

OVERTOURISM AND SPATIAL PLANNING IN GREECE: CHALLENGES (1077)

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Abstract. The recovery of tourism following the pandemic resurfaced the challenges of the tourism sector. There is a worldwide dispute about whether overtourism exists or is the result of inadequate tourism planning and management. The most common consequences are the exhaustion of resources, (over)crowding of tourists, popular discontent, displacement of residents, the transformation of the neighborhoods' character, changing land uses to satisfy tourism demand, land, and public space exploitation, sharing economies, overloaded infrastructure, etc. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the issue of overtourism via a spatial planning approach. Specifically, the spatial planning tools and policies applied in Greece if any as a response to tourism over-crowding will be presented and analyzed. The upper aim is to finally answer if the symptoms are due to overtourism or tourism mismanagement.

Keywords: planning, tourism, overtourism, policies, management.

1. Introduction

Rapid urbanisation during the last decades brought a steep rise of the urban population and an abrupt transformation of the cities. Meanwhile, tourist flows towards urban destinations have recorded an upward trend. Thus, challenges arise in conjunction with half of the world's population being in urban areas. As a result, resources are being depleted, tourists are swarming into masses, residents feel discontented, the real estate market is unstable, land uses change, and cities being transformed to meet tourist needs.

The positive contribution of tourism to host communities and destination growth is widely accepted. However, negative aspects, such as overtourism, are not to be overlooked.

Overtourism is listed among the current mega-trends¹ - determinants of the worldwide tourism market, affecting destinations all over the world. The origin of the phenomenon

¹ Digital transformation, sustainability, sharing economies, social and demographic changes, rising and secondary destinations and worldwide crises (health, recession).

is traced to the negative sides of mass tourism.

By planning approach, tourism has prevailed over the (urban) landscape and now has a powerful role in shaping the wider urban agenda. Under those circumstances, any tourism-related issue should be investigated also under the lens of spatial planning as a means of management.

Considering tourism as a motivating force of (urban) changes, it is quite easy to imagine what is overtourism capable of, turning destinations' popularity into a disadvantage.

What is more, take for the negative consequences of the excessive tourism growth: some of them are occasional and more visible during the high tourist season (discomfort of residents and/or tourists, the congregation in facilities and infrastructure, etc.) markedly in Greece throughout summer. At the same time, they may be of permanent character (environmental degradation, change of land uses, the transformation of the landscape, etc), crucial for the viability of the destination, putting at risk its future attractiveness. Given that, researchers and stakeholders are becoming interested in finding tools to manage the issues deriving from the massive tourism development.

Tourism congregation attracts again scientific and academic interest after the tourism rebound following the recession period due to the pandemic. To be more precise, 2022 was a year of congregated tourist traffic with international arrivals reaching 917 million (UNWTO, 2023). Data from the World Tourism Barometer (UNWTO, 2023) show a rise in international tourism values for every European and non-European region, which are predicted to grow further. Europe alone had a share of 585 million tourist arrivals, whose market marked the fastest rebound (United Nations, 2023). Nevertheless, the tourism flows are not distributed equally in space. Thus, the geography of tourism is formed by patterns characterised by concentrations in specific destinations, some of which cannot correspond to the great volumes of tourists, suffering from the consequences of overtourism. The need for urgent action is recognised by lately published reports in the field such as European Tourism – Trends & Prospects (European Travel Commission, 2022, p.4) and OECD Tourism Trends and Policies (2022).

This paper examines the spatial tools, if any, being used to manage and address overtourism having in mind that tourism is an urban phenomenon that cannot be studied individually from urban activities.

To achieve the study's goal, the following research questions are being set:

- Does Greece suffer from overtourism or is it just a matter of inadequate management policies?
- Are any spatial tools to counter overtourism and which are they?

- Are these tools considered appropriate and adequate to address the phenomenon in Greece?

2. Conceptual background

The summer of 2017 was a key date for the travel industry. Suddenly, the negative side of mass tourism expressed as overtourism, and the consequent implications became a hot topic for the media. Protests across famous destinations declaring widespread discontent among residents over too many tourists and the depletion of physical and social resources, made the issue public. Sooner or later, a boom of references to *overtourism* took over a large part of the news and relevant literature by 2018. Markedly, overtourism became the World of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary.

During the past five years, overtourism attracts great interest, being noticed in destinations with high tourist densities and serious overcrowding, although the phenomenon is not new.

