

THE DARK SIDE OF TOURISTIFICATION PHENOMENON – A SHORT POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT. – **The Dark Side of Touristification Phenomenon – A Short Point of View.** Tourism is considered to be a socio-economic development engine worldwide, its importance being undeniable at international scale. Because tourism represents such a notorious activity and global phenomenon, new concepts inevitably arise that need further understanding and clarification. One of them is *touristification*. Browsing through related scientific literature, one can see that touristification concept is a complex process mainly used with a negative connotation to describe tourism’s impact for a specific area and on a specific group of people, their daily activities on one hand, and on the environment on other hand. Touristification is given many meanings by scholars, from an “empty” concept to an element of analysis without an unanimously accepted definition, this short point of view trying to shed a little bit of light on the matter highlighting the negative impacts of this phenomenon that manifests in touristic hot-spots worldwide.

Keywords: *touristification, tourism impacts, touristic hot-spots, sustainability, environment.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years the concept of touristification has attracted scholars' attention, generating pertinent discussions and debates (Cerdá-Mansilla *et al.*, 2022; Cheung & Yiu, 2022; Kim & Holifield, 2022; Tulumello & Allegretti, 2021;

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Sequera & Nofre, 2020; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Campos & Sequera, 2020; Calle, 2019; Freytag & Bauder, 2018; del Romero Renau, 2018). Despite this, the phenomenon of touristification and its impacts represent a topic remaining still little researched even if the dimensions of tourism sector is witnessing a continuous growth. It is important to mention from the start that the touristification concept is mostly used in the context of and related to urban tourism (a passive form of consumerism), but can easily be extrapolated to rural tourism, mountain tourism, especially post pandemic.

Scientific literature highlights a series of synonymous words or collocations for touristification according to Ojeda & Kieffer (2020): touristisation, tourismification, touristifying (in English), turistificación and turistización (in Spanish), mise en tourisme (in French). Nowadays the concept is more and more associated with tourism-phobia and gentrification (Almeida-García *et al.*, 2021; Frago, 2021; Ramos & Mundet, 2021; Torres-Outón, 2020; Jover & Díaz-Parra, 2020; Almeida-García, Cortés-Macías & Balbuena-Vázquez, 2019; Zerva *et al.*, 2019; Blanco-Romero *et al.*, 2019; Perez-Garcia & Garcia Abad, 2018), which cannot be entirely correct because tourists do not settle down permanently. Before proceeding to look a little bit to the impacts generated, we tried to give some definitions from the specific literature.

There have been many attempts by scientists in order to define touristification, but with no unanimously accepted definition, because each one is given from a different point of view or analysis. Kwon *et al.* (2021, p. 3) indicates that “touristification entails a transformation of the economy, society, culture, landscape, and overall lifestyle as a result of the infiltration of tourist culture in a place of residence, because of the interplay between urban development and tourism development”.

Woo *et al.* (2022, p. 67) document that touristification is “understood as the capacity of the destination to absorb tourism before the destination’s residents feel negative impacts”, describing also the residents’ worries about the increased flow of tourists and tourism project developments in certain destinations. The research of Muselaers (2017, p. 12) refers to touristification as the level of transformation through tourism of a space “in which this space has shifted from its original state towards a tourist performed state”. Ojeda and Kieffer (2020) explain in their paper that touristification triggers changes in the socio-economic components and dynamics of a territory’s environment and landscape. In a similar way Torres-Outón (2020, p. 348) defines touristification as the process where “economic activities and traditional uses are replaced by activities and uses related to tourism”, in accordance with Cocola-Gant (2018) and Hiernaux & Gonzalez (2014). Basically, tourism activities and their effects on the environment and culture contributed to the manifestation of touristification (Picard, 2003).

Others indicate that when a territory in general emerges into a touristic one because the choices made are oriented towards attracting visitors is called touristification (Rio Fernandes, 2011; Belhassen, Uriely, & Assor, 2014; Muselaers, 2017).

