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10. Overtourism and gentrification in the eastern Mediterranean coastal cities: the need for a sustainable and integrated approach in World Heritage sites

Snezana Bobic and Mina Akhavan

1. INTRODUCTION: MOTIVATION AND METHODOLOGY

In the past few decades (excluding the years of the COVID-19 pandemic), the world has been facing an unprecedented period of tourism growth. For some time now, negative consequences have been reported in certain cities. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) report, international tourism concluded 2023 at 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with approximately 1.3 billion international arrivals. Europe, the world's most visited region, reached 94% of 2019 levels, where southern Mediterranean Europe stands out as the region that exceeded their 2019 arrival levels (UNWTO, 2024). Additionally, cruise tourism, characterised by an instant influx of many visitors, is the fastest-growing leisure tourism sector, increasing by more than 7% annually since 1990 (CLIA, 2018). Notably, the Mediterranean region is a growing market for cruise tourism, where the “absence of international coordination of the industry at the region level leaves it open to exploitation” (Carić & Mackelworth, 2014, p. 350).

Indeed, the tourism industry has the potential to play a constructive role in preserving World Heritage by generating income and increasing global awareness of its significance (Drost, 1996). However, as international tourist arrivals have increased nearly twofold since 2000, some urban areas have struggled to plan and adapt to the economic, social and cultural impacts of this growth, including the transformation of residential neighbourhoods due to the expansion of the services sector (Bobic & Akhavan, 2022). Such a process is often supported by Disneyfication, or the presentation of historical or cultural material in an expurgated or distorted fashion to appeal to a large number of tourists or consumers (American Heritage, 2016).

With its rich cultural heritage, natural beauty and mild climate, the Mediterranean region has long been a major tourist destination, contributing significantly to economic growth (Andolina et al., 2021). However, the rapid expansion of tourism has also raised concerns about its environmental impacts (Brščić et al., 2020) and issues of gentrification (Bobic & Akhavan, 2022). As a result, the sustainable development and management of coastal zones, particularly in the context of the Mediterranean, have become crucial due to the pressures imposed on environmental resources by the excessive growth of the tourism sector (Drius et al., 2019). This chapter examines three case studies – Venice (Italy), Dubrovnik (Croatia) and Kotor (Montenegro) – all of which have been highly affected by high visitor numbers. These cities stand out for their World Heritage status and nonflexible structure, which present unique challenges with tourist influxes far exceeding their capacity. All three cities are

now witnessing peak tourist arrivals comparable to those seen in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Today, numerous places in Europe are identified as suffering from overtourism. Yet, research on tourist crowding, unsustainable tourism and sustainable urban planning/ management has only recently expanded (see Mihalic, 2020). This chapter aims to contribute to this growing body of academic literature by exploring the relationship between urban preservation visions and current urban planning policies regarding tourism management in World Heritage Sites within the Mediterranean region. We argue that although growing tourism provides benefits, such as economic gains for heritage cities (unsustainable), overtourism also leads to significant externalities and pressure on both local residents and World Heritage sites, as illustrated by the three Mediterranean case studies. Therefore, integrated territorial planning and tailored policies are needed to mitigate tourism-driven gentrification and promote a sustainable blue tourism industry. Given the national importance of tourism, government intervention is crucial, requiring a multidisciplinary approach and specific top-down initiatives. This need is most apparent in the case study sections, which underscore the relevance of management plans that balance heritage preservation with tourism activities, shaping the development of these cities.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive overview of studies on cultural tourism and the issues of overtourism and gentrification, focusing on coastal cities. Section 3 outlines the methodology and introduces the three primary case studies. Section 4 discusses the findings from the case study analysis. The final section concludes by summarising the key findings and highlighting the need for co-designing tailored policies and actions in collaboration with local communities and stakeholders.

2. OVERTOURISM, GENTRIFICATION AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN COASTAL CITIES: A REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Tourism and World Heritage Sites

It is widely accepted that tourism contributes to economic growth, job creation and the preservation of cultural heritage, and it also develops local businesses (Haley et al., 2005). “Cultural tourism”, a significant segment of the tourism industry, has garnered increasing attention with research exploring its development, sustainability and impact from various perspectives (Richards, 2018). Cultural tourism is closely linked to sustainability and sustainable tourism, including elements of sustainable society, economy, environment and culture (Jureniene & Radzevicius, 2022). Furthermore, the involvement of local actors in the development of cultural tourism, as demonstrated by Boulhila et al. (2022) in their study of the Province of Constantine, Algeria, underlines the critical role of local communities in fostering sustainable cultural tourism.

The mutual relationship between tourism and heritage has been a prominent topic of discussion in academic literature in recent years (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 1990). Xiao (2022) discusses the correlation between intangible cultural heritage and the tourism industry, emphasising the potential for mutual promotion and synergy between the two, contributing to sustainable tourism development. The expanding notion of cultural consumption by tourists has made the definition of cultural tourism increasingly complex, reflecting the continuously

evolving nature of cultural tourism experiences (Noonan & Rizzo, 2017). To better understand the relationship between heritage preservation and tourism development, it is essential to consider urban preservation through its three interconnected objectives outlined by Orbasli (2002): physical, spatial and social.

Physically, urban preservation involves safeguarding the built environment, which includes restoring and adapting for modern use. Spatially, it consists of viewing the townscape as a holistic entity, considering the relationships between spaces and how they are used. The social objective, often overlooked, addresses the users – tourists, the local community and the urban population, as noted by Nasser (2003). While the social dimension may be the most challenging to define, it is the most critical, as heritage preservation can be truly successful only if urban life continues to thrive within these spaces.

Amid escalating threats to heritage from ageing factors and changing social and economic conditions, safeguarding national-level heritage often remains incomplete due to resource constraints. In 1972, UNESCO, in partnership with the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), established the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage to develop an effective system for the collective protection of the cultural and natural heritage “of outstanding universal value” (UNESCO, 1972, p. 3). By signing the Convention, each country commits to conserving the World Heritage sites (WHS) within its borders and safeguarding its national heritage.

Some scholars argue that achieving WHS status magnetically attracts tourists (Shackley, 2009), as WHS designations can serve as an extremely powerful brand (Buckley, 2012). However, as stated by Poria et al. (2011), many studies highlight the potential economic benefits of the WHS designation but do not provide clear evidence of a direct causal relationship between WHS status and patterns of tourist arrival. While the potential advantages of WHS designation are significant, they must be carefully evaluated by the stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the process, as they may pursue different, often conflicting, benefits.

