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”Tourists Go Home!” – Tourism Overcrowding And “Tourismophobia” In European Cities (Can Tourists And Residents Still Co-Habitate In The City?)

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[CO]HABITATION TACTICS
Imagining future spaces in architecture, city and landscape

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Notes

All papers presented at this conference have undergone a process of **double blind review** by the members of the international scientific committee. The quotation system adopted is the **Harvard Referencing System**.

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Migration is probably the biggest social challenge of the last decades. The large human flux mobilized by this phenomenon affects the social and urban patch of our cities, it transforms our landscapes and it calls for a further reflection on the concept of boundaries. The latter, currently a core aspect of different disciplines' research agendas, can be considered a contact zone, hybrid and porous, whereby cultural interchange and co-habitation are possible. The aim of this session is, on one hand, to explore how users perceive these spaces, their capacity of interaction and adaptability through co-habitation tactics, and on the other, to propose material and spatial solutions that overcome both, physical and conceptual boundaries. Researchers are invited to present contributions to the topic of migration and its impact in different contexts: architecture, city and landscape.
"Tourists Go Home!" – Tourism Overcrowding And “Tourismophobia” In European Cities (Can Tourists And Residents Still Co-Habitate In The City?)

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abstract

Tourism development provides numerous advantages to the host nations and places. However, more recently, indiscriminate place marketing, as well as the development of low-cost flights and the popularization of home-sharing platforms, such as Airbnb, has led to massive surges in the number of tourists visiting European cities. Swelling number of tourists creates massive overcrowding making it difficult for locals to live in the more touristy neighborhoods. Some cities, where tourists and locals battle for the use of shared spaces, are already stretched to breaking point. The questions we ask in this paper is whether or not it is still possible for residents and tourists to co-habitate under these conditions and what tactics should be employed to change tourism so as to manage its impact and make it more sustainable for both tourists and residents.

keywords Urban Tourism, Place Marketing, Home-Sharing Platforms, Tourist-Resident Co-Habitation

“This is a warning sign. Any city that sacrifices itself on the altar of mass tourism will be abandoned by its people when they can no longer afford the cost of housing, food, and basic everyday necessities.” (Colau, 2014)

Ada Colau, since 13 June 2015 mayor of Barcelona

Introduction

Most people were taught that tourism is good for the economy and for the community because it brings jobs, foreign currency and helps local businesses. They believe in advertising their city/region/country to attract more tourists and the more people visit the more successful they think their city/region/country is.

Over the last few years, however, a series of protests against tourists, widely covered in the media have shocked the public. Last year, 2000 residents from Venice marched through this historical city to protest against uncontrolled tourism that is damaging and polluting the city (Anonymous, 2017b; Coldwell, 2017; Sansom, 2017). There were also crackdowns in Rome and Dubrovnik as locals were protesting against city-breakers and cruise ships (Coldwell, 2017). In Barcelona, residents protested against the proliferation of tourist apartments (Burgen, 2017). Some protesters even occupied a rental apartment and posted a banner on the balcony (Jessop, 2017) while in San Sebastian certain left-wing groups painted anti-tourist slogans on the wall, such as “Tourists go home!” (McLaughlin, 2017). Similar actions took place in Valencia, Majorca (McLaughlin, 2017), Bilbao (Jessop, 2017) and Venice (Hunt, 2017). Most of these events were peaceful. However, in Barcelona some youths attacked a tourist bus, punctured a tire and sprayed the bus with anti-tourist slogans. No tourist was harmed but they were shocked and shaken by the event (Burgen, 2017). So what were these local residents protesting against?

Research Objectives

The goal of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it will examine the main factors that have contributed to “tourism overcrowding” in a number of European cities. This part is important to understand the more recent manifestations of “tourismophobia” reported in the media. Secondly, it will try to understand whether or not it is still possible for residents and tourists to co-habitate in the “touristy” cities and what tactics should be employed to change tourism so as to manage its impact and make it more sustainable for both tourists and residents.
Background information

Transformation of cities from production-oriented into consumption-oriented

Tourism development provides numerous advantages to the host nations and places. Cities are particularly keen on developing the service industry related to leisure and tourism activities as with de-industrialization they have lost their industrial base and needed to reinvent themselves as service centers (Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). This is in line with post-Fordism which is characterized by a shift in trend from the consumption of goods to the consumption of services (Mowforth and Munt, 2009).

To make them more appealing to tourists, cities were subjected to gentrification. In fact, the relationship between gentrification and tourism development is so strong that it is often known as “tourism gentrification” (Janoschka et al., 2014). Tourism gentrification refers to the transformation of working class - or middle class - neighborhoods through the proliferation of hospitality and entertainment venues, thus making them more attractive not only to upper class residents but also to tourists (Gotham, 2005). This has had numerous social, economic and residential impacts (Nofre et al., 2017), the most important one being the transformation of neighborhoods from residential-oriented into leisure- and tourism-oriented spaces (Quaglieri Dominguez and Scarnato, 2017). Gentrification has been encouraged by local authorities through specific urban planning and regulations (Gotham, 2005; Nofre et al., 2017) and has often led to changes in the retail landscape (Nofre et al., 2017) and to displacement of residents (Gotham, 2005).

In addition place marketing has played a major role in changing the image of industrial cities (Ashworth and Goodall, 1990; Bramwell and Rawding, 1996). For example, the heavy marketing of Barcelona as a tourist destination since before the 1992 Olympics has changed its image from that of an industrial city ridden by crime and suffocated by pollution to that of a city of art, culture and entertainment (Petkar, 2017).

