Chapter 15

Lisbon Historic Quarters: Identity vs. Overtourism

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ABSTRACT

This chapter contributes to the emergent debate about sustainable tourism versus overtourism, in the context of urban development. The study underlines, on one hand, the growing importance of tourism in the historic quarters of Lisbon, and on the other hand the rise of overtourism and its effects on residents’ quality of life. Consequently, there is the analysis and debate regarding the policies responses of the Lisbon Council in the framework of an integrated urban rehabilitation in Lisbon’s historic quarters and the Lisbon Council Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Travel & Tourism (T&T) is one of the world’s largest and fastest-growing economic sectors (WTTC, 2019). In 2018, it represented 3.2% of World GDP (direct contribution) and is forecast to rise by 3.6% in 2019. Additionally, it is expected to continuing to grow by 2029 (WTTC, 2019).

The tourism importance, it’s exponential growth and recent overcrowded territories, enhance several impacts both in local ‘community and business’, and tourists. Accordingly, “overtourism” – as a phenomenon created by “the perfect storm of budget airlines, short-term rental websites, and social media” (Loudis, 2018) led to tourist demand concentration associated with crowded/overcrowded territories. Once the problem, “has largely been ignored” (Neuts & NijKamp, 2012; in Jacobsen, Iversen & Hem, 2019: 53) an emphasis in tourism planning and management is urgently required.

In this context, this paper aims at investigating the growing importance of overtourism in Lisbon, the capital city of Portugal, and its central historic quarters, namely Alfama, Mouraria e Bairro Alto. Regarding the methodological framework, firstly it begins discussing concepts such as “crowded/overcrowed” as well as “overtourism”. Consequently, it examines the tourism policy/strategy in European
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cities, namely related to the rise of “tourismophobia” or “tourismophilia”. Additionally, it also highlights the main challenges of tourism planning and management in order to overcome the negative impacts of overtourism.

Regarding the methodological framework, it is based on a case study analysis. Firstly, it puts in evidence Lisbon tourism market characteristics. Secondly, it discusses local policy concerns regarding tourism and historic quarters “overtourism” impacts. In accordance, documentary research on Lisbon’s tourism policy is discussed fundamentally based on Municipality documents. Finally, the main conclusions are presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overtourism and the Increased Tourismophobia

Growth in international tourist arrivals (5% in 2018) and receipts continues to outpace the world economy and both emerging and advanced economies are benefitting from rising tourism income (UNWTO, 2019: 2). Europe accounts for half of the world’s international arrivals (51%), 5% of growth, and almost 40% of international tourism receipts (UNWTO, 2019: 6). “Southern and Mediterranean Europe led results [+8% of tourist arrivals], with most destinations enjoying double-digit growth. Among the larger destinations, Italy, Greece, Portugal and Croatia saw robust performance” (UNWTO, 2019: 10).

Cities, and namely the “300 of the largest city travel destinations accounts for over half a billion trips per year, which amount to 45% of global international travel” (Oxford Economics’s Global City Travel; in WTTC, 2018: 18). Simultaneously, “travel to city destinations has grown more rapidly than total international travel demand over the past decade and account for a rising share of overall travel demand (…)” (WTTC, 2018: 18).

Consequently, many destinations are presenting high levels of tourism demand concentration and intensity, usually associated to concepts such as “crowded”, “overcrowded”, “overtourism” (any destination suffering the strain of tourism) (Richardson, 2017), “hotspot destinations” (“attract many ‘site seers’ associated with popularity and overall destination appraisal), “tourist bubble” (Cohen, 1972), “(excessive) commercialization” (Ponting & McDonald, 2013), among others. The term is also related to “carrying capacity” (Borg, Costa & Gotti, 1996) that is the maximum limit to tourism development. “Overtourism” has become a phenomenon created by “the perfect storm of budget airlines, short-term rental websites, and social media” (Loudis, 2018).

Crowding is associated with several meanings compatible with its own complexity, subjectivity and dynamic. On one hand, it could be understood as “indication of tourism destination popularity and fame” (Petr, 2009), on another hand, perceived as a “source of negative traveller reactions (Dowling, 2006; Jacobsen, 2000; Krebs, Petr & Surbled, 2007; in Jacobsen, Iversen & Hem, 2019: 53) and resident community reactions (Seraphin, Sheeran & Pilato, 2018: 374).

As several studies highlight, “crowding as both perceived social density and as physical density in relation to desired or accepted levels” (in Jacobsen, Iversen & Hem, 2019: 5) and consequently is associated with “approach reaction” or “avoidance reaction”. “Overcrowding” could also be associated with “success”, although the term is imprecise (McKinsey & Company and WTTC, 2017: 8). The referred authors’ assumption is that: - overcrowding is not exactly alike in any two destinations; - overcrowding is currently more a matter of sensibility than data; - overcrowding is easier to prevent than to recover from.
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