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The costs and benefits of overtourism – perspectives of residents of cities and resorts

Michał Żemła, Adam R. Szromek, Sylwia Orzeł and Jakub Para

Abstract

The costs and benefits of tourism development and their perception by destinations' residents have been a subject of research for many years. Although relevant studies considered the effects of overtourism, resident perceptions of overtourism impacts were not analyzed in a comparative context of different types of destinations. Large cities, for example, require different tourism development approaches and tools as they differ from other destinations, especially tourism resorts. This study therefore examines residents' perceptions of overtourism by focusing on two important yet different destinations in Poland, Cracow and Białka Tatrzańska. The results confirm significant differences in how residents perceive the impact of overtourism with the biggest difference being evident on how the benefits of tourism development are perceived. The chapter draws conclusions that can contribute significant insights on the management of tourism in different types of destinations.

Key words:

Overtourism; urban tourism; costs and benefits of tourism; social impact of tourism

Introduction

Large cities are becoming more and more popular as tourist destinations (Namberger et al., 2019). In fact, the 21st century represents the period of rapid development of what has become known as ‘urban tourism’ or ‘city tourism’ (UNWTO, 2018; Maitland, 2018). This sharp increase in urban tourism demand was due to various reasons: a) people taking shorter holidays but traveling more often; b) low-cost carriers allowing people to reach cities at affordable prices; and c) cities become more attractive by organizing various events as well as becoming increasingly popular as locations for culture, shopping and sightseeing (Namberger et al., 2019). Even so, research on urban tourism began only in the 1990s. Up to that point, tourism played a marginal role in the development of cities and the monuments and places attractive to tourists were not recognized as key tourism products (Christaller, 1964). Ashworth (1989, 1992) pointed to the significant scientific negligence of the interface of urban cities and tourism development, calling for more research on the growing urban tourism phenomenon. The last decade of the 20th century, thus, marked the beginning of an intense international and interdisciplinary academic debate on various aspects related to urban tourism development. Despite the significantly increasing amount of literature, Ashworth (2003) indicated that scientific knowledge about the development of urban tourism remains insufficient, especially with regard to resident perceptions.

Residents’ support for tourism development is strongly related to its success (Gürsoy, et al., 2002; Su et al., 2018). Considering that tourism is acknowledged as one of the most sustainable economic growth strategies for cities (Koens et al., 2018), one would expect that city residents will perceive tourism favorably and extend support to tourism development (Goodwin, 2017). Even so, strong anti-tourism attitudes and movements are currently emerging among residents of large cities, mostly as a result of the impacts of overtourism. As the phenomenon of overtourism and in parallel ‘tourismphobia’ came into being (Milano, 2017; Gürsoy, 2019), it is becoming evident that the relationship between the success of a destination and residents’ support may be negative, at least in the case of large city destinations. Overtourism is most evident in cities that have achieved large market success as a result of a great number of tourists, accompanied by significant income from tourism. The consequences of overtourism are often so significant that sometimes it leads to as a

'third-order change' (Hall, 1994), which involves a shift in the policy paradigm including an adaptation of a new goal hierarchy (Żemła, 2020). Undoubtedly, overtourism is one of the most typical and characteristic phenomena associated with contemporary tourism. Although its rapid development is disturbed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it requires creating new approaches in terms of tourism management.

As a result of overtourism in large cities, it is necessary to perform research to uncover the conditions for sustainable urban tourism development. Tools and approaches followed so far in managing tourism development in tourist resorts are largely ineffective in the case of cities (Goodwin, 2017; Żemła, 2020). Research on the impact of tourism on the lives of residents of tourist destinations have been conducted, yet without a detailed examination of how this impact may be differentiated in destinations of various types. Although some authors (Peeters et al., 2019) indicated that overtourism is present in various destinations, others limited their research on overtourism only to metropolises (Goodwin, 2017; Milano et al., 2019; Capocchi et al., 2019). To date, the differences between how the impact of overtourism is perceived by residents of different types of destination has not been the subject of scientific analysis. This chapter attempts to fill this gap by examining how the impact of tourism development of a well-known and popular tourist resort (Białka Tatrzańska) and a large city (Cracow) in Poland is perceived by residents.

The impact of urban tourism on residents' lives

One of the social consequences of the development of urban tourism is the change of residents' attitude towards tourists. This change depends on whether and, if so, how the positive and negative effects of tourism are perceived by residents. The changes in the attitude of residents are often explained using Doxey's (1976) model, which indicates that the negative attitudes of residents towards tourists are the result of exceeding the limits of social carrying capacity. According to this model, changes in residents' attitudes to tourism development can be divided into four successive stages: from euphoria, through apathy, irritation, even to as much as conflict. While mass tourism brings significant economic gains to cities, it has a negative impact on their development as a result of overtourism which may yield various negative effects on residents' lives (Su et al., 2018).