Lately development of low-cost flights as well as numerous internet platforms that allow travelers to book their own accommodation and plan their entire travel from the comfort of their home (Dunne et al., 2007; Egresi, 2016a) have also revolutionized the tourism industry and led to growing number of tourists (Williams, 2009). Moreover, much cheaper flights have encouraged people to travel more (especially short and medium distances on which the great majority of these low-cost airlines operate) not only for business but also for leisure (Bieger and Wittner, 2006; Rey et al., 2011). Major cities with cultural heritage and vibrant nightlife are especially attractive for city breaks (Graham and Dennis, 2010). This has led to a rise in the frequency of short travel alternative forms of tourism, mainly to other countries in the European Union (Dunne et al., 2007). An important contribution to the popularization of short travels and city breaks had the creation of economic and political blocs (such as the Schengen Agreement or the Euroland) which made border crossings faster and cheaper (Egresi, 2016d). Especially professionals prefer several shorter vacations in a year instead of or besides one longer vacation (Williams, 2009). On the other hand, the number of repeat visits is decreasing as more tourists are seeking alternative sites and attractions (Franklin, 2003).

During weekdays many accommodation units are occupied by business travelers so there is underutilized accommodation capacity during weekends which can be reserved by leisure-seeking travelers at discounted prices. Moreover, with the advent of home-sharing platforms accommodation could be much cheaper (Airbnb) or even free (Coach Surfing). Airbnb has been particularly successful (Guttentag, 2015). In Spain, already, there are almost twice as many accommodations in private apartments as in hotels (Lambea Lop, 2017). In Barcelona, while the number of hotels has increased by 83.74% between 2001 and 2014, the number of tourist apartments has increased by 258% within the same interval (Nofre et al., 2017). In fact, Barcelona is ranked fourth in terms of the number of tourist apartments listed on Airbnb (Lambea Lop, 2017). However, in many cities, a great proportion of these rental apartments function illegally. For example, in Barcelona, 78% of all accommodations that can be booked on Airbnb are illegal (Nofre et al., 2017 citing an Airbnb document).

Cities like Venice, London, Paris or Rome which in the past were visited as part of longer tours and, generally, more affluent populations have now become affordable weekend destinations for almost everyone. Due to the dramatic drop in costs, today even low-income people (including students) can afford these weekend city breaks (Dunne et al., 2007).

Emergence and development of home-sharing platforms, such as Airbnb has led to over-touristification of attractive neighborhoods situated within or close to city centers (Ioannides et al. 2018). Gutierrez et al. (2017) have analyzed the patterns of spatial distribution of Airbnb accommodations in Barcelona and compared it to the pattern of spatial distribution of hotels and with that of the most visited places by tourists. They found that Airbnb accommodations, while visibly concentrated in the central areas of the city are more scattered in those areas than hotel accommodation. This means that Airbnb listings extend the areas in the city center under pressure from tourism making life for local residents more difficult.
Rising number of tourists and tourist-resident relations

The total number of international tourists increased by 7% in 2017 against the previous year to reach 1,322 million (WTO, 2018). In Europe, the number of international tourists grew by a remarkable 8% driven especially by the extraordinary results in Southern Europe (13%) (WTO, 2018).

The number of international tourists has reached a record 84 million in 2017 and tourism accounts for about 13% of all jobs in Spain (Anonymous, 2017a). Important increases in the number of foreign tourists have also been announced in other European countries. For example, in Hvar, in the first seven months of 2017, the number of visitors increased by 20% over the same period in 2016 (Lyman, 2017).

This massive increase in the number of tourists visiting selected places in Europe brings into question the tourist-resident relations. The study of tourism impact on host communities has preoccupied a great number of researchers from a broad range of disciplines over the last four decades to become one of the main subjects of inquiry in tourism studies (Gilbert and Clark, 1997). Interest in tourist-resident relations goes back to the 1970s, when, following development of mass tourism, researchers started to be concerned with the impact of tourism and tourists on the local communities (Harrill, 2004). Doxey (1975) suggested that relation between tourists and residents will pass through a sequence of reactions as the number of tourists in the community rises. Initially residents’ perception of tourism development is best characterized by euphoria. This reaction will, in time, be succeeded by apathy, irritation and, eventually, antagonism. The recent surge in demonstrations and even violence against tourists shows that the tourist-resident relation in the most tourist-sought European cities may be entering the last phase in Doxey’s Irridex Scale. However, as pointed out by Faulkner and Tideswell (1997), most communities are heterogeneous; thus, resident responses to tourism stress will be different and could be both positive and negative (Jordan and Moore, 2018). In general, residents tend to accept the negative impacts of tourism if they benefit from it (Rasolimanesh, Jaafar, Kock and Ramayah, 2015).

Overtourism and tourism overcrowding

When locals and/or visitors complain about too many visitors in one place which could affect the residents’ quality of life and the tourists’ and excursionists’ quality of experience we can talk about overtourism (Goodwin, 2017). Many locations in Europe have been identified for experiencing overtourism today; however, studies on tourist crowding in high-density destination are still scarce and most of these studies are approached from the perspective of tourists. For example, a study by Neuts and Nijkamp (2012) has concluded that, while, in general, acceptability of tourists decreases with the growing number of tourists, this depends to a great degree on individual perceptions. Similarly, based on a case study in Florence, Italy, Popp (2012) argued that in case of urban tourism there could be negative crowding (due to the stress involved) as well as good crowding (in situations in which crowding could add to the experience). She stressed that while negative crowding could be a major problem in a city like Florence there are spatial and temporal strategies that could be employed to best experience a city affected by mass tourism. Weber et al. (2017) also emphasized that while crowding could sometimes be perceived as a sign that the attraction is worth visiting, therefore attached a positive connotation, negative crowding leads to overtourism. There are few works on tourist crowding from a resident perspective. One problem is that, very often, tourist crowding is not identified as a problem for residents. It is understood as a problem only when local people start rebelling; hence, overtourism is also perceived as a social movement (Milano et al., 2017). In a study published more than 20 years ago, Montanari and Muscara (1995) posit that very often conflicts between tourists and locals in some of the world's greatest tourist-historic attractions, such as Venice, are explained in a very simplistic manner leading inexorably to the equally simplistic conclusion that the number of tourists should be limited. They argue that, in fact, tourist flows are made up by many types of tourists, each with his/her spatial behavior, perceptiveness, receptiveness and spending power and not all these types are causing troubles for the residents; hence, the authors propose that some types of tourists be actually encouraged. Similarly, Clements (1989) argued that, in order to reduce crowding, tourism marketers should target certain market segments and discourage others. Finally, Montanari and Muscara (1995) believe that, in order to peacefully co-habitate, tourists and residents/commuters should be effectively separated when using the water transport system.

