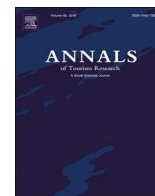


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## Conceptualising overtourism: A sustainability approach

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### ABSTRACT

This paper conceptualises a new tourism phenomenon: overtourism. Conceptualisation is based on relevant tourism knowledge on sustainability and related responsibility. The proposed model, presented in concise pictorial form, brings together the tourism capacities of the ‘sustainability pillars’ as well as the novel ‘socio-psychological’ and ‘socio-political’ capacities. Ultimately, the model may assist in monitoring, diagnosing and influencing the risks of any unsustainable tourism situation. The proposed novel capacities add to growing academic call to revisit the contemporary academic and practical approaches to tourism and sustainability, based on its low efficacy in practice. Paper suggests to extend and update the existing sustainable tourism paradigm to encourage more sustainable tourism strategies, policies and their more effective implementation.

### Introduction

The term “overtourism” has been in use only for few years (Ali, 2016; Dickinson, 2018a); however, its roots have been widely discussed in tourism literature since the mid-1960s (Koens, Postma, & Papp, 2018). Over 50 years before the present paper, socio-political concern over the growth of tourism and its negative natural and social-environmental effects had already induced academic discussion on tourism’s impacts. In 1987, the Brundtland’s report *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987) pushed the global debate on environmental sustainability to the forefront of socio-political discussions and agendas. Tourism scholars and socio-political forces soon reacted by developing and disseminating the term “sustainable tourism” and its conceptual basis (Inskip, 1991; Nash & Butler, 1990; UN, 1992). Sustainable tourism is now a mainstream tourism paradigm, primarily based on a balance between economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability, and coded by the UNWTO definition.

Tourism researchers from varied disciplines have consistently expanded sustainable tourism’s horizons (e.g. Butler, 1974; Cohen, 1987; Ritchie & Crouch, 2000). The emerging science of sustainability (Munasinghe, 2007) connects to the pillars of sustainable tourism—economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability—and has a strong multidisciplinary focus. This three-pillared approach dominates sustainability thinking (Wall, 2019) and is incorporated in destinations’ tourism agendas worldwide (UNWTO, 2019a). However, in reality, tourism destinations continue to encourage economic growth—to be sure, we are strongly embedded in a capitalistic socio-political system (Bramwell, Higham, Lane, & Miller, 2017; Hall, 2011; Hunter, 1997). Historically, tourism has been too slow to implement sustainable practices, leading to the recognition of a gap between theoretical sustainability and its practical implementation (Buckley, 2012; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010; Sharpley, 2020).

Overtourism is, among other things, the acceleration and growth of tourism supply and demand, the use of tourism destinations’ natural ecological goods, the destruction of their cultural attractions, and negative impacts on their social and economic environments. These have rendered tourism irresponsible—and this has led to today’s stronger focus on implementing responsible tourism

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paradigms based on sustainability (Goodwin, 2011; Mihalic, 2016, 2020; UNWTO, 2012). Nonetheless, overtourism still occurs in many destinations and provides the strongest practical evidence so far of the illusiveness of a sustainable and responsible tourism paradigm. In 2017, numerous media reports on tourism growth, overtourism, antitourism, and tourismphobia began to emerge notably from diverse destinations. Barcelona definitely took first place under the overtourism spotlight, followed closely by other destinations such as Venice, Dubrovnik, Amsterdam, and Hong Kong, to name but a few. The media and public embraced the topic because of its appeal to “people’s basic instincts” and “an element of alarm and fear in it” (Ali, 2018, para. 1). UNWTO acknowledged that a “serious situation” existed that needed to be addressed in “a serious way” (Coldwell, 2017), and responsible destination managers started to fear phone calls and media questions such as “Is your destination already a Barcelona?”

Academia has confirmed that this new phenomenon, along with its related issues, must be addressed in an appropriate and scientific manner (Capocchi, Vallone, Amaduzzi, & Pierotti, 2019). Despite the urgency and the fact that much literature has been produced, overtourism is still not fully defined academically and remains subject to various interpretations (Koens et al., 2018; Dodds and Butler, 2019; Gretzel, 2019) from different aspects and disciplines. Seen as “a complex and multidimensional phenomenon,” overtourism entails complex and multidisciplinary issues (Alonso-Almeida, Borrajo-Millán, & Yi, 2019, p. 14) that must be jointly addressed. It is in this context that the present paper considers the gaps in literature and knowledge around the topic of overtourism.

The main purpose of the present research is to fully conceptualise the complex phenomenon of overtourism and offer a knowledge for monitoring and managing its existence or the risk of its existence. The main question guiding the research is: what elements are required to form a holistic and practical synthesis of all relevant dimensions of unsustainable and irresponsible overtourism? Our goal is to incorporate all relevant overtourism issues and their interrelationships into a complex, multidimensional model presentable in concise pictorial form. The disciplinary approach entails application of sustainability (Munasinghe, 2007) and enables a multidisciplinary and practical synthesis that helps to make development more sustainable.

## Methodological approach and data

This paper is an epistemological attempt to offer a conceptual model, supported by a constructivist approach that emphasises the ability of the researcher to construct new knowledge. It uses a conceptual research methodology, which involves a review of existing theoretical knowledge and existing evidence on a given topic—here, overtourism—and related concepts. With the proposed conceptual model (Jaakkola, 2020), we seek to build a theoretical framework that predicts relationships between model constructs and, most of all, introduces new constructs (Fulmer, 2012).