First and foremost, as Timothy (2011) suggests, the designation and the national commitment it requests make the preservation, protection and conservation of the site feasible. Additionally, a site’s inclusion on the World Heritage list increases its chances of receiving government funding (González Santa-Cruz & López-Guzmán, 2017). To address elements that could negatively impact site conservation, such as increased transportation and tourism activities, a management plan has been required from all WHS nominations since 2005. This plan anticipates that the World Heritage list is closely associated with a notable growth in the number of visitors, necessitating careful planning for site preservation. Research studies on various WHS have shown that structural interventions to adapt local market supply to meet the new tourism demands can be beneficial (Canale et al., 2019; Mariani & Guizzardi, 2020). However, decision-making processes often rely on a top-down approach to managing heritage sites and tourism. Nevertheless, as Timothy and Boyd (2009) argue, this methodology is inadequate since it largely overlooks the critical role of stakeholders in the process.

2.2 Overtourism and Gentrification

Before delving into the notion of overtourism, it is worth outlining a timeline for tourism development, particularly with the rise and fall in the cost of travel, home sharing and other influencing factors, which reflects a complex interplay of economic, technological and social

dynamics. Prior to 2000, tourism was dominated by traditional travel agencies and package tours, making travel expensive and accessible mainly to affluent individuals (Thrane et al., 2023). In the early 2000s, the rise of low-cost carriers (LCCs) like Ryanair and EasyJet and online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia reduced travel costs and increased accessibility (Fageda et al., 2015). Platforms like Airbnb further disrupted the market by offering affordable alternatives, contributing to the gentrification of urban neighbourhoods (Ioannides et al., 2019; Gutiérrez Puebla et al., 2017). As LCCs gained market share during the 2010s, the tourism sector experienced significant growth and signs of market saturation on popular routes (Álvarez-Díaz, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic led to a temporary decline in tourism, followed by a surge in demand and rising costs due to economic and environmental factors (Škare et al., 2021; Muritala et al., 2022). Increasing awareness of climate change also shapes sustainable tourism preferences and potentially leads to higher costs for environmentally friendly options (Hall et al., 2013).

Overtourism is a complex topic that has gained increasing attention in both media and academic discourse in recent years (Koens et al., 2018). It is characterised by a situation where the impact of tourism exceeds the physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological and/or political capacity of a destination at specific times and locations (Rogowski, 2023). This phenomenon is not entirely new, as it has been described in the past, albeit not using the term "overtourism" (Komorowski & Hołderna-Mielcarek, 2019). The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines overtourism as the degradation of the tourist experience due to an excessive number of visits to a popular destination, resulting in damage to the local environment and historical sites and a decline in the quality of life for residents (Adie & Falk, 2021).

The negative consequences of overtourism are not limited to physical infrastructure; they also impact social dynamics, as local communities often feel marginalised in their own neighbourhoods due to the influx of tourists (Vetitnev, 2023). Moreover, overtourism can lead to a high economic dependency on the tourism sector, inflation, increased property prices and living expenses (Azinuddin et al., 2022). This phenomenon is partly fuelled by the new configuration of social capital introduced by the sharing economy in local communities (Zmyślony et al., 2020). Addressing overtourism requires a holistic approach, considering interior and exterior dimensions across individual and collective realms (Kohl, 2019). It is essential to manage destination factors that affect residents' frustration and quality of life while also developing innovative anti-overtourism solutions based on the resident's perception of the issue (Żemła & Szromek, 2021). Furthermore, the impacts of overtourism on cultural identity, environmental changes and violations of human life need to be carefully considered and managed (Daly et al., 2020).

Many scholars have discussed the impact of (over)tourism on the displacement of local residents and "gentrification" in some neighbourhoods. According to Gotham (2005), tourism gentrification refers to the transformation of middle-class neighbourhoods through the spread of the service sector and entertainment facilities, making them more appealing to tourists. Local governments have supported this through specific urban planning policies, which has often led to the displacement of residents. The most significant impact of this process, among various social and economic factors, is the transformation of neighbourhoods from residential to leisure-oriented functions (Nofre et al., 2018). Simultaneously, Larraz and García-Gómez (2020) argue that the cohabitation of residents and tourists starts with some form of control over tourist accommodation spread, which creates pressure on the housing supply.

Touristification, a term that encapsulates the transformation of urban spaces into environments primarily designed for tourists, is closely linked to gentrification. Sambou (2024) highlights that touristification can be a gentrification process, where the influx of tourism leads to rising property values and the displacement of dwellers, particularly in areas like Brufut Heights in The Gambia. This relationship is further supported by Almeida-García et al. (2021), who discuss how tourismphobia arises from the mismanagement of tourist activities, exacerbating the gentrification process in historical centres like Málaga and Gdańsk. The authors argue that the pressures of overtourism contribute significantly to the gentrification narrative, leading to a decline in local populations as traditional residents are priced out of their neighbourhoods.

In many cities facing overtourism, gentrification and/or touristification, urban planning and policies on tourism have been adapted as tools to mitigate pressure on historical centres (Calle-Vaquero et al., 2020). For instance, policies that limit short-term rentals can help maintain the availability of affordable housing and prevent the displacement of residents. Pompurová et al. argue (2018) that focusing solely on economic growth in tourism can hinder sustainable development; thus, regulatory frameworks that prioritise social and environmental considerations are essential.

Furthermore, the effects of overtourism and gentrification present challenges for tourism development planners and government authorities seeking to expand the involvement of residents in the tourism industry (Jaafar et al., 2017). In fact, one of the most effective strategies to address challenges brought by tourism is fostering collaboration among stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies and tourism operators. Engaging the residents in decision-making processes not only empowers them but also ensures that tourism development aligns with community needs and values. This participatory approach can help mitigate feelings of alienation and resentment among locals, often aggravated by gentrification and touristification (Koens et al., 2018; Lyon et al., 2017).

