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Venice: An Analysis of Tourism Excesses in an Overtourism Icon

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1.1 Introduction

Tourism, as a sector characterized by a set of activities overlapping with the everyday, leads to long-standing conventions and ways of life being reinforced or ruptured. Rather than transcending the everyday, most forms of tourism are fashioned by culturally coded attempts to escape from the everyday (Edensor, 2007). Today, each of us is a potential tourist and part of the problem of fostering unsustainable tourist practices. For different reasons, purposes, curiosities or necessities, we exercise our mobility. In the early 2000s, travel and tourism scholars sought to place ‘mobility at the heart of our understanding of tourism’ (Hall, 2005, p. 134; Hannam, 2008). The rise of the new mobilities paradigm helps us understand global tourism in the context of other social and spatial travel processes while paying attention to the production and consumption patterns of both tourists and residents, all influenced by similar (and also opposite) gazes and performances in different places (Sheller and Urry, 2004; Adey, 2017). The problematic relationship between tourists and hosts – and the overlap between the two – has generated recent waves of anti-tourism protests in enduringly popular European cities such as Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Rome and Dubrovnik (Butler, 1980; Russo, 2002; Novy, 2016; Gerritsma and Vork, 2017), as well as in other parts of the world such as Central America (Cañada, 2010). The debate concerning the backlash of social movements against the pressure of tourism is not something new, as noticed by Milano (2018, p. 552) – instead, it may be more appropriate to talk about an old debate which has acquired new configurations.

A tourist’s mood can be seen as a moment of withdrawal from the everyday routine, which contrasts with local residents’ lifestyles, yet a mood compelled by the search for new and authentic experiences (MacCannell, 1999).

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One of the most popular slogans reflecting the search for authenticity is ‘live like a local’, popularized by the most prominent peer-to-peer short-term holiday rentals company, Airbnb. This has changed to ‘belong anywhere’, questioning even further the assumption that tourism is simply a consequence of ‘host–guest interactions’. Tourism is frequently acclaimed as one of the world’s largest and most pervasive industries and, as any other industry, has been demonstrated to have both positive and negative effects at destinations and on those who live there (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018).

It is arguable that the sustainability of tourism across Europe remains elusive, with the industry not fully comprehending how to achieve desirable sustainability goals (Cheer and Lew, 2017). Tourism has a Janus-faced character (Sanchez and Adams, 2008); indeed, for a lot of destinations, tourism has become the most important economic development vehicle, yet it is also the most problematic and complex to tackle and come to terms with. Venice is evidence of this and is undoubtedly a global icon attracting millions of tourists annually, with a local economy highly dependent on tourism, and overtourism symptoms that are near impossible to reconcile.

In this chapter we examine the contemporary touristification of Venice, first through a ‘panoramic’ overview, and then through a deeper analysis of the spatial impacts of tourism development over the last decade. According to Zanetto (1986), tourism has been a central part of Venetian culture and society since at least the 18th century. Today, however, there is ample evidence to suggest that tourism has taken over the historical city of Venice. Our principal aim is to assess a series of warning signs (e.g. depopulation, uncontrollable and overwhelming tourist flows, the rise of day-trippers, decline in the hospitality sector, intensification of low-cost airline activity, exponential growth of international cruise ships and explosions in the growth of peer-to-peer short-term holiday rentals platforms) associated with overtourism.

The deep analysis demonstrates how the impacts of overtourism stretch far beyond dimensions of local quality of life, affecting and irreversibly changing the balance of the city’s economic landscape and leading to transformation of its fundamental geography. This analysis illustrates an alarming picture of Venice where, for example, the number of residents in the city is now equivalent to the number of beds for tourists. Finally, we propose a list of possible overtourism indicators that could further contribute to the overtourism debates, and stimulate new areas of inquiry that may be useful in explaining the reasons for the development and intensification of anti-tourist sentiments. The negative local feelings are shared not only by residents, but also by regular city users (i.e. workers and students). In recent years, the public sector has been expected to manage tourist flows and support both residents and tourists in their exchange for a more mutually beneficial authentic experience.

1.2 Research Context: Venice, an Overtourism Icon

In 1996, Van der Borg *et al.* (1996, p. 314) defined Venice as ‘the city that most clearly represents what the term touristification means for an urban area’.

Venice has since become one of the most cited cases for describing the growing global problem of overtourism. One of the key issues that characterizes the phenomenon of overtourism in the case of Venice is the city's gradually declining population, as described in the documentary film *The Venice Syndrome* (Pichler and Tielsch, 2012), and a hotly contested matter central to the angst of local social movements (Quinn, 2007; Cavallo, 2016; Minoia, 2017). For instance, when the population dipped below 60,000 in 2008, a group of residents organized a mock 'funeral' for the city. Before the funeral, in Campo San Bartolomeo (a stone's throw away from the Rialto Bridge), a counter that indicates in real time the number of residents in Venice's historic centre was placed in the window of the Morelli pharmacy. The counter was inaugurated on 21 March 2008 and, on that day, the LED screen indicated 60,699. In November 2018, this had fallen to 53,135 (Comune di Venezia, 2018a).