The starting point for theoretical framing (Bramwell et al., 2017) is knowledge of sustainable tourism, which also covers multidisciplinary issues associated with the phenomenon of (unsustainable) overtourism. Along these lines, this study conceptualised overtourism using an engaged scholarly approach (Van de Ven, 2007). We engaged with academic multidisciplinary knowledge: it drew on a narrative historical review of tourism theory and schools of thought. We also drew on practical evidence and information concerning the newly recognised phenomenon of overtourism, which has not yet gained full academic consensus and recognition. Both approaches have been iterated to fit the proposed overtourism conceptual model.

Our sources for the present study include academic tourism literature and tourism practice surveys, commercial reports, media, collaborative sources, and personal contacts. The academic sources were accessed through depositories and online databases accessible via the University of Ljubljana academic library service, Google, and Researchgate. Reports issued by socio-political, institutional, governmental, or media actors were found through websites. Practical studies and reports from tourism media and different organisations, such as the WTTC and McKinsey&Company (2017), CELTH (2018), UNWTO (2018), and TRAN (2018), were used to engage the reality of overtourism.

## State of the art

In applying a paradigm to understand new developments, paradigm shifts become relevant (Dwyer, 2017). Here we use “paradigm shift” to describe a major change in concepts and practices of how we see (un)sustainable development of tourism. We use “paradigm” to refer to the whole set of relevant ideas and schools of thought on tourism and sustainability that have achieved consensus or have been validated among academics and stakeholders in practice and expressed through definitions and strategy based actions.

Over time, accepted sustainable tourism definitions may no longer correspond to the full subject matter, which is constantly fuelled or shifted by new knowledge and insights within the field. Not all existing research and knowledge is reflected in circulating definitions or paradigms; such work might remain outside the paradigm until an event or issue, such as unsustainable overtourism, attracts attention to it and makes it suddenly relevant to the actors. As such, all knowledge, concepts, and models that could inform new overtourism phenomena are relevant to a new theoretical framing.

In 1964, Forster reports on reactions to tourism in the social environment (Forster, 1964, p. 218). Shortly thereafter, Clawson and Ketch (1966) argue that increased visitation to an area lowers total visitor satisfaction. In his 1973 book *Tourism: Blessing or Blight*, British author George Young challenges thinking that tourism contributes positively to development. The positive economic impacts of tourism (Archer, 1977) are thus faced with new questions, and a double faceted way of thinking about tourism emerges—ultimately, Young argues that with the blessings of tourism come many negative impacts.

Meanwhile in 1973, Swiss-based tourism professor Kaspar (1973) suggests a new branch of tourism science called “tourism ecology” that increases academic attention on the natural environment of tourism. In 1974, British tourism professor Richard Butler argued that “greater attention should be paid to ... the undesirable social impacts of tourist development” (Butler, 1974, p. 100). The

following year, Turner and Ash publish *The Golden Hordes* (Turner & Ash, 1975), a book about tourism's destruction of the landscape and corruption of the local culture. Also in 1975, American researcher Harry Matthews addresses tourism issues from a political science perspective. Almost a decade later Swiss ecologist Jost Krippendorf (1984) presents a fresh understanding of alternatives to the mainstream mass tourism that has, become environmentally, socially, politically, and ethically intolerable (Swarbrooke, 1999). Tourism scholars of the era develop and also criticise alternative tourism concepts, such as alternative, minimum impact, eco, ethical, green, and responsible tourism (Cohen, 1988). In the 1990s, the emerging fields of tourism ecology and environmental economics emphasise the need for environmentally friendly tourism policies (Mihalic & Kaspar, 1996).

The fierce economic and social academic debate on tourism's positive and negative impacts then leads to novel discussions regarding capacity and acceptable limits and on mass tourism and its alternatives at the time, such as eco-tourism. Each of the above mentioned new approaches, and many others, receive a unique conceptualisation, often adopted or produced in the form of a declaration and critique (e.g. *Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism, 2002*; *Manila Declaration on World Tourism, 1980*; *Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002*). Notably, the *Our Common Future* debate (WCED, 1987) attracts the attention of shapers of the socio-political reality, including media, private citizens, tourism professionals and academia members. Finally, in 1991, Edward Inskeep applies the sustainable development concept to tourism policy and planning (Inskeep, 1991). Since then, many researchers and international institutions, among others UNWTO, do the same, and the sustainable tourism paradigm is now the mainstream school of tourism thought.

The “three-pillar” concept that situates sustainable tourism as rooted in economic, socio-cultural, and natural pillars is part of UNWTO's (2019a) definition of sustainable tourism as well as part of tourism strategies of destinations worldwide. However, some scientists claim that the “intellectually appealing” theoretical concept of sustainable tourism has little practical application ... allowing essentially the same behaviour as before” (Wheeler, 1993, p. 121). Indeed, it remains hard to find a consensus on the efficiency of implementing sustainable tourism (Chettiparamb & Kokkranikal, 2012). Numerous researchers claim that practice is “not yet close to the sustainability” (Buckley, 2012, p. 528) or “...alarmingly unsustainable” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010, p. 117). Still, the overtourism phenomenon is upsetting the academic and professional tourism world and is a known form of unsustainable tourism, which—taking all socio-political agendas for more sustainable tourism into account—should not have occurred.

### Tourism ecology

Before the full development of the tourism sustainability paradigm, the need to holistically address tourism attractions as part of the tourism business led to a school of thought on tourism ecology. More specifically, Kaspar (1973) is the first to integrate tourism blights related to the natural ecological environment into the tourism discussion. Two years later, the World Bank extends its understanding of the terms “environment” and “ecology”. Ecology used describes the relationships between organisms and their environment, including the “man-environment relationship” (WB, 1975, pp. 5–6). This change broadened the meaning of the ecological environment, now recognised as cultural and social as well as natural (Mihalic & Kaspar, 1996).

