) or by requiring that some annual leave must be taken separately from the main holidays, as France did when it adopted a fifth week of paid vacation. Spreading demand geographically is another option in addressing overtourism, though more difficult as lack of transportation infrastructure and a lack of attractions tend to be barriers to dispersal, and both require significant investments to overcome.

Controlling supply to discourage demand is another option available to governments. Barcelona has taken the drastic step of halting further licensing and development of accommodation (Chapter 9), while Mallorca (Summers, 2017) has gone even further, with a planned reduction in the number of beds available. Many destinations are battling the spread of online short-term rental platforms, such as Airbnb, since the use of residential accommodation by tourists tends to lead to a shortage of affordable housing for residents.

Although governments can control development through regulation and licensing, to be effective they would need to be able to determine what constitutes an optimum capacity and identify when the limits to change that are acceptable to residents and visitors alike are approached. Walter Jamieson documents a number of the models that have been tested in this regard (Chapter 16).

Many issues associated with overtourism cannot be addressed at the macro level by upper tier governments as the conditions can vary vastly at the micro level, depending on the level of urbanisation, the amount and size of events and attractions, the diversity of the local population, the fragility of the natural environment, the public infrastructure in place, and ease of access, among others. At the same time, municipal governments have no say beyond their boundaries and are too

often reliant on upper tier governments to help fund large infrastructure projects. Furthermore, a large portion of intra and intercontinental tourist flows are controlled by transport and tourism stakeholders, including airlines in terms of seat capacity and cost (see Chapter 11 on the impact of low-cost airlines on a destination), cruise lines in terms of ports of call, and tour operators. We see this playing out in several of the case studies: in Venice (Chapter 10), where the cruise port, outside the municipal borders, brings tens of thousands of day excursionists into the city each day; in Prague (Chapter 11), where the airport is being expanded to cope with demand even as the city centre is choking with visitors; and in Barcelona (Chapter 9), where the surrounding towns offer accommodation options, thus frustrating the efforts of the city government to control visitor numbers. These companies cannot easily be controlled and many companies, including transport and tour companies, can simply switch locations should the economic, social, environmental or political conditions in a destination no longer be optimal.

In theory at least, Barcelona is a "textbook case" of responsible tourism. The City of Barcelona was proactive by starting to plan strategically over a decade ago to "strengthen the balance between local residents and tourists while preserving the identity values of the city" (Chapter 9: 129), involving not only the community but also multiple municipal departments. It also decreased the focus on promotion and marketing by the local DMO, placing an emphasis on the management of tourism. And yet, the protests and antipathy towards tourists in Barcelona have increased to the point where the city finds itself in an almost intractable situation: those who stand to gain financially from the tourist trade do not want to see it curbed, but residents, especially those living in the areas where tourists congregate, feel crowded out and are dismayed by the drastic changes in their neighbourhoods. A survey by the city council in 2017 found that almost 60% of surveyed residents felt that "Barcelona is reaching the limit to its capacity for providing tourist services" (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2017: 3). Yet every small "victory", like getting cruise liners to moor further away from the city and discovering thousands of illegally rented apartments, is countered by the strong year-over-year increases in visitation (e.g. a rise of 8.2% in the number of passengers on cruise ships docked at Barcelona Port between August 2017 and August 2018) (Ajuntament de Barcelona, n.d.).

Long-term planning at the national level is often decried as it is associated with communist regimes, yet many large-scale infrastructure programmes, such as the construction and expansion of major highways, rapid transit and high-speed rail, airports, etc., require planning 20 to 30 years into the future. While this type of planning will include forecasts for demand, sometimes even from tourists, they often do not consider how the improvements in access will shape and shift visitor demand (the market seizes those opportunities). Thus, there is almost no thought given to the impact on the quality of life of residents or on any changes to the identities of local communities that are an inevitable consequence. When growth is more rapid than the planning takes into account, we see not only an exacerbation

of crowding, but also the failure of infrastructure, as in the case of deaths during the Hajj in Makkah (Chapter 13) where overcrowding has taken on extreme proportions. It is anticipated that the number of pilgrims will triple in the next decade, yet options for their dispersal in time and space are very limited due to the religious symbolism associated with certain sites in Makkah.