Owing to its particular geographical urban characteristics, as well as its physical and cultural attractiveness, Venice is also a classic case of 'hyper-touristification' (Costa and Marinotti, 2003; Minoia, 2017). In the city, residents have become consumed by the ills brought about by tourism, the local newspapers churn out articles about touristic issues almost on a daily basis and the committees in favour of housing dedicate considerable time and space to the theme. This is reflected in UNESCO's threats to add Venice to the list of valuable cultural assets at risk, precisely because of the unresolved problems caused by tourism (UNESCO, 2015). In particular, the public demonstration #MiNoVadoVia (I do not go away) was held on the banks of Riva degli Schiavoni on 2 July 2017. This mobilized almost all the city committees, usually known for their bitter disagreements, and in unprecedented fashion united them in protest against out-of-control touristification. #MiNoVadoVia incorporated other similar initiatives and makes explicit reference to the depopulation of the city because of the so-called tourist 'invasion'. Exactly 1 month after the event, *The New York Times* published an article titled 'Venice, invaded by tourists, risks becoming "Disneyland on the Sea"' (Horowitz, 2017). This is only one of a plethora of articles emphasizing the potentially catastrophic impact of tourism on cities' residents. What is most compelling, however, is not so much the comparison with Disneyland as a leitmotif already used and heard but, rather, the dramatic impact tourism has had on rapid population decline. The axiomatic equation that represents the Venice situation is that, as the number of tourists continues to rise, this has had a correspondingly inverse impact on the city's population.

1.3 Venice – Overtourism Warning Signs

To put it simply, in this context 'overtourism' defines an occurrence of far too many visitors for a particular destination to absorb over a given period. Indeed, 'too many' is a subjective term, and it is best defined in each destination relative to the number of local residents, hosts, business owners and tourists. The reasons behind overtourism in Venice are complex

and numerous. Many of the same causal factors in Venice are also found in Barcelona, Reykjavik, Dubrovnik and other popular destination sites (Milano *et al.*, 2018). The impacts of overtourism stretch way beyond quality of life, though. With time, as evidenced in Venice, overtourism disrupts the balance of economic activities that are important in defining a living urban space: local gastronomy and the mix of goods in retail outlets, as well as the music being played in bars all lean toward tourists' tastes, and correspondingly may fail to cater to local people (Edensor, 2001; Becker, 2013; Vettese, 2016; Zanini, 2017; Erbani, 2018). Indeed, deconstructing the 'touristic situation' of Venice is akin to the opening of a Pandora's box replete with undesirable contents.

Threats by UNESCO first in 2015 and then much more strongly in 2017 to put Venice on its list of sites in danger is by far the clearest sign that the city is imperilled. The decision to do so was deferred until 2018 and highlighted that

the exceptionally high tourism pressure on the city of Venice has resulted in a partial functional transformation in Venice and the historic centres of the Lagoon, caused by the replacement of residents' houses with accommodation and commercial activities and services to the residents with tourism-related activities, that endanger the identity and the cultural and social integrity of the property (UNESCO, 2015, p. 14).

The displacement of long-standing local residents is quite evident from the dramatic situation of the city's depopulation: from approximately 170,000 in 1950 to approximately 43,700 in 2015 represents one of the most tangible and visible causes of tourist pressures on the city (Comune di Venezia, 2018a). In a meeting dedicated to 'Living on an Island' on 13 April 2018, hosted by the Ateneo Veneto and organized by the local association '25 Aprile Venezia', the problems related to the touristification of several cities and islands (Rodi, Dubrovnik, Venice, Corfu and Cyprus) with similar circumstances across the Mediterranean Sea were highlighted.

At the 'Living on an Island' event referred to above, the Dubrovnik resident Ljubo Nikolic outlined a similar set of circumstances for the Croatian city: its population had undergone considerable decline from 42,000 inhabitants in 2007 to 36,955 in 2018 (Comune di Venezia, 2018b). At the same time, from 2000 to 2017, the number of tourists arriving in the historical city of Venice almost doubled from 1,503,913 to 3,156,000. This growth is astounding if we also take into account overnight stays: these have grown from 3,562,728 to 7,862,000 over the same period (Città di Venezia, 2017, p. 39). The problematic relationship between tourism growth and inhabitants leaving the city was analyzed in a recent work by Zanini (2017), who took into consideration the pressure from tourism in the Cannaregio *sestiere* ('district', in the Venetian dialect) of Venice, an area that still manages to maintain a balance between tourism and residential activities. According to an estimate by Carrera (2016), every year commuter numbers in Venice are estimated at about 7.5 million to which 17.5 million annual day-trippers are added. These figures suggest that the number of people who daily crowd the *calli* ('streets',

in the Venetian dialect) includes around 20,500 commuters and 66,800 day-trip tourists.