In general, the tourism system (see Fig. 1) is depicted as rooted in tourism economics, referring to tourism supply (supply stakeholders) and tourism demand (visitors) (Inskeep, 1991, p. 22). Moreover, the system is also embedded in different environments important to tourism ecology, namely: ecological, economic, and socio-political environments. The socio-political environment that

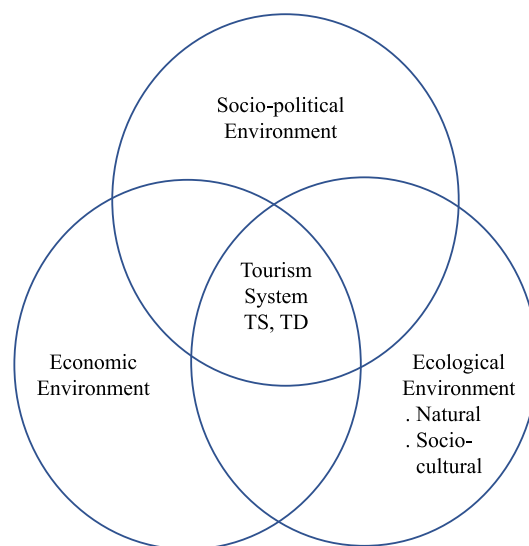


Fig. 1. The tourism ecology framework: the triple environments of the tourism system.

Note: TS: Tourism Supply; TD: Tourism Demand.

Source: adapted from Mihalic & Kaspar, 1996.

emerges with political economy and welfare economics is considered a key factor in the implementation of the ecological concept (Frey, 1985; Mihalic & Kaspar, 1996). It includes social ecological awareness and ethics, as well as formal and informal pressures on ecological behaviour, including laws, politics, and policy instruments. According to Frey (1985), every society must go through certain developmental stages in order to enter the phase of ecological (e.g.) environmental responsibility. The first phase is ignorance of environmental problems, which is replaced by the phase of awareness. This leads to social discussion and the formation of an environmental agenda leading to environmental actions; it is to the phase of tourism responsibility.

Later evolutions of the tourism sustainability view embrace economic, socio-cultural, and natural sustainability and the socio-political dimension (Bramwell et al., 2017), as presented in Fig. 1. To effectively address the sustainability concept-implementation gap, tourism destinations should have strong sustainability ethics and guidance from governments, the private sector, public-private networks, and communities (Hall, 2011). Theoretically, the interplays of ethics, stakeholders, a critical mass, and consensus-building are important socio-political enablers of sustainable tourism. Notably, the overtourism debate brings the involvement of political processes and stakeholders' rights to the forefront (Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). In addition, numerous scholars emphasise the need to focus on spatial and socio-political limits and active co-ordination among planning, socio-political processes and systems, governance, management, the media, and community involvement (Becken & Simmons, 2019; Bramwell et al., 2017; Innerhofer, Erschbamer, & Pechlaner, 2019; Joppe, 2019; Russo & Scarnato, 2017; UNWTO, 2019b; Zacher, Pechlaner, & Olbrich, 2019).

### *Mass tourism, crowding, and tourism carrying capacities*

Before sustainable tourism thinking takes centre-stage, the mainly sociological mass tourism debate (Cohen, 1984; Fink, 1970; Graham & Cohen, 1991; Krippendorf, 1984) greatly contributes to the development of ethical tourism thinking. In those days, in general, mass tourism is seen as an outcome of the growth and concentration of tourism demand and supply. It manifests in its too-high numbers and too-high negative impacts on the environment (Mihalic & Kaspar, 1996).

On the demand side, excess tourism results in destruction of destinations' environments by turning them into "touristic" places. New trends to avoid such crowded places and search for authentic individually tailored new modes of tourism and alternatives such as eco-tourism follow (Butler, 1980; Cohen, 1987, 1988; Poon, 1994, 1993; Wanhill, 2000). At the same time, on the supply side, the growing tourism business fails to sufficiently mitigate and manage tourism's negative environmental impacts. No general guidelines for determining a destination's tourism capacity are identified as each tourism environment has multiple limits (Wall, 2020).

Limits depend on place specific factors such as tourism type, stage of development, environmental and social characteristics, and typical visitor behaviour in terms of tourism's flows through time and space. In addition, socio-spatial studies on tourism crowding expands the context by including personal and behavioural variables of residents that impact their perception of social density or crowding and thus satisfaction with their residential neighbourhoods. Due to overtourism, issues of mass tourism, crowding, and tourism capacity have become relevant again.

Carrying capacity comes to be seen as a basic metric in tourism planning for determining the upper limits of development and visitor use and the optimal utilisation of tourism resources (Inskoop, 1991, p. 144). The analyses imply setting limits on tourism development. Most models refer to ecological and spatial (natural), ecological and sociological (socio-cultural), and economic environments. However, in the context of overtourism, social and psychological carrying capacities (Bezzola, 1975; Innerhofer et al., 2019; Muler Gonzalez, Coromina, & Galí, 2018) seem to be of special significance and are generally from two perspectives. The upper limit is both the maximum levels of overcrowding that visitors are willing to accept and the maximum levels of tourism and its (negative) impacts that local residents are willing to accept. As a result of a descriptive approach to evaluating the socio-psychological attitudes towards tourism development the following alternative diagnoses emerge: tourism development is possible, is not possible, and stakeholders are indifferent to tourism development.