Resident-tourist co-habitation and tourismophobia

The co-habitation of residents and tourists is troubled especially when boundaries between tourist spaces and resident spaces are blurred as tourists like to wander into residential neighborhoods and mingle with locals in search of more genuine atmospheres (Quaglieri Dominguez and Scarnato, 2017). Tourists are no longer seeking the extraordinary in a location but rather looking to experience the picturesque urban fabric and urban everyday lifestyle (Quaglieri Dominguez and Scarnato, 2017). This is in line with the postmodernist trend emphasizing cultural difference and fragmentation that has replaced the global culture model. This new trend explains why more and more people travel today in search of authentic culture (Egresi, 2016d).
Previous studies have identified a clear correlation between tourism “overdevelopment” and the deterioration in the residents’ quality of life in cities popular with tourists, such as Barcelona (Casado Buesa, 2017). Overtourism has been blamed for reducing the residents’ buying power and increasing congestion as well as for reducing their sense of place and sense of belonging leading to collapsing socio-cultural connectivity (Milano, 2017b). The most affected by this massive tourism development seems to be the right of residents to decent housing (Casado Buesa, 2017). This may be because, as explained earlier in this paper, tourism gentrification is more complex than classical urban gentrification and residents can be affected in more than one way. Thus, long-term residents are displaced not only because rents normally increase after gentrification but also because tourists can afford to pay more. Moreover, as more residents move out and more tourists move in, tourism gentrification will also affect the socio-economic activities in the neighborhood (such as the type of retail) and the public spaces which are invaded by tourists and visitors further alienating the residents (Casado Buesa, 2017). Further, tourists’ behavior and tourists’ encroachment on residents’ personal spaces could put a lot of pressure on the remaining residents, eventually forcing them to move out (Casado Buesa, 2017). For example, the neighborhood of Barceloneta has lost over 11% of its permanent population in just 15 years, between 2000 and 2015 (Ballester, 2018 citing documents published by the local government of Barcelona).

“Overtourism” and “tourismophobia” are often used interchangeably although the two concepts are not synonymous (Soydanbay, 2017). Yet there is a relationship between the two concepts. That is, if the troubled resident-tourist relationship caused by overtourism is not fixed, it could eventually lead to “tourismophobia” (Vainikka and Vainikka, 2018, Milani, 2017b). The term was coined by the staff of the El Pais newspaper in Madrid (Ballester, 2018) and was later adopted by much of the mass media. The concept has more recently permeated into the academic literature, particularly in Spain (see Huete and Mantecon, 2018). The concept of “tourismophobia” could be shortly defined as extreme aversion to tourism and tourists’ behavior and tourists’ encroachment on residents’ personal spaces could put a lot of pressure on the remaining residents, eventually forcing them to move out (Casado Buesa, 2017). For example, the neighborhood of Barceloneta has lost over 11% of its permanent population in just 15 years, between 2000 and 2015 (Ballester, 2018 citing documents published by the local government of Barcelona).

Methodology

This study is based on the qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles and their reader’s comments. We have shown elsewhere (Egresi, 2017; Egresi, 2015) that qualitative content analysis of reviews and comments posted by travelers could be used as a reliable and relevant method to investigate people’s attitudes towards and perception of certain tourism phenomena and issues. However, to our knowledge, so far, there has not been any study to rely on reader’s comments on newspaper articles, although these could provide rich information and insights into tourists’ experiences that cannot be obtained through other methods (Law, 2006). The main advantage of this method is that the comments are not led by the researcher’s questions and subjects can post and interact with their online community members in a relatively uninhibited manner (Banyai and Glover, 2012). The idea for this study emerged as the author was documenting for another study and came across one article about residents of Barcelona protesting the “touristification” of residential neighborhoods. To select the newspaper articles to be analyzed for this study we employed a purposive sampling method. We used Google’s search engine to look for relevant articles using “anti-tourist protests” as keywords. We started with the first choice by google, clicked on it to check whether the document was a newspaper article and whether the content was relevant to our research topic. If it did not meet our criteria we moved on to the next document. Sometimes, the site visited would recommend similar articles published by the same or other newspapers which were also scrutinized.

In compiling our list of newspaper articles preference was given to articles with comments from readers, although some articles without any comment but which included interesting information not covered by any other articles
were also included in the list. We included only articles in English regardless of the date or year of publication, although most of the articles in our list date from 2017 when most protests took place. Since we did not use probability sampling, we did not have a definite sample size in mind. We stopped our search when we felt that we reached a point of saturation, when the information started to be repeated and no new content was produced (see Lopez and Whitehead, 2013).