Over time, attempts were made to define overtourism. Searching across the relevant literature, many definitions, and related concepts such as *tourismophobia*, emerge. This term for example was coined by the Spanish media to underestimate the severity of the overcrowding issues that many Spanish cities were dealing with as a result of too many tourists. It would implicate the locals' aversion to excessive tourism growth to diminish the actual problem.

Milano (2017, p.05) associated tourismophobia and overtourism as direct results of promoting and practicing unsustainable forms of tourism such as mass tourism. Before that, Ali Rafat, founder of the travel website Skift, produced the term overtourism in June 2016, triggered by the announcement of the World Tourism Organisation, that international arrivals had exceeded 1 billion, reaching precisely 1.3 billion. Ali introduced overtourism as a new construct to look at potential hazards to popular destinations worldwide, as the dynamic forces that power tourism often inflict unavoidable negative consequences if not managed well. In some countries, this can lead to a decline in tourism as a sustainable framework is never put into place for coping with the economic, environmental, and sociocultural effects of tourism. The impact on local residents cannot be understated either.

Ali aimed to initiate interest and alert on the massive tourism flows and their management. He coined the term as an expression of the intersection between the global growth of tourism and the tourism industry's duty to manage it (Ali, 2018).

Likewise, Goodwin (2017, p.01) describes overtourism as a localised situation, where hosts or guests, locals or visitors, feel that there are too many visitors and that the

quality of life in the area, or the quality of the experience has deteriorated unacceptably. It is the opposite of responsible tourism which is about using tourism to make better places to live in and better places to visit. Often both visitors and guests experience the deterioration concurrently and rebel against it.

More recently, Milano et al (2019) identify overtourism as the excessive growth of visitors leading to over-crowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have caused permanent changes to their lifestyles, denied access to amenities, and damaged their general well-being.

According to Collins Dictionary (2018) overtourism is 'the phenomenon of a popular destination or sight becoming overrun with tourists in an unsustainable way.'

In 2018, UNWTO (2018, p.03) defined overtourism as '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.'

This definition is set as a reference point for this paper and implies that the limit over which tourism activities stop being beneficial for the host community, rather than being a cause of problems has been exceeded. Problems such as residents' eviction, housing crisis, environmental degradation, overcrowding in infrastructure and services, land use changes, city transformation, and gentrification, are practical indications of overtourism.

Pressure derived from overtourism is not expressed everywhere in the same way, depending on the tourists' volume and the enablers of tourism development (Weber et al, 2017). In any event, overcrowding can be observed under different conditions and places. As Weber et al (2017) point out that the unrestrained tourism growth and a combination of factors (sharing economies, changes in tourist behavior and patterns, social media, competitive markets) have led to the intensification of overcrowding phenomena. To sum up, overtourism indicates limitless tourism growth and the absence of control.

At this point, it should be clarified that the concept of overtourism is more complex than the one of overcrowding. Peeters et al (2018) relate overtourism to the number of tourists, the type and period of visit, and the carrying capacity of the destination. In particular, accounts for the number of tourists in correlation with the carrying capacity of the tourist system (Weber et al, 2017). In that case, negative effects arise when the limit of the carrying capacity is exceeded.

As an illustration, residents feel discomfort, bad governance, environmental overuse and degradation, regional inequalities, the diminished standard of living, carrying capacity issues, resources and infrastructure over-exploitation, traffic and means of transport congestion, and inadequate enforcement of policies and strategies are recognised as

negative consequences of overtourism while some of them may also correspond to enablers of the phenomenon.

Tourism activity also includes a spatial dimension (land uses, development provisions, real estate) which is often overlooked on the economic and social ones. Above all overtourism causes the following outcomes in space: neighborhoods' character alteration (residential to tourist), expansion of tourism activities to residential zones, overcrowding and sovereignty in public space, land uses change, and space takeover to meet tourist demand, privatisation of public space (Milano et al, 2019), residencies alter to short-term rental accommodation (Airbnb, etc), the crisis in the real estate market (rise of rent prices, eviction of residents, availability of housing), infrastructure and facilities bottlenecks, et al. Referring to the local economy, it is quite common for tourism to dominate as a monoculture against other economic activities. In general, tourism is considered a social phenomenon. Although this may be true, tourism entails serious environmental and spatial consequences being also an urban- derived phenomenon.