It is interesting to note that a recent publication by the UNWTO (2018a) on overtourism does not see any role for macro or meso-level planning in addressing the issue. At most, cities are encouraged to work with surrounding areas to promote alternative attractions and events and to disperse visitors seasonally, although it does call for "governance models that engage administrations at all levels (tourism and other relevant administrations), the private sector and local communities" (UNWTO, 2018: 10). There is no acknowledgement that the changing distribution of middle-class spending will have an effect on markets, and that established destinations will likely see increases in arrivals from Asia, particularly China and India, that outpace even the predicted middle class growth of 6% (Kharas and Hamel, 2018). This influx will add to the sense of overcrowding as such new entrants into the tourism market are more "visible" amongst the population, which could very well increase the sense of loss of identity of local residents at destinations, since there is a perception of greater social and cultural distance. This sentiment also correlates with the benefits and costs derived from tourism (Thyne, 2001; Zaidan, 2016) and is playing out in cities like Lucerne (Chapter 12).

Like "whole-of-government" policy and regulatory decisions, tourism strategies focus on how they impact on tourism. The foci tend to be: improving access and connectivity, streamlining visa and regulatory processes, expanding and upgrading product and experience offerings, ensuring sufficient labour including through temporary migration, and better research-driven marketing. All of these objectives will see an increase in numbers, possibly with some dispersal in time and space but with little space for resident voices, and none for those who are tourism-phobic. Furthermore, while it is generally recognised that "all strategies strongly benefit from more cooperation between administrations at multiple levels, also beyond tourism" (UNWTO, 2018: 10), such cooperation is very rarely the case.

Governance

"Governance determines who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered" (Institute on Governance, n. d.). The crux of the overtourism conundrum is that three of the four types of governance as defined by Hall (2011): *hierarchies* (state governance), *markets* (essentially private economic actors and their associations) and *networks* (dominated by various forms of public-private partnerships and associations) are dominated by actors that

largely follow the dictums of a neoliberal agenda. Thus, these actors perpetuate the focus on economic growth and job creation, push for constant increases in tourist volumes and spending, and foster a business environment that is allowed to externalise social and environmental costs (Simmons, 2017).

Almost all the destinations suffering from overtourism have lost much of whatever power they had to control development and/or determine tourist flows to exogenous sources of capital (e.g. cruise lines, low cost airlines and international hotel chains). The neoliberal philosophy that took hold in the 1980's worked towards much greater liberalisation of trade, freedom of movement for capital, goods and services, deregulation and a reduction of government control and interventions as a means to increase economic growth. The signing of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1995, followed by a myriad of regional trade agreements, forced the opening of more domestic markets to tourism development and foreign direct investment. The implications for tourism were problematic as these agreements reduced governmental autonomy in the delivery and provision of various social services and the management of resources. These agreements were signed at the national level and so the call that sustainable tourism development requires input from all stakeholders – formal (public, economic and non-economic institutions) and informal (social capital) institutions (see Chapter 18) – is fairly illusionary.

Governance through networks is particularly popular in tourism and can be found at every jurisdictional level, but more often than not, membership is "pay to play". This tends to limit participation to organisations that stand to gain from an increase in visitor numbers and spending. As regards the governance of marketing campaigns, which not only shape how a geographic region is portrayed but also who is targeted and the type of tourism that is promoted, the influence of the private sector leaves little room for other voices to be heard, be they residents or visitors.

Although it is recognised that governance requires government and non-government stakeholders to voluntarily collaborate through a complex web of both horizontal and vertical networks, private citizens and their associations in their capacity as taxpayers, workers and residents have little meaningful input into policy-making deliberations, especially at the regional and national levels. At best, they are "consulted" and requested to provide feedback on proposals that are fairly well advanced. Even their elected officials in local authorities can only exercise the powers granted to them by senior levels of government, severely constraining their ability to avoid the destruction of what are ultimately the primary attractors for tourists – the local environment and culture. And the negative impacts that inevitably accompany an ever-increasing number of international and domestic tourists are borne by local residents.

The governmental domains that impact tourism (e.g. the departments of transportation, natural resources, labour, health and safety, customs and immigration, consumer protection, culture, parks and recreation) tend to be hierarchical, with their own narrow agendas. Therefore, even when tourism agencies are inclined to

drive positive social and environmental change by providing a more meaningful role for host communities, their counterparts at the national and state levels are rarely be open to including these voices. For example, a ban on climbing Uluru (formerly known as "Ayers Rock"), Australia, was achieved, after years of lobbying, by the Anangu people, the traditional owners, to whom Uluru has deep cultural meaning (Hitch and Hose, 2017), but the announcement of the ban by the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park Board of management engendered much controversy among businesses and national government officials, who are more interested in keeping the marketing draw Uluru represents than in respecting the wishes of the Anangu people. Similarly, tourists have been ignoring the many signs put up asking them not to climb this sacred site, contributing to the perceived disrespect for this "place of Law" (Wilson 2018, as quoted in Henschke, 2018, 1917).