The main disadvantage of this type of sampling is that it suffers from a number of biases due to the fact that the articles selected may not be representative for all articles and all comments that were written on the topic over a certain period of time. However, considering that the total number of articles and comments published online on this subject is not known and considering the pioneering character of this study, this was the only choice. Moreover, the chosen sampling method was appropriate for the purpose of our study as we did not intend to clarify exactly what percentage of the articles/comments can be classified as “anti-tourist” and what percentage as “pro-tourist”. The fact that there are articles/comments that report on anti-tourist attitudes of residents means that a segment of the local population (the size of which is irrelevant for the purpose of our study) displays negative feelings towards tourists visiting their cities. The purpose of our study is to understand the factors that have contributed to this attitude and for this goal a purposive sampling was considered adequate (Lopez and Whitehead, 2013).

For this study we analyzed the content of 16 articles and 1880 comments. The newspaper articles examined for this study are listed in the bibliography (together with the number of comments). However, some comments were discarded from the analysis for being duplicates or for not being related to the article examined. This resulted in a number of 1845 cases and 101,862 words that were further analyzed. Codes were pre-determined and based on our research questions and the cases analyzed were mined for useful quotes to illustrate the main problems identified.

Findings

Tourist overcrowding

Based on the media sources consulted, we found that overcrowding has become a major problem in many (West) European cities. In fact, residents of Barcelona consider overcrowding to be the second biggest problem for the entire city (Roca, 2017) and according to a recent poll conducted and published by the municipality of Barcelona, the residents of this Spanish city blame tourists for causing this problem (Peter, 2017).

Barcelona received 30 million tourists in 2016, of which 12 million day-trippers, a figure that is almost 20 times higher than its resident population (Sansom, 2017). Another popular destination, Venice, an old historical city of 70,000 inhabitants receives no less than 70,000-90,000 visitors a day more than doubling its permanent population. These visitors crowd all the popular sites and even wander into the residential neighborhoods which is resented by the locals who are transformed willy-nilly into actors for the tourists’ photo albums. As Valeria Duflot, co-founder of Venezia Autentica (Authentic Venice) rightly put it: “Venice is being turned into a theme park and locals and visitors alike resent this fact” (Sansom, 2017). This explains why residents are upset. As Goundwater (2017) explains:

“No wonder there’s a backlash. Surely people in Barcelona don’t want to live in a tourist attraction, don’t want to exist purely as a backdrop for Instagram photos. They want to live in a normal city, a place where they’ll have the same neighbors next week and the week after, where they can go to the market and buy some jamon and not have to push past a group of hungover tour passengers taking photos of the tomatoes to get there.”

1 / However, Soydanbay (2017) argues that “tourismophobia” is not caused by overcrowding but is rather triggered by xenophobia.
2 / We should be aware that in the past “tourismophobia” was used with different meanings. For example, Korstanje (2011) defined “tourismophobia” as “fear of traveling”.
3 / For those readers who still want to get a sense of how widespread this anti-tourist attitude is, I will provide some numbers as a footnote. A survey conducted in 2016 on a sample of 4959 residents of Barcelona concluded that more than half of the city’s residents viewed tourists’ behavior positively, 29.3% considered it to be neither good nor bad and 14.5% perceived it to be bad or very bad. However, in the more touristy neighborhoods the proportion of residents with negative perception of tourists was much higher, reaching 49% in Barceloneta and 37% in the Gothic District. Moreover, we should remark the sharp increase in anti-tourist attitudes. While in 2013 almost 70% of the residents believed that the city should continue to attract more tourists this segment dropped to only 47.5% in 2016, while 48.9% opined that the city has reached its maximum capacity to service tourists (up from 27.2% in 2013). Similarly, while in 2013, 74.7% of the residents assessed tourism management in their city positively and only 10% negatively, in 2016 these proportions changed to 43.9% and 23.6% respectively (Alvarez-Sousa, 2018).
What is somewhat surprising in Ms. Duflot’s statement is that not only locals but also tourists find overcrowding to be a major problem. Indeed, a poll conducted in Barcelona revealed that 58% of tourists found that some places in the city were overcrowded (Roca, 2011). For example, this is how reader/tourist NEurGeeza describes his/her experience in Barcelona: “Me and my partner spent the last 2 nights of a Catalan holiday in Barcelona before flying home and was shocked how overcrowded and downmarket Las Ramblas had become. Also the area around the Cathedral was like a sardine can” (Hunt, 2017).

Others, who visited the European city after (or have lived in it for) several years were able to document the changes that increasing tourism activity brought to the place. For example, a reader from Australia who commented under the name “Doctor Strabismus” wrote about the changes he witnessed in the city of Florence, Italy which he visited with his wife 40 years after his last visit: “I found it as beautiful as ever, but the congestion was almost unbearable, hardly possible to move at times, and I know I will never go back, which saddens me” (Hunt, 2017). Another reader, known as “The Moustache” who has been living and working in Palma de Mallorca (Spain) for ten years concluded regarding the changes in the number of tourists:

“Over the years, Palma centre has increasingly stopped catering for those who live there, replacing regular shops with luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton, and traditional simple restaurants and cafés with pricey tourist-friendly places serving frozen paella and the like. It’s incredibly difficult to find affordable accommodation for rent, such is its scarcity, and buses are now so full that it’s not uncommon to be waiting for nearly an hour before one turns up which has some space on it. Bins are overflowing, despite daily collection; the volume of traffic is higher than ever before, and there’s no parking; and beaches are full and littered with plastic and junk.” (Coldwell, 2017)

When reading these comments it becomes clear why travelers themselves resent overcrowding of the places they visit. This, in fact, has been noticed also by Groundwater (2017) who concluded:

“In fact, ‘travelers’ are a major part of the issue. They want to get off the beaten track, they want to see the ‘real’ city – but in doing so they’re breaking down the traditional tourist/local barriers, they’re popping up in quiet neighborhoods, invading locals-only havens in the name of seeing something authentic. At least the tourist crowd just congregates in one spot and can easily be avoided.”