To close this chapter, tourism is an extremely complicated phenomenon interrelated with other activities, subject to the conditions of the supply and demand markets and world events. Granted that Buhalis (2021 in Pantziou, 2021) argues that long-term policies and strategies are needed for the diversification and sustainable growth of the tourist product. Overall, overtourism reflects the absence of appropriate planning and management of the tourist flows and unrestrained tourism growth.

3. An insight into overtourism in Europe

Overtourism is a global phenomenon. As was mentioned in the introduction (see Chapter 1), a wave of protests has erupted in several destinations, Barcelona, San Sebastian, Venice, and Berlin officially suffering from overtourism. Formerly, tolerance to the excessive tourist numbers and depletion of resources have reached the breaking point in which residents resent and demonstrations outburst (Goodwin, 2017). In this chapter, a review of the phenomenon and how it is expressed across famous European destinations will be presented.

To start with, Denmark, a country with 5.83 million permanent population (2020), accepts the triple number of tourists annually (15.6 million in 2020) (statista.com, 2022a; worldometer, 2022). Copenhagen, the capital of Denmark counting 1.15 million residents, is named the 73rd most popular urban destination worldwide. Redistribution of the tourist flows within the city and in the peri-urban zone was chosen as an appropriate strategy to counter overtourism (Goodwin, 2017). Additionally, a supportive measure in the effort to avoid further tourism congregation in the city centre was to ban

the opening of new restaurants and bars in this area together with designing cycling routes dedicated to tourists.

Moving on, Barcelona is a renowned destination on European scale. According to official data, the city held over the half share of international tourist arrivals, to be precise 67 percent, for 2020, translated into 7 million visitors (statista.com, 2022b). Before, 2018, 18 million visitors, tenfold the number of residents (1.6 million) spend the night in the city designating Barcelona as the seventh most popular European destination (Weston et al, 2019). Coupled with the inability to manage these flows, tourism has acted as a force of successive changes in the city. To name a few, loss of the city's identity, territorial decentralization, overcrowding, and social unrest.

Barcelona's municipality introduced a new tourist model as an answer to overtourism including measures to control and tax short-term rental accommodations such as Airbnb and the voice of local communities. As an illustration, the Emergency Inspection against Illegal Tourist Flats plan in 2016 targeted the elimination of illegal tourist accommodation, the rise of which has caused a housing crisis meaning high rental prices and consequent residents' evictions and residential turning into tourist land uses (Goodwin, 2017). Like the Danish approach, *Barcelona is much more* program aimed at spreading tourists out of the urban tissue (Weston et al, 2019). What is more, a turnaround of the tourism policies has been attempted by redistributing the tourism budget from promoting to controlling tourism. Goodwin (2017) characterises it as a wider regulation of the tourism sector by returning to traditional spatial planning prioritising locals' needs over tourists' and avoiding an attack on tourism.

Other famous destinations in the same country, Mallorca and the Balearic Islands, voted for new tourism laws in the battle against overtourism. In the pursuit of quality, it was decided the number of tourist beds in the hotels and other forms of tourist accommodation (rooms to rent) to remain the same. Secondly, a social plan agreed with the specific provision of turning abandoned hotels (1 and 2 stars) into social housing by 50 percent as well as office spaces or retirement homes, but no tourist uses (money tourism, 2022).

To continue with Venice, one of the most visited and discussed destinations around the globe. UNESCO has repeatedly expressed concerns about overtourism threatening Venice being a World Heritage Site since 1987. Tourism has been established as a commercial monoculture and dominant economic activity. As a result, the permanent population has decreased to 57,000 residents in 2012 in comparison to 174,000 in 1951. In other words, residents have been overrun by tourists presenting a notable decrease of 2/3 of the initial population (Goodwin, 2017). Notably, Venice ranks second as the Italian province with the highest number of tourist stays (3.6 million in 2020) and arrivals

(domestic and international) (1.3 million in 2020) (Citta di Venezia, 2022). Of these, 30,000 originate from cruise ships (Citta di Venezia, 2022). Regards to accommodation, 1,187 hotel facilities are located solely in the municipality of Venice offering a 421,000 total beds (statista, 2021). Therefore, numbers speak up for themselves.

