

Józef Komorowski

WSB University of Poznan
e-mail: rudnicze@interia.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-3578-0302

Bernadeta Holderna-Mielcarek

Poznan University of Physical Education
e-mail: holderna-mielcarek@awf.poznan.pl

ORCID:0000-0002-9738-1633

MASS TOURISM AND OVERTOURISM IN POLISH AGGLOMERATIONS. POZNAN AND WROCLAW CASE STUDIES

TURYSTYKA MASOWA I OVERTOURISM W POLSKICH AGLOMERACJACH NA PRZYKŁADZIE POZNANIA I WROCLAWIA

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Summary: The goal of this paper was to identify the functions of mass tourism and overtourism and explore the possibilities of the optimisation of solutions allowing to prevent excessive levels of tourism, using the example of two Polish agglomerations, Poznan and Wroclaw. Based on theoretical solutions and proposals for actions in selected European cities, research was carried out among local experts on tourism. The results provide an example of local perception of the analysed problem. The conclusions indicate that in these cities the problem of mass tourism and especially overtourism does not exist; and that tourism is perceived through the lens of economic effects, which are seen as a very significant positive attribute. The optimization of mass tourism solutions that support limiting excessive tourism includes e.g: the distribution of tourist infrastructure and attractions in various parts of the city, creating tourist products covering urban space as well as suburban areas, cooperation and coordination in the field of tourist initiatives.

Keywords: mass tourism, overtourism, optimization of mass tourism solutions.

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu było zidentyfikowanie funkcji turystyki masowej i overtourismu oraz rozpoznanie możliwości optymalizacji rozwiązań wspierających zapobieganie nadmieremu natężeniu ruchu turystycznego na przykładzie dwóch polskich aglomeracji – Poznania i Wrocławia. Opierając się na teoretycznych rozwiązaniach i propozycjach działań w wybranych miastach europejskich, przeprowadzono badania wśród lokalnych ekspertów

z zakresu turystyki, których wyniki stanowią przykład lokalnego postrzegania analizowanego problemu. Sformułowane wnioski wskazują, iż problem masowej turystyki, a szczególnie overtourismu, w miastach tych nie istnieje, a turystyka postrzegana jest przez pryzmat efektów ekonomicznych, które są dostrzegane jako bardzo istotny pozytywny jej atrybut. Wśród optymalizacji rozwiązań turystyki masowej, wspierających unikanie nadmiernego natężenia ruchu turystycznego, wymieniono np.: rozmieszczenie infrastruktury turystycznej i atrakcji turystycznych w różnych dzielnicach miasta, tworzenie produktów turystycznych obejmujących przestrzeń miasta i obszary podmiejskie, współpracę i koordynację w zakresie podejmowanych inicjatyw turystycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: turystyka masowa, overtourism, optymalizacja rozwiązań w turystyce masowej.

1. Introduction

One of the biggest problems of modern tourism is its massive scale caused by globalization growing for decades, gradually reaching more and more destinations that were previously relatively unknown or even inaccessible. Participating in tourism is no longer something exclusive and is now available for people from different backgrounds and parts of the world. The dynamic development of mass tourism depends on multiple economic, social, and technological factors related to rapid progress, especially in the transport, hotel, organization and distribution of accommodation services as well as information technology. Additional reasons for the current growth of mass tourism include the growing mobility of society and consumer trends, including prosumption and collaborative consumption (the sharing economy). The role of marketing instruments in creating the phenomenon of mass tourism also cannot be ignored. Tourist reception areas see them as a source of economic success, while assuming the concept of social responsibility to a different extent. Another particular micro-spatial phenomenon affecting cities is overtourism, i.e. a situation when the influence of tourism in a certain period and area exceeds this area's physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological and/or political limitations [Peeters et al. 2018]. The development of mass tourism is a gradual process that reflects the changing, often favourable, external conditions influencing the popularity of certain destinations. This process is also accompanied by actions that initially received a strong, usually promotional, impulse. When not controlled, mass tourism overcomes different obstacles and keeps growing. Such a situation is usually unnoticed at first but with time it can lead to increasingly negative consequences, including in many cases the physical and visual degradation of a tourist area. In a trendy and well-known area valued by tourists, tourism becomes somewhat of a cult sphere. Almost all the functions of the city centre and all the social groups adjust to the needs of this sphere creating new activity structures solely aimed at facilitating tourism. Due to the difficulties connected to the drastic limitations and emerging inconveniences resulting from excessive numbers of

tourists, the only way of halting the downward spiral of the negative influence of mass tourism are the coordinated actions of local government and residents that notice its threats. This is especially important considering that the tourist success of an area changes in time and bears a risk of being dependant on many, often external, factors. During the last few decades, mass tourism has become a global phenomenon, flooding new destinations and areas.