Taking all above mentioned in consideration, this short point of view brings to front that it is crucial to monitor the residents' perception (they are the most affected element, fact pointed later) and to shift the attention in developing and implementing policies that have the aim to minimize the negative impacts of tourism development and to enhance the benefits in a sustainable manner, more research being fundamental to gain more insight on the real impacts of touristification.

2. WHY TOURISTIFICATION REPRESENTS AN ISSUE?

The world as we know it has not changed its size and tourism exploded, but tourism is not evenly distributed worldwide (some places receive more tourists than others, destroying them and making them unavailable indefinitely). Nowadays it's easier than ever to travel, tourism being pretty affordable, facts that translate into multifaceted damages seen not only on residents, local economies, but on the environment as well. Scholars explain that touristification impacts have been studied in various contexts and can be divided in three major categories: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental ones, the most obvious negative consequence being seasonality (Figini & Vici, 2012; Almeida-García *et al.*, 2016; Muselaers, 2017).

If we talk about negative economic impacts, we notice that they affect the cost of living, the standard of living, the prices and offer of products, properties, or services, local businesses investments, taxes, and personal incomes. An eloquent example in this respect is the peer-to-peer (p2p) rental market — spearheaded by Airbnb, that has grown exponentially in almost every big European city, leading to tourists pushing out locals from these markets (Bondora.com; Sequera and Nofre, 2018).

In terms of socio-cultural impacts of touristification, we can see that the cultural heritage, the identities, values, beliefs, rituals, traditions, daily routines, social lives of residents, the intercultural communication are affected. An alarming fact is related to the increased rate of alcohol and drugs consumption, crimes, social conflicts, crowding of public facilities (Almeida-Garcia *et al.*, 2016), Ooi & Stober (2010) concluding that touristification damages and destroys the authenticity of a place inflicting staged authenticity. Basically everything is produced or performed for touristic purposes, becomes a commodity and

residents begin to feel like “strangers in their own community” (Harrill, 2004 as cited in Muselaers, 2017, p. 14). Another consequence of touristification is the degradation of historic places, and maybe the most known and emblematic example is the case of Venice, Italy, its historic centre “being so crowded of visitors that is no longer a place to live in, but only a place for tourists” (Bujalance, Barrera-Fernández & Scalici, 2019, p. 103).

When it comes to the environmental issues associated to touristification, the impacts can be seen both on the natural environment and the man-made one, because tourists regularly consume more resources and generate more waste than locals, making it extremely difficult for cities and tourist hot-spots to be sustainable. In terms of nature, all components are affected, facts translated into: air pollution, water pollution, soil contamination, waste, litter, noise pollution. Some research papers indicate that because tourism is not seasonal anymore, touristification generates a flow throughout the year which means more ecological pressure, as the ecosystem has no chance to renew its resources (Stausberg, 2011).

A synthetized overview of touristification negative impacts can be found in the research of Muselaers (2017) as shown in table 1:

Table 1. Negative touristification impacts

Economic impacts	Socio-cultural impacts	Environmental impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased price of goods and services (cost of living) - Increased housing prices - Increased property taxes - Direct displacement (gentrification) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased crime, alcohol and drugs rates/ violent incidents - Social conflicts - Commodification of culture - Threats to cultural heritage (rituals, beliefs, traditions) - Indirect displacement (gentrification) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noise and pollution (air, water, soil, waste) - Site degradation - Vandalism - Crowdedness - Traffic and parking problems - Indirect displacement (gentrification)

Source: Muselaers (2017, p. 21)

It is only fair to remark the fact that touristification has manufactured a world where cities and touristic hot-spots are now pleasing tourists in a problematic way. Driven by the profits and economic benefits that derive from the tourism industry, touristification represents a disturbing trend and leads to the destruction of some of the world’s most coveted sites. Fortunately, things are starting to move and the wheels to end touristification are being set in motion worldwide aiming to ease the burden of this phenomenon.

3. WHAT WHEELS MUST BE SET IN MOTION IN ORDER TO KEEP TOURISTIFICATION UNDER SUSTAINABLE BOUNDARIES?

In order to keep under control this troubling trend that started or is on the verge of destroying well-known tourist destinations, actions must be taken ranging from individual to global level.