Most readers commenting on the articles analyzed for this paper were of the opinion that, although there are many advantages to tourism development, unchecked growth would eventually alienate residents and destroy the very characteristics that made those places famous. For example, “Airstavros”, a British resident of a “tourism-oriented” region in England stated that: “Tourists bring money but ruin everything with litter and overcrowding during the summer. Second homes force locals out and expensive restaurants replace old pubs. Tourism will become antisocial if it keeps growing” (Lopez Diaz, 2017).

Next we will examine the main factors leading to the phenomenon of overcrowding visible in most tourist-attractive European cities.

Rise of city breaks and short trips leading to a focus on a few major tourist objectives

One of the major changes that have affected the tourism industry in the last decade or so is the shift towards shorter trips and city breaks (Dunne et al., 2007). When people have only two or three days to see a place they will prioritize the most obvious tourist objectives. These are those objectives that each tourist guide classifies as “must see” in the area. The consequence is that tourists travel with a list of places they want to see and take photographs with. When they flock en masse to these objectives, these places become clogged with tourists. One reader aptly described this situation as the “Mona Lisa effect”:

“I would argue a larger problem (at least for the moment) is the numbers of tourists are gigantic compared to the number of places they actually go to. Places get famous and people tend to flock to them, causing more people to follow and you end with a literal Mona Lisa effect where everyone is crowded into one small room taking photos of a single small painting that is behind glass and barriers whilst the rest of the gigantic gallery is quieter or untouched.” (Coldwell, 2017)

Day trippers and city breakers, therefore tend to stay in the city center, rarely choosing to explore further afield (Coldwell, 2017). They are driven by a desire to quickly check objectives off their list, then take a few selfies and post them on social media. On the other hand, when a tourist stays in the area for a longer period of time, he/she will visit the most famous objectives in the first few days after which they will visit objectives considered of secondary importance. These tourists also spend more time on resting and enjoying life so their agenda is less dense and they tend to be more relaxed and less aggressive when visiting places. The same is true with the tourists visiting the same city several times. While the first time they may, indeed, concentrate on the primary objectives, the next times they visit they would want to see places that are less “touristy” and experience local life (Gitelson and Crompton, 1984).
Rise of cheap flights leading to a focus on a limited number of cities

With the advent and rapid expansion of low-cost airlines, the cost of flying medium-distance has dropped significantly. In fact, as one reader (“cakefordinner”) observed, “it’s usually cheaper to fly than taking the train nowadays. It’s insane!” (Hunt, 2007). This has encouraged people to travel more often and has allowed even the poorer segments of the society to participate in the tourism phenomenon.

However, because they still need to be profitable, low-cost airlines tend to fly only to a number of select destinations which are already very popular or have the potential to become very popular with tourists. By so doing, low-cost airlines channelize the flow of tourists creating hot-spots that could lead to overcrowding of destinations. We, therefore, agree with one reader’s (“waaliki”) assertion that cheap flights have changed “the scale, type and impact of tourism on most European cities [...] in the last 10-15 years’ (Hunt, 2017).

Increasing popularity of home-sharing platforms leading to the spreading of tourists within the city and displacement of residents

Although a very new phenomenon, the popularity of home-sharing platforms has skyrocketed in the last few years both among tourists and among owners of rental properties. In Barcelona, for example, there are 16,000 holiday rentals which accommodated around 9 million tourists in 2016 (Sansom, 2017) and every day new apartments are listed. Since few of these homes are newly built, this means that, in fact, residential apartments serving local population are transformed into holiday rentals to serve the needs of tourists. In the historic Gothic district already 27% of all housing is being used as tourist accommodation and there are buildings in which the number of holiday rentals has surpassed the number of residential apartments (Roca, 2017).

One effect, as already intimated in this paper, is that rents go up and ordinary residents are forced to move out. In central Barcelona, for example, rents increased by 25% since 2014 (Roca, 2017) and an ordinary apartment is rented now for €800 or more while many young locals earn €1,000 or less a month (Peter, 2017). They can no longer afford to live in those neighborhoods and are forced to find cheaper arrangements on the outskirts. This residential trend is reflected in the statistics showing that the number of residents in the central neighborhoods of Barcelona has fallen by almost one-half in the past decade (Roca, 2017).

The situation in Barcelona is not unique. Many commentators have reported similar urban problems in London, Amsterdam or Berlin. For example, “Deanna” pointed out that “investors and foreign buyers have bought most of London driving up prices and rents, with Airbnb adding to it” and believes that “[...] uncontrolled greed is the reason and unless governments put their foot down and make laws and implement them nothing will change” (Lopez Diaz, 2017). When people cannot afford to live in the towns and villages in which they were born, “Airstavros” claims, “they [...] resent the tourism and expensive restaurants that have replaced shops and cafes” (Lopez Diaz, 2017).

Moreover, besides the effect these have on rents in the area, residents resent home-sharing platforms, such as Airbnb, “[...] because of noise, but more often because of total collapse of community you get when people come and go weekly” (opinion expressed by “waaliki” commenting on Hunt, 2007).