The goal of this paper was to identify the functions of mass tourism and overtourism and explore the possibilities of the optimisation of solutions allowing to prevent excessive levels of tourism, using an example of two Polish agglomerations, Poznan and Wroclaw. Based on the known theoretical solutions and actions aimed at alleviating the negative impact of the overload connected to mass tourism already proposed in some European cities, in this study the authors used the method of an in-depth direct interview with local experts on tourism.

The qualitative study was conducted from January to April 2019 with members of organisations and institutions engaged in the development and promotion of tourism in Poznan and Wroclaw, as well as in the metropolitan areas and voivodeships (representatives of tourism departments / offices of Marshal's Offices and City Halls, regional and local tourism organisations, associations of travel organisers and guides, the Society of Wroclaw Friends, the Lower Silesian Chamber of Tourism, Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society (PTTK) – the Poznan branch). In total eight experts from Poznan and seven from Wroclaw participated in the study. The obtained information was collected using the interview transcription

The results allowed to identify the functions of mass tourism and propose solutions helping to avoid excessive tourist traffic volume in the analysed cities.

2. A description of mass tourism and overtourism and their consequences for the cities

The term mass tourism is defined in many ways. The analyses by A. Drews describe mass tourism as a phenomenon connected with the process of society modernisation and concentration of tourist traffic. Mass tourism's characteristics include a wide range and participation of different social classes made possible by paid leave, increased income and mobility, and organised forms of travel. The negative face of mass tourism is related to the concentration of tourists in certain destinations and its destructive influence on the landscape and social and cultural disfunctions [Drews 2011].

Overtourism is defined as the perception of the quality of life by the local population and visitors. This term refers to destinations where, in the opinion of residents or visitors, quality of life and the tourist experience deteriorated unacceptably due to excessive tourist traffic volume (often visitors and hosts experience deterioration simultaneously) [UNWTO 2018].

Mass tourism is a broader term and when it concerns a situation of excessive exploitation of resources and common goods in a tourist environment, the term overtourism can be used [Milano 2018].

The problem of overtourism was already described in 1986 by A. O'Reilly, however, he did not use the term overtourism and was focusing on the determination of the "tourism carrying capacity of a certain area" [O'Reilly 1986]. His definition was similar to the definition of the tourism carrying capacity proposed in 1981 by the World Tourism Organization: "the maximum number of people that can visit a particular destination at the same time without causing any damage to the physical, economic, and socio-cultural environment". This somewhat general definition took into account not only the number of visitors but also other social aspects, including the spatial distribution of visitors in a certain space, their actions and behaviour, and the existing tourism infrastructure. Due to the growth of the massive scale of tourism, many authors, especially in the last decade, focused their attention on the problem of overtourism as a specific aspect of this massive scale. The popularisation of this term started from the publication of E. Becker's book [2013] and the occurrence of the highly publicised protests of the residents of some cities (e.g. Barcelona and Venice) against the process of 'touristisation', i.e. the mass and highly dense presence of tourists in a limited space which led to a situation when local communities started to consider tourism to be the cause of a number of inconveniences and social issues [Milano, Cheer, Novelli 2018]. Ch. Becker, H. Hopfinger, and A. Steinecke [2010] described the process of touristisation in a slightly different way. These authors saw this process as the ongoing transformation of the environment of the existing tourist area into a new space dedicated to tourism. In the discussion on mass tourism one needs to remember not only about the overuse of certain destination's resources, but also about disturbing the essential conditions enabling tourism to be satisfactory for every part of the tourism function. The term overtourism includes a reference to the aspect of different social inconveniences caused by excessive tourism. The reception of the term mass tourism has to be relative and it is not possible to objectively determine the reference values enabling to establish when the influx of visitors can be considered excessive. Thus, the term of a limit is more of a social construct based on the opinion of the local population expressed by the participation of residents in protests and negotiations during conflict situations. This is described, among others, by J. Saarinen [2006]. Thus, when studying this problem in practise, it is necessary to diagnose the occurrence of the phenomenon while determining its sources (factors). This also means that researchers have to face the problem of their quantitative expression and creation of appropriate indicators that would realistically reflect the situation in particular areas suffering from overtourism. On the other hand, the expressions of dissatisfaction contradict the existing and commonly preferred economic model of constant growth in the tourism industry and the benefits resulting from this model. In some cases of well documented statistics for some cities