### *Social exchange theory, quality of life (welfare), and stakeholder theory*

Nevertheless, to explain residents' attitudes towards tourism development, tourism researchers refer to tourism social capacity and socio-psychological social exchange theory (SET) (Navarro Jurado et al., 2012; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990). In this context, the majority of studies discuss tourism impacts and support for tourism, while some also address satisfaction with tourism or quality of life in a tourism destination (Ko & Stewart, 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999). Tourism development depends on how the residents of a destination weigh the potential benefits and risks of tourism's presence. They develop their support for tourism based on their satisfaction with their quality of life in the tourism-affected community (Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma, & Carter, 2007; Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejía, & Porras-Bueno, 2008).

Quality of life refers to the feeling that life is going well overall and concerns people's perceived satisfaction with the circumstances in which they live (Moscardo, 2009). In the context of overtourism we define quality of life as a concept of "... human welfare ... measured by social indicators..." (UN, 1997, p. 61). This definition opens discussion of tourism stakeholders' perceptions of social impacts, such as residents' satisfaction or irritation with tourism circumstances.

Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Sautter & Leisen, 1999) suggests that a destination is characterized by its relationships with various groups and individuals, including local businesses, government, competitors, activist groups, and residents as well as national business chains. Stakeholders connect to sustainability, as they have the power to affect its performance or have a stake in it. Sautter and Leisen caution that failure to retain participation of even a single stakeholder group will result in the failure of, in our case, the achievement of quality of life centred sustainability. Growing tourism that neglects the interests of local residents necessarily leads to overtourism, here defined as tourism that irritates stakeholders.

### *Destination irritation index, diminishing tourism satisfaction, and tourism area life cycle*

The concept of Doxey's destination irritation index (Irrindex) (Doxey, 1975) suggests that as visitation grows at a given destination, residents pass through a sequence of emotions and reactions towards the visitation and the visitors, beginning with euphoria and culminating in antagonism. Initially, the visitors are welcomed. As they grow in numbers and congestion increases along with rising prices and other negative impacts, social interactions and acceptance become negative (Ross, 2000). Similarly, Clawson and Knetch (1966) explain the negative impact of increased visitation on visitors' satisfaction based on the economic law of diminishing returns—the same can be applied to residents' satisfaction.

Spatial economics, based on the link between a destination's carrying capacity and its irritation level, was established by Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle concept (TALC) (1980). More specifically, it refers to the developmental growth of a destination and its visitation levels and shows a decline in a destination's development and visitation when carrying capacities have been reached. At this point, an area's attractiveness starts to decline because of overuse and the negative impacts of tourism (Ross, 2000). However, a destination can reverse a decline and rejuvenate tourism, depending on its socio-political capacities, the circumstances and possibilities of appropriate destination management, and the destination's prevailing policy. In light of the overtourism debate, the above SET, TALC, and Irrindex concepts are relevant again. In the overtourism context, Butler (2019) argues that to prevent an unsustainable future, destinations must prepare for sustainability at the earliest stages of their life cycles.

### *Sustainable tourism and responsible tourism*

The *Our Common Future* report (WCED, 1987) suggests that sustainable development should maintain the integrity and diversity of the ecological environment, meet basic human needs, keep options open for future generations, reduce injustice among and between generations, and increase self-determination. The concept is widely accepted by governments and industry representatives (Wall, 2000), and the tourism industry and academia also embrace it. Inskip (1991) identifies and defines five pillars of sustainable tourism, which include the economic, environmental (meaning natural), and social responsibilities of tourism as well as its responsibility to tourists (meaning assuring visitor satisfaction) and to global equity in development. The last pillar receives less attention in the following sustainable tourism development debate but remains a part of academic thinking and develops into a 'just tourism' concept of its own (Camargo, Lane, & Jamal, 2007; Hultsman, 1995; Jamal & Camargo, 2014). The main tourism sustainability consensus culminates in the three-pillared concept of sustainability (Fig. 1), renamed as the natural, socio-cultural, and economic pillars (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000; Swarbrooke, 1999; UNWTO, 2004).

In cooperation with academia and tourism practitioners, UNWTO has done enormous work regarding the sustainable tourism paradigm. The current short UNWTO sustainable tourism definition dates from its work in 2005 and situates "sustainable tourism" as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNEP & WTO, 2005; UNWTO, n.d., para 2). UNWTO also provides a longer conceptual definition of sustainable tourism, which expands the "simply expressed" (UNWTO, n.d., para 1) definition of the above quoted paragraph as follows:

Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects ... and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions ... Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building ... Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction...

(UNWTO, n.d., para 7–8)

One shortcoming of that conceptual definition is that it does not position both main stakeholders of the tourism system (visitors on one side and industry and host communities on the other) on the same level with regard to the sustainability pillars, although the shorter definition does. Instead, it only refers specifically to visitors, implying an overly visitor-centred vision that does not prioritize destination residents. In fact, such a narrow view of sustainability, when implemented, gives priority to marketing aspects and economic growth (Wall, 2019), ignoring stakeholders' theory (Sautter & Leisen, 1999). Furthermore, it ignores quality of life, an important aspect of sustainability (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Milano, Novelli, & Cheer, 2019b; Perkumiene & Pranskuniene, 2019). However, it rightly acknowledges some triggers for the implementation of sustainability, such as the "informed participation of all relevant stakeholders," "political leadership," and "consensus," that correspond to socio-political requirements arising from our academic debate on tourism ecology (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, the full socio-political environment has never truly made its way into the main sustainability paradigm but has remained on the agenda of some tourism researchers.

