

OVER-TOURISM IN THE EYES OF THE EUROPEAN CITY TOURISM STUDY



The crowded La Rambla in Barcelona, mega-cruisers in front of the Doge's Palace in Venice – you know the pictures. “Cities are becoming victims of their own success. That is irresponsible and really not necessary,” Markus Gratzner, Secretary General of the Austrian Hotel Association summarized the situation. The association, along with Roland Berger, presented a Europe-wide study on over-tourism which shows how cities can master and control this phenomenon. In the process, 52 European cities were analyzed.

“It does not happen overnight and there are always several factors at force,” Vladimir Preveden, Managing Partner at Roland Berger Austria. He refers to the exceptional situations such as in Amsterdam or Lisbon. One of them is the continuing trend towards city tourism holidays. **Overnight stays in surveyed countries have increased by 26% in the past 10 years, and they increased more than twice as fast in cities.**

The added value and relationship between tourists and locals, the so call tourism intensity, is the central parameter of the study. In London, Vienna, Berlin, Munich or Rome their relationship is almost perfect. In Venice, Reykjavik, Istanbul but also Salzburg it is quite different. There is an urgent need for action.

“The good news is that over-tourism is not a one-way street. A turnaround is possible,” emphasizes Gratzner. The study shows seven approaches to how cities can effectively address over-tourism. “Those who are not yet under pressure must act to keep it that way,” he added. Cities with low or medium tourism intensity would have it in their own hands.

Firstly, it is necessary to develop a tourism strategy and city planning together. This is the most promising and long-term approach. Tourism managers and urban planners have to work together to develop a common strategy on the development of city tourism. The focus should be on infrastructure, the environment, quality of life and smart city features.

Moreover, it is necessary to distribute the flow of tourists to relieve the centers. Hot spots have to be created off the ‘classic’ tourist track. Existing offers away from busy locations should be adapted. In order to increase added value, offers should be created that specifically target luxury guests. Quality over quantity prevents cities from falling into the over-tourism trap.

In the case that cities already are affected by over-tourism, there are also measures to slow the process down. One of them is limiting capacities, from the number of hotel beds to the limitation of bus or cruise passengers. Another way is to start regulating sharing economy. This can be achieved by registration obligation of hosts or, more extremely, by a ban on tourist short-term rental apartments.

Staying passive, watching developments is not an option. Not only tourist advertising is needed today, tourism management is essential. Measures such as the management of the sharing economy should be considered soon enough so that the situation does not worsen.

According to the study, however, there are also several cities that are the “shining stars” and are handling their tourism inflow in a sustainable way. For example, Rome, London, Berlin or Vienna. “I see the good performance of Vienna very positively. From representative surveys we know that **96% of Viennese are positive about tourism in the city**. It is important to maintain the balance that makes Vienna endearing for guests, liveable for locals and profitable for the economy as a destination,” Tourism Director Norbert Kettner said.

And the goal should be to create more and more “shining stars”. Because on the other side there are cities that don’t do so well. Notable examples are the already mentioned Amsterdam and Barcelona, but also Prague, Dublin or Copenhagen, while there are also cities that have unused potential, like Helsinki, Istanbul or Valencia.

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