Sequera and Nofre (2018) underline the fact that many touristic cities have difficulties in tackling the negative impacts induced by touristification and do not have all the efficient tools to keep the phenomenon under control. But still there is some progress and governments worldwide are starting to battle in order to combat unhealthy amounts of tourists. Authorities are in the process of fighting Airbnbs against short term rentals which are a real threat to locals because of disloyal competition and results in forcing them out of the housing market (for instance, according to Bondora.com in 2019 there were near 60,000 listings for Paris, and 22,000 in Berlin on the platform).

Many municipalities are starting to restrict the number of cruise ships and implicitly the number of tourists (the city of Dubrovnik, Venice), others are shutting down indefinitely popular tourist areas in order to recover and heal from pollution and environmental damage caused by touristification. For instance, in 2018, Boracay, Philippines was closed to visitors for 6 months because the 6,400 daily tourists were too much to handle; while Maya Bay, Thailand, was closed for more than 4 months, being estimated that about 80% of the coral reefs around it have been destroyed due to pollution from litter, boats and sunscreen (The Guardian, 2018; Conde Nast Traveller, 2018). These are just a few examples that demonstrate how local governments are doing their best to balance the economic benefits of tourism with the problems they bring to the local ecosystems.

But tourists must help also in the process of stopping touristification, by making better choices when traveling or planning a vacation. So instead of going to places already threatened or damaged by tourism, one can choose other beautiful places which are deemed sustainable and can withstand the impact of tourism, like Cogne (Italy), Baiona (Spain), Bhutan, etc.

In terms of accommodation, a conscious choice would be supporting local business like hotels, inns, sharing homes with resident families, which provide all the needed amenities while helping them and gives in this way the full immersive experience of the visited place. The market is offering also an alternative to Airbnb, respectively Fairbnb (community powered tourism), founded in 2016, which accommodates sustainable home-sharing options across Europe. Their manifesto states that: “we work to connect conscious travellers with fair hosts to promote stronger, more sustainable and equitable communities all around the world” (Fairbnb, 2022).

How resources are used while traveling is lifesaving, because unfortunately tourists consume more than locals especially when it comes to water (careful choices can curb greatly individual consumption). To prevent plastic pollution and waste generation, tourists must travel with reusable items like water bottles, straws, reusable cloth bags, in order to eliminate the need for plastics and disposables. When purchasing food, a sustainable choice is to avoid big chain supermarkets and restaurants and to appeal to local producers and markets. These are just a few examples how to avoid consuming more resources when traveling.

To reduce the carbon footprint generated by flying to a destination (one international flight can emit an amount of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere as an average person in certain countries) and to counter the terrible negative environmental impact, carbon offsets can be purchased and once arrived at the destination public transportation, bikes instead of private cars, Uber, Cabify can be used.

4. FINAL REMARKS

Touristification is a global phenomenon that brings with it impacts at the economic, socio-cultural and environmental levels, the negative ones being the most obvious. Residents and local communities have to adapt and adjust to the changes induced by touristification, governments being the main actors in deciding how tourism should be regulated and controlled.

It is essential to understand touristification in all its complexity, fact that requires a new breakthrough approach in order to avoid the rift between locals and their tourist counterparts, to avoid conflicts, to be updated to all new developments (technological ones included), to have at hand monitoring tools and flexible tourism planning strategies and last, but not least, to always have in mind “that there is no such thing as waterproof planning” (Martins, 2020, p. 146). The best combo to mitigate touristification and to help create a healthy sustainable tourism industry is comprised of government actions and conscious tourism. These endeavours will have a deep impact on erasing many of the controversies caused by touristification nowadays, and designing a tourism that is sustainable for the decades to come.

Even if the concept is mostly used by scholars in the scientific literature related to urban tourism, for sure it can be extended to rural or mountain tourism and further research should be focused in those directions, this short point of view being intended to broaden the discussion scope on this topic.

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