Signs of growing pressures from tourism were raised in 1991 by Canestrelli and Costa (1991), who estimated that the optimal level and composition of arrivals in line with the notional socio-economic carrying capacity suggested that Venice could absorb a total maximum number of some 22,500 daily arrivals, of which no more than 10,700 should be excursionists. Clearly these carrying-capacity limits have been largely surpassed since, 'despite attempts to smooth the peaks through regulation and planning' (Russo, 2002, p. 173).

One of the reasons for the rapid growth in tourism is low-cost aviation. There has been a growing presence of low-cost carriers – this is reflected in the report of ENAC, Italian Civil Aviation Authority (2017), which outlined that the operation of airports at Treviso and Verona was underlined predominantly by low-cost carriers (Aeroporto Antonio Canova di Treviso, 2018; Aeroporto Valerio Catullo di Verona, 2018): the airports' yearly passenger totals exceeded 3 million from five main airlines (all low cost), with another 3 million from 19 low-cost and charter airlines. Venice airport, with over 10 million passengers in 2017 (from 55 airlines, about one-third of them low cost), takes the lion's share (Aeroporto Marco Polo di Venezia, 2018). Obviously, not all passengers are destined for Venice, but it is an ideal hub that makes the city easily accessible. From the sea, Venice is also one of the most active cruise ports in Southern Europe, accommodating nearly 500 ship arrivals and departures, carrying around 1.5 million passengers annually (Risposte Turismo, 2018). The image of one of several cruise ships crossing the Giudecca Canal in front of St Mark's Square has become a symbol of the tension expressed by the local social movement 'No Grandi Navi' (No large cruise ships). Although the Venice port authorities are keen to redirect passenger traffic, the city's business community is intent on ensuring that the flow of tourists to the city centre is not disrupted (Fig. 1.1).

In April 2018, large-capacity cruise ships (defined as anything over 96,000 t) were banned from the Giudecca Canal (Capitaneria di Porto di Venezia, 2018). The Mayor of Venice, Luigi Brugnaro, also introduced new and controversial plans for controlling visitor numbers. Mayor Brugnaro announced a system of 'segregation', whereby access to popular sites such as the Rialto and St Mark's Square is controlled when crowds become too large, with tourists diverted to alternative routes and only local people and business operators allowed to use the most popular thoroughfares (Ordinanza 229/2018 Città di Venezia, 2018). These temporary administrative solutions have not been welcomed by some local associations and residents and, in one case, turnstiles designed to separate local people from tourists were removed on 29 April 2018, the day after they were installed, with protesters chanting 'Free Venice'.

Furthermore, the impacts of hallmark events such as the Venice Carnival and Biennale festivals are additional driving factors towards tourism massification in the Venice lagoon, and extension of the tourist season (Massiani and Santoro, 2012; Fincardi, 2013). While city authorities have increased the



Fig. 1.1. ‘No Grandi Navi’ manifestation of small boats against cruise ships. Boats carrying protestors converge in the Giudecca Canal, September 2016.

Source: Boris Di Giovanni.

tourism tax during the 11 months considered to be high season (1 February to 31 December), a visible contradiction has emerged in the city administrators’ attempts to limit tourist numbers while at the same time enthusiastically embracing the continuous and increasing flow of tourist taxes.

The paucity and ineffectiveness of regulations has doubtless increased the vulnerability of resident groups and their livelihoods in Venice. Over the past two decades, free market principles have been followed dogmatically by the various local government administrations. This can be seen in the liberalization of retail stores whereby the pre-existing network of small shops, manufacturers and workshops have made way for enterprises largely focused on touristic traffic and with little direct relevance to Venetian culture (Cócola Gant, 2015; Salerno, 2018). New regulations concerning fishing and fish markets have also contributed to an irreversible decline of traditional, family-run cooperatives, while liberalization of bed and breakfasts, coupled with the failed control of short-term holiday rentals, has led to massive inflationary effects on the local real estate market. This internationalization of real estate in Venice, especially housing, has exacerbated the crisis of housing affordability for local Venetians.

Moreover, there are numerous indirect costs (e.g. congestion, inflation, abusiveness and waste) that are difficult to quantify because they are reflected in the social and economic fabric of the city in a complex manner. This was highlighted by Van der Borg (2007), who stated that tourists compete with other activities on the real estate market, with the consequent increase in the price, forcing non-tourist residents and businesses to choose a peripheral location. This process – also called crowding out – is one of the main issues responsible for the decentralization process.

While it is often argued that it reached its carrying capacity a while ago, Venice has not lost its touristic appeal, despite the clear governance deficits

Table 1.1. Tourism evolution of Venice 2007–2017 (From Città di Venezia, 2017 and Comune di Venezia, 2018b).