2.3 Planning for Sustainable Tourism in Coastal Cities

In coastal areas, the impacts of overtourism include issues such as loss of sense of place, increased congestion and the privatisation of public spaces (Joyce, 2019). The large-scale cruise industry contributes to overcrowding and overtourism in many coastal cities, particularly the Mediterranean (Holden et al., 2022). The popularity of specific attractions, particularly in the coastal and island destinations, also contributes to the potential for overtourism in these areas (Padrón-Ávila & Hernández-Martín, 2019). Managing overtourism in coastal cities requires a comprehensive approach that considers residents' perspectives, the impacts on the local environment and the overall sustainability of tourism development (Mihalic & Kuščer, 2022). In the Mediterranean region, the rapid growth of coastal tourism has exceeded the carrying capacity of cities, compromising their natural and urban environment, lifestyle and cultural traditions (Candia et al., 2018). The Mediterranean's environmental and cultural heritage, particularly in coastal areas, provides an ideal framework for sustainable tourism, emphasising the need to integrate environmental, socioeconomic and cultural dimensions into tourism sustainability (Pirlone & Spadaro, 2017).

Tourist sustainability implies applying control over the carrying capacity of a destination (Alvarez-Sousa, 2018). O'Reilly (1986) first spoke of the carrying capacity of a tourist destination, while the World Tourism Organization proposes the following definition: "The maximum

number of people that may visit a tourist destination at the same time without destroying the physical, economic, socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitor satisfaction” (UNWTO 2018, p. 3). However, the concept of tourism carrying capacity should not only take into account the number of visitors. Other essential variables are (i) the distribution of visitors in the area, (ii) their activities, (iii) their behaviour and (iv) the tourism infrastructure of a given territory (O’Reilly, 1986). However, the phenomenon is far more complex, depending on the characteristics of each context.

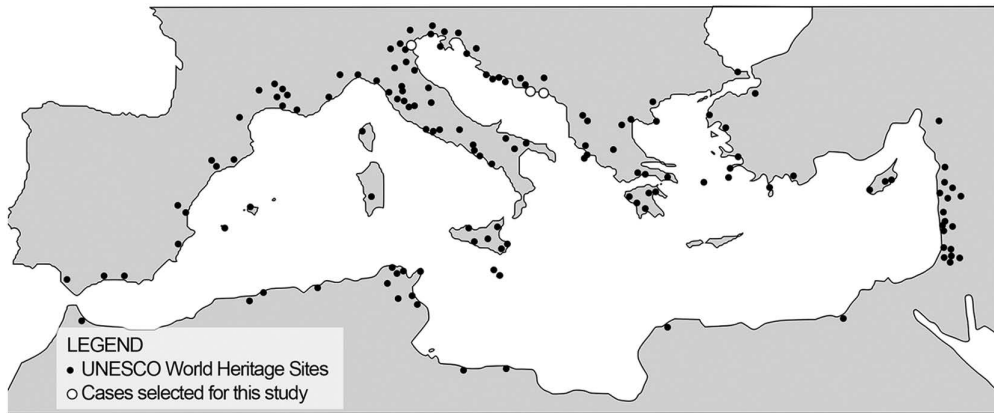
The recognition that mass tourism often harms culture and the environment has spurred the development of alternative forms of tourism. Today, the UNWTO defines sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”.¹ However, as Butler (1980) argues, a longstanding challenge of this approach is the development of quantitative sustainability indicators for the tourism sector. Buckley (2012) also identifies this issue as one of the main reasons for the limited evidence of its practical implementation. One other key point emerging from Hunter’s (1997) analyses is that sustainable tourism must be understood as an adaptive paradigm capable of aligning various goals related to resource use. The formulation and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies cannot occur without local authority planning, development control and the involvement of local communities in the planning process.

Intending to provide an empirical foundation for destinations and help in assessing their situation and identifying vulnerabilities, the World Travel & Tourism Council (2017) developed a diagnostic model based on simple, broadly available indicators, including tourist arrivals, social media reviews, seasonality and pollution. Their central concept emphasises that overcrowding is easier to prevent than to recover from. Thus, efficient tourism management practices and planning are critical to the sustainable development of urban areas. It is important to note, as Cheer et al. (2019) argue, that the issue of overtourism is more rooted in governance practices of planning and management than in tourism itself.

In the context of cruising tourism pressure, the negative externalities on local communities are mainly not considered in the cruise lines’ approach to sustainability. To address the root of the problem, Klein (2011) illustrates that, in most cases, the distribution of benefits between cruise ships and host areas tends to favour the cruise ship heavily. However, as this study suggests, the most pressing issue to address is overcrowding, which necessitates determining the realistic carrying capacity of the port.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The Mediterranean region (see Figure 10.1) is the foremost global tourism destination, attracting over 300 million international tourists, constituting 30% of the worldwide tourist population (United Nations Environment Programme, 2017). According to the Mediterranean 2017 Quality Status Report, tourism is a key driver of Mediterranean economies, providing steady employment (11.5% of total employment in 2014) and contributing significantly to economic growth (11.3% of regional GDP in 2014). Nevertheless, coastal tourism presents numerous challenges associated with unregulated human activities. The selection of cases for this research is based on the primary objective of examining overtourism and urban planning challenges in old Mediterranean cities, considering three main criteria.



Source: Authors compiled using data from UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2024).

Figure 10.1 UNESCO World Heritage sites in the Mediterranean region (sites that are less than 100 km away from the coastline)

First, the selected cities, recognised for their outstanding universal value, should be listed as World Heritage sites: The Natural and Culture-Historical Region of Kotor and the Old City of Dubrovnik (both listed in 1979) and Venice and its Lagoon (listed in 1987). Second, the cities must demonstrate issues related to tourism development, as documented in the literature. While Venice has been studied extensively concerning tourism challenges (Russo, 2002; Pesce et al., 2018; Seraphin et al., 2018; Milano, 2017; World Monuments Fund, 2013), research on Dubrovnik (Carić & Mackelworth, 2014; Marušić et al., 2012) and Kotor (Nikčević, 2019) is more limited, despite significant concerns being highlighted (UNESCO, 2014). The third criterion involves the cities' prominence as highly popular tourist destinations in the Mediterranean, as recognised by Cruise Critic (2019), since excursionists are identified in the literature as a significant threat to a location's carrying capacity (O'Reilly, 1986). Consequently, the following three cities were selected for in-depth study, each offering a unique example due to variations in scale (Eurostat):

- Venice (Italy) with a population of 250,369 inhabitants and 5,664,611 tourist arrivals (Source: Comune di Venezia, 2024) in 2023 (2263%)
- Dubrovnik (Croatia) with 41,562 inhabitants and 1,244,159 tourist arrivals (Source: Turistička zajednica općine Župa Dubrovačka, 2024) in 2023 (2994%)
- Kotor (Montenegro) with 21,916 inhabitants and 236,546 tourist arrivals (Source: Monstat, 2024) in 2023 (1079%)

Then, a mixed-method case study approach is applied, collecting quantitative data (descriptive statistics) and qualitative data (derived from official documents). Data were gathered and compiled using official statistical sources from the websites of local and national management bodies (such as the Municipality website, national tourism agencies national statistics agencies, etc.).