As already mentioned, since the start of the 21st century, understandings of sustainability are informed by research findings showing the concept's excessively slow implementation in the tourism industry. For this reason, responsible tourism came to the forefront, emphasising "sustainability in action," the implementation of sustainable tourism through sustainable actions or behaviours. European and international organisations have amended their documents with a new awareness of sustainability (pillars) and responsibility (action and behaviour). Examples include the European document titled *European Charter for Sustainable and Responsible Tourism* (EC, 2012) and UNWTO's *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism*, subtitled *For Responsible Tourism* (UNWTO, 2012).

Simultaneously, the academic discourse on tourism is changing accordingly, as shown by the books *Responsible Tourism* (Leslie, 2012) and *Taking Responsibility for Tourism* (Goodwin, 2011). Knowledge relating to sustainable tourism has expanded, with some scholars arguing in favour of the term "responsible tourism" alone, meaning tourism that realises the concept of sustainability. Based on the more conservative standing of the EC and UNWTO (since both organisations have retained both terms), a new joint



**Table 1**

Extended sustainability: developing SRT.

Source: adapted from Mihalic, 2016 and adjusted according to the literature review in this paper.

No.	Description category	Sustainable tourism	Responsible tourism
1	2	3	4
1	Core	Concept-pillars-centred	Concept-implementation-centred
2	Rationale	Idea of sustainable tourism	Making tourism sustainable
3	Theoretical/practical	Focus on understanding sustainability	Focus on sustainability implementation
4	Based on elements	Sustainability pillars 1. Economic capacity 2. Socio-cultural capacity 3. Natural (environmental) capacity	Sustainability enablers 1. Socio-political environment (awareness, ethics, norms, leadership, collaboration, consensus, critical mass, tourism agendas, governance, destination management, media, civil initiatives, political agendas...) 2. Socio-psychological capacity of destination-based stakeholders (locals, industry, networks) (supply side) 3. Socio-psychological capacity of visitors (demand side) Satisfaction and dissatisfaction (quality of life)
5	Measure/indicator focus	Positive and negative impacts	Irresponsible tourism
6	Opposite	Unsustainable tourism	... addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.'
7	Definition: old-new paradigm (text in italics added by author)	Old: 'Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, ... New: 'Quality of life centred tourism that takes full account of its current and future 1) economic, 2) socio-cultural and 3) natural impacts ...	... and responsibly addresses the 1) host communities and industry, 2) visitors and 3) socio-political environment.' (UNEP & WTO, 2005, para. 2; UNWTO, n.d.)

Note: SRT: Sustainable Responsible Tourism.

sustainable-responsible tourism concept (SRT) is suggested and dubbed “responsustable” tourism, merging the two terms and recognising the difference between the conceptual pillars and the implementation enablers of sustainability (Mihalic, 2016, 2020).

The new responsustable tourism, presented in Table 1, has been reframed to accommodate broader input from practical over-tourism occurrences and academic research. The updated SRT combines all the elements of tourism ecology (Fig. 1) equally in the same three-plus-three model: the capacities of economic, socio-cultural, and natural pillars; the socio-psychological capacity of the visitors and destination-based stakeholders; and the socio-political environment (Table 1, line 4).

For any tourism destination, the risk of unsustainability is real. In line with the proposed SRT framework, destinations can address this risk from the perspective of the sustainability pillars or enablers (Table 1, columns 2 and 3). In the first case, the impacts are addressed. In the second case, the risk is also managed by ensuring the wellbeing and satisfaction of local residents, other local stakeholders (e.g. industry), and visitors.

The mainstream sustainable paradigm of tourism has not yet fully internalised the reality that the tourism system is a part of a global resource allocation mechanism of global capitalism (Burrail, Buda, & Stanford, 2019). Indeed, it was capitalism-driven tourism's continuous growth that produced overtourism, a new unsustainable tourism phenomenon, presented in the next section.

## Overtourism and related phenomena

### Overtourism and undertourism

Generally, overtourism means unsustainable tourism. The definition of overtourism in the *Collins Online English Dictionary* is “The phenomenon of a popular destination or sight becoming overrun with tourists in an unsustainable way” (Dickinson, 2018b). UNWTO suggested a perceived quality of life and satisfaction centred socio-psychological definition: “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO, 2018, p. 6). The latest definition from the European Parliament's TRAN Committee (TRAN, 2018, p. 19) goes further by adding the socio-political dimension. It defines “overtourism” as “the situation in which the impact of tourism...exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological and or political capacity thresholds.” This definition refers to impacts, socio-psychological and socio-political dimensions, and well-captured relevant multidimensional elements of the phenomena.

“Undertourism,” the opposite of overtourism, has already entered academic discussion as a term (Peltier, 2019; Trono, Mansfeld, & Schmude, 2019). Media did not pick up the topic, although they have published some promotional advertisements to attract visitation to alternatives to overtourism (Glusac, 2019). In this sense, the word “undertourism” is under consideration by Cambridge Dictionary. The proposed definition is “the situation when a city or other holiday destination does not receive many tourists or enough tourists” and also as an “... increasingly common marketing tactic being used by less-frequented destinations” (Undertourism, 2019). Such definitions reflect the practical uses of the word well but do not capture all dimensions of the academic debate on undertourism's opposite. According to the full understanding of overtourism, the opposite should refer to destinations where the impact on tourism players means that tourism does not contribute to quality of life in the destination in the long run and that stakeholders are irritated by insufficient tourism opportunities and benefits.