Conclusion

Overtourism starts with short-term thinking on the part of politicians too focused on re-election and who have bought into the notion of unrestrained free-market capitalism, and is fostered by the ignorance of bureaucrats and the lack of courage to confront politicians about long term consequences, as well as by greed on the part of businesses, which are more concerned with grabbing as much as possible of the shared resources for their own profit while externalizing as many of the costs as possible.

The backlash to tourism did not happen overnight: it has built up slowly over decades (see, for example, Doxey, 1975). Today it is accelerating, however, as ever more people crowd into the same spaces. A piecemeal approach will not solve the problems. Piecemeal measures range from the ludicrous, e.g. stopping people taking beach sand in Sardinia (Street, 2018) and prohibiting street snacking in the historic district of Florence, Italy (O'Hare, 2018), to the extreme, e.g. banning new tourist shops in the centre of Amsterdam, Netherlands (Boztas, 2017). Addressing the issue of overtourism requires a transformation in how the capitalistic forces driving tourism's growth are harnessed. The focus must shift from raising tourist numbers and receipts to improving the quality of resident life and of tourism experiences, with a planning horizon that is at least 20 years into the future to anticipate the infrastructure, facilities and services needed by increasing local populations and visitor numbers.

This shift is gathering momentum, with the neoliberal market economy coming under increasing criticism in recent years, including from business leaders themselves, and viable alternative models and approaches being proposed. These include: "conscious capitalism", which proposes to "elevate humanity through business" (Conscious Capitalism, n.d.); social enterprises or cause-driven businesses, which aim to maximise improvements in social and environmental well-being; Bcorporations (a certification), which "consider the impact of their decisions

on their workers, customers, suppliers, community, and the environment" (Bcorporation, n.d.); a "circular economy", which proponents say will "redefine growth, focusing on positive society-wide benefits. It entails gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources, and designing waste out of the system" (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, n.d.); and the "Economy for the Common Good", which "advocates a more ethical economic model, in which the wellbeing of people and the environment become the ultimate goal of business" (Economy for the Common Good, n.d.). All of these approaches challenge the short-term, profit-motivated approach to business that has greatly enriched humanity and driven the growth of the middle classes, but has been accompanied by environmental destruction, social stress and market failures.

With the world population fast approaching 9 billion, and with it likely to reach 11 billion by the turn of the century, and with more and more people having the means to travel domestically and/or internationally, we must recognise the pressure each of us exerts on the planet and societies in tourist destinations, and decide what we deem important and what we are willing to do without, and fundamentally change our mindsets and behaviour to ensure sustainability. Some paradigm shifts are already underway. Among young people, for instance, there is a tendency to be more minimalist, less focused on the acquisition of material goods and more interested in experiences, rather than traditional mass tourism.

Technology is touted by some as an enabler of making alternatives to traditional mass tourism more accessible, re-distributing arrivals temporally and geographically, and even as a substitute for physical travel, and technological solutions are being hotly pursued by many destinations as part of "smart cities" initiatives. Gretzel, and Scarpino Johns (2018) call for a smart tourism mindset to enhance destination resilience. This requires not only that the physical structures, means of transportation, electricity grid and utilities as well as closed circuit cameras all communicate with each other as well as with users, but that they do so with technologies that are "smart" in that they can adapt, sense, learn, anticipate and predict, and ultimately self-organise and even self-sustain (Derzko, 2007). The sharing and analysis of the data collected in this process would allow organisations to co-create value for consumers through the personalisation of recommendations and notifications. Boes, et al. emphasise "conceptualizing the smart tourism business ecosystem as involving a multitude of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders who, through participatory governance, are encouraged to co-create the smart tourism value propositions" (cited in Gretzel and Scarpino Johns, 2018: 7).

There is no magic solution to overtourism. Addressing the issues will require a combination of a compelling vision of well-being for the resident population and long-term strategic planning for tourism, managed using a governance model that is inclusive horizontally as well as vertically, and pays more attention to maximising social and environmental well-being than to the profit motive. While we can envision a future where smart cities will deliver offerings that allow for tourist, host

and resident experience enhancement and sustainability goals at the destination level, this is a longer-term solution to addressing overtourism. It is also unclear to what extent this model is scalable to the regional or national levels, which play a large role in exacerbating the pressures at the local level.

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