

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

OVERTOURISM IN URBAN DESTINATIONS: A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR DIAGNOSIS BASED ON A SYSTEM OF INDICATORS

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“Some tourist destinations are in danger of being loved to death” (World Tourism Council, WTTC). Overcrowding in urban tourism leads some cities to excessive socio-cultural pressure and overuse of resources. In recent years, the accelerated development of urban tourism has led to the emergence of phenomena associated with overcrowding, such as overtourism.

The present work is framed within a framework of analysis where, despite the paralysis of the industry due to COVID-19, it is a topic that is still valid and of great relevance.

This study attempts to complement the quantitative results (obtained from the development of a system of tourist saturation indicators) with information on the community’s perception, and to apply it to a representative area in the field, the city of Seville. Thus, the general objective is to propose a methodological proposal that facilitates the analysis and exploratory diagnosis of tourist saturation in urban destinations, testing its applicability in Seville. Justified by its position as the third Spanish city in number of annual tourists and its significant growth in the last decade, together with its post-pandemic resilience.

That said, the state of the art of research is based on the concept of *overtourism*, which the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines as: “the impact of tourism on a destination, which excessively influences the perceived quality of life of citizens and/or the quality of visitor experiences in a negative way” (UNWTO, 2018:4).

This phenomenon is manifested in an unprecedented increase in tourists in urban areas, especially in historic centers and residential neighborhoods, due to the economic dependence on tourism and the growth in demand. Tourist saturation affects sustainability and all actors in the tourism industry. The root causes include mass tourism driven by

budget flights and accommodation platforms, the globalization of the industry and the use of social media. In addition, five categories of impacts linked to this over-tourism are identified: those affecting the resident population, urban functionalities, environment, cultural heritage and tourist experience. In this context, it is worth mentioning three theoretical models related to the limits of tourism growth of the 1970s and 1980s: The Tourism Irritation Index, Tourist Carrying Capacity and the Tourism Life Cycle, which help to understand the residents' perceptions according to the stage of tourism development of the destination.

In research on the phenomenon of overtourism, various institutions and authors have proposed methodologies for its analysis and diagnosis. The WTTC (2019) developed an index that evaluates the situation of cities in the face of tourism growth and was applied to 50 global destinations. In the academic field, cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona and Berlin have been studied (Guitart *et al.*, 2018) to understand tourism phobia, for which they have used indicators related to tourism pressure, intensity of use, social impact and contribution of tourism to the local economy. Qualitative studies involving in-depth interviews with residents have also been carried out to identify signs of tourist saturation, as in the case of the historic center of Seville (Jover and Díaz-Parra, 2022).

In addition to analyzing overtourism, these studies propose various solutions. Some of the proposals include decreasing tourism; the "5Ds", which address deseasonalization, decongestion, decentralization, diversification and luxury tourism; and flow management.

In terms of sources and methodologies applied, this research is based on an exhaustive review of academic literature and reports related to overtourism in urban destinations. A relevant report for this study is the one prepared by the WTTC in 2017, entitled "Coping with success. Management overcrowding in tourism destinations", which focuses on identifying destinations at risk of tourism saturation through a series of indicators applied to 68 cities. Reliable statistical sources from the sector have been used, such as the Occupation Survey of the National Statistics Institute (INE), Andalusian Tourism Register (RTA), reports from the Seville City Council and Social Security affiliation data. Finally, a survey has been carried out aimed at teachers, graduates and students of Tourism and related disciplines who reside in the city of Seville.

These sources have allowed the selection and systematization of analysis indicators of overtourism in urban destinations, which have been applied to analyze the city of Seville in 2019, which is considered a year of significant tourism growth in the city. This is not intended to be a definitive indicator, but rather a preliminary exploratory analysis that allows Seville to be placed in the context of the 2017 WTTC report, which is an important reference in the use of variables related to the subject.

In addition to the quantitative indicators, an analysis of statistical data and geolocation of key elements on the map have been carried out to characterize and contextualize the tourist destination of Seville. In a complementary way, a survey has been carried out among teachers, graduates and students of Tourism and related disciplines in Seville to obtain direct information on the local perception of the tourist situation. This survey included closed questions and Likert scales to assess the level of agreement of the participants, as well as open questions to collect experiences and proposals related to tourism in Seville.

The survey was divided by age groups, and a snowball sampling method was used. This allowed opinions to be obtained from individuals with diverse professional profiles and complemented the quantitative assessment with qualitative input.

The results of the exploratory analysis of the indicators of tourist overcrowding in the city of Seville reveal that there is a near risk of saturation in most of the variables studied.