Tourism overcrowding has become so intense affecting negatively the living standards and the viability of Venice both as a destination and city. Locals or Venecians as how they are being called, have started to express feelings of discomfort and rebel against the massive tourism flows. The most representative example is the *No Grandi Navi* movement, expressions of which can be spotted anywhere in the city. What is more, Venice constitutes the third biggest port for cruise ships in Europe accepting 500-600 of them annually (International Transport Forum, 2016). Complaints about cruise tourism concern the congregation being caused by tourists landing for a short period and on specific timetables daily but not adding to the tourism revenues. Also, the ecosystem endangers by cruise ships at anchor which over exceed its carrying capacity, being a cause of environmental degradation.

Accumulated pressure has evoked efforts of banning or setting a limit on the large-scale cruise ships arriving in Venice to lessen the negative effects. In the meantime, authorities enforced the prohibition of new tourist accommodation in the city centre. Since 2017, a counting system of visitors has been implemented in major tourist locations within Venice where tourism bottlenecks are being noticed (Piazza San Marco, Rialto). Under discussion lie the follow-up measures of specifying the number of visitors entering San Marco Piazza and imposing a tourist tax (2,5-10 euros), revenues of which will be allocated to the conservation of the city (Tjolle, 2022).

As can be seen from the European case studies, the strategies to control overtourism are focused on shifting the priorities regarding tourism. That is to say, management of destination over promotion. In any event, these procedures are long-term and require the commitment of the local authorities and communities. Hence, the results are not tangible yet and suspect to evaluation.

4. Greek reality

Traditionally, tourism development in Greece has been shaped by small and medium - scale, mostly family-owned businesses, which were entering the tourism industry taking full advantage of the land ownership policies but lacking the appropriate knowledge and background. Presently, the new tourist model requires big-scale, integrated, high standards tourist units, meaning large land properties in contrast to the past land ownership fragmentation. Both tourism types have a profound impact on space, environment, and landscape. First one, is synonymous with the construction sprawl

outside urban zone areas, a crucial spatial issue that Greece deals with for many decades causing a fragmented landscape. Whilst the latter one demands great untouched areas that are being attributed to tourist land uses even in an integrated construction scheme (Βουρεκάς, 2018). Public authorities play the most significant role in how tourism is being treated, which has a direct effect on carrying capacity and hence on the resilience of the tourist system to challenges such as overtourism (Goodwin, 2017). This is why Buhalis (2021 in Pantziou, 2021) indicates that insufficient tourism policies as the main issue and not overtourism.

What is of great interest in the Greek tourism scape, is the dispersion of the destinations (accumulation in coastal areas and islands) across the country. Evidence that proves the accumulation of tourism activities is the almost double increase of rented rooms (10,6%) in comparison to the hotels (5,7%) during the last decade (2010-2020) (Νταλακογεώργιο, 2018). A rise in the five-star hotels, mostly big-scale resorts, manifests also tourist concentration (Νταλακογεώργιο, 2018). Λιάλιος (2023) estimates that in many cases the number of tourist beds² is triple or even quadruple the number of residents.

To demonstrate, the imbalance between residents and visitors, the five islands with the highest ratio of tourist beds per resident are: Mykonos 3.7, Santorini 3.42, Folegandros 3.16, Ios 3.07 and Antiparos 3.03 (Λιάλιος, 2023). Meaning that during the peak tourist season the visitors' population³ exceeds four times the residents'. This variable is not exclusively representative of the pressure that an island is subject to. The degree of tourism development, the infrastructure, and the area of the island should be taken also in consideration. Even so, these data denote the trend that dominates the Greek tourist space in the last years: an increase in tourist beds and hotels in the already developed and saturated islands (Cyclades and Dodecanese) while other destinations such as the North Aegean are behind. This is part of the wider mindset in Greece which relates the success of the tourism sector to the number of tourist accommodations and visitors. The more the better.

As shown in the McKinsey and World Travel and Tourism Council report, Greece ranks 15th in tourist overcrowding worldwide presenting a 3 million international arrivals rise in a four-year period (from 2016-2020) (WTTC, 2017). The intensity of the phenomenon is imprinted in Figure 1 Tourists per resident, where Greece is listed as 10th (2.53 tourists per resident⁴). Zooming in, Santorini is illustrated in red color with a ratio of 128.62 tourists per resident.

² Excluding short-term accommodation such as AirBnb, which count for thousands.

³ Referring only to visitors and not counting the employees or the ones staying on the island without being tourists or locals.

