



Overtourism: impact and possible policy responses

Prof. Paul Peeters (PhD)
*Centre for Sustainability, Tourism & Transport (CSTT),
Breda University of Applied Sciences
The Netherlands*

Structure of the presentation

1. Introduction, definition & causes
2. Description and overview of overtourism
3. Measuring overtourism
4. Results
5. EU case studies
6. Conclusions and actions for TRAN
Committee

1. Introduction

Aim of the study

- The study aims:
 - to improve the understanding of overtourism
 - to identify and assess the issues
 - to assess policies and practices to mitigate or prevent overtourism

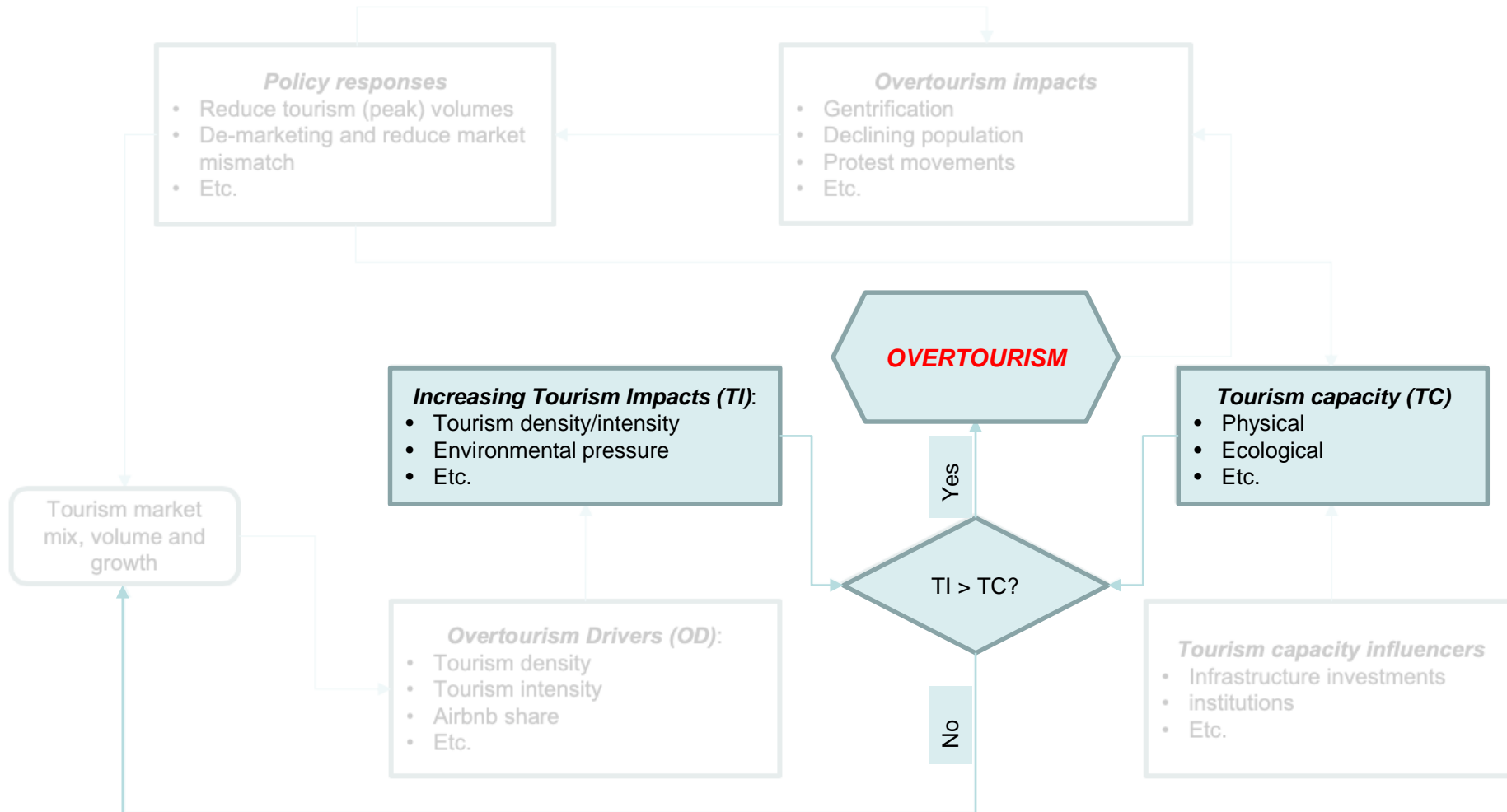
Definition

- Overtourism describes the situation in which the impact of tourism exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds.