We have used a framework for analysing *overcrowding* as recommended by the World Travel & Tourism Council (2017). Based on this framework, cities have been divided into quintiles, with only the top quintile being used as a benchmark for the highest risk. Table 10.1 outlines the metrics used to assess potential risks, which include factors representing overall economic context, locals' alienation factors, factors determining degraded tourist experience, overloaded infrastructure, environmental damage and possible threats to culture and heritage.

Then, we conducted a qualitative overview of the WHS Management Plans, which were examined through the lens of the Operational Guidelines issued by UNESCO (2005), emphasising the necessity of implementing monitoring systems for managing World Heritage sites. The guidelines suggest that management plans should include, among other things (p. 26), (i) an assessment of the property's vulnerabilities to social, economic and environmental changes and (ii) a cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

4. CASE STUDY ANALYSIS, EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Case Study 1: Kotor (Montenegro)

Following the framework for analysing overcrowding recommended by the World Travel & Tourism Council (2017), Kotor (Figure 10.2) can be classified as a highly endangered city, given that 7 out of 9 metrics are placed in the top quintile. According to this model, the overall context of tourism in Kotor can be regarded as a high risk of overtourism.

To explore the risk of alienation among locals and, subsequently, gentrification, two additional parameters were employed in this study: (i) the annual growth rate of average price per square meter of dwelling in Kotor and (ii) the population decline rate in the city. However, drawing definitive conclusions is challenging, as official census data, for example, do not include most resident flows through the city (moving from the historical city to the periphery and vice versa). Additionally, due to the particularly high density of tourism, the growth in cruise arrivals has also been observed. The number of day visitors (Figure 10.3) from cruise tourism in 2023, which is almost two times larger than the number of arrivals for the same period, already places tourism density and intensity in Kotor above average criteria of overtourism. Since home-sharing is a significant factor in the tourist lodging landscape in Kotor, further studies should analyse a detailed breakdown of accommodation types to better assess the risks to residents and infrastructure. Furthermore, the statement by Ashworth and Page (2011, p. 11) that "possible answers to the question, 'who plans and manages urban tourism?' include almost everyone and no one" seemed particularly relevant in the analysis of the Management Plan for Natural and Culturo-Historical Region of Kotor.

It is essential to detect whether there is a completed management plan for the site. In this case, the Management Plan for the Natural and Culturo-Historical Region of Kotor (2011) was brought by the Ministry of Culture of Montenegro in 2011. We then made a qualitative review of the content and concrete forms of planning and control systems within the Management Plan through the lens of Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Based on previously analysed data through the World Travel & Tourism Council (2017) framework, it was assumed that the planning and control system is ineffective in Kotor. As

Table 10.1 Metrics to understand the potential risks of overcrowding

Dimension	Metric	Indicator	Description of the indicator calculation*	Top quintile (highest risk)
Overall Context	Importance of tourism	Tourism share of GDP (%)	Average contribution of direct tourism to GDP (as a percent of the total) in 2023 (per country, given the data availability)	>8.5%
Overall context	Arrivals growth	Growth in tourist arrivals (%)	Average annual growth rate in international and domestic arrivals from 2019 to 2023;	>7.7%
Alienated local residents	Density of tourism	Number of visitors per square kilometre (#)	Calculated as 2023 arrivals divided by the number of square kilometres in the area encompassing TripAdvisor's top 20 attractions for the destination	>930,000
Alienated local residents	Tourism intensity	Number of visitors per resident (#)	Calculated as 2023 arrivals divided by the population in the destination	>5.3
Degraded tourist experience	Negative TripAdvisor reviews	Share of "poor" or "terrible" reviews among top attractions (%)	Data captured from TripAdvisor's top 10 attractions in the destination as of September 2024, measuring the magnitude of negative sentiment in visitors' experiences	>2.8%
Overloaded infrastructure	Arrival seasonality	Difference in arrivals between high and low month (ratio)	Calculated as the value from the month in 2023 with the highest number of arrivals divided by the value from the month in 2023 with the lowest number of arrivals	>1.36

Dimension	Metric	Indicator	Description of the indicator calculation*	Top quintile (highest risk)
Overloaded infrastructure	Attraction concentration	Share of reviews limited to top 5 attractions (%)	Data captured from TripAdvisor as of September 2024 and calculated as reviews of the top 5 attractions divided by the number of reviews of all attractions	>36%
Damage to nature	Air pollution	Annual mean PM10 particulate concentration ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)	Data captured by the World Health Organization on the annual mean concentration of PM10 in cities for the most recent year with official reporting	>74.9
Threats to culture and heritage	Historic site prevalence	Share of top 20 TripAdvisor attractions that are historic sites (%)	Data captured from TripAdvisor as of September 2024 on the top 20 attractions for the destination, analysed to identify historical sites (e.g. historic buildings, religious centres) and indicate potential risk to the spiritual and physical integrity of the area	>45%

Source of metrics: World Travel & Tourism Council (2017). *Sources of data collection:** Monstat, Eurostat; Comune di Venezia (2024); Turistička zajednica općine Župa Dubrovačka (2024); TripAdvisor.com, Google Maps; World Health Organization Global Urban Ambient Air Pollution Database.