### *Antitourism and tourismphobia*

Another term emerging from the overtourism debate is “antitourism,” but it is mostly used in scholarly literature and has not yet entered the popular vocabulary. Outside of academic sources, only one definition, “opposing tourism” (*Antitourism, n.d.*), was found, and that on a page in the collaboratively edited non-academic source. Although this meaning fits our discussion well, a scan of tourism literature reveals two slightly different interpretations. The first is older and refers to intellectual and cultural responses to mass tourism that attach disrespectful or negative meaning to terms such as “tourist” and “tourism” (Buzard, 1993; Cohen, 1988; McCabe, 2005). In response to these negative representations of tourists and tourism, other visitors try to avoid everything known to be “touristic” (McWha, Frost, Laing, & Best, 2016; Robinson, 2015).

Meanwhile, the second interpretation is based on recent overtourism thinking and is directly connected to the phenomenon of overcrowding. Hughes (2018) connects antitourism with the negative impacts of mass tourism and destination mobilisation using the motto “Tourists go home.” “Aversion to tourism” or tourism “rejection” is a result of the negative effects of tourism development (Martín, Martínez, & Fernández, 2018). From the perspective of local residents, antitourism starts after visitor carrying capacity is reached and perceptions of quality of life begin to decline. Residents' contentment with the growth of tourism in terms of visitation and impacts turns into dissatisfaction and irritation, resulting in their opposition to tourism development, projects, or presence (Navarro Jurado et al., 2019). In such circumstances, overtourism is met with mobilised or organised movements of irritated destination residents acting against the development of tourism and social movements being organised to oppose growth projects.

Similarly, the new meaning of antitourism can also be applied from the visitor perspective: antitourism or antivisitation from the visitor perspective starts after visitors' carrying capacity limit has been reached: overall visitor satisfaction with the destination turns into dissatisfaction and visitors react by leaving and avoiding the destination in the future.

Indeed, one may argue that the same old understanding of mass tourism, defined as too many visitors causing excessive unsustainable impacts, has made a return as overtourism. Even if this is true, the practical evidence of the unsustainability of tourism that has caused the problem to return to the tourism research agenda demands a rethinking of current tourism paradigms and practices. Notably, the new phenomenon draws attention to the social and political mobilisations and networks that must meet demands for sustainable development (Lalicic, 2019; Novy & Colomb, 2019; Valdivielso & Moranta, 2019). More specifically, overtourism and antitourism give ground to the socio-political dimension of sustainability, which should be given more attention in the sustainability paradigm context.

In the above context, some researchers employ the term “tourismphobia” (Koens et al., 2018; Martins, 2018; Milano, Novelli, Cheer, 2019b; Taş Gürsoy, 2019). The term describes forms in which antitourism manifests, such as organised movements and pressures. One instance is discrimination expressed against visitors, as epitomized by the slogans “tourists you are terrorists” and “no tourists allowed” observed in Barcelona (Martins, 2018, p. 5).

### *Overcrowding and growth-led tourism*

The industry avoids all use of the term “overtourism” and tries to enforce the term “overcrowding” as noted in a 2017 report from the WTTC and McKinsey & Company (title page). This and implicit definitions of overcrowding as “signs of success” (2017, title page) demonstrate the industry's current thinking about the phenomena. It is likely that the WTTC wants to soften criticism of the market-based, capitalist tourism system that produces not only benefits but also disadvantages. Obviously fully aware that the term “overcrowded...is imprecise,” the report's authors explicitly admit they have no intention to “dampen...the basis of tourism” (WTTC and McKinsey&Company, 2017, p. 8). Further, the report takes the position of managerial ecology (Hall, 2019), as expressed by the WTTC's unquestioning faith in management as a solution to overcrowding.

On the contrary, a position of political ecology should be taken. In this context, some tourism researchers see overtourism as one “symptom of the problem” related to the growth-led neoliberal capitalism tourism business model (Fletcher, Murray Mas, Blanco-Romero, & Blázquez-Salom, 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles, Carnicelli, Krolikowski, Wijesinghe, & Boluk, 2019, p. 1926). They suggest focussing on degrowth and placing the rights of local communities above the rights of tourists and the rights of tourism businesses to make profits. Given that many residents also directly or indirectly receive or are aware of financial and other benefits of tourism for the destinations, a consensus on degrowth and proper action will not be easy. An UNWTO study on overtourism found that the majority of residents in eight “overcrowded” European cities believed “there should be no limitations to the growth of visitor numbers” (2018, p. 9).

The academic discussion concerning the economic sector's dominance and constant ignorance of the impacts and efforts for growth (Fletcher et al., 2019; Taş Gürsoy, 2019) is too slow in entering the tourism sustainability paradigm. Much academic evidence of tourism's imperfections, discussed in the framework of economic blights (Young, 1973) or capitalistic growth (Fletcher et al., 2019, p. 1745), has yet to be common ground among all tourism stakeholders. This is well illustrated by the views of different stakeholders: “The growth is not the enemy” says one side (Rifai, 2017, UNWTO press release title); tourism degrowth is “an emerging agenda for research and praxis” says the other (Fletcher et al., 2019, p. 1745).

Another illustration of a discourse occurring between academia and industry is the idea that the tourism system “needs to be changed” (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019, p. 1938–1939) which emerges against the idea that overtourism can be managed by “managing overcrowding” (WTTC and McKinsey&Company, 2017, title page). Another example is the tension between the idea of a destination “coping with success” (WTTC and McKinsey&Company, 2017, title page) and the idea of being a “victim of its own success” (Cheer, Milano, & Novelli, 2020, p. 230).