⁴ Price is calculated by the tourist arrivals in the past 12 months.

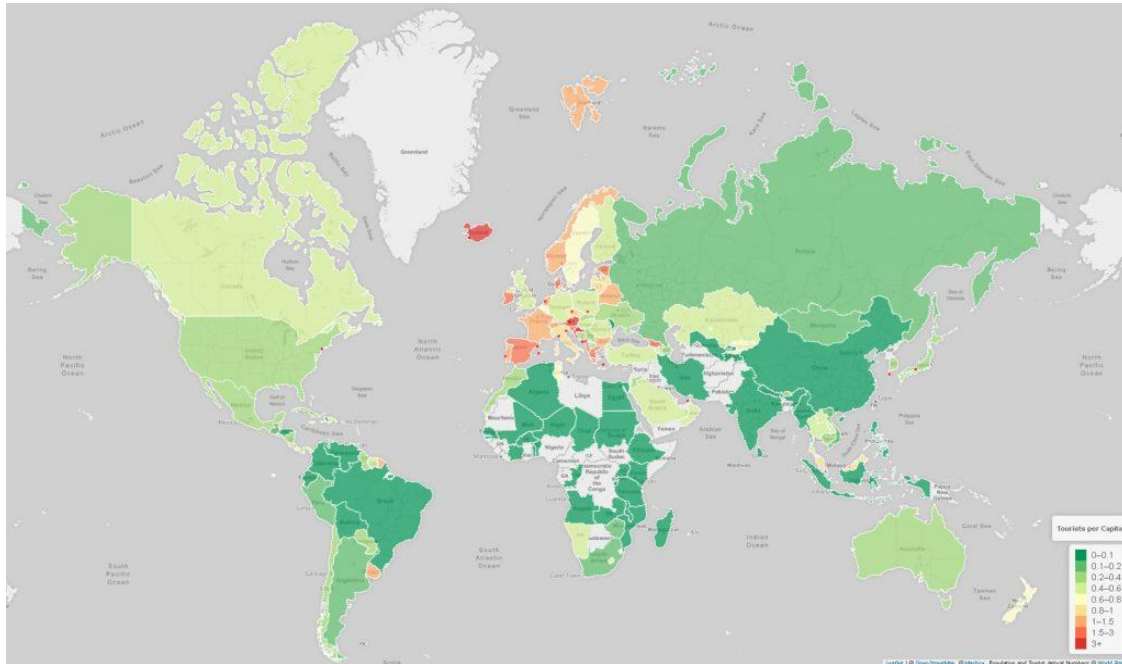


Figure 1. Tourists per resident

Source: <https://vividmaps.com/the-over-tourism-map/>

Another case of unrestricted tourism development and absence of control is Cavos in Corfu. The issue of unmanageable tourism flows dates back to 1970 reaching a peak point of 4,500 tourist beds and insufficiency of water resources (Goodwin, 2017). Moreover, the Ionian Islands and Peloponnese are pointed by the Research for TRAN Committee - Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses report as European areas with a high risk of overtourism (Peeters, et al, 2018).

To continue with, the Greek most known islands Mykonos and Santorini are officially destinations hit by overtourism. Whilst authorities in Crete, another famous island destination, forbade the entrance of 10,000 British tourists aged 18-30 years old due to reasons related to inappropriate behavior. These destinations are characterised by the seasonality of the tourist product. Practically, this means that the pressure put on their ecosystems derived from the tremendous tourism flows culminates during the summer months, threatening their viability. Because of this invisible burden, as recently being called, a re-direction of tourism from mass to more sustainable forms is necessitated with the upper aim of the destinations' resilience to internal and external shocks. For this purpose, the Ministry of Tourism assigned the preparation of two reports dedicated to Mykonos and Santorini aiming at elaborating customised policies per the Special Urban Plans by the Ministry of Environment and Energy.

The first thing to notice is the absence of a former integrated report for Mykonos, one of the most well-known Greek destinations. Someone can remember the discussion regarding the establishment of Zones of Urban Control (ZOE) via presidential decree (Δήμος Θήρας, 2021). Given the mass tourism model adopted on the island, the high numbers of visitors, and the specific characteristics due to the insularity, recording, and evaluation of the data constitutes an impressive need.