(e.g. Berlin and Reykjavik), examples of quantitative data are given that support direct connections between the increased influx of tourists, especially the popularisation of tourist apartments, and the negative phenomena characteristic for overtourism [Milano 2018]; for instance losing ownership of real estate, residents moving away from certain neighbourhoods, abuse of the workforce, and tourist apartments speculations. However, despite the practical difficulties in capturing the described phenomena in measurable values, researchers in this field consider the possibility of using statistical data illustrating certain direct socio-economic issues of mass tourism and overtourism that are possible to obtain, e.g. growing apartment prices (purchase prices and lease prices per 1 m²), reduction and privatisation of public areas, loss or decrease in residents' purchasing power, loss of balance between the number of visitors and residents, job insecurity and outsourcing in the tourism sector, transformation of commercial services networks, increased number of tourists-passengers of cruise ships, impact on the environment, pollution, and increased amount of waste. This list of negative consequences of mass tourism and overtourism clearly shows that they influence a wide range of fields of the functioning of a city. Their analysis gets even more complicated because of the fact that they create multiple relationships, occur at different degrees, in different periods and types of cities, and that they are not always seen as something solely negative. It is characteristic of mass tourism that it can be perceived and judged differently by differently affected parties. It is *de facto* difficult to measure and assess it in a way enabling to see it as a negative phenomenon. However, overtourism is a more narrow term and it concerns particular areas (destinations) usually of a micro-spatial scale that are overloaded by an excessive number of visitors in specific times of the year. Thus overtourism refers more precisely to the seasonality. Nowadays, both terms: mass tourism and overtourism, have negative connotations. Mass tourism is a phenomenon concerning a certain socio-economic mass that is difficult to count and express in a measurable way, however, economically it is considered as highly positive due to its impact on national economies. That is why the local authorities of the affected cities consider mass tourism a phenomenon that is, after all, positive and highly significant for the city's economy as it is a factor which induces effects stimulating many activities that accompany tourism that the residents generally consider positive as they are noticing visible changes in their standard of living. Mass tourism currently affects mainly a few countries which have led in international tourism for many years and its source is the modern trend of visiting certain cities (especially those known from their architecture or popularised by literature, music, etc.). Trips to cities are a dynamically growing segment of international tourism, conditioned by the multi-optionality of cities as a destination offering diverse cultural experiences, sightseeing, participating in events, walks and shopping with the possibility of its individual shaping [Burdack 2018].

However, the problem of mass tourism has two sides. On the one hand, it is undeniably beneficial for the receiving parties (new workplaces, improvement of infrastructure and services, increase of income, restoration of cultural heritage objects, and support for environmental protection). On the other hand, mass tourism can be transformed into a phenomenon of “flooding the banks” when it exceeds the capacity limits and negatively impacts the local environment. As yet Polish cities have not faced this problem, where tourism is still encouraged and supported by local governments as a phenomenon generating revenue. The negative side effects are not yet realised nor felt by the residents, thus they are still unnoticed. One can consider the following indirect phenomena: making the city’s economy dependent mainly on tourism, poor working conditions in the tourism industry, social conflicts between local population and tourists, exodus of local population to different neighbourhoods or outside the city, concentration of public services answering mainly to the needs of mass tourism and decline in traditional trade, noise, illegal rental of tourist apartments causing inconveniences, economic inequality, damaging the environment, and loss of *genius loci* of the area. Mass tourism and overtourism lead to economic and social changes, which is understandable and unavoidable. However, if the changes are too deep and change entire social microstructures of an area and its original, often unique, character being the magnet attracting the tourists, than this area’s attractiveness and its popularity among the more demanding tourists can decline. One of the strategies of solving the problem of overtourism, the so-called concept of 5D, was presented by C. Milano [2018]:

1. *‘Desestacionalización’* – a solution to the problem of seasonality through promoting and extending tourism outside the main season (e.g. congress tourism, accepting cruise ships in certain periods – Barcelona, Venice, pricing policy depending on the part of season).

