

Chapter 17

Covid-19 Vs. Over-tourism: Challenges or Opportunities for Tourist Destinations: Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has thwarted global mobility over an unimaginable scale, forcing the competitive market processes of the tourism sector to be seriously disrupted. The ongoing pandemic has closed borders, suspended flights, quarantined more than half of the world population, induced mass fear and shook globalisation. The phenomenon of over-tourism is related to the high number of tourists, the nature and time span of their visits and the carrying capability of the destination. To understand the nature of over-tourism and the implications, it is essential to recognise why people of particular cities have begun to see tourism as a factor that has an adverse impact on their quality of life. This chapter aims to provide a link between Covid-19 and over-tourism and also to examine whether both of these can offer opportunities or challenges to tourist destinations in the future. Based on the analysis of numerous existing crisis recovery mechanisms, the tourism industry is expected to rebound from this abrupt market shock, mostly due to various forms of government interventions. The present startling moment of the Covid-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to find hope in the ruins through the deconstruction of framings of crisis as 'error' and through reflecting on the present and future role of tourism in contributing to a more socially and environmentally sustainable community.



Keywords: Covid-19; over-tourism; opportunities; challenges; tourist destination; crisis; new normal

Introduction

The outbreak of Coronavirus, Covid-19, represents an essential and evolving challenge to the tourism sector. Containment of the pandemic is the top priority,

and the tourism sector is committed to supporting all measures taken to contain the epidemic. The United Nations Organization (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and World Health Organization (WHO)) are working very closely to ensure a coordinated and effective response. As most of the things are very uncertain or changing very rapidly during this pandemic and even if the rapidly changing reality quickly overcomes any assessment of the impact of this unprecedented crisis on the tourism sector, based on the latest developments regarding quarantine measures, travel bans, border closures and the patterns of previous situations, the UNWTO can already foresee a massive loss in tourist revenues, especially at the international level. The World Travel and Tourism Council warned that the Covid-19 pandemic could cut a million jobs in the travel and tourism sector as travelling is expected to drop worldwide in 2020 significantly (UNWTO, ).

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In response to  the virus outbreak and the imposed social distancing, many World Heritage properties are currently closed, thus having social and economic consequences on the communities that live in and around these sites. Covid-19 has also suspended many intangible cultural heritage practices with significant implications for the social and cultural life of organisations around the world. The unfolding Covid-19 pandemic has closed borders, grounded planes, quarantined more than half of the world's population, triggered anxiety en masse and shaken global capitalism to its core. Scholars of the political ecology of disasters have sought to denaturalise so-called 'natural' disasters by demonstrating their disproportionate consequences. In contrast, work on the political ecology of health similarly accounts for how the risk of illness and disease are socio-economically mediated. While this scholarship has demonstrated the need to contextualise the uneven consequences of disaster and health, we still know very little about how hope is cultivated in moments of crisis. This commentary integrates the scholarship mentioned above to not only account for how the unequal consequences of the Covid-19 disaster reveal the festering wounds of structural inequality but also how, in this revelatory moment, we may find hope in the rubble. By deconstructing framings of crisis as 'error' and homing in on the current and potential role of tourism to contribute to a more socially and environmentally just and sustainable society, this commentary opens new debates at the intersection of tourism geographies and political ecologies of hope in revelatory moments of crisis. Even though over-tourism is a recent phenomenon and a new subject of scientific research, there are several definitions presented thus far in the literature. Most authors agree that it is tough to give a commonly accepted definition of over-tourism. Koens, Postma, and Papp (2018) suggest that the term over-tourism mainly arose from media discourses without a solid theoretical foundation. This new concept is very unclear because it is not well-defined, it lacks clarity, and it is challenging to make it operational (Capocchi, Vallone, Pierotti, & Amaduzzi, 2019). That is why over-tourism remains open to multiple interpretations (Koens et al., 2018). Furthermore, the term over-tourism does not describe a single phenomenon but a multitude of sensations that converge and overlap expressing a new trend worth being analysed (Capocchi et al., ). This

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chapter has bi-folded aims, first to look after comparison in-between Covid-19 and over-tourism and second to check either these both are opportunities or challenges/crisis for the tourist destination in the long term.