The case of Santorini is referred to in the relevant literature as a typical example of a Greek destination suffering from overtourism. Tourism development on the island is traced back to 1970 and is based solely on the 3S⁵ model. Nowadays, tourist arrivals reach 2 million (2017), of which 620,000⁶ are cruise passengers, while residents account for 15,457 (census 2021) according to official data provided by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ΕΛΣΤΑΤ, 2021).

Based on these numbers, the relevant indices occur TPR at 107.8⁷ tourists per 100 residents daily (cruise passengers included) and TDR⁸ at 220.6 tourists/m² daily (Peeters et al., 2018). These values demonstrate the scale of the phenomenon.

Under those circumstances, the given space can't correspond to the increased tourism needs resulting in tourists sprawling in residential zones, unplanned and uncontrolled building, environmental degradation, waste disposal, overuse and insufficiency of resources, congestion in infrastructure, facilities, and public transportation, overcrowding in public spaces, and overexploitation, residents and visitors feeling discomfort, inappropriate behaviors, cultural shift, landscape transformation, housing crises, etc. Pressure intensifies during the summer period but few of the consequences are permanent (landscape transformation) threatening the destination's future attractiveness.

The absence of an integrated spatial planning framework for tourism is mirrored in overtourism and its aftereffects, both short and long-term, from which the island suffers. Santorini is at the top of the list of the most popular destinations worldwide due to its unique characteristics. However, the island has surrendered to the power of tourism and its negative impact which prevails over the benefits due to the lack of appropriate policies and planning.

On the positive side, the study for the calculation of the carrying capacity of Thera

⁵ Sun, Sea and Sand.

⁶ Slightly decreased number to previous years due to the restriction that the authorities set for the number of cruise passengers embarking on the island daily.

⁷ TPR Tourism Penetration Rate: average rate for the islands: 279.4 tourists per 100 residents/daily (Peeters et al., 2018).

⁸ TDR Tourism Density Rate: average rate for the islands: 306.3 tourists/m² daily (Peeters et al., 2018).

Municipality includes spatial planning provisions (control of urban sprawl, etc) and predictions for the land uses (ban of nuisance ones in certain congested areas). Surprisingly, indices⁹ are also being specified for the first time and their accepted value range is based on urban–regional and environmental criteria and legislation, European directives and local authorities, and community viewpoints (Δήμος Θήρας, 2021, p.21). Equally important is the establishment of a monitoring mechanism for the indices.

Finally, not to be ignored the local measure of setting a maximum limit on the number of cruise passengers visiting the island daily (8,000 passenger/day). This is considered a successful strategy that has contributed to the decrease of the relevant prices aiming at the dispersion of visitors on a weekly basis (Peeters et al., 2018).

The problem of overtourism in Greece has two sides. The first one regards the carrying capacity, if the resources are enough and not scarce. The second one concerns locals' perception of it. It is not coincidental that the permanent population in many islands has shown a decrease in the last census (2021) despite the tourism development. Long-termly, this could lead to the devaluation of the coastal zone and many island destinations.

5. Legislative framework and policies

The multifaceted nature of tourism means its interrelation and dependence on different policies. In this fact lies the difficulty of the policymaking process from the local to national level. The establishment and implementation of a common policy line for tourism including a broadband of areas requires the cooperation of the different governmental levels, stakeholders, and public and private sector partnerships.

Greek tourism spatial planning has a bitter history. In detail, the current legislative framework will be analysed. Starting from top to bottom, the newly introduced law 4759/2020 constitutes the National Spatial Policy including planning implementation mechanisms at the different governmental levels, national, regional, and local.

In general, the legislative instruments for the spatial organisation and sustainable development of tourism nationally are provided via the Special Planning Framework for Tourism. In 2009, the first SPF (1138/11.6.2009) introduced *Approval of the Special Framework of Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development for Tourism and Strategic environmental impact assessment* named as an initial attempt to set a legal reference for tourism. Later, it was replaced by its amendment (3155/12.12.2013 *Approval of the Amendment of the Special Framework of Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development*

⁹ Building rate built area per resident (Δήμος Θήρας, 2021:203).

for Tourism and Strategic environmental impact assessment). However, the latter one was declared invalid by the Council of State under the 519/2017 judgement (Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλίας, 2020). At the moment, none of the aforementioned frameworks are enacted. The spatial development of tourism is not in conformity with an in-force national policy but rather in the Regional Planning Frameworks and their underlying legislation until the adoption of the new framework.