	2007	2017	Variation %
Residents	60,755	53,835	-11.39%
Arrivals	2,165,656	3,156,000	46%
Overnight stays	5,875,370	7,862,000	34%
Number of hotels	249	274	10%
Rooms in hotels	16,015	18,384	15%
Number of extra hotels	1,408	5,535	293%
Rooms in extra hotels	9,218	25,301	174%
Number of restaurants	395	370	-6%
Number of shops	2,605	2,035	-22%

at destination level (Seraphin *et al.*, 2018). The 10-year trend (2007–2017) (Table 1.1) indicates that in the entire historical centre (composed of the six districts and the other islands of the lagoon), tourist flows show continuing increases. These are coupled with growing investments in increasing tourism facilities (accommodation) even though the destination appears to be labouring under the typical symptoms of the vicious circle discussed in Russo (2002). This describes the inability of a heritage city to accommodate growing tourism demand within its boundaries, leading to rising prices and, eventually, to tourism infrastructure and facilities (such as hotels) moving outside historical districts. Looking more closely at the current situation in Venice, and especially in the historical centre, it seems that only long-standing residents are moving out (residents decreased by 11% in 10 years, along with services for residential purposes, such as shops, which decreased by 22%). This is in contrast to tourism facilities, which are still growing as if the destination is in the development stage, especially in relation to the number of extra hotel facilities (+293% - see Table 1.1). Along with bed and breakfast, hostels, camping, these include all new accommodation structures such as short-term holiday rentals, which are experiencing large growth through the Airbnb phenomenon.

Venice has a particular urban structure that amplifies and extends the impact of the tourism industry on its well-preserved urban system because of its pedestrian and nautical features and the fixed limits between the historical centre and the peripheral area of the cities of Mestre and Marghera on the mainland. Salerno (2018) has highlighted that Mestre and Marghera have witnessed a significant increase in short-term holiday rentals – and Airbnb as well, in recent years – which shows that tourism may also commodify these two areas. The physical and social concept of overtourism (caused by the surpassing of carrying capacity) and the impossibility of moving facilities and visitor flows outside (owing to Venice’s geographical limits as an island surrounded by a lagoon) lead to the entire destination of Venice being considered a historical city more than a destination with

a historical centre or area. Furthermore, there are many restrictions (some of them not always respected), such as the prohibition of new construction or limitations on the way a structure can be used (e.g. as only public), which safeguard Venice's unique urban structure. However, these further reduce the space dedicated to residents and city users, keeping these areas dedicated to tourists. In addition to the continuous development of the official accommodation system (hotel and extra-hotel facilities), this transformation of space and functions is emphasized by the growth of sharing-economy activities related to tourism, especially peer-to-peer short-term holiday rentals offered on the Airbnb platform (Zervas *et al.*, 2017; Guttentag, 2015). Airbnb has expanded the accommodation offered in Venice, speeding up the already incessant process of the 'touristification', 'Disneyfication' (Bryman, 1999) or 'McDonaldization' (Russo, 2002) of Venice and its six *sestieri* (districts). The process of the touristification of Venice has caused not only a change in the purposes of the city areas, but also an economic change across all its islands, displacing other economic activities and leading to a tourism monoculture. Here, touristification in an overtourism environment can be termed 'Venicefication', referring to a situation where a destination, its inhabitants and its productivity sector are victims of their own success.

1.4 Research Findings

The warning signs of overtourism in Venice are in evidence from a range of sources. In this section, we will first illustrate the continuous development of the tourism industry in Venice, highlighting the main evidence for this growth. Then, through observing complementary tourist services, we reflect upon their impacts on the local context (i.e. on the entire island and its districts). Finally, we devise stress indicators to clarify the excesses of Venetian tourism. We argue that these stress indicators can also be used to report on the situation of overtourism, as warning signs to be mindful of, and which can be used to manage and reduce the touristification of a destination or as starting points for future research in urban cultural destinations.

According to Van den Berg *et al.* (1995), a tourism destination structure can be divided into two different systems that constitute the 'tourism product'. Among the different factors that compose the tourism product, Russo and van der Borg (2002, p. 634) described the 'presence and quality of secondary or complementary tourist services' consisting of tourism facilities (accommodation, restaurants and shops), which were observed to better understand the city's infrastructure and sketch a touristification trend of Venice's districts. At the end of 2017, the situation in Venice's complementary tourist services is described by the following categories (see [Table 1.2](#)):

- Accommodation sector such as (i) hotels; (ii) extra hotels (B&B, hostels, etc.); and (iii) short-term holiday rentals offered on Airbnb. The extra hotel sector represented in [Tables 1.1 and 1.2](#) consists of the total number of

Table 1.2. Venice's complementary tourist services and residents per district (Castello includes Sant'Elena Island, Dorsoduro includes Giudecca Islands, Santa Croce includes Tronchetto Island) in 2017.