Covid-19

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Since its emergence in early 2020, the rapidly spreading Covid-19 (Corona) pandemic has wreaked chaos around the globe. While numerous communities have been facing lockdowns of varying lengths, the economic consequences of the virus have been devastating. The effects on the global tourism sector, not to mention thousands of destinations worldwide, have been particularly harmful as our normally hyper-mobile society has ground to a halt. It is not only the major players in the tourism supply chain (airlines, cruise companies, international hotel chains) who have suffered unfathomable damage, which is estimated to amount to \$1.2 trillion (Goodwin, 2020; Polias, 2020). In thousands of localities, businesses of all sizes, which depend either directly or indirectly on the visitor economy, have suspended operations, and indications are that many of these will likely never reopen. The impact on the sector's labour force has been devastating, especially considering the precarious nature of numerous tourism and hospitality-related jobs at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder (Inel, 2020; UNWTO, 2020). Both the scope and consequences of global immobility induced by the Corona crisis have incredibly perplexed tourism practitioners, policymakers and researchers (Viles & Shipway, 2020). While, just a few years ago, Gal (2015) anticipated the possibility of a global pandemic playing out as the 'perfect storm', the interlinked social, cultural, psychological and economic effects of a crisis of this magnitude are leading us along unforeseen trajectories. On the one hand, there is already growing speculation especially in the mass media that the pandemic might trigger an enduring shift in market behaviour, which could radically transform global travel patterns (Din, 2020). On the other hand, we recognise that in the past, following a particular crisis, including the outbreak of epidemics, the tourism industry has usually bounced back, demonstrating the sector's remarkable resilience to mitigate sudden breakdowns in demand or supply (Norelli et al., 2018; Theodorou et al., 2010).

Indeed, evidence suggests that memories following crises and disasters tend to be short and sooner, rather than later, things return to the status quo (Antogeorgopoulos, 1999). For instance, although the SARS epidemic in the early 2000s initially led to a drastic fall in visits to China, the destination rapidly rebounded (Gill et al., 2005). Disaster capitalism, influential stakeholders in destinations like Thailand and Sri Lanka, which were devastated by the massive tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004, used the catastrophe as an opportunity to implement land grabs, leading to brand new large-scale developments that quickly enticed international visitors to return (Wen, 2011). If a particular tourist destination is affected by an unforeseen sudden event such as a volcanic eruption or a terrorist attack, the major international travel suppliers (e.g. tour operators and airlines) substitute this with another one offering similar attractions and

facilities (Thunides, 1994). This ability of footloose international players to shift their turf, aerospace or fairway around the globe is currently a moot point. Following the closure of international borders, almost all international passenger air traffic has been cancelled, and transnational cruise liners sailing underflags of convenience are refused entry into most ports.

The unprecedented circumstances that the travel and tourism sector currently faces as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic signify that in an evolutionary sense, we have reached a fork in the road where at least two general outcomes are possible. The first (based on extrapolations of past recovery history) is that the sector will gradually revert to the pre-crisis unsustainable growth-oriented trajectory. An alternative scenario entails a transition towards a radically different way of doing things (Rrbach et al., 2017). Arriving at this metaphorical fork in the road constitutes an opportunity for society at large to pause and ponder the way forward. After all, from an etymological aspect, the word 'crisis' originates from the ancient Greek 'jqí ril', which among its several definitions has to do with coming to a judgement or making a decision.

Nowadays, a crisis implies that a turning point has been reached giving rise to the opportunity to institute varying degrees of change that may allow us to move away from the original trajectory and escape some of the problems associated with this (Vides & Petridou, 2015; Polas, 2020).

We treat the disruption in global tourism as a prism through which we contemplate how broader transformations could play out in the aftermath of the Covid-19 crisis. We admit it is dangerous to make predictions with limited facts, nor do we possess a crystal ball as to how things might evolve in the aftermath of the present crisis. Instead, by adopting a far less ambitious stance, we discuss how the present catastrophic effects on the tourism sector present an opportunity for reconsidering certain practices. Therefore, there is a potential decline of mainstream tourism practices, which are currently severely disrupted by Covid-19, with emergent niche activities, for which opportunities might arise from the very same disruptions.

Over-tourism

According to Peeters, Gössling, Klijs, Milano, Novelli, Dijkmans, and Mitas (2018) by its very nature, the over-tourism phenomenon is associated with high numbers of tourists, the type and time frame of their visits and a destination's carrying capacity. Thus, over-tourism may appear when the number of tourists in a particular place is exceptionally high. However, over-tourism is not just the same as the phenomenon of overcrowding, which is commonly known and has been researched for many years (Milano, 2017). Too many tourists in a particular place are not enough to call it over-tourism. According to the definition by Peeters et al. (2018), the critical factor is the impact of tourism. However, destinations with tourism development that approach or exceed their ecological capacities were identified and researched plenty of times; thus, this problem is not to be perceived as a new phenomenon defining over-tourism. In fact, what is new

(or most likely forgotten in tourism research for the last few decades) in the definition by Peeters et al. (2018) is a social capacity (Namberger, Jackisch, Schmude, & Karl, 2019). At the very beginning of the research on tourism impacts, it is possible to find many works (Cazes, 1989; Wheeler, 1991; Whinney, 1996) on the social effects of mass tourism under the heading of alternative tourism, which was one of the critical topics of tourism studies between the 1960s and the 1980s. Mass tourism, which was growing fast at that time, was perceived negatively, as local societies in particular destinations were excluded from economic benefits and were bearing the social and cultural costs of its development.