Up until then, tourism development will be bestowed on the national policy for unplanned construction. Now this condition will cause more harm than good and surely will not contribute to the resolution of the chronic pathogenies of the Greek planning system. As can be seen, the planning treatment of tourism is not equal to its significance and magnitude.

A step forward is the elaboration of Local Town Planning Schemes for 150 municipalities (including 36 destinations and clusters of destinations). Priority will be given to the ones facing challenges such as overtourism.

Ministry of Tourism passed into a new law *DMMOs, Greek Thermal Springs, Zante Shipwreck, provisions for the tourist bureaus, tourism operators,, and tourist accommodation and other regulations for tourism development* which promises to solve key issues of Greek tourism. Indirect reference to overtourism is illustrated in the section concerning the foundation of *Destination Management and Marketing Organisations - DMMOs* and the *Greek International Tourism Destinations Organisation*. Besides the identification of the world and nationwide destinations will ensure their protection by

- a) monitoring the carrying capacity indexes
- b) creation of developmental strategies for every destination and
- c) construction coordination of the necessary infrastructure to support the destination (Υπουργείο Τουρισμού, 2020).

To explain, DMMOs' role will be the identification and resolution of tourism concerning issues in each destination through the private–public sector partnership. These organisations will function as means for managing challenges such as overtourism in suffering destinations and promotion in those lacking.

Overtourism was the starting point of the discussion regarding DMMOs. Βασιλείου and Τοάνογλου (2020) recognise DMMOs as a valuable tool proven successful in other countries but are criticised for the history of mismanagement in Greece. In reality, it is an institution that wasn't widely accepted except for limited cases (Tourism Organisation of Chalkidiki). Not to mention the spatial and thematic conflict of responsibilities between DMMOs and International Tourism Destinations Organisation since their aim is the bottom-up operation and not top-down control. Practically, they represent the participation of the local society in the destination's management process with the

upper aim of the enforcement of Integrated Management Schemes. Another point that raises concern is the definition and operating responsibilities which differ noticeably from the respective ones given in European Union and the United States. Hence, experts imply a centre – focused, designed model (Βασιλείου and Τοάνογλου, 2020). Given these points, even though it is considered a promising initiative, several mistakes and inaccuracies are being observed which need further clarification for the successful function of these institutions.

In the same bill, another institution, *Sustainable Tourism Development Observatories* (Article 3), is being promoted as a responsibility of the DMMOs on a local/regional scale. The Observatories will oversee the monitoring of the sustainability chain – economy – society – environment and deliver the relevant annual reports. Moreover, they shall propose enhancement actions based on the values of the indices.

Now, DMMOs are not an innovative tool. Many European destinations placed their tourism development on the DMMOs years ago. Their belated adoption in Greece is considered a major step towards the treatment of tourism chronic issues but as it was revealed, confusion may arise. For one thing, the establishment of new structures and institutions does not always lead to the desired results, especially when their functions are unclear. On the other hand, the concept of carrying capacity is being introduced as an indicator of sustainable tourism development without the necessary quantitative criteria as it is a variable (ΣΕΤΕ, 2021). Ultimately, the overall approach is being questioned as a fragmented one due to the absence of a specified indices and actions framework.

In the middle of the overtourism debate, lies the long-discussed concept of carrying capacity. Focusing on Greek reality, the concept has been introduced to the common law by the Council of State over nearly two decades. Nevertheless, its use is usually encountered when it comes to island destinations. According to the law, omission from its incorporation into the tourism strategy counts as a serious reason to cancel the administrative act (Δήμος Θήρας, 2021, p.26). Βουλέλης (2009 in Δήμος Θήρας, 2021, p.26) interprets carrying capacity as the drafting of tourism planning for a tourist destination with a view to sustainability and key priorities for the protection of the sensitive areas from the excessive tourism development and the prevention of the overexploitation of the physical resources of the area. That is to say, the Council of State succeeded to set as a responsibility to the administration the inclusion of carrying capacity in tourism planning.

In the foreground, a recent example of bad policymaking became the spotlight. The omnibus bill and specifically Article 72 *Designation and other land use regulations of settlements* introduced by the Ministry of Interior which was into public consultation

(March 2022) favors specific interests. Through the town planning provisions is given the option for *segmented land use regulations* in *areas of interest*. This means the expansion of already designated residential areas which are under a protection regime for architectural, environmental, and historical reasons leading to their turistification (Λιάλιος, 2022).

