

THE RISKS OF OVER-COMMERCIALIZATION VERSUS CONSERVATION IN INTERNATIONAL TOURISM

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Abstract: Given our current time, the risks of over-commercialization are met quite frequent in tourism internationally speaking, thus, conservation becomes difficult sometimes but not impossible. In this scientific paper, we give examples of countries that overcome this kind of problems with innovative ideas that work practically not only theoretically.

Key words: laws, tourism, disadvantages, commerce

INTRODUCTION

Tourism currently represents one of the most significant sectors of the global economy, playing a crucial role in generating income, creating employment opportunities, and fostering the socio-cultural development of communities. However, the uncontrolled expansion of tourism activities has led, in many destinations, to the emergence of an increasingly visible phenomenon — over-commercialization of tourism. This is manifested through the excessive exploitation of natural and cultural resources, the homogenization of tourist experiences, and the gradual loss of authenticity specific to each geographical or cultural space.

The UNWTO defines 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 visitor experiences in a negative way".

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this paper we used online books, along with official sites and transcripts from UNWTO conventions. Legal aspects will be listed as well regarding the conservation of the historical monuments, methodological norms on the creation, arrangement and certification of hiking trails. The methodological framework involves the critical examination of texts and case studies in order to identify patterns, relationships, and recurrent themes related to tourism commercialization and conservation efforts. The research focuses primarily on pedestrian and nature-based tourism, as these forms of tourism are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of excessive commercialization.

RESEARCH RESULTS

In a simpler version, overtourism means massive number of individuals in the same place at once, making the locals life harder psychologically and economically. Tenants are being evicted by property owners in favor of converting the properties into vacation homes, and housing prices are increasing. Also, noise pollution caused by tourists in large cities disturbs the locals, the general prices are high and the damage done to historical sites is alarming [9]. Justin Francis, co-founder and CEO of Responsible Travel, a tour operator focused on more sustainable travel, explains: "Social-media has concentrated tourism in hotspots and has exacerbated the problem, while the number of tourists worldwide continues to rise, even though destinations have a limited capacity. Until local residents are consulted about what they want and do not want from tourism, we will see more protests" [10]. The French startup that monitors the environmental impact of tourism states that 80% of travelers targets only 10% of the worlds tourist destinations.

Even though it's hard to believe, there are some advantages as well. This overtourism created globally over 330M jobs and also brought 11,1B of dollars globally.

The best way to conserve tourism, according to UNWTO is to practice ecotourism and maintain, protect natural, cultural and social resources that make a destination attractive.

Some interesting measures are those taken by UNESCO by limiting the number of visitors, constructions and commercial development around sites [11]. UNWTO, takes another initiative, durable tourism along with balance between economical development, environmental protection and wellbeing of the locals [4]. UN at the Convention on Biological Diversity mentioned a “carrying capacity” concept which indicates the maximum number of visitors a place is capable of carrying without any damage to it [5]. The most popular and used methods of protection are limiting number of visitors, ecotax, tourist education, development of alternative tourism and urban planning, architectural protection. There are programs like “Leave NO Trace” or local companies which teaches tourists how to pay respect to nature or the culture of the site. Italy, especially Venice, faces extreme tourist overcrowding, which leads to pollution, higher prices and a decline in the quality of life for locals. Measures include a 5-euro tourist access tax introduced in 2024, limiting the number of large cruise ships that can enter the lagoon, and encouraging sustainable tourism in less-visited areas of the Veneto region [6]. Thailand’s Maya Bay on Phi Phi Island has suffered severe damage to its marine ecosystem after the movie *The Beach*, with coral die-off, pollution and habitat destruction. The authorities responded by completely closing the beach for three years (2018–2022), introducing a daily limit on visitors, banning swimming in the area after reopening, and enforcing strict rules for coral protection [14]. Barcelona in Spain also struggles with tourist overcrowding, noisy visitors and protests from locals, along with the loss of cultural identity and traditional commerce. Measures taken include limiting tourist numbers, promoting tourism in less-visited regions, creating a sustainable tourism plan and encouraging visits to rural areas [7]. In France, sites such as Mont-Saint-Michel and areas in Paris face degradation of UNESCO heritage due to the large flow of tourists. The measures taken include lengthening visiting routes, imposing strict rules around monuments and running awareness campaigns about heritage conservation [8]. Japan, particularly Kyoto, experiences overcrowding in historical areas and inappropriate behavior toward locals and temples. Measures include educational campaigns (“Respect Kyoto”), restricting access to certain streets and promoting tourism outside peak seasons [15].