	Venice	Cannaregio	Castello	Dorsoduro	San Marco	San Polo	Santa Croce	Source
Residents	53,791	15,322	13,160	12,160	3,691	4,551	4,907	Registry office, Municipality of Venice
Hotels	215	51	45	28	62	11	18	Open data, Municipality of Venice
Rooms in hotels	13,264	2,668	2,108	2,356	4,617	391	1,124	Open data, Municipality of Venice
Extra hotels	807	184	194	135	143	73	78	Open data, Municipality of Venice
Rooms in extra hotels	4,082	779	770	1,034	735	429	335	Open data, Municipality of Venice
Airbnb	5,895	1,497	1,503	890	892	596	517	Open data from Insideairbnb.com website
Rooms in Airbnb	22,427	5,651	5,665	3,161	3,545	2,393	2,012	Open data from Insideairbnb.com website
Restaurants	570	121	140	108	67	63	71	Trade and productive activities department, Municipality of Venice
Food shops	295	68	75	44	45	35	28	Trade and productive activities department, Municipality of Venice
Non-food shops	1,550	262	252	169	564	209	94	Trade and productive activities department, Municipality of Venice
Mixed shops	191	49	46	18	46	22	10	Trade and productive activities department, Municipality of Venice

Source: City of Venice (open data; statistical and registry office; trade and productive activities department), Insideairbnb.com.

accommodations regulated by regional law no. 33 (Veneto Region), with the addition of legally registered short-term holiday rentals recorded by the municipality; here, it is appropriate to separate these sectors in order to study the local impacts of this system.

- Food and beverage sector, including restaurant facilities.
- Commercial facilities (shops); shops are split into three categories: food, non-food and mixed. The commercial structure of Venice is well illustrated by Zanini *et al.* (2008) who thoroughly analysed and defined the various (almost 80) retail store types, based on the merchandise displayed in the shop windows. The classification presented in this study is based on registration data from Venice's Chamber of Commerce and the Municipality of Venice, organized according to the type of goods sold.

According to Celata (2017), Airbnb enables the touristification of peripheral areas, which are arguably more attractive from a historic-artistic point of view and less populated by official accommodation (hotels and extra hotels) than in city centres, where they tend to proliferate. In Venice, this was verified by examining the ratio of the number of beds in short-term holiday rentals offered on Airbnb versus the number of beds in official accommodation such as hotels and extra hotels. Through this ratio, it is possible to identify changes in the complementary tourist services linked to the accommodation sector for all individual geographic areas of the historical city of Venice, represented by division into districts. Taking the small district of San Polo, for example, which is most affected by the growth of short-term holiday rentals in this ratio, it is possible to see that Airbnb has taken root in a touristic area (the district of Rialto Bridge) with a limited diffusion of official accommodation (2393 Airbnb beds to 820 hotel room beds). On the other hand, other districts such as Castello and Cannaregio (which represent the two biggest but less 'touristified' districts of the historical centre) have suffered from the same impact, as shown by a high ratio index. These results, shown in Fig. 1.2, underline that San Polo (2.9), Castello (1.97) and Cannaregio (1.64) have more short-term holiday rentals offered through Airbnb than through official hotels, spreading the potential to host more tourists all over the historical city. Future studies should analyse the negative impacts of this transformation, such as increases in rent (Horn and Merante, 2017), changing market dynamics (Xie and Kwok, 2017) and the creation of new urban structures (Gutiérrez *et al.*, 2017; Picascia *et al.*, 2017).

Airbnb cannot be seen as the main cause of the changes in the urban milieu in Venice. Even if it represents a reduction in spaces available to residents and city users, it is arguably still a reversible condition, in contrast to the restoration of a building to establish a new hotel. The case of Venice shows that tourists make very selective use of the city. Studies analysing the spatial patterns of tourist mobility in cities have shown that they tend to be concentrated in specific areas of city centres, where they make intensive use of the facilities and services available and where iconic attractions are generally located (Shoval and Raveh, 2004). Figure 1.3 shows the ratio between non-food

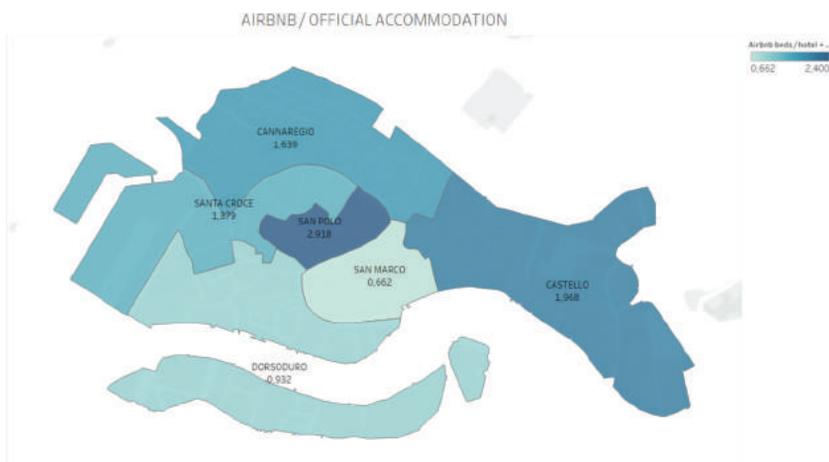


Fig. 1.2. Airbnb beds per official accommodation (hotel and extra hotel beds) per district, 2017.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