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Additionally, tourists were consuming low, culturally inauthentic products (Cannell, 1973, 2013). Unfortunately, it appeared that small-scale alternative tourism could not be a proper solution to solve the global problem of mass tourism. The outcome of the alternative studies stream was a bit forgotten when sustainable tourism development studies took the lead with the underlined ecological impact of tourism and the need to balance economic, social and environmental pillars of that development. Among those three, the social impact of tourism is the most difficult one to be researched and the most ambiguous one. It is agreed that the economic pillar of tourism development is mainly about benefits; the ecological one is primarily about costs. It is easy to identify the many cost and benefits of tourism development of a social nature, and the balance of the social values and services can be very different in different places, and it can change with time. Thus, it is not surprising that several scientific and practical studies on sustainable tourism development were concentrated on balancing the economic benefits and ecological costs.

On the contrary, many studies in over-visited city destinations are focused on the social carrying capacity (Namberger et al., 2019). The significance of the negative social impact is evident in the most commonly reported examples of over-tourism. The ubiquitous part of those examples is the resistance of citizens of particular cities against tourism and tourists, which is manifested in differentiated ways (Namberger et al., 2019). Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolkowski, Wijesinghe, & Boluk (2019) stated that over-tourism indicates that local communities are becoming increasingly hostile to forms of tourism that are imposed on them and diminish their quality of life. A popular term used to present this inhabitants' negative perception of how tourism development impacts their lives is 'tourist phobia'. The term was used for the first time in 2008 to explain a mixture of repudiation, mistrust and contempt of tourists (Dodds, & Butler, 2019). Later, a similar concept, tourism phobia, has been deliberated together with over-tourism as a direct result of the accelerating evolution of unsustainable mass tourism practices (D'Amico, Novelli, & Cheer, 2019). Examples of tourist phobia were already identified in many cities such as Barcelona (Dodds, & Butler, 2019;

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Porto, 2018) and Berlin (Dodds & Butler, 2019).

To understand the nature of over-tourism, its causes and consequences, it is necessary to understand why citizens of particular cities started to perceive tourism as a factor that has a negative impact on their quality of life (D'Amico et al., 2019). The answer to this question is complicated and includes changes

of quantitative and qualitative nature and factors coming from the outside of the tourism industry as well as those from the inside, including those who were and still are at least partially dependent on tourism stakeholders' actions. The widely recognised factor, which is independent of the tourism industry and tourism academia actions and which is of typical quantitative nature, is the growth of tourism. Fast-growing numbers of tourists, which is an objective fact confirmed in statistics (such as those conducted by UNWTO), are partially supported by marketing activities of the tourism companies and public bodies, but trends mainly influence it in the global economy, politics, technology and demography. However, over-tourism should not be perceived as merely a too big number of tourists.

To understand the dramatic increase in the perception of hosts that tourism may be a disadvantage for their lives, an additional switch in tourist behaviour and preferences is to be considered. That switch is much more difficult to be captured and measured than just the growing number of tourists, and as such, it is much more ambiguous and controversial. What is also of great importance is the fact that, at least partially, tourism policies following models proposed by the academia are responsible for that switch.

The New Normal

As many academics and media commentators have noted, the scale of Covid-19 has shocked the global tourism industry with force similar to the Great Depression or World Wars I and II (Bisby, 2020; Hall, Scott, & Gössling, 2020; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; Hollingsworth, 2020). Academic, journalist and social media commentators propose a 'new normal' (Ateljevic, 2020; Berentson-Shaw, 2020; Degarege, 2020), while the pandemic continues to evolve. For many communities worldwide, the pandemic is a historical turning point as many are small-scale, remotely located (so isolated from the virus unless outsiders arrive) and without health support needed to manage the pandemic should the virus reach their communities. Those with tourism ventures are experiencing business downturns, and many owner-operators or family businesses are unable to relocate or retrain quickly without leaving their homelands. Undoubtedly, there will be no singular experience of the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead, many occasions will be diverse and unsettling depending on each country's government response to the health and socio-economic needs arising from the pandemic. As Bisby (2020) noted, even in Canada with its strong economy.