1. Causes of over-tourism

- Main causes:
 - low costs for long-distance transport have substantially increased potential markets to become almost worldwide
 - technology (i.e. digital platforms, social media) cause concentration of visitor flows in time and space
 - the combination causes a minority of destinations to experience extreme growth and overtourism
- Other factors:
 - traditional policy focuses on promoting volume
 - proliferation of unregulated tourist accommodations
 - concentration of large groups of tourists
 - commercial gentrification and loss of residents' purchasing power

1. General overtourism model



2. Short description and overview

The impact of overtourism

- Worldwide 105 destinations in state of overtourism were identified of which 70 within Europe
- The impacts of overtourism can represent an existential risk for destinations around the world
- Overtourism has social, economic and environmental impacts
- The most vulnerable destinations are not necessarily cities, but rather coastal, island and rural destinations

3. Measuring overtourism (1)

Overtourism indicators:

- Most indicators show a large overlap for regions with and without overtourism

Overtourism checklist (answering 'yes' is risk):

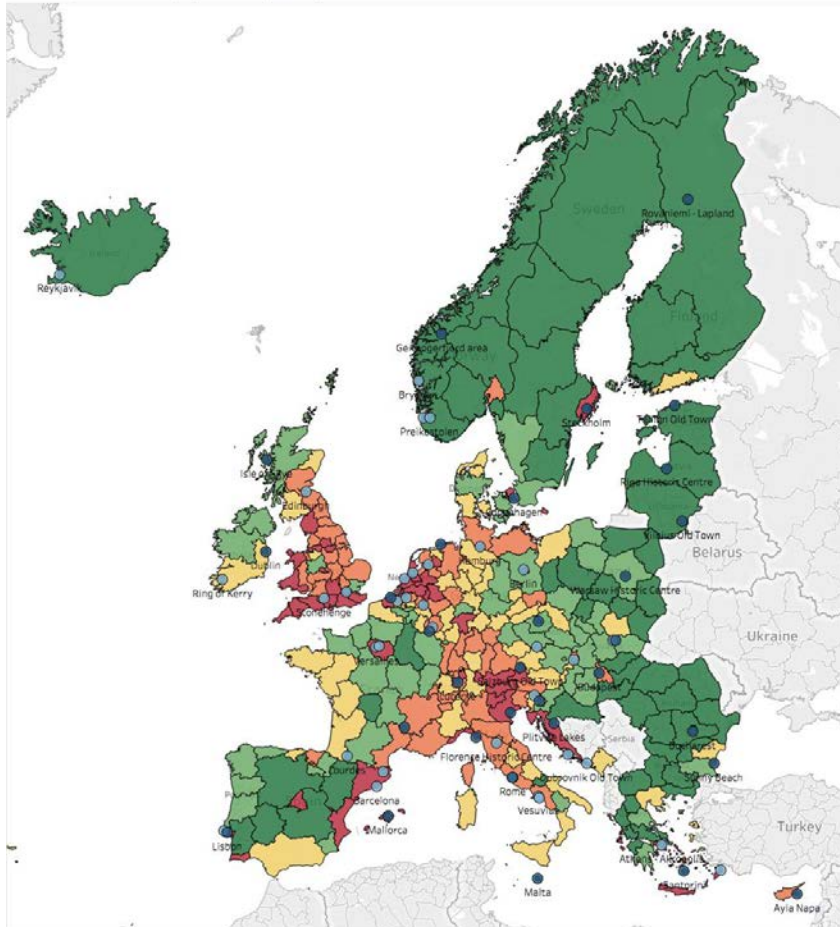
- We developed a checklist for regions (NUTS2 level because relevant data were not all available at NUTS3). High risk means, that a certain destination within the region will develop overtourism.

Regions identified being at overtourism risk:

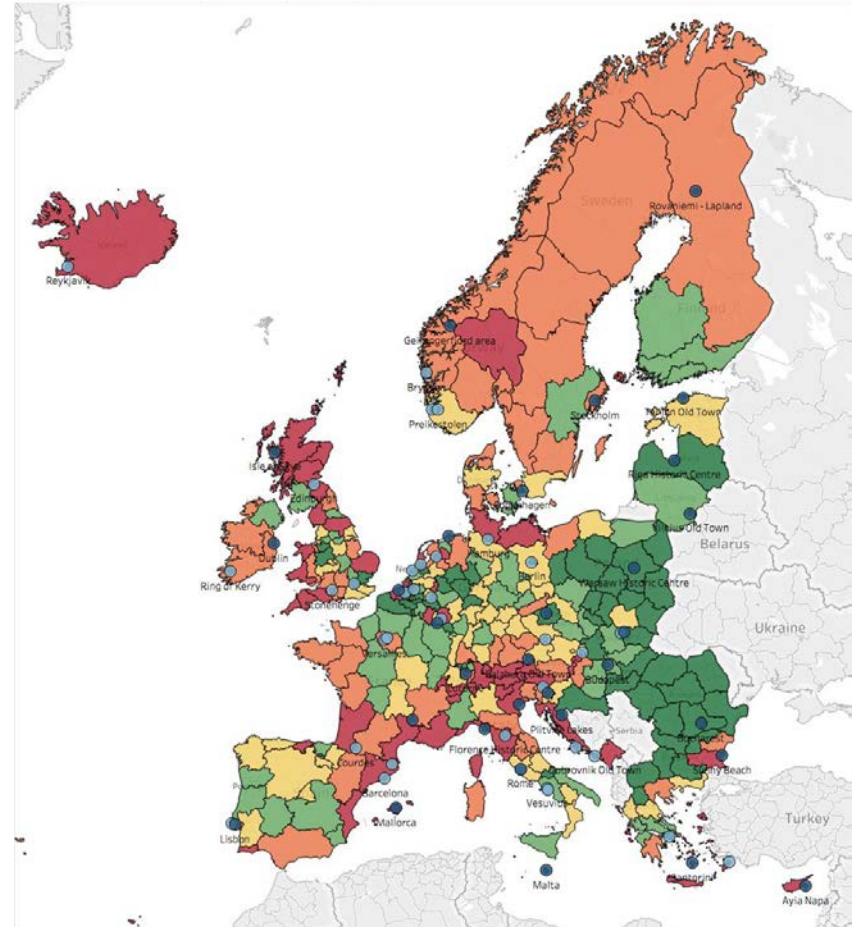
- Spain: Andalucía, Canarias, Comunidad Valenciana
- France: Languedoc-Roussillon, Bourgogne
- Italy: Provincia Autonoma di Trento
- Portugal: Região Autónoma da Madeira, Algarve
- Greece: Ionic Islands, Peloponnesus
- UK North Yorkshire, East Wales, Cumbria, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly, West Wales and The Valleys

3. Measuring overtourism (2)

Bed-nights density (number/km2)



Bed-nights intensity (number/citizen)



Case
■ Y
■ N

Tourism density
1.000 5.000

Case
■ Y
■ N

Tourism intensity
1.000 5.000

4. Some results: indicators

Statistically significant risk factor

Tourism share GDP (%)

Tourism density (bed-nights/km²)

Tourism density (bed-nights/
resident)

Growth of air transport (%/year; 2016 over 2015)

Airbnb average shortest distance to booking.com
addresses (km)

Airbnb share of booking.com plus Airbnb (%)

Air transport intensity (air passengers/
bed-night)

Cruise passenger density (pax/resident)

Number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites (number)

Risk factor statistically not tested significant

Growth of number of bed-nights
(%/year)

Air transport seasonality 2016 (-;
ratio between highest and lowest
monthly arrivals by air transport)

World heritage site closeness
(number within 30 km)

Cruise harbour closeness (number
within 10 km)

Airport closeness (number within 50
km)

Combined intensity growth score (-)

5. EU case studies (1)

Selection based on literature review, expert assessment and tourism network questionnaire.

- Small circle: identified overtourism destination
- Big circle: case study



Dest type
■ Coastal & Islands
■ Heritage & Attractions
■ Rural
■ Urban

5. EU case studies (2)

Case studies' characteristics:

- overtourism impacts depend on the type of destination
- the most frequent measures taken by destination management organisations and local governments to soften the negative effects of overtourism are related to:
 - ✓ spreading visitors in time and space
 - ✓ targeting inappropriate visitor behaviour
 - ✓ increasing the capacity of infrastructure, accommodation and facilities.

5. EU case studies (3)

Monitoring overtourism:

- The case studies did not reveal any evaluation or monitoring programmes in any of the destinations, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the measures in place
- Volume managing measures like restricted access, transport and accommodation capacity is not applied yet.

6. Conclusions and actions for TRAN (1)

Key conclusions:

1. The effects of overtourism are potentially **severe and existential** for citizens, nature and culture
2. **Unambiguous indicator thresholds** for overtourism could not be identified
3. Most destinations are managed based on a **growth-paradigm**, without considering carrying capacity and other policy goals
4. **Low-cost long-distance transport and cruises** are enablers of overtourism
5. **Social media** and peer-to-peer platforms may hype destinations into overtourism

6. Conclusions and actions for TRAN (2)

Key recommendations (1/2)

- **Conduct more systematic research on the overtourism issue** including urban, rural, coasts and islands, and natural and cultural heritage types of destinations
- **Advocate for data collection, at NUTS 3 level**, on the number of tourists and day-visitors, beds including Airbnb and other new forms of accommodation and transport mode shares
- **Initiate debates on tourism growth and quality within destinations**

6. Conclusions and actions for TRAN (3)

Key recommendations (2/2):

- Establish a discussion on **governance of sharing economy platforms**
- **Regularly involve residents and stakeholders in tourism planning**
- Support developing **monitoring the ‘sentiments’ of tourists, hosts and (other) residents** to detect early warnings of overtourism
- In order to proactively prevent and/or address overtourism’s impacts, **customised and place-specific tools and measures** are needed
- Encourage the **creation of a cross-EU ‘Task Force on overtourism’**