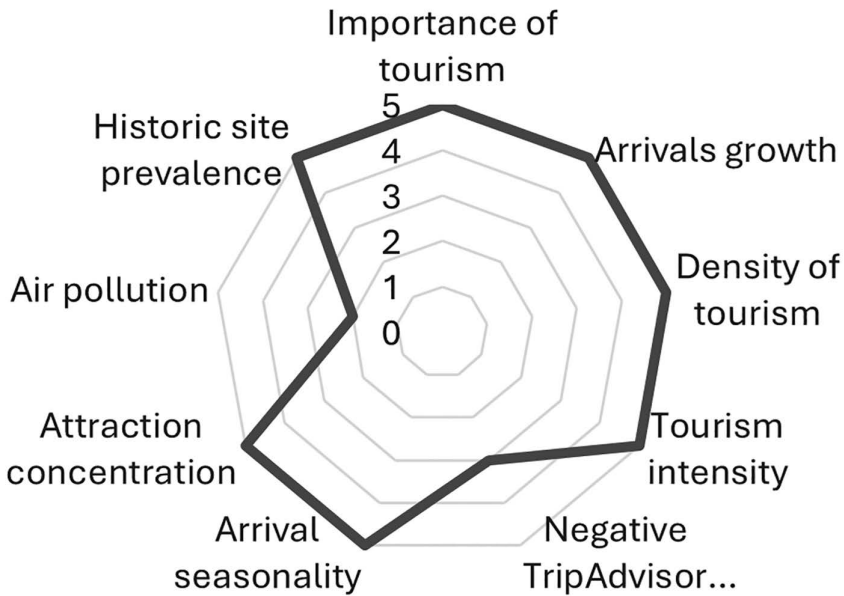
stated in the Management Plan (Ministarstvo Kulture Crne Gore, 2011, p. 24), the main objective is to strike a balance between conservation values and the development and use of the area on the principle of sustainable development and energy efficiency. However, only a small share of the plan addresses measures, guidelines and implementation strategies, while greater attention is given to the overview of the current situation. Furthermore, in the Action Plan, which forms part of the Management Plan, there are evident actions for which setting clear measurement criteria for implementation is challenging. This issue is particularly noticeable in the aim of developing the protected area through the application of sustainable development principles, for which some of the actions identified include (i) creating conditions for preserving traditional fishing practices and (ii) enhancing cultural tourism in protected areas.

In the context of developing elements that present a planning and control system, the realisation of the Vision for the Kotor Region over the next 15 years (2011, p. 33), as outlined in the Action Plan, hinges on the attainment of overarching objectives: strengthening the legal and

Table 10.2 Overcrowding analysis for Kotor

Importance of tourism	Arrivals growth	Density of tourism	Tourism intensity	Negative TripAdvisor reviews	Arrival seasonality	Attraction concentration	Air pollution	Historic site prevalence
9.2%	38.5%	2,956,825	10.8	1.5%	12.4	80%	21.3	90%

Source: Authors. See Table 10.1 for the description and source of data.



Source: Authors. See Table 10.1 for the description and source of data.

Figure 10.2 *Overcrowding diagnostic results for Kotor*

institutional infrastructure to preserve and protect the exceptional universal value of the area; improving cooperation between all stakeholders; ensuring the effective implementation of laws and planning documentation to preserve cultural and natural heritage from excessive and uncontrolled urbanisation; improvement of valorisation and protection of cultural and natural heritage of the protected area; integral protection of cultural and natural heritage through constant control of local urban development; development of the protected area through the use of potentials on the principles of sustainable development; strengthening of personnel capacities at all levels, education of new and additional education of existing professional staff; presentation and popularisation of the area and raising citizens' awareness of the value and importance of the protected area. Such objectives, in our opinion, are too generic and raise concerns as to whether they are practically effective.

However, the Vision broadly aligns with the suggestions of the Operational Guidelines. It does not provide a detailed explanation of how the core aims of the Action Plan, concerning the objectives, will be implemented. Drawing from the literature reviewed and in adherence to UNESCO recommendations, these efforts can be considered a solid foundation for the planning and management process, though they require further exploration.

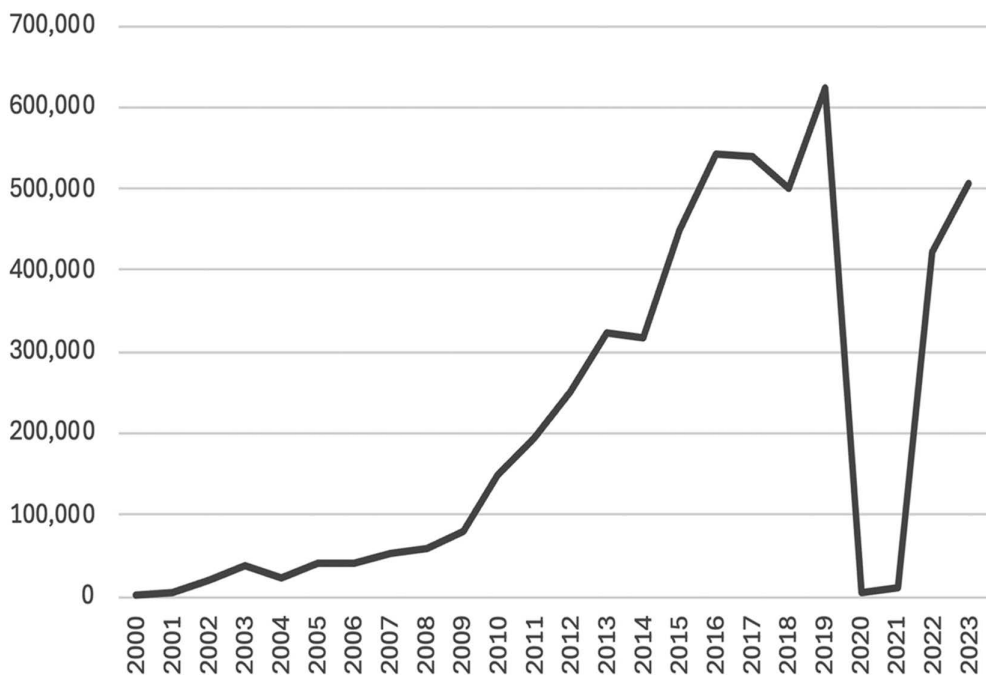
In addressing the specific aspects related to evaluating vulnerabilities and strategising for tourism development within the Management Plan, noteworthy observations arise:

- Specific ideas are noted in some sections of the Action Plan, but they do not extend into actionable guidelines. For example, the significant receptive potential for visitors was

omitted, which could be realised by adapting old stone houses in settlements along the rugged coast, thus promoting the ethno-social value of space. This represents an opportunity for the affirmation of family businesses and the active involvement of the local population.

- On the other hand, the Action Plan notes that certain actions cannot be undertaken until other objectives are met: the first requirement for managing a protected area is protecting its cultural property with particular social interest.
- Furthermore, the Action Plan offers a general overview of the needs of both locals and tourists. Respectively, in the Action Plan, no specific actions follow to address these needs.