Firstly, the importance of tourism was measured through the contribution of tourism to employment, using data on Social Security affiliations in tourist activities for the year 2019. Seville had a total of 32,962 affiliates in accommodation and restaurant activities, representing 9.1% of total affiliations to Social Security in tourist activities. According to the WTTC criteria, this places Seville in the high-risk quintile of tourist saturation.

The average annual growth of tourist arrivals who stayed overnight in regulated accommodation between 2016 and 2019 was 6.2%. This data places Seville in the second quintile, which indicates a proximity to the risk of overcrowding.

Regarding tourism intensity or social impact, Seville registered 4.6 visitors per resident in 2019. This places the city in the second quintile, again close to tourist saturation.

To measure tourism density, the tourist space was delimited based on the main attractions according to TripAdvisor, resulting in an area of 7.17 km² for Seville in 2019. This led to a result of 438,954 tourists per km², placing Seville on the threshold of the third quintile, indicating an intermediate level of use intensity.

In addition to these quantitative indicators, the survey carried out among the local population reflects a certain discomfort due to tourist pressure in the city. Participation in the survey included 102 people, 44% of whom were between 18 and 25 years old.

In the second part of the form, 40% of respondents agree with the statement that the presence of many tourists in Seville has started to bother them. Younger people tend to be more tolerant of tourist volumes. They are also the most confident in further tourism growth. 67% of respondents believe that tourism can damage the social and cultural values of Seville, and similarly (62%) that the city's standard of living is more expensive due to the industry.

Furthermore, approximately 4 out of 10 respondents believe that, prior to the pandemic, the carrying capacity of the tourist destination had been exceeded, perceiving tourist activity as unsustainable. And with respect to the management of tourism from the administration, 80% of those surveyed believe that the Seville City Council does not achieve good tourism management.

Among the main concerns of the surveyed population, the depopulation of the historic center due to tourist rentals and the increase in housing prices stands out. In the voluntary open section, the participants suggest diversifying the tourist attractions to other neighborhoods and segments of the city. It is also proposed to decentralize the main points of tourist interest to reduce the concentration of tourists. The control of tourist rental housing is a major concern, since its proliferation is increasing residential rental prices and causing the abandonment of tourist areas by the local population: "Seville without Sevillians".

In summary, the results of the survey and the opinions collected reflect a growing unease towards tourism in Seville, with an increase in discomfort being observed as respondents get older. Tourist pressure on the city, along with issues such as rising costs

of living and loss of cultural identity, are generating significant concerns among local residents.

One of the main contributions of this research is to make an approach to the establishment of a system of indicators for evaluating overtourism in urban destinations. Through a literature review, it was found that, although tourism sustainability indicators exist, there is little consensus on their use and a lack of specification in the calculations and values to be considered. This research is mainly based on the model presented by the WTTC (2017), which was adapted to be more applicable at the local level, for which alternatives to the calculation of the indicators used are proposed: regarding the contribution of tourism to GDP and employment, an official source was used, the Social Security affiliates in tourism-related activities. However, this source does not include all tourism jobs, and does not distinguish between tourist and non-tourist restaurant establishments.

To measure the number of visitors per resident, a more local approach involving the daily balance between tourists and residents in specific areas of the city was proposed.

Regarding the measurement of tourist space, two alternatives were proposed: the delimitation of tourist areas based on heat maps of photographed locations (through SightsMap or Instasights) and the delimitation of official tourist areas, such as districts and neighborhoods. Both options produced similar figures to those of the WTTC, but the need to develop a more precise procedure was recognized.

The research also highlighted the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to better understand the phenomenon of overtourism. The results revealed a future danger of saturation in Seville due to its strong economic dependence on tourism, as well as a growing unease among residents. These findings were similar to previous research on the impact of tourism in the city such as the study by Jover and Díaz-Parra (2022), according to the WTTC report (2019) or in Mínguez *et al.*, (2019).

However, the research also noted limitations, such as the size of the survey sample and limited participant profiles, as well as the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic that made face-to-face data collection difficult. It highlighted the importance of future research exploring long-term insights.

As a summary, this study has outlined a system of indicators to evaluate tourist saturation in urban destinations, focusing on Seville. It allows tourism activity to be related to economic aspects, urban space and the perceptions of the local population in the context of overtourism. The results reveal signs of tourist saturation in the city of Seville, confirming its high dependence on tourism, with emerging impacts on the local community. The creation of a System of Tourist Saturation Indicators in the Urban Area (SISTAU in Spanish) is suggested for its application in other urban destinations, adapting it to the particularities of each place and considering technological tools for data collection. Ultimately, the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative data for a complete diagnosis of the overtourism phenomenon is emphasized.