

OVERTOURISM: TOURISMOPHOBIA AND TOURISTOPHOBIA, SAME FIGHT?



How can we explain why the cases of Barcelona, Venice and Dubrovnik are so exemplary? According to the Top 100 City Destinations Ranking WTM published by Euromonitor International, Barcelona is only 23rd among the most visited cities by tourists, with 7.6 million tourists received in 2017, far from the world's leading cities with audiences. For its part, Venice does not appear in 38th position and Dubrovnik does not even appear in the top 100...

How and why talk about overtourism, since metropolises have – theoretically – sufficient reception capacities to support such a growing flow of visitors? **Why should tourism be a problem in only two of the world's top 100 cities?** This is all the more surprising since the notion of touristophobia was invented to describe the negative effects of too much pollution on fragile environments (Machu Picchu, Mont St-Michel, natural sites, etc.), which is clearly not the case in these large cities.

And as for Venice, only the greed of the municipal authorities explains why they have allowed an increasing number of increasingly large cruise ships to arrive, jeopardizing a fragile natural ecosystem in the lagoon. The problem was simple, and the solution was just as simple.

Arbitrations to be considered upstream

We must therefore set the record straight. To do this, we propose two definitions of two phenomena which, although related, are nevertheless distinct in their causes and, above all, in the solutions to be provided.

Touristophobia: aversion towards tourists, which manifests itself in acts of rejection – or even aggression – committed against them.

Tourismophobia: rejection of the tourism industry and its institutional partners (public administrations, municipalities, tourist offices, port and airport authorities) and commercial (OTAs, hotels, attractions, transporters) by residents of a territory, who feel – legitimately or not – deprived of their rights, benefits and peace.

The first one must be strongly criticized. We cannot accept such a form of obscurantism that would seek to undermine this healthy willingness to discover the vast world. Any political project that aims to make visitors aware of the odious local choices of the past appears to be an easy – some would say populist – and dangerous response to a much more complex problem. This recalls the current political vision of the American President, who blames others for the difficulties experienced by his fellow citizens (those who think like him, especially).

The second one is worth thinking about. If our first reflex is to defend tourism and tourists at all costs, it is possible to see that some territorial decisions of the past have been taken to the advantage of some and sometimes to the detriment of others, particularly the inhabitants. Tourists do not appear by miracle (and by millions) in a destination without the active support of the tourism governance of that same destination. All this is the result of work spread over several decades. This is therefore a sustained, organized and constant desire on the part of local and regional authorities, which is often explained by the appetizing fruits of taxation and the economy. However, good public policy is based on the following precept: its benefits must be concentrated with a group that will benefit and recognize them, and the costs must be diffused, i.e. carried by a majority that will have little or no awareness of them.

Tourism development often meets this criterion for the tourism governance of a territory, but rarely for its inhabitants. **On the contrary, residents sometimes inherit concentrated costs (i.e. daily irritants) and receive only diffusely the benefits received by their community (taxes, other income and jobs).**

Certainly, the presence of tourists can be a source of irritants for locals. However, nighttime noise nuisances experienced by residents of tourist areas or housing issues (the most common illustrations) can easily be resolved through municipal planning and regulation. Success stories in this area are numerous all over the world, and are the rule, more than the exception.

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