Increasing popularity of cruise ships and day-trips by coaches leading to higher concentration of tourists

A relatively new phenomenon, the popularity of cruise ships is growing year by year. As many as 3.6 million cruise passengers visited Spanish port-cities in the first half of 2017, a figure that is twice as high as a decade ago (Tadeo and Penty, 2017). Readers commenting on the newspaper articles analyzed for this research mentioned that cruise ships could unload as many as 5000 visitors (“Frenchview” in Hunt, 2017) and very popular historical cities, such as Venice, could receive as many as 17,000 cruise passengers in one day (“Anne Baillie” in Groundwater, 2017). Even second-tier tourist cities, such as Cadiz (Spain) could be “flooded” with as many as 17,000 cruise passengers in one day (“Professor Parkin” in Hunt, 2017). In small towns, such as Dubrovnik, the impact of these masses of visitors is even greater (“Georgette Wheeler” in Anonymous, 2017). And the numbers are predicted to go up in the coming years (Tadeo and Penty, 2017) creating resentment among residents (Peter, 2017).

Although these visitors usually behave well (“Frenchview” and “Professor Parkin” in Hunt, 2017), they are detested by the locals because they “[...] have pre-paid their meals and crowd the towns with masses of people in shorts, funny hats and selfie sticks with cameras attached who just walk around and buy nothing” (“Frenchview in Hunt, 2017). Moreover, “these multiple groups of 50+ people often have head phones and are listening to their guide and don't care who they run over or push into walls in their determination to keep their guide in sight” (“Georgette Wheeler” in Anonymous, 2017). The general conclusion is that these visitors do not benefit local economies, yet, simply by their sheer numbers could bring a city “to a halt” (“Anne Baillie” in Groundwater, 2017) and the
recommendation is that city governments take responsibility, limit the number of ships allowed per day and charge per visitor (“Anne Baillie” in Groundwater, 2017) and that cruise ship organizers “encourage people to travel more responsibly and with consideration to the locals” (“Georgette Wheeler” in Anonymous, 2017b).

**Overall impact on residents**

Many residents in European cities and towns are complaining that the recent increase in the number of tourists is making their lives intolerable (Anonymous, 2017a). For this reason, many residents would like to see a stop to their places being promoted as a destination for tourists. “Ivan Tiger” explains that his city does not need more tourists because space and resources are limited: “Sorry, but London’s economy does seem to promote unnecessary tourism to the fatal outcome of residents – e.g. all these Central London blockages every weekend – which means locals cannot get taxis, buses, roadways thru to hospitals, work, any social activities, childcare/elderly lunch clubs and most tubes are still not accessible to disabled, so we’re all trapped in our homes from Fridays to Mondays.” (Hunt, 2017)

The same idea is echoed by another reader (“Doctor Strabismus”) who calls for solutions to limit the number of visitors “within bounds of sanity” while recognizing that “everyone has an equal right to travel and love places like Florence” (Hunt, 2017). What most residents complain about is not overcrowding but a complete transformation of their place from a residential neighborhood into a tourist-oriented area with no regard for the residents. “Kate King” commenting on the article by Hunt (2017) summarized this situation very clearly: “[…] The point is that the whole place becomes taken over, not only with coaches, tour buses and thousands of extra people per day. The shops become gift shops and every recreational space becomes a melee. It isn't that locals don't appreciate the tourist yen or dollar. It's that they don't want their environment to become nothing but that. Locals need real shops, would prefer to eat out in places that aren't dominated by loud tourist groups with phones on sticks and don't want all their pedestrian precincts filled with mobile stalls selling spinners and wooden roses – or whatever the equivalent in their town …“ (Hunt, 2017).

The result is that cities invaded by tourists become uninhabitable by year-round residents who are forced to move out and abandon their places of residence to tourists (Anonymous, 2017b). For example, “Ferdy Lijftogt” laments: “I used to live in Amsterdam and while I still like visiting the city, I wouldn't want to live there anymore because of the tourists. Especially the British stag parties who think that the city is a sort of adult Disneyland and roam the streets looking for drugs, drinks and prostitutes.” (Coldwell, 2017)

Three conclusions can be drawn from the quote above:

1. Many tourists fail to notice that their playground is also a residential neighborhood in which locals try to go on with their lives. In some of Barcelona’s central neighborhoods banners were hung from balconies to remind tourists of this fact but these had a very limited effect (“necronancy” – an ex-resident – in Colau, 2014).
2. It is not only the overcrowding that bothers residents but also the behavior of tourists, who, unlike tourists in the past, are not as much interested in a cultural experience as they are in getting drunk and doing things that would never dare to do in their hometown. Or, according to “Jonellsworth”, perhaps they would: “Part of the problem these days is that many ‘tourists’ are not ‘touring’ at all or seeking any form of cultural experience or knowledge gains whatsoever. They are simply boorish, binge-drinking louts who behave pretty much the same way when they are at home” (Coldwell, 2017).
3. Most residents want their neighborhoods (and their city/town) to remain “residential”. However, with each new tourist moving in and each resident moving out there is a possibility that their neighborhoods/cities would turn into a theme park. As a reader, known by the handle “Mad Maki”, in a response to another reader who accused residents of xenophobia, puts it: “It’s not about appreciating diversity, it’s about turning historical cities into theme parks for tourists who walk around like sheep, not caring where they are, their only purpose being to take a selfie at the world-known sights (sic!) and buy some ‘Made in China’ typical souvenir (in a place where a ‘real’ shop used to be). […] The architecture and cultural attractions of a city are important, but without the people who live there, their bars, restaurants and shops it’s something more like Disneyland.” (Coldwell, 2017)