Overall, it can be inferred that the Management Plan tends to be overly general in evaluating the situation and lacks precision in planning and implementation. While the document provides a detailed description of the area, it falls short of focusing on specific issues that require improvement and lacks a clear vision of particular goals. The absence of a clear vision is reflected in the vaguely defined actions outlined in the Action Plan; so the actions have not led to concrete measures to confront the issues.



Source: Luka Kotor (2024).

Figure 10.3 The growth of cruising arrivals in Kotor

4.2 Case Study 2: Dubrovnik (Croatia)

Once again, following the World Travel & Tourism Council's framework (2017), the overall tourism context in Dubrovnik (Figure 10.4) can be seen as highly susceptible to overtourism, with 6 out of the 9 metrics significantly surpassing the top benchmark for risk assessment.

Due to the particularly high parameters of density and intensity of tourism (Figure 10.4), the growth of cruise arrivals has also been investigated. The number of day visitors from cruise tourism for 2023 adds 50% to the arrivals for the same period (Lučka uprava Dubrovnik, 2024). However, when considering the trend since 2011, the numbers remained generally constant, but monthly coordination shows signs of improvement in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, home-sharing and data on dwelling prices in the historic city could be significant factors in investigating the risk of gentrification since arrival seasonality (Figure 10.5) shows considerable pressure on the local infrastructure. A detailed mapping of single-category services that have replaced other functions in the historic city is also necessary. For this research, no official data on private accommodation or service distribution within the historic city were found. We have conducted a desk study to detect the existence of a completed and approved management plan. Subsequently, we made a qualitative overview of the content and specific forms of planning and control systems in the area of the World Heritage site.

The Strategy for Tourism Development and Regulations on Cruise Tourism (2017), presented by the city of Dubrovnik in 2017 as part of the process of the Management Plan development, includes an analysis of current tourism trends and strategic visions for future development. It is worth noting that the document places perhaps necessary emphasis on global tourism trends, providing a detailed overview of various statistical data regarding other destinations and Dubrovnik itself. On the other hand, with regard to strategic planning, particular attention is given to cruise tourism. The following recommendations concerning daily tourist flows are noteworthy:

- To take full advantage of opportunities and minimise threats, a port aiming to become a cruise centre should adopt a differentiation strategy and develop as a destination that offers high value to travellers. To maximise opportunities, the port must focus on developing the necessary infrastructures to improve accessibility and enhance resident comfort.
- The number of cruise arrivals in the period November–April should be increased to 30% of the total for the other six months of May–October.
- The number of annual cruise arrivals should be reduced to 70% of the current total, with a maximum sustainable daily capacity for cruise visitors set at 7,000.

Regarding the aims of the Strategy and addressing the vulnerabilities, some interesting points can be highlighted, such as investing in the improvement of the existing transport infrastructure and development of new infrastructure, with an emphasis on optimising road, air and sea connections; moreover, strengthening educational institutions by investing in human resources training in tourism.

Overall, the presented strategy document provides a solid foundation of knowledge and vision for planning and tourism development policies. The new Management Plan (2021), now in the early stages of implementation, adopts a comprehensive, integrated approach that includes a variety of stakeholders, including local organisations. The plan seeks to unite the

Table 10.3 *Overcrowding analysis for Dubrovnik*

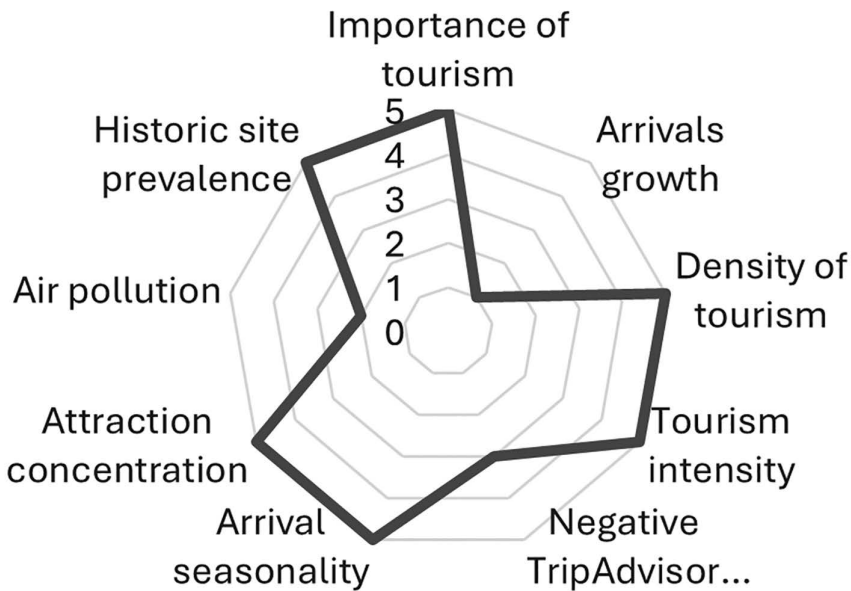
Importance of tourism	Arrivals growth	Density of tourism	Tourism intensity	Negative TripAdvisor reviews	Arrival seasonality	Attraction concentration	Air pollution	Historic site prevalence
25.8%	-10.6%	6,220,795	30	1.8%	27.5	80%	13.8	50%

Source: Authors. See Table 10.1 for the description and source of data.

preservation of cultural heritage with the socioeconomic development needs of the territory, with a clear aim to establish a long-term management structure. The main directions of the Management Plan include preserving the "living" city, maintaining the quality and way of life of the local population and promoting tourism that adds social, economic, ecological and heritage value to the local community. One example of a specific activity aimed at achieving the objective of *Dubrovnik as a "living" city*, which illustrates a clear planning and control structure, is the focus on increasing the availability of public services (2021, p. 63):