Last to report are the actions taken by the Ministry of Tourism introduced via the development laws for the support of the tourism sector in the context of development European programs and funding. Notably, incentives are provided for the construction of new tourist accommodation which is being promoted more than the rehabilitation of the existing ones, perpetuating the typical Greek mentality which correlates the success of tourism to the number of tourist beds. Λιάλιος (2023) disputes the overloading of certain areas/destinations (Mykonos, Santorini) and calls it a strategic mistake based on the raising problematic. On the contrary, he advocates for the funding of upgrading the existing accommodation. The dispute lies on the sustainable character of these interventions, raising also the question if there is adequate space in tourism-saturated areas meant exclusively for tourist uses and under which standards.

In the final analysis, the burden lies on the legislation and the spatial planning framework, which are considered inflexible, inadequate, and outdated and require enhancement, simplification, and alignment on the current trends and challenges. The discussion should be directed into a society-centred approach.

6. Conclusions

The analysis revealed that Greece has also been hit by overtourism. The phenomenon has been a result of a combination of factors: the inadequate management of the tourism flows, the absence of integrated spatial planning, and the national tourism policy being focused solely on the 3S model, promoting and attracting mass tourism. Furthermore, the deficient support of the tourism sector by the governments, the outdated planning system, and the inability to draft and establish integrated management policies fostered the conditions for overtourism in many destinations. The established mindset that tourism is an instrument to resolve national economic issues has led to short-term, opportunistic policies lacking provisions for the long-term consequences. Thus, we should be aware of tourism's results in real-time monitoring the consequences except the numbers.

In terms of the policies and the spatial tools, progress is being recognised although they continue to be inadequate overall. The *invisible burden* upon the built and physical environment is caused by the regulations: the resource-surplus tourist product is affected and endangered.

Overtourism occupies mostly the public space, which is under central governance. Goodwin (2017) outlines that the management of infrastructure, which are capable of attracting mass tourism, is the liability of the state, where the tax return but not the negative effects. In the case of Greece, the administration is criticised as inadequate given the outcomes: insufficient support of the tourism sector by means of developing and enforcing policies focused on tourism traffic control.

The future of the destinations lies on the local authorities and communities efforts, which show initiatives to mitigate the negative consequences of the excessive tourism development with a representative example Santorini (daily limit to cruise passengers see Chapter 4). However, local initiatives are not sufficient to address challenges of that magnitude without the support of the central governments. As was observed by the study of the phenomenon, even these efforts are spatially located in the island destinations with references to the urban ones being totally absent. In addition, the inability of cooperation between the different governmental levels does not contribute to the solution of the issue rather than being harmful to the destinations. Given these points, the establishment of a spatial toolbox through the SPF for Tourism would allow for the resolution of these chronic illnesses.

Regards to the tourism flows management strategies, the review of the international experience revealed a shift in the policies from the promotion to the control and management of the destinations. The dispersion of the tourism traffic outside of the city centres and the urban tissue is prominent to address overtourism coupled with the promotion of more sustainable tourism forms and experiences and the enforcement of maximum limits of visitors. Hence, the answer could be the spatial and time dispersion (seasonality) targeting the equal distribution of the tourism flows to the Greek destinations.

Equally important are the upgrading of the infrastructure and the cooperation of the different governmental levels and stakeholders. Also, the need is urgent for legislation amendment and adaptation to the current trends for tourism to be resilient towards internal and external shocks. The necessary spatial tools, measures, and indicators should be included along with prevention and management policies, where a noticeable lack is being noticed (absence of an indicators framework, monitoring mechanisms, and official data at the national level).

Because of the complexity of tourism, mirrored in policy and planning, the assurance of its benefits for the host societies demands an integrated management and governance system, a map of actions for every destination. Tourism should be for society and not society for tourism. A unified solution cannot be discussed due to the unique characteristics of each destination and the driving factors. The only thing that must be in

common is the participation of the local community. The upper aim is for tourism to be sustainable for all the destinations and to prevent spreading the problem along with safeguarding destinations' viability. Thus, the planning approach should be integrated: environment, society, culture, and space.

In conclusion, tourism is beneficial for the local communities – stakeholders – tourists under the condition of the existence and enforcement of an integrated (spatial) planning framework, the absence of which enables phenomena such as overtourism.

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