and food shops and the imbalances between districts. After studying the results of this relationship, it is possible to stress the strong impacts of tourism on the San Marco district. Indeed, this area houses Venice's main attractions (San Marco Square, Rialto Bridge, Doge's Palace). In this district, there are more non-food than food shops (with a ratio of 12.5 to 1, see Fig. 1.3) compared with the average situation observed in the other districts (values of 3 to 1 or 6 to 1), where the commercial mix is better balanced. Indeed, San Marco is more devoted to tourists and therefore less populated (3691 inhabitants, see Table 1.2), and tourists can sightsee, shop and stay in hotels (one-third



Fig. 1.3. Ratio of non-food shops to food shops per district, 2017.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

of hotel rooms of the entire historical centre are located there). On the other hand, local residents tend to avoid what is considered to be an area that is overcrowded (with people) and underserved (by facilities for inhabitants).

When comparing [Figs 1.2 and 1.3](#), we see that where a greater impact of the official accommodation system is visible, there is also a greater change in the commercial mix, in the form of more non-food than food shops. Indeed, where the presence of hotels is stronger (San Marco district), there are more non-food shops. A better balance between these two complementary tourist services is evident in areas where tourists can find more beds using Airbnb than in official accommodation. An examination of Cannaregio, Dorsoduro and Castello indicates that there are double the number of beds in Airbnb accommodation compared with the number in official accommodation ([Table 1.2](#)). In [Fig. 1.4](#), a close correlation between Airbnb lodgings and food shops is obvious. A possible consequence of this is that in Cannaregio, Dorsoduro and Castello, the residential areas where Airbnb's short-term holiday rentals are more concentrated (see [Fig. 1.4](#)), tourists use the city differently and share infrastructure with local residents. Indeed, most of these listings are entire homes/flats equipped with a kitchen (82%), offering visitors the opportunity to buy and cook local food. In this way, it may be argued that some of the negative impacts determined by short-term holiday rentals are mitigated by looking at the correlation between the total number of Airbnb listings and local food shops ([Fig. 1.4](#)) – Cannaregio (22 vs 1), Dorsoduro and Castello (20 vs 1).

The correlations in [Figs 1.2–1.4](#) show the impacts of complementary tourist services on all districts of the historical city, providing a geographical analysis of the effects of the tourism sector there. These effects lead to widespread overlap between tourists' and residents' use of the city. Accordingly, local residents' attitudes of rejection towards tourists will no



Fig. 1.4. Ratio of Airbnb listings to food shops per district (2017).

Source: Authors' own elaboration.



Fig. 1.5. A banner protesting against tourism pressure in Giudecca Island ('More residents, less tourists. No hotels'), September 2018. The island lies directly in front of Zattere and San Marco and historically was a residential area ignored by visitors.

Source: Francesco Visentin.

longer be restricted to the already touristified area of San Marco. What seems clear is that a new environment of interaction between tourists and local residents is emerging, which is increasing the perception of tourism pressure (Fig. 1.5).

1.5 Discussion

Transformation of some neighbourhoods has tended to lead more and more to the touristification of the entire island, making the environment more hospitable to tourists than to its residents. This process, which is detrimental to residents' well-being, has existed for several decades, but has intensified by the introduction of Airbnb (and short-term holiday rental websites in general). This could be the last straw for the island's local residents and may well constitute the most important driver in the establishment and amplification of anti-tourism movements.

Indeed, overtourism occurs both in a physical sense (too many people in one place or lack of control over visitor flows and regulation) and as a psychological perception by residents (feeling of being hemmed in by tourism). In this section, we apply the previous relationships from a geographical to a social and community perspective, translating the ratios from the places to

Table 1.3. Current status of Venice’s tourism industry and facilities, with the impacts and related stress indicators for the residents.