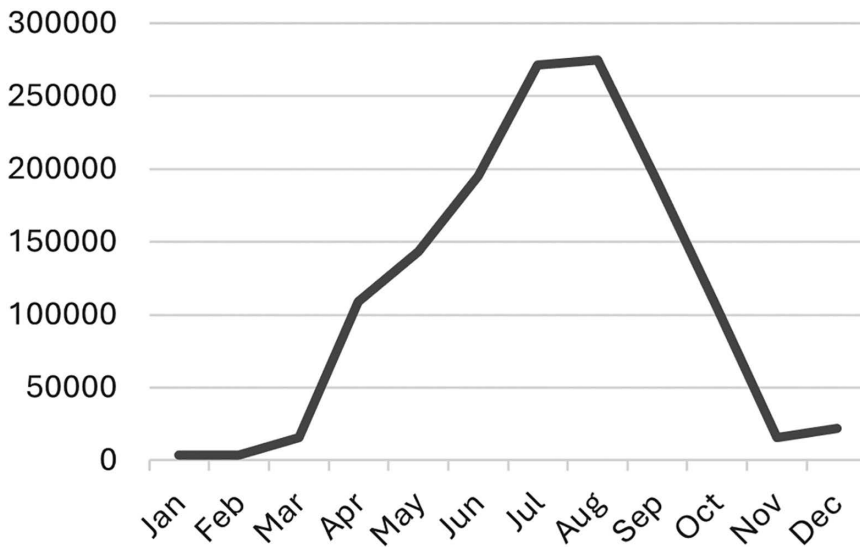
In the historical center, one-third of the population is elderly, with limited mobility in performing daily activities. It is necessary to ensure the quality and the availability of services and the availability of food for the elderly population. Followed by clear actions: The urban plan should provide a network of store locations for the daily supply of the population and the necessary services with incentives from the City, due to the difficult delivery of goods and with favorable space rents. Public and private partnerships and programs need to be initiated in order to maintain desired services such as grocery stores and traditional crafts.

Nevertheless, the potential effects and efficiency of this integrated approach are yet to be seen in the coming years.



Source: Authors. See Table 10.1 for the description and source of data.

Figure 10.4 *Overcrowding diagnostic results for Dubrovnik*



Source: Author compiled using data from Turistička zajednica općine Župa Dubrovačka (2024).

Figure 10.5 Dubrovnik arrivals seasonality

4.3 Case Study 3: Venice (Italy)

In this final case study, based on the available data and relevant parameters, the broader context of tourism in the Venice central area (Figure 10.6) is characterised by a significant risk of overtourism. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2017) framework, Venice ranks in the highest quintile for 5 out of 9 factors, with the most prominent being 22.6 visitors per resident.

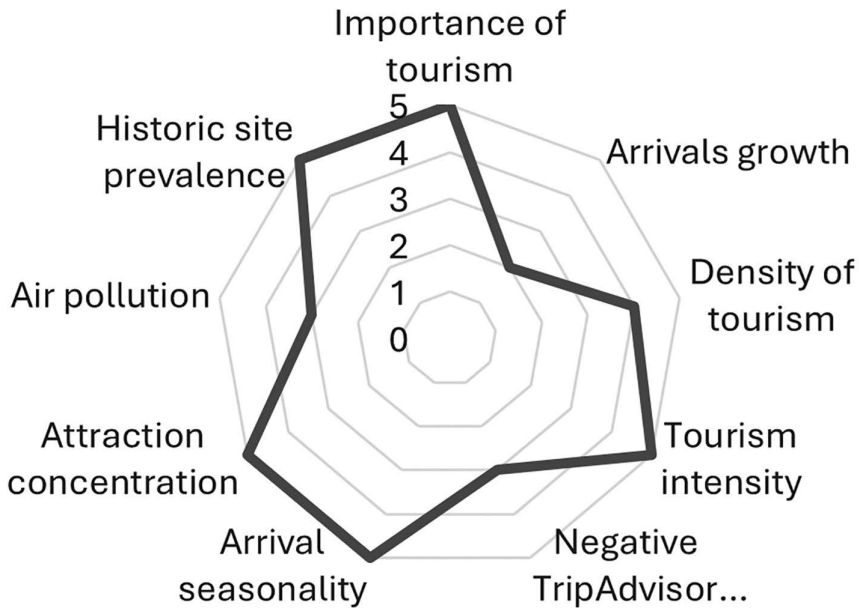
Additional parameters were used to assess the elevated risk of alienation (related to the quality of life) among locals, notably the continuous and sharp decrease in population within the city centre (Figure 10.7), a trend that has been prevalent since the early 1990s. Regarding home-sharing, data gathered from inside Airbnb in November 2019 shows that Venice has 8,469 listings. Compared to the number of households, which stands at 12,048, this highlights tourism gentrification, defined as the transformation of neighbourhoods through the proliferation of facilities aimed at tourists. Nevertheless, the substantial influx of tourists is not the sole factor contributing to the endangerment of Venice. The devastating floods of the mid-1960s brought the city's environmental vulnerability to global attention (Seraphin et al., 2018). The passage of ships through the Giudecca Canal, located near the historic city, continues to pose a significant threat to its environment. This underscores the necessity for comprehensive planning and collaborative efforts to explore the possible relocation of ship terminals and the development of new modes of access to the city (World Monuments Fund, 2013).

Also, in this case, we first determined the existence of a completed management plan: the Management Plan for Venice and its Lagoon 2012–2018, approved by the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture and Tourism. We then reviewed the content and specific forms

Table 10.4 Overcrowding analysis for Venice

Importance of tourism	Arrivals growth	Density of tourism	Tourism intensity	Negative TripAdvisor reviews	Arrival seasonality	Attraction concentration	Air pollution	Historic site prevalence
10.5%	2.6%	629,401	22.6	1.9%	2.5	68%	15	95%

Source: Authors. See Table 10.1 for the description and source of data.



Source: Authors. See Table 10.1 for the description and source of data.

Figure 10.6 Overcrowding diagnostic results for Venice

of planning and control systems within the Management Plan through the lens of Operational Guidelines for implementing the WH Convention.

Upon reviewing the Management Plan (2011), several broad observations can be discerned. The document features a well-defined and easily navigable structure, describing key aspects such as the World Heritage site, the involved stakeholders, the plan's methodology, Vision, Action Plans and monitoring system in a clear and accessible manner. The vision of the Lagoon and the city of Venice has been divided into four scenarios that describe the desired image of the city as orientational guides by answering the following questions: *Where do we want to go? What do we want to become? Where do we want to invest our energy and resources? What is the desired situation compared with the current one?*

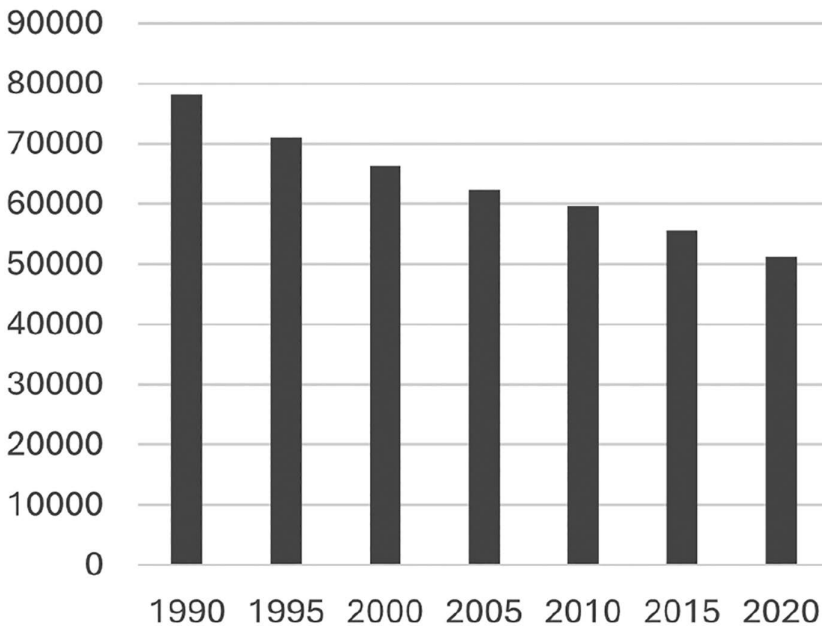
The corresponding scenarios that offer a clear and place-based idea of future imperatives are as follows:

- *Sustainable Utilisation* – various city authorities are encouraged to collaborate on establishing network initiatives that promote cultural identity and environmental values.
- *Conservation and Regeneration* – the preservation of environmental and cultural heritage through revitalising historical settlements in the Lagoon.
- *Updating of Values* – the goal is to sustain the income of the resident population while reducing dependence on maximising tourism revenue. This concept promotes attracting new activities to the historic city, ensuring that these functions align with the need for building restoration.

- *The Venice Lagoon: An Archipelago of Creativity and Research* – the Lagoon and historical settlements are to evolve into research laboratories for exploring environmental protection techniques and safeguarding cultural heritage. This transformation aims to create employment opportunities and foster new interaction spaces among local, national and international stakeholders.

Finally, it is worth noting one of the aims of the Action Plan (as part of the Management Plan) focuses on protecting and enhancing rural architecture: *Taglio del Sile*. This activity involves analysing the territorial landscape system to propose guidelines for restoring rural architecture, historical land reclamation structures and industrial archaeology. The aim is to improve tourist accessibility and support innovative agricultural activities, with the effectiveness of this action measured by the number of restored heritage buildings and subsequent visitor numbers.

However, despite being one of the nine themes outlined in the agenda, the issue of large ships in the Lagoon is not addressed in the Action Plan or Project. Given the overcrowding issues identified in previous sections and the well-structured Management Plan, it can be presumed that such concerns may arise in the later phases of implementing this document. On the other hand, it is unclear why the critical issue of cruise ships threatening the survival of the Lagoon, which is one of the city’s most significant challenges, is not further elaborated upon.



Source: Author compiled using data from Comune di Venezia (2024).

Figure 10.7 Venice’s population decline through the years (1990–2020)

5. CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR ACTIONS AND POLICIES TO MITIGATE OVERTOURISM

Overtourism in coastal cities presents a significant challenge that requires careful management, sustainable planning and the implementation of innovative solutions to ensure the preservation of these valuable destinations and the well-being of their residents. The Mediterranean's cultural heritage, including ancient city ruins, historical sites and art tourism, offers diverse opportunities for sustainable tourism development, emphasising the need for a comprehensive approach to integrating cultural heritage into tourism strategies.

In this chapter, the three case studies of Kotor, Dubrovnik and Venice have been discussed as examples of uncontrolled tourism with varying management approaches, selected from among the eastern Mediterranean heritage cities along the coast of the Adriatic Sea. This empirical study explored the complexities of planning and management of tourism development in historic Mediterranean cities, particularly focusing on overcrowding as a primary cause of tourism gentrification and the role of management plans in addressing current issues and identifying opportunities for improvement.

The case study analysis of Kotor, Dubrovnik and Venice reveals significant insights into how Mediterranean coastal cities have responded to the pressures of overtourism. Despite their shared status as UNESCO World Heritage sites, the three cities have employed different approaches to managing the challenges of overtourism, and their outcomes vary considerably.

In Kotor, the management plan appears insufficiently detailed in addressing the specific needs of tourists and residents. Although the city has not yet reached critical levels of alienation (related to their quality of life) and gentrification, the rapid increase in cruise tourism signals a need for more concrete, actionable strategies. The lack of precise implementation guidelines in Kotor's management plan indicates a missed opportunity to safeguard both the cultural heritage and the daily lives of its residents. Therefore, Kotor serves as a cautionary case where inaction or vague planning could lead to severe consequences if the pressures of overtourism are not managed proactively.

Conversely, Dubrovnik is already experiencing the severe impacts of overtourism, with the city exceeding many benchmarks for overcrowding. Without a comprehensive management plan until recently, Dubrovnik's approach to tourism development has been reactive rather than preventive. This has resulted in strained infrastructures, a significant rise in living costs and the displacement of local residents, exacerbating issues of tourism gentrification. Dubrovnik's belated efforts to implement a management plan underscore the importance of foresight and strategic planning in balancing tourism and preservation.

Perhaps the most extreme case, Venice exemplifies the severe consequences of unsustainable tourism growth. Despite having a structured and well-defined management plan, the city continues to struggle with overcrowding and loss of its resident population. While Venice's management plan addresses various urban and environmental challenges, the on-going problem of large cruise ships passing through its canals illustrates the limits of top-down planning without effectively executing crucial strategies. The failure to mitigate the cruise ship issue reflects the need for stronger enforcement and innovative solutions beyond the existing management frameworks.

In all three cases, the key (common) finding is that planning for sustainable tourism requires not only well-crafted management plans but also robust mechanisms for implementation, monitoring and enforcement. Therefore, a more integrated approach is necessary – one that

involves the local community in decision making, adapts to each city's unique sociocultural and environmental contexts and ensures that tourism serves both economic and cultural preservation goals. Additionally, a balance between tourism development and the preservation of local life is crucial. Cities that fail to integrate local voices and social considerations in their tourism policies risk losing their identity and long-term viability as sustainable tourist destinations. In other words, to develop sustainable tourism, it is essential to include both tourists and local communities in the co-design strategies and tailored policies.

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NOTE

1. <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>.

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