Of course residents understand the benefits of tourism and are willing to make some compromises. However, they do not want to live in a “fantasy” place. Moreover, as was also evidenced in previous studies (see, for example, Egresi, 2016c) most locals do not benefit from tourism – tourism brings indeed a lot of money but “this doesn't filter down to ordinary working people” (“Bee Locks” in Hunt, 2017) – they only share the costs as “ordinary people get priced out of living in the city where they work” (ibidem). Even some residents who make a living from tourism feel overwhelmed by the onslaught of tourists during the summer season making everyone's life so much more difficult and declare that they would happily agree with any restrictions and regulations to limit the number of tourists (“el Brujo” in Coldwell, 2017).
Also, while most of the complaints seem to come from larger and more populated places (cities), it is possible that the effects of tourist overcrowding are felt worst in smaller and/or less densely populated places, such as Iceland, a country in which the number of tourists skyrocketed after the 2008 financial crisis. This is how “Kriabird” describes the impact of tourism on residents in this country:

“Iceland’s been hit very hard with this. We have more tourists visit each year than we have people living here. Our already poor road system is crumbling, idiots keep chasing horses with drones for ‘dramatic effect’, and far too many people are ignoring warnings at the ice floes, cliffs or dangerous beaches and getting into trouble and the (volunteer!) search and rescue teams in danger. … [Tourism is] a huge part of our economy but the attitude of a lot of tourists is infuriating, and the negative effects the sheer numbers is having on locals is getting absurd.” (Coldwell, 2017)

What can be done to ensure peaceful co-habitation of residents, tourists and visitors?

In the previous section we have concluded that a series of factors related to tourism development challenge the co-habitation of residents, tourists and visitors in many European cities. The question is what can be done to solve this problem.

One reader (“Bucket”) suggests banning “Airbnb style lets” unless the owner lives in the house, banning cruise ships from docking in busy destinations and limiting the access of tourist buses to city centers (Hunt, 2017). Limiting the number of tourists is not a new idea. In the past, a number of studies have argued for demarketing as a means to reduce overcrowding and to encourage/discourage certain tourist types (Beeton and Benfield, 2002; Carlsen and Ali-Knight, 2004; Clements, 1989). Demarketing, a term coined by Phillip Kotler (Kotler and Levy, 1971), is defined as “that aspect of marketing that deals with discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers in particular on either a temporary or permanent basis” (p. 75).

Current urban policy and planning is outdated as it cannot cope with negative impacts of tourism development and there is an urgent need for a new community based planning strategy that is able to ensure neighborhood livability and co-habitation between residents and tourists (Nofre et al., 2017). Therefore, it is stringent that we find solutions that could both protect and preserve residential neighborhoods and satisfy the needs of the tourists (Lambea Lop, 2017).

Some readers (“serpyuk”; “Hendouwenti”) also pointed out that most of the problems discussed here are not the fault of tourists but rather the fault of central and local governments that failed to plan for and regulate the increased tourism activities and are unable to control corruption and illegal activities (Coldwell, 2017; Lopez Diaz, 2017). Their conclusion was that the number of tourists should not be limited. This opinion is also shared by some decision-makers at both global and national levels. For example, while recognizing that the rise in anti-tourist sentiments is “a very serious situation that needs to be addressed in a serious way”, Taleb Rifai, the secretary general of the United Nations’ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), has argued that the solution to this problem is not the limitation of tourism but rather the design and implementation of strategies for managing crowds in destinations, such as extending the area visitation beyond the famous landmarks and tourist objectives, diversifying tourist activities, reducing seasonality and addressing the needs of the local residents (Coldwell, 2017). Although we agree that we should not blame the tourists for the situation, we believe that the number of tourists must be capped. Of course, tourist apartment owners and hotel owners will not be happy with this decision but we need to control tourism development “otherwise we'd end up having a city with just tourist apartments and deserted neighborhoods” (Roca 2017; quoting Agusti Colom, chief of tourism for the Barcelona municipal government). The ever increasing number of tourists in Barcelona could be interpreted as a sign of success but these numbers cannot go up indefinitely or else “Barcelona could die of success” (ibidem). The present mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, has already taken the decision to freeze the total number of tourist accommodation units (tourist apartments included) at 158,384 and to gradually redistribute these units away from the city center (Roca, 2017). Similarly, Venice is considering a ban on new tourist accommodations in the city center (Coldwell, 2017). One reader (“Helen Wheels”) reports that similar concerns exist also in Amsterdam where the city council tried (albeit unsuccessfully) to limit the number of centrally located accommodation units advertised by Airbnb (Hunt, 2007).

Next, these cities should clamp down on illegal tourist apartments and tax more those that are legal. Since the existence and rapid expansion of tourist apartments shared on Internet platforms such as Airbnb emerged (in this study and many others) as one of main factors responsible for the frictions between residents and tourists, Lambea Lop (2017) suggests suspending the permits for tourist apartments and designing new regulations and special urban planning rules for these short-term rentals.

There is already a strategy to do exactly this in Barcelona. Airbnb was fined last year €600,000 for continuing to
advertise unlicensed short-rental apartments on their website (Sansom, 2017). However, as already mentioned, in many cities, the majority of these tourist apartments function illegally anyways. Moreover, visitor accommodations listed on home-sharing platforms are difficult to regulate because in big, attractive cities there are so many of them that it is very difficult to monitor them and they often avoid detection until neighbors complain (Gurran and Phibbs, 2017). Furthermore, besides Airbnb, which, admittedly, is the most popular, there is a long list of websites allowing home owners to advertise their residential properties which could make the task of detecting (and, perhaps, closing) illegal short-term rentals next to impossible (Gottlieb, 2013).

Barcelona also intends to impose higher property taxes on legal tourist apartments (Roca, 2017; Sansom, 2017). It is a well-known fact that the owners of most apartments on Airbnb listings do not pay any taxes (Guttentag, 2015). Hence they could keep their prices lower than hotels and still be highly profitable. When they are properly taxed, it is reckoned that some of these rental units may become less competitive and may have to close business. Many problems arise from the absence of landlords from the premises to manage the property and tourists like a traditional tourist accommodation provider (Jordan and Moore, 2018); hence Barcelona city council also intends to ban illegal subletting (Sansom, 2017).

Another necessary step is limiting the number of cruise ships (we do not think that they should be completely banned). As we have seen in this paper, cruise ships disembark thousands of tourists who crowd the area without actually bringing many economic benefits to the community. Venice already imposed a limit on the number of cruise ships allowed to dock in its port (Lyman, 2017) and similar measures are being considered in Dubrovnik (Coldwell, 2017). Meanwhile, the city of Barcelona, which receives about 750 cruise ships a year carrying at least 11 million visitors, is planning a new tax to be levied on each visitor staying less than 12 hours (Anonymous, 2017b). Not only cruise ship passengers will be affected by this tax but also groups of visitors arriving by bus. For example, each bus which parks at the foot of Montjuic Hill will be charged a fee of 34 euro (Roca, 2017).

Eliminating crowding of public spaces should be a primary concern of city governments. Already, Rome is considering limiting the number of visitors to certain areas of the city center such as the Trevi fountain (Anonymous, 2017b) and, in Barcelona, large tour groups are forbidden to enter La Boqueria, the city’s famous food market in order not to clog its alleyways (Lyman, 2017). At the same time, in Venice, the mayor’s office is contemplating the introduction of “people counters” at popular tourist sites to monitor crowding (Coldwell, 2017). Some city officials have even proposed to allow access to some of these sites, such as St. Mark’s Square, only with tickets (Anonymous, 2017b). Authorities in Barcelona have also restricted the use of segways and electric bikes which are dangerous in areas with large crowds (Roca, 2017).

Central and local governments should also implement stricter measures against tourists and visitors with anti-social behavior. In Dubrovnik, cameras were installed to monitor the number and behavior of tourists in the old town while on the Croatian island of Hvar the mayor is determined to crack down on the anti-social behavior of drunken tourists by fining them (Coldwell, 2017). In fact, the residents of the island made it clear that “This new generation that’s coming in, who come to rollick, who come to drink cheap alcohol, we don’t want this type of clientele”. (Senka Halebic, spokeswoman for one of the most popular beach clubs; in Lyman, 2017). In Rome, it is also not permitted drinking or eating in the streets and at tourist attractions or bathing in the public fountains. Measures against anti-social behavior were also taken in Milan to protect residential neighborhoods (Coldwell, 2017).

In order to decongest the city centers of tourists and visitors, one reader (“Neur Geeza”) suggests visitors shift their attention to “the 2nd, 3rd, and even 4th cities of a country/region”, a strategy that would also help visitors “to have a more authentic experience” (Hunt, 2017). Others have made the case that in order to ease overcrowding, tourists should be redistributed from the city center to other neighborhoods (Roca, 2017). Copenhagen has already started an aggressive tourist redistribution strategy from the city center to the more peripheral neighborhoods (Goodwin, 2017). While we agree with the strategy to shift the attention of tourists away from the crowded tourist cities, we do not think that spreading the tourists across residential neighborhoods would be beneficial. We agree with “Uriruri84” who lamented: “We have accepted that we’ve lost the center of the city, but now tourism invades many other zones” (Colau, 2014). Indeed, in our opinion, the centers of the cities and some neighborhoods close to it are already lost. There is not much the residents can do to reclaim them. What the governments should do now is contain the damage and not spread it to other neighborhoods.

Finally, the findings of this study confirm the conclusions drawn by previous studies that tourism growth and development should be regulated because, in the absence of proper planning, mass urban tourism will evolve in a haphazard way leading to numerous socio-economic and environmental problems (see also Egresi, 2016b). We, therefore, agree with Ada Colau, the current mayor of Barcelona, that tourism needs to be controlled in order to remain beneficial, otherwise “it’s paradoxical, but uncontrolled mass tourism ends up destroying the very things that made a city attractive to visitors in the first place: the unique atmosphere of the local culture” (Colau, 2014).
Conclusion

In this paper we analyzed the recent anti-tourist movements in several European destinations while trying to understand the reasons behind residents’ anger. Through critically examining a number of newspaper publications presenting the events and the comments readers posted to those articles, we found that many locals find the increasing number of tourists visiting their places of residence objectionable on the grounds that the overcrowding caused by tourists has made their lives a lot more difficult.

Similar to other studies, we found that some European cities and mass tourism destinations, where tourists and locals battle for the use of shared spaces, are already stretched to breaking point (Sanchez-Galiano et al., 2017) causing resentment among residents (Dirksmeier and Helbrecht, 2015). As found also by other studies (Gutierrez et al., 2017), one reason for residents’ discontent is the swift rise in rents fueled (at least in part) by the success of home-sharing platforms, such as Airbnb. This has had the greatest negative impact in cities like Barcelona where two-thirds of the population lives in apartments organized in condominiums (Lambea Lop, 2017). Moreover, private parties in tourist apartments fueled by cheap alcohol consumption create excessive noise (Nofre et al., 2017) which is another source of dispute with local residents as it challenges community livability (Colomb and Novy, 2017). These factors coupled with increased cost of living have led to “collective displacement” of residents from the central neighborhoods (Cocola Gant, 2016).

The results of our study present many similarities to findings of other (previous) studies. However, our study is novel in that our research methodology was different. This proves that qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles and of readers’ comments to investigate co-habitation problems in urban contexts could lead to meaningful results.

The main limitation of our findings results exactly from the method we used as public opinions derived from comments of readers on newspaper articles cannot be taken as representative for the entire population (Henrich and Holmes, 2013). However, given the high number of comments some of the articles we analyzed received, we could safely assume that they represent the opinion of a large segment of the population.

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