Overtourism warning signs in Venice	Specifics	Impacts	Stress indicators (ratio)
Depopulation of the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Residents leaving the city Extended high seasonality Overcrowding of places and during certain times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts all over Venice’s historical city, but intensified in the most touristified <i>sestiere</i> (San Marco) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily visitors/residents: 324 to 1 Peak season 11 months out of 12 (except January)
Increase in tourist demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrivals and overnight stays Cruise tourism (1,427,812 passengers) Low-cost international passenger arrivals (4,464,123 for Venice and 1,010,166 for Venice–Treviso Airport) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacts all over Venice’s historical city and surrounding destinations (inside and outside Venice’s municipality) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overnight tourists/residents: 146 to 1 Cruise tourists/residents: 26.5 to 1 Foreign passenger arrivals in Venice airports/residents: 101 to 1
Increased offerings to tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hotel beds (13,264) Extra hotels (4,082) Airbnb (22,427) Restaurants (570) Total shops (2,036) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> San Marco is always the area showing the greatest impacts Because of Airbnb’s extra supply of accommodation, other districts (Santa Croce, San Polo and Castello) are suffering from tourism impacts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 25 hotel beds per 100 residents Eight extra hotel beds per 100 residents 42 Airbnb beds per 100 residents 75 total accommodation beds per 100 residents One restaurant per 100 residents 0.5 food shops per 100 residents Three non-food shops per 100 residents

Source: Authors’ own elaboration (data from Città di Venezia, 2017).

the island’s residents. The deficiencies evident in the management of tourism flows and in the associated regulation of tourism facilities and infrastructure are strong driving factors that influence anti-tourism protests.

In [Table 1.3](#) we outline this complex relationship, presenting some indicators that can describe the excessive tourism pressure on the local community.

These are regarded as stress indicators, highlighting the pressures of the tourism industry on the residents of Venice. To develop these indicators, we underline the principal overtourism signals of the destination and classify them into three main categories: specifics, impacts and stress indicators. The major effects on the destination have been described for each category, and the specifics explained with the data illustrated in the previous sections. All data have been given a geographical scale to underline the impacts on the historical city and individual districts. Finally, stress indicators related to local residents have been elaborated by using specific data from the three categories, setting the total number of inhabitants (also split into Venice districts) as a fixed denominator of the proportion (e.g. the total number of tourists divided by the total number of residents). In creating these indicators we can provide more detail of the overtourism situation in Venice, measuring the impacts and trends in the growth of tourism, and including social perspectives while using quantitative indexes. The following discussion examines the three categories.

Impacts on depopulation and local community – The first stress indicator that expresses in detail the presence of overtourism is the tourist-to-resident ratio (stress indicators, [Table 1.3](#)): 324 day visitors per resident and 146 overnight tourists per resident per year. It is clear that the urban area of Venice has already lost its principal function as a place for the production of goods and services for local residents, and considers tourists as priority.

Impacts on tourism demand and local community – According to Butler (2001), ‘seasonality is a temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism, which may be expressed in terms of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment and admissions to attractions’. Tourist destinations have varying seasonality influences that can be affected by natural or institutional causes; for example, art cities and cultural destinations have a longer tourist season than seaside or mountain equivalents. Venice however, does not reflect a diversification of periods and receives an incessant flow of tourists all year long, a fact that has been accepted and registered by the municipality of Venice. Indeed, according to tourism tax data, a regulation developed by the city’s administrators, Venice does not have a proper seasonality, as this tax considers 11 out of 12 months as peak season (Città di Venezia, 2018). In this regard, it may be argued that an off-season period would allow not only the recuperation of natural elements, but also a rest period for local communities and the maintenance and improvement of facilities. Other indicators can deepen the analysis of the different types of tourist profiles, dividing travelers by the type of transportation used to reach Venice: 26.5 cruise tourists for each resident, and 101 foreign flight arrivals per inhabitant.

Impacts on tourism supply and local community – Other stress indicators show a disproportionate excess of tourist supply and tourist facilities compared with that catering for local residents. The first ratio that can be used to illustrate this correlation is the relationship between the total number of beds, representing the entire accommodation sector in the destination (hotel, extra hotel and Airbnb listings), and local residents. For every 100 beds occupied

by locals, there are 75 beds ready to be used by tourists. In this context, where tourism pressure is high and constantly increasing, the entire focus is placed on tourism. In such an environment, food and non-food shops are exploiting the enormous number of potential customers (here represented by tourists – the ratios do not consider day trippers who sleep outside Venice – and visitors), and have adjusted their offerings to attract tourists (expensive, high-quality and famous brand products for shopping and luxury tourism, with takeaway food and ready-made food for tourists and visitors). The indicators of retail and food facilities show a ratio of one restaurant and half a grocery store per 100 residents. The most stunning indicator related to this complementary tourist service is the ratio showing the relationship between non-food shops (mainly clothes, household goods, and gift and souvenir shops) and local people, which is calculated as 3 to 100.

While tourism pressure is clearly spread all over the island, because of the mobility of tourists and the large diffusion of accommodation facilities, San Marco is the district that suffers the most, as highlighted by the analysis developed in the previous sections. San Marco represents a sort of overtourism area by default. Narrowing these indicators to each district would make it possible to measure the rate of ‘Venicefication’ of the destination, as described above, and to study the process of touristification in a city affected by overtourism.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter assesses key drivers and contentions associated with the overtourism phenomenon in Venice. It is clear that, in recent decades, little has been done to effectively manage the growth of tourism, and consequently this has led to the current dire situation as illustrated in [Figs 1.2–1.4](#) and [Table 1.3](#). Our findings emphasize the need to devise a destination management plan that is dedicated not only to the growth of the tourism industry, but also to the preservation of local residents’ needs, well-being and quality of life.

Importantly, we display and underline a series of stress indicators that lie behind local communities’ difficult relationships with tourism in the context of overtourism and economic dependence on the sector. New tourism trends, such as short-term holiday rentals (like those offered through Airbnb) and heightened mobilities have generated a new environment of interactions between tourists and inhabitants (Martín *et al.*, 2018). This has resulted in widespread local resident rejection of tourism in traditionally tourism-dependent environments. Of course, the indices proposed here are just some examples of indicators depicting the relative weight of tourism in the city. They symbolize a whole range of problems, impacts, factors and negative externalities that underline the occurrence of overtourism.

Indeed, tourism arguably has an ambiguous character, exemplified by the uneasy marriage between economic tourism interests and residents’ well-being. There is, therefore, a large gap between a policy focused on

accommodation and one focused on hospitality. In a recent articulation of Barcelona's tourism status quo, Martín *et al.* indicated 'the urgent need of defining public policies that decrease socio-economic impacts derived from tourism growth in residential areas. The attitude of the locals is necessary to sustain tourist products as well as the preservation of local communities, which are the cultural essence of the city' (Martín *et al.*, 2018, p. 13). In this sense, one might contend that more resident-friendly management strategies seem to be absent in many tourist destinations because local governments are more interested in tourist satisfaction, and on promoting destination marketing strategies predicated on maximizing tourist arrivals, than in improving residents' quality of life. In this sense, Venice is not an exception and is an archetype of the struggle local residents encounter in popular tourist destinations.

A possible way of inverting the trend towards overtourism was proposed by Dennis Boutkan from Amsterdam's City Council at a recent workshop at the Venice International University on 20 November 2018. Boutkan displayed the project 'City in Balance' (City of Amsterdam, 2018) collectively initiated by residents, business owners, cultural institutions, city districts and schools. The Amsterdam City Council has adopted this project with the overarching objective of stemming and changing the 'tourism tide'. The 'City in Balance' initiative is focused on four issues: (i) to develop a greater variety of high-quality shops; (ii) to push back on nuisance; (iii) to spread visitors, dispersing them beyond the city limits; and (iv) to improve open spaces and lessen congestion in busy areas. All of these initiatives are emblematic of the assessment that, in some neighbourhoods, residents' quality of life is deteriorating. This is a refreshingly different perspective on tourism politics because pressing issues are countered with the use of regulatory measures and interventions such as raising the tourist tax, imposing a day tax for cruise passengers, limiting low-budget flights to Schiphol Airport, promoting retail diversity (banning tourist shops) and promoting the dispersal of tourists over the region.

Indeed, tourism policies have always been directed at the growth of tourism to meet economic development exigencies. In the Venetian context, little has been done to safeguard the residents in the form of promoting different working activities and improving hospitality structures such as public restrooms, public transportation and waste management, among other priorities. As this chapter has outlined, Venice continues to encounter unyielding tourism growth despite the clear occurrence of conditions that underline overtourism which it has suffered from for many years. Not only are the negative impacts of tourism concentrated in particular geographical areas or at certain periods of the year (such as during the Biennale exhibitions or the Carnival), but they also affect the entire historical city unrelentingly throughout the year. This was evident when, in 2017, overnight stays in the historical centre increased by a further 10% (Città di Venezia, 2017). This incessant expansion has surpassed the notional limits that underline Venice's carrying capacity and its management of tourism pressure. Over two decades ago, Canestrelli and Costa (1991) outlined the risks of Venice exceeding

its carrying capacity. Russo (2002) followed suit two decades later, warning about the socio-economic impacts on Venetians if tourism carrying capacity limitations were continually exceeded.

This analysis forms a starting point for developing stronger and more expansive surveys of popular tourism destinations labouring under the weight of overtourism. We propose indicators using local residents as denominators to emphasize the impacts of tourism growth in Venice. In any case, the vast and heterogeneous impacts caused by tourism and the way that local residents perceive these impacts, should be regularly examined. Venetians are essential to tourism on the island and the same applies to the development of any tourist destination. In the same way, tourists are an important resource for the local economy, for cultural exchange and for a growing acceptance of diversity. The real challenge is to find a balance between the two. Finally, rather than focus exclusively on the negative factors of tourism pressure in Venice, an accurate and more balanced analysis of both the positive and the negative effects of tourism is essential rather than giving in to narratives that suggest the removal of tourism altogether – an improbable task, given the enduring dependence of Venice on tourism.

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