Table 1.

The Challenge of Overtourism

	Actions reported in the media or published
Czech Republic Prague	Prague bans Segways from historic city centre’s narrow streets
Croatia Dubrovnik	Seeking to be a top quality destination CCTV cameras would be introduced to monitor- and, if necessary, stop- crowds passing through the city’s three gates Canecelling cruise ship stops cutting the number of cruise ship arriving at peak time and attempt to move them away from peak times, such as the weekend Impose limits on tour operators running days trips to the city
Hvar	Plans to find lewd, rude and drunk tourists
Denmark Copenhagen	Forbids foreigners from buying houses in coastal areas or along it’s beaches Establishment of new bars and restaurants has been prohibited Bicycle routes for tourists have been created and there are ‘silent areas’ within residential areas
Iceland	Official registration for home sharing and business licenses for people who rent out their accommodation for more than 90 days a year or make more than about \$18,000 in rental income The government has also taken measures to upgrade Iceland’s roads, bridges, and parking lots. Responding to outrage over bad tourist behaviour, it has put more toilets and garbage cans in the country side
Greece Crete	Has banned 10,000 18-30 British holidaymakers
Holland Amsterdam	2016 Banned Beer Bikes Zandvoort was renamed Amsterdam Beach to attract visitors The range of the City Card was extended to encourage visitors to travel out Video streaming the queues outside the major sites and attractions

Source: [12]

In order to preserve areas of historical and cultural value and achieve a healthy symbiosis between built heritage elements and tourism-related activities, which can provide the necessary financial reserves, in addition to funding mechanisms at the national level and beyond, a more profound is needed, as well as a more sustained awareness raising activity for local residents and site staff, including targeted marketing specialists.[13]

In Romania we have the following normative acts regarding the issue:

Decision 1252/2000, version of 19 Nov. 2022

Article 3

(1) For the purpose of creating, developing, and certifying a hiking trail, the following conditions must be met:

a) The trail must be of tourist interest and dedicated to one or more tourist attractions and/or points of interest;

b) It must propose one or more tourism-related themes, which should be present and highlighted throughout the entire route;

c) It must not cross an area that has been legally designated as a mountain zone. In such cases, the tourist trail shall be certified in accordance with the provisions of Government Decision No. 77/2003 on the establishment of measures for the prevention of mountain accidents and the organization of mountain rescue activities;

d) It must not require the construction of facilities—such as bridges, footbridges, railings, or steps—that could have a negative impact on the environment. The arrangement and maintenance of the trail may be carried out without major interventions affecting the flora and fauna in the area;

e) It must not cross areas that are dangerous to the safety and security of tourists;

f) It must ensure that tourists have the possibility to rest at intervals of no more than 5 kilometers, and in cases where the hiking trail requires more than one day to complete, it must provide access to accommodation and food services in authorized tourist reception facilities.

Article 4

(1) The certification of hiking trails shall be carried out by the central public authority responsible for tourism, based on the documentation provided in Article 5, paragraph (3), upon the request of the administrator of the hiking trail, with the participation of local councils, county councils, or, as applicable, the General Council of the Municipality of Bucharest.

(2) The certification of hiking trails shall be conducted in segments, so that the duration of each segment does not exceed nine hours, and at the end of each segment there shall be an accommodation facility available.