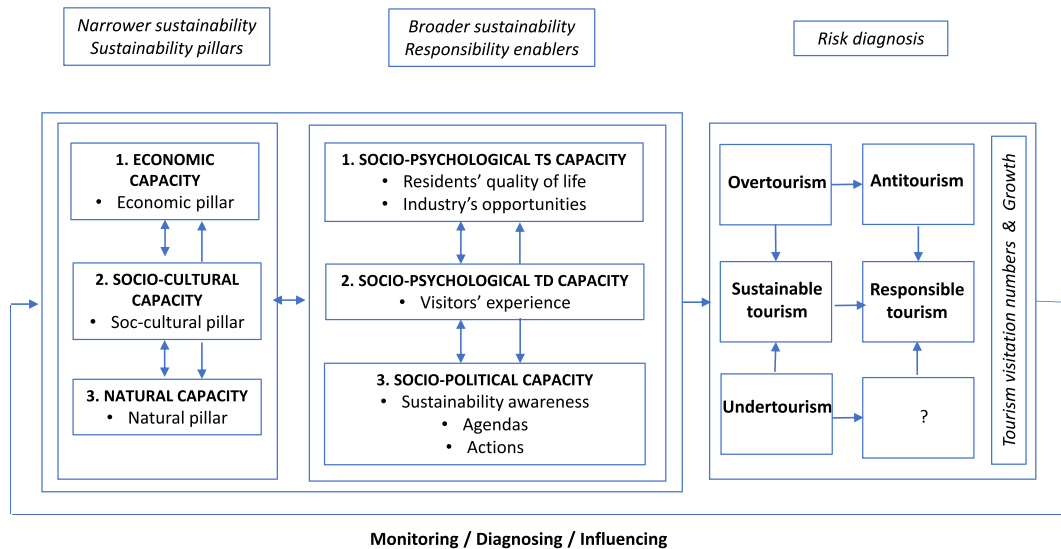


Fig. 2. Conceptualisation of overtourism.

Note: TS: Tourism Supply; TD: Tourism Demand.

Source: the author's fusion of the concepts taken from the presented schools of thought on tourism.

### Overtourism: concept and discussion

To accomplish our original aim to capture all relevant overtourism elements within a single graphic model, many iterations of the first attempt at the model and consistent use of the different terms found in this paper were made. The model is presented in Fig. 2.

The proposed concept combines the updated SRT by bringing the sustainability pillars and responsibility enablers together on the same platform. This platform comprehensively illustrates all relevant dimensions of overtourism risk, monitoring, and influencing.

The first column in Fig. 2 shows the three sustainability pillars and capacities. The pillars are a subject of positive and negative impacts of tourism development and presence. Indicator values could be benchmarked to planned, agreed upon, or legal carrying capacities among destinations or over time to help monitoring, diagnosing, and analysing the risk of overtourism and its underlying reasons.

The second column in Fig. 2 shows the three sustainability enablers (see Table 1) in three separate yet interdependent boxes. The socio-psychological capacity of tourism stakeholders is shown in the first two boxes. The first box refers to the destination's supply side, and the second box to its demand side. These represent stakeholders' satisfaction: for example, opinions about the impacts of tourism growth and the presence and possible irritation experienced by local stakeholders and visitors. Here, the main local stakeholders are local residents and the tourism industry along with other relevant stakeholders from the private, public, or social sectors of the destination's supply side (Mon, 2015).

Then, a third box contains the socio-political environment and in short relates to awareness, agendas and actions. It provides space for sustainable tourism awareness, ethics and values, norms, legislation, and information including from the media. It also provides space for tourism leadership, governance, and management, as well as for civil initiatives and political agendas. Examples are governmental, private, or non-governmental tourism actions and collaborations that connect all relevant stakeholders from the private, public, and social spheres and their networks to achieve synergies, cooperation, consensus, and a critical mass that leads to responsible sustainable action.

In dealing with overtourism issues, some researchers point to the need for greater regulation and government leadership instead of the styles of self-governance that have led to overtourism (Koens et al., 2018). For example, relevant indicators for monitoring and diagnosing overtourism include number of media articles and their sentiment, relevant civil initiatives or political demands, and a destination and government's sustainable development actions, to name but a few.

The six boxes of the model propose six sets of indicators to support the final diagnosis of overtourism risk. The relative impact-capacity ratio must be observed to understand the occurrence of this risk and manage the prevention and mitigation measures. If residents wish to move away from the destination and the rate of such migration rises due to irritation from tourism, this clearly indicates an unfavourable overtourism situation and calls for a response.

The proposed overtourism conceptual model synthesises multidimensional knowledge relevant to sustainable tourism on one platform, allowing us to present it in a concise pictorial form. All relevant sustainability elements for monitoring and diagnosing unsustainable tourism are incorporated in a coherent and all-inclusive model. The proposed model holds implications for addressing overtourism issues through sustainability awareness, ethics, and a destination's management and governance. It offers a full framework for monitoring tourism and diagnosing the risk of overtourism. This includes informing tourism destination management and policies on how to avoid and reduce the negative impacts of tourism and manage satisfaction with its presence. All the boxes in the



overtourism conceptual model are important. However, the relationships among them are not simple. For example, the physical impact and perceptual socio-psychological indicators might give opposing results (Wall, 2019) and different signals to the response action. An example is the negative impacts of overtourism on bathing water quality (hard quantitative data on faecal bacteria) that would demand closing the destination and local sentiment not to close the beach due to other visitation benefits for the community (opinion data). Only if we add the socio-political box, can we gain a holistic perspective on closing the beach, following the legislation on bathing water pollution standards in the destination.