2. *‘Diversificación’* – diversification of tourist products through new forms of activity and experiences in the urban space.

3. *‘Decentralización’* – decentralisation of investments in tourism and shifting them to different locations (e.g. to the outskirts). Local government may limit construction permits for hotels and airbnb licenses in the city centre.

4. *‘Decongestión’* – decreasing the overcrowding where tourists concentrate and redistributing tourist streams from the overcrowded urban to areas outside. Numbers of tourists can be better distributed in the urban space, however, in the case of overtourism this possibility has to face tourists’ preference to visit the so-called ‘must see’ places (e.g. Paris, Venice, Barcelona, Rome). One of the proposed methods was installing revolving entrance doors in the most crowded places of Venice to limit the number of tourists.

5. *‘Deluxe Tourism’* – luxury tourism options as a way of increasing the offered range through the adequate pricing policy and attracting the elite group of tourists.

It should be noted that attempts to solve the problem of mass tourism, especially overtourism, are very diverse and depend on the place.

3. Functions of tourism in Poznan and Wroclaw according to the local experts

This case study includes qualitative analysis concerning learning the opinion of experts on mass tourism in Poznan and Wroclaw and their approach to managing it. In the empirical study of the analysed problem, two research questions were posed:

1) Is mass tourism a phenomenon accepted in the analysed cities potentially due to the economic benefits improving the financial situation of entities of the touristic value chain and to the residents (the tourism multiplier effect), overshadowing the social and environmental negative effects?

2) Can mass tourism improve the local socio-economic and environmental balance, achieving which is facilitated by the optimisation of solutions relieving the seasonal excessive concentration of tourists in analysed cities?

In the perception of the respondents – local representatives of organisations and institutions working in the field of managing tourism, its significance in the development of the analysed cities is related to the traditional economic functions. The experts share the opinion that tourism has a positive impact on the incomes of enterprises and institutions, employment levels in the hotel and transport industry, and on the development of tourist attractions. In the aspect of its significance for the development of the sports, cultural, and entertainment infrastructure in Poznan, two aspects were noted: 1) the influence of organised sport as well as cultural and entertainment events (e.g. marathons, runs) on activating tourism during and after the event, 2) the development of sport and recreation as well as the cultural and entertainment infrastructure and the better use of the existing facilities; in the experts' opinion this can result in mutual positive effects (development of tourism and service capacity). In Wroclaw it is thought that the reason for the relationship between the development of tourism and the improvement of the sports and recreation infrastructure is organising/hosting major sport events, of which, as an example, the respondents mentioned EURO 2012 (the stadium) and The World Gamet 2017 (the rollerdrome). The respondents stressed the significance of the new stadium as a tourist attraction. Considering the influence of tourism in the city on initiatives concerning the protection of cultural heritage and the environment, while in Poznan, tourism's positive role was appreciated in the context of the revitalisation of areas of the city and undertaking pro-environmental initiatives, for instance, regulating the river banks and landscaping that can influence the development of tourism and serve the local residents. It was also pointed out that it is necessary to increase residents' awareness on such actions being held and on the public discussion concerning the fact that tourism can have an impact on the quality of urban space, including the old town. In Wroclaw, the respondents connected the influence of tourism on the development of the cultural and entertainment infrastructure with the group visits of tourists wishing to attend performances, for instance, to go the opera. It was also pointed out that sport and recreation as well as cultural and entertainment facilities

are built for the residents. Its positive impact on the initiatives concerning the protection of cultural heritage, mainly the restoration of old buildings, was also noted. In the case of the influence of tourism on undertakings in the field of environmental protection, the respondents saw its positive impact but some of them found it difficult to