Article 11

Annually, local councils, county councils, the General Council of the Municipality of Bucharest, and other interested private legal entities are obligated to inventory the hiking trails within their territorial-administrative area and to inform the central public authority responsible for tourism of any changes to their legal status, for the purpose of creating and updating the National Registry of Hiking Trails (ROPED).

Article 15

The contraventions provided for in Article 14 shall be sanctioned as follows:

a) with a fine ranging from 10,000 lei to 20,000 lei, for the violation specified under letter (a);

b) with a fine ranging from 5,000 lei to 10,000 lei, for the violation specified under letter (b).[1]

The 2004 regulation on the authorization of conservation and restoration laboratories and workshops: **Article 12**

(1) Authorized conservation and restoration laboratories are required to maintain clear records of the restoration interventions carried out on classified movable cultural assets.

(2) The records of restoration interventions shall be maintained through restoration files, which include written and photographic documentation specific to the restoration process of classified movable cultural assets, in accordance with the applicable legal provisions.

(3) Restoration files representing documentation of interventions on classified movable cultural assets may be made available to the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage and its decentralized services, as well as to investigative and prosecutorial authorities, as applicable, upon their request [2].

Ordinance 43/2000, version 30th of August 2021: **Article 28**

(1) The following acts constitute contraventions and shall be sanctioned as follows:

a) Conducting archaeological research, or any other activities that affect the integrity or endanger the conservation of archaeological heritage, without the authorization issued under the conditions of this ordinance, with a fine ranging from 10,000 lei to 50,000 lei;

b) Failure to report archaeological discoveries referred to in Article 4, paragraph (2), by the holder of the research authorization, with a fine ranging from 2,500 lei to 10,000 lei;

c) Failure by the persons referred to in Article 4, paragraph (4), to report accidental archaeological discoveries within the deadline established by this ordinance, with a fine ranging from 2,000 lei to 50,000 lei, and confiscation of the discovered items;

c1) Failure to resolve, within the term provided in Article 5, paragraph (18), a request regarding the issuance of the clearance certificate, if the act was not committed under conditions that would constitute a criminal offense under the Penal Code, with a fine ranging from 2,500 lei to 10,000 lei;

d) Violation of the provisions of Article 7, letters (a) and (b), with a fine ranging from 25,000 lei to 75,000 lei.

e) Failure to comply with the opinion of the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, or the issuance of a building permit in the absence of such an opinion, for construction or demolition works in areas with identified archaeological heritage, with a fine ranging from 10,000 lei to 50,000 lei;

f) Failure to fulfill the duties provided in Article 13, letters (a) and (c), with a fine ranging from 2,000 lei to 10,000 lei;

g) Possession of metal detectors without the authorization provided in Article 5, paragraph (10), with a fine ranging from 25,000 lei to 75,000 lei, and confiscation of the detectors;

h) Possession of metal detectors without the approval provided in Article 5, paragraph (12), with a fine ranging from 25,000 lei to 75,000 lei, and confiscation of the detectors;

i) Violation of the provisions of Article 9, paragraph (1), and Article 23, paragraph (1), with a fine ranging from 5,000 lei to 25,000 lei.

(2) The amount of fines provided in paragraph (1) shall be updated by government decision [3].

CONCLUSIONS

Over-commercialization in tourism presents a complex challenge, as the pursuit of economic growth often comes into conflict with the preservation of natural, cultural, and social resources. Concentration of tourists in popular destinations, driven in part by social media and global accessibility, has led to environmental degradation, the disruption of local communities, and the erosion of cultural heritage. At the same time, unregulated development, such as the conversion of residential properties into vacation homes, contributes to rising housing costs and social tensions. Ultimately, sustainable tourism

depends on integrating economic objectives with environmental stewardship and social responsibility. Only by aligning development with conservation principles can tourism continue to provide benefits without compromising the very resources that attract visitors. Failure to do so risks further protests, environmental degradation, and the loss of cultural and natural heritage, undermining both local well-being and long-term tourism viability.

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