The outcomes of risk monitoring are shown in the third column in Fig. 2. Overtourism is presented at the top, as it goes hand in hand with too many visitors or too high a rate of visitation growth. As practical experiences reveal, overtourism may turn into antitourism if a critical mass, such as civil or political power, is present. Examples of such transitions include Barcelona in 2017 (Milano, Novelli, & Cheer, 2019a), where a political party became involved, or Mayo beach (Thailand), where the government reacted to the global civil pressure regarding intolerable damage to the natural environment of one of the world's most admired marine environments (Ellis-Petersen, 2018).

Further, the proposed outcomes of risk monitoring in the third column in Fig. 2 also connect to other unfavourable tourism situations, presented as antitourism and undertourism, as well as to the favourable situation of sustainable and responsible tourism. Thus, by conceptualising overtourism, we were able to expand the elements of sustainable tourism that should be addressed, if sustainability is to be responsibly implemented.

## Conclusion

This study is an epistemological attempt to add to academic schools of thought on tourism by proposing a conceptualisation of overtourism, based on anything relevant that tourism researchers know. The area of relevance is defined by knowledge and discussions about sustainable tourism. Both the tourism research field and the science of sustainability are recognised as multi-disciplinary—nevertheless, this paper is not occupied with deep disciplinary discussions of relevant concepts and insights; instead it collects existing concepts and insights that influence tourism (un)sustainability performance and could inform our full multi-disciplinary understanding of new overtourism phenomena.

More specifically, the study mainly built on literature published by academic researchers of tourism from different disciplines as well as on non-academic sources and practical evidence on overtourism. The study tried to pull all relevant elements of an overtourism model together into the same tourism platform. Ultimately, the study seeks to inform researchers, strategists, policies, and destination governors and managers how to make tourism more sustainable by illuminating the elements that need to be addressed. Old approaches that narrowly balance the three pillars of sustainability have proven unsuccessful, resulting in alarmingly unsustainable tourism practices and, in many destinations, excessive growth, overcrowding, and overtourism. Addressing diverse element constructs and joining multidisciplinary elements on the same platform is novel and may help overcome the kind of partial approach by one discipline that should be avoided in order to bring all the relevant sustainability implementation factors together (Munasinghe, 2007).

Through the process of conceptualisation, it became evident that some historically old and new developments in tourism ecology, economics, political tourism economy, welfare economics, geography, sociology, psychology, and other disciplines regarding the sustainability-responsibility tourism academic debate helped us consider overtourism from a reframed perspective. In this regard, overtourism—a manifestation of unsustainable tourism—has put the mainstream paradigm of sustainable development to the test and opened the door to its redesign. In this context, the specific case of an overtourism situation can be fully conceptualised by an expanded SRT based understanding of sustainable tourism as follows: “quality of life centred tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, socio-cultural, and natural impacts and responsibly addresses destination stakeholders (host communities and industry), visitors, and the socio-political environment” (see Table 1).

One future avenue for the continued monitoring of overtourism includes the development of indicator groups for each box in the model and their elements and actual application of the model in a real setting. More research to understand what constitutes the critical mass of resident dissatisfaction with tourism is needed to diagnose this risk in a particular context. The WTTC already suggests basing the risk of overtourism (using the term ‘overcrowding’) on benchmarking with similar destinations and using the top quantile values to define the situation. Yet, the results for overtourism risk have only been presented according to each indicator. We assume that a single (composite) overtourism indicator for destinations will soon be developed.

The main limitation of this study was its approach, which was based on the sustainable tourism paradigm and relevant tourism schools of thought. As the sustainable development paradigm for tourism evolved inside the tourism field and remained ‘pro-growth’-oriented, it has long been contested as a weaker form of sustainability. However, future debates and research will show whether the new socio-political box and its further development may give domicile to anti-growth, tourism equality, and equity-based voices among tourism researchers. The same box also opens the door to address the efficacy of destination management to manage unsustainable situations and thus explore if overtourism can be managed.

Further paradigm acceptance and development ought to be informed and supported by vigorous multifaceted theoretical underpinnings from both inside and outside the tourism field. This paper offers a conceptual coverage of overtourism and also proposes a tourism paradigm shift towards an extended tourism sustainability paradigm. Notably, the study emerged from “the desire to continue to research, promote, deliver and experience” (Burrai et al., 2019, p. 993) sustainable and responsible tourism while at once working to enhance and develop its theoretical credibility, practical relevance, and social welfare contribution. Almost every tourist destination worldwide has a sustainable tourism-based tourism development agenda. As such, shifting the mainstream sustainable tourism definition, as suggested in the present paper, would certainly progress sustainability and responsibility in tourism by taking

into account all multidimensional elements of sustainable welfare clarified by the conceptualisation of unsustainable overtourism in this paper.

### Statement of contribution

The contribution of this paper to theory and practice is twofold. First, the conceptualisation of overtourism adds to tourism knowledge and theory, as a new tourism phenomenon is conceptualised in all its dimensions. It also adds to tourism practice, as the model offers an overtourism monitoring tool which informs managerial decision for making tourism more sustainable. Second, during the conceptualisation process, the sustainable tourism paradigm was extended. The extension has been informed and validated by review of academic literature and other relevant sources and network reports on overtourism. The conceptualisation of sustainable tourism through novel elements calls on academia and practitioners to think about ways to expand the existing paradigm of sustainable development.

The paper offers a social science approach, as it explores sustainability perspective and considers responses and actions, relying on a rigorous understanding of the historical, contemporary, and contextual practical and theoretical information about the social issue under consideration (overtourism).

### Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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