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Challenges versus Opportunities

The aftershocks of the Covid-19 pandemic will present us with an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine more resilient and equitable tourism forms (Lew, Ng, Ni, & Wu, 2016). Yet, through the reframing of the Covid-19 pandemic as 'error' or malfunction of current industry norms, it is also possible that this potential may be squandered. Those with the means to monopolise what will become the

post-Covid-19 tourism industry will undoubtedly seek to do so. Smaller, locally owned tourist venues close daily. At the same time, corporations that support tourism and are ‘too big to fail’ receive state support to not only survive but also thrive through consolidation with less fortunate competitors. Just as the top 1% of Americans captured 91% of the income growth after the Great Recession, we may find that the precarity of most tourism industry actors will follow suit. Indeed, as one *Forbes* commenter suggests, ‘this is the normal reaction of inequality to a recession. The rich lose the most in the recession and then gain the most in the aftermath and recovery. That second simply being a result of the first’ (Worstell, 2020). The need for a ‘new normal’ could not be more urgent, and activists and academics around the world have sought for their audiences to heed this warning. As Huijbens (2020) explains, ‘That is not tourism as business as usual. That is a completely different type of tourism that starts in our backyards’. As states prepare for the economic fallout of Covid-19, we may also witness how the crisis is appropriated as a political tool to stabilise existing political-economic structures as well as bridle efforts towards collective mobilisation (Masco, 2017). These responses are familiar tricks in what Klein (2017) describes as the disaster capitalist playbook in which she describes with disturbing clarity how power profits from disaster. She explains, ‘Shock tactics follow a clear pattern: wait for a crisis..., declare a moment of what is sometimes called “extraordinary politics”, suspend some or all democratic norms – and then ram the corporate wish list through as quickly as possible’ (Klein, 2017). While Klein first described these plays more than a decade ago, they resonate deeply with the current response to the Covid-19 disaster. With one out of 10 people in the world working in tourism and the industry accounting for 10% of the global GDP, the effect of this kind of socio-economic restructuring could echo the post-2004 Indian Ocean tsunami recovery efforts where, as Rob Fletcher recalls, there was a deepening of privatisation and corporate consolidation (Fletcher, Murray, Blázquez-Salom, & Asunción, 2020).

Growth-centric strategies of tourism development in particular cities led to another tragic mistake, which was opening doors of coastal cities for cruise tourism too wide. For many years, Venice was presented as a ‘perfect’ example of a destructive impact of overdeveloped cruise tourism on the city’s sustainable development, including influence on the environment, citizens and tourists (Capocchi et al., 2019; Dodds & Butler, 2019; González, 2018; Seraphin et al., 2018; Veiga, Santos, Aguas, & Santos, 2018). After the tremendous success of *Game of Thrones* being shot partly in Dubrovnik, this city is perceived as even more strongly ‘infected’ by over-tourism and, in particular, by cruise tourism (Capocchi et al., 2019). [Pavliotopoulos and Pisano \(2017\)](#) indicated that the ‘over-tourism dystopia’ is related to the paradox of tourism that risks the destruction of what tourists come to see. In both cases, it should not be perceived that the over-tourism problems of both cities are caused by the cruise tourism only, but both cities suffer because of the vast number of tourists travelling there by planes, coaches, cars or trains, and there is another massive stream of tourists travelling there by the sea. Even more discouraging is the fact that this vast stream of tourists does not bring too many benefits for the local economies as they arrive

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at their destinations with their accommodation and often also with gastronomy on-board. However, the problem is so apparent that in many places, local authorities have taken different measures to deal with it. However, many authors turned our attention to factors not directly connected with numbers. The most commonly unaccepted tourists' behaviour has been pointed out (Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019; Goodwin, 2017; Phi, 2020). Seraphin et al. (2018) noted that the environmental sustainability of destinations might be permanently jeopardised and that the tourists are impacting negatively on the quality of life of the locals and reducing the positive contribution of tourists to local legal businesses. Over-tourism has also been linked to the Tragedy of the Commons, as tourism activities often rely on and heavily exploit public resources (Goodwin, 2017; Phi, 2020; Pintassilgo & Silva, 2007). Additionally, Der et al. (2019) stated that over-tourism appears for a variety of reasons, which are shaped by several supply-side destination drivers, demand-side factors and a global supply chain. The last two are difficult for destinations' management to influence. Finally, it is clear then that particular reasons for the appearance of over-tourism in a destination might differ significantly between specific places.

Discussion, Conclusion and Avenues for Future Research






Covid-19 is going to reshape tourism as we saw it before. Yet, while there are grounds to be optimistic, the issue of who will profit from this restructuring is still unsettled. Tourism has the potential to play a crucial role in realigning culture (Gibson, 2019). Yet the story of how Covid-19 is going to restructure community has yet to be established, and there is reason to expect that people around the world will fight back against attempts to adjust the crisis paradigm in ways that reinforce influence (Klein, 2020). Thus, seeking optimism in times of distress needs awareness of the systemic differences that have created the unequal effects of the catastrophe. The tourist industry and the radical players inside it have started to make an innovative contribution to this attempt to locate light in ruins. Calls for global solidarity among tourism stakeholders have accelerated from the UNWTO (2020) Global Tourism Crisis Committee, which calls for a concerted solution not only to recover but also to 'grow back better'. When the popular tourist attractions, once crowded with visitors, have seen the emptying of streets and cafes for perhaps the first time in decades, people have come to reconsider what a middle course could be for the renewal of tourism.

A few years ago, mass tourism was blamed not only for its detrimental effects on destinations but also by proponents of alternative tourism and many other academics and analysts, who pointed out very little value to visitors (Cazes, 1989; Cohen, 1987; Mohamad, Razzaq, Khalifah, & Hamzah, 2010; Wheeler, 1991). Usually, the empirical reality of the increasing number of people moving around the world and the growth of digital media and technological approaches, including shared economy booking sites, low-cost airlines and tourism web 2.0, are also to be blamed for the emergence of over-tourism. Furthermore, local, provincial and federal governments were not ready to cope with the inevitable

effects of overcrowding, since the research carried out by Peeters et al. (2018) did not disclose any assessment or tracking systems in any of the destinations surveyed, rendering it impossible to determine the efficacy of the interventions at a given location.

Changes in tourism development and modern destinations are relatively fast, and the findings obtained a few years earlier may not apply to new challenges. That is why a lot of potential research on the topic is needed. The effect of rising tourist traffic is an important topic to be studied. Future studies should serve to build a tourism strategy specific to destinations for over-tourism, which should define the exact methods and ideas discussed in contemporary destination management literature and how to change them. Future study should examine which form of tourist activity is viewed by people as the most unpleasant and which can be welcomed. Similarly, the degree of traffic that may be appropriate to people must be investigated; additionally, a study of areas that, according to the opinion of residents, can be crowded and should not be overcrowded by visitors in any conditions should be carried out.

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Uncorrected Proof

Author Query Form

Queries and/or remarks

[Q1]	Please confirm which reference the citation 'UNWTO (2020)' refers to, as there are two different references 'UNWTO, 2020a; UNWTO, 2020b' provided in the reference list.
[Q2]	Missing references: References 'Capocchi et al., 2018; Goodwin, 2020; Nicol as, 2020; Chanel, 2020; Miles & Shipway, 2020; Hall, 2015; Irwin, 2020; Novelli et al., 2018; Papatheodorou et al., 2010; Kontogeorgopoulos, 1999; Zeng et al., 2005; Cohen, 2011; Ioannides, 1994; Loorbach et al., 2017; Miles & Petridou, 2015; Cheer et al., 2019; Bisby, 2020; Panayiotopoulos & Pisano, 2007; Alonso-Almeida et al., 2019' are not listed in the 'References' section; please provide complete reference details.
[Q3]	Note that in the sentence beginning 'It is not only the major players...', please check and advise whether the term '400bn' should be changed to '400 billion'.
[Q4]	The citation 'MacCannell, 1976' has been changed to match the author name in the reference list. Please check and correct if necessary.
[Q5]	The citation 'Milno, Novelli, & Cheer, 2019' has been changed to match the author name in the reference list. Please check and correct if necessary.
[Q6]	The citation 'Martin, 2018' has been changed to match the author name in the reference list. Please check and correct if necessary.
[Q7]	The sentence 'As Bisby (2020) noted...' seems to be incomplete. Please check and amend.
[Q8]	The citation 'Phi, 2019' has been changed to match the author name in the reference list. Please check here and in subsequent occurrences, and correct if necessary.
[Q9]	Please provide the volume number for the references 'Ateljevic, 2020; Cazes, 1989; González, 2018'.
[Q10]	Uncited references: References 'Carr, 2020; Milano, Cheer, & Novelli, 2019' are not cited in text; please indicate where a citation should appear or delete it from the reference list.
[Q11]	Please provide the complete information for the reference 'Fletcher et al., 2020'.