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The concept of overtourism and potential solutions to its challenges

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Abstract

The article explores the phenomena of "**overtourism**" and "**tourismophobia**," which negatively impact the quality of life of host communities and the visitor experience on a global scale. The theoretical framework is based on the classical models of R. Butler and J. Doxey; however, it emphasizes that in the contemporary stage, the paradigm of purely economic growth must be replaced by principles of social well-being and sustainable development.

Using the **Batumi case study**, the author demonstrates that the social impact of tourism depends not only on quantitative indicators of tourist flows but also on visitor behavior, adherence to local etiquette, and the tolerance level of the local population. The key findings of the study are as follows:

- **Absence of a Universal Model:** Addressing overtourism requires a tailored approach that considers specific local circumstances.
- **Alternative Strategy:** For Georgia, and the Adjara region in particular, rather than adopting the European policy of "prohibitions and restrictions," it is more effective to implement mechanisms for the **rational distribution of flows**.
- **Solutions:** Overcoming the seasonality factor and diversifying tourism types (ecological, rural, and ethnic tourism).

The paper concludes that to alleviate pressure on the coastal zone and prevent overtourism, it is essential to develop less popular destinations and establish robust **cluster networks**.

Keywords: overtourism, destination, social impact, Batumi, sustainable tourism, diversification

JEL Classification: Z32

The article introduces a new, controversial area of research in the field of tourism for Georgian tourist destinations. It is devoted to the problem of overtourism, which is relevant to a growing number of tourist destinations worldwide. The article explores the concept of overtourism, aiming to theoretically analyze this emerging phenomenon, its associated challenges, and potential solutions.

Such terms as "excessive tourism" and "turismophobia" appeared only a few years ago. The mentioned problems attracted attention only after excessive tourism damaged the living environment of the host community in the main tourist destinations of Europe and even caused street protests. This circumstance is explained by the fact that the negative aspects of the social impact of modern tourism remained unnoticed due to its dynamic growth and high economic

Overtourism is a highly complex and opaque phenomenon, which might be portrayed by stakeholders as simplistic, particularly if it doesn't show up right away. It was not discussed until 2017, even though since the 1960s, there have been models such as Doxey's Irridex model [3], Butler's life cycle [1], and Pizam's description of the social costs to destination communities, in which the issues related to overtourism are viewed in the light of the interplay of tourism and urban change [9]. The UNWTO definition of overtourism now is "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way" [10]. It is worth noting that the term is vague, and lacks clarity, its practical application is associated with certain challenges [6]. Accordingly, it can be used in discussing and developing existing ideas [2].

The phenomenon of overtourism is associated with a change in the social paradigm: People's well-being cannot be assessed only in terms of economic growth and the alternative is the quality of life of people.

Consequently, the presented research aims to identify strategies for reducing the social impact of tourism and addressing negative attitudes towards tourism and its manifestations in local communities. At the same time, it spoils the impression of tourists about the destination.

Batumi was selected for the research as a rapidly developing resort city, where visible aspects of overtourism could be observed.

The impact of tourists on the physical environment can be assessed by quantitative indicators, just as the environmental impact is assessed by the capacity of the area. However, the assessment of the social impact is much more complex. It depends not only on the economic significance but also on the level of tolerance of the local community, which varies across all tourist destinations.

The research based on the example of Georgia substantiates the opinions raised in recent scientific papers regarding the suggestion that the attitudes of the local community towards tourism and tourists are impacted not only by the number of visitors but also by their behavior, time/period, concentration, location, local etiquette, etc [4].

The attitude (mood) towards tourism of the residents living in tourism destinations is determined by the following components: standard of living, the perception of the impact of tourism, and the likelihood of conflicts. Therefore, developing a general strategic model to address the issues due to overtourism is almost impossible and it should be considered based on local factors.

Georgia, as a tourist destination, is characterized by uneven development of tourism, and its resorts are characterized by seasonality. Tourism development policy should not be subject to prohibitions, or pressure on vacationers, in order to force them to refuse to visit. Tourism is needed both for the region and for the country as a whole, and therefore alternative ways should be found that would be subject to the principle of rational distribution of tourist flows in space and time.

We are discussing measures to shift the destination from seasonal recreation to all-season recreation. In this regard, the development of as many types of tourism as possible seems to be relevant. In addition to swimming and beach recreation, which are well-developed on the coast of Adjara and other coastal zones of Georgia, it is important to promote the development of new types of tourism, such as ecological, rural, ethnic, and event-based, which will only add to coastal destinations and will lead to a certain "unloading" of the coast [5]. As for the spatial distribution of tourists, the redirection of tourist flows in coastal zones, potentially to

new territories in coastal tourist areas, will contribute to the formation of a network of clusters [6].

The role of the state is crucial in addressing the problems caused by overtourism. When the growth of mass tourism is inevitable, it is crucial for there to be a tourism policy that considers the development of the sector with the involvement of the interested communities and the introduction of appropriate regulations, investing in and attracting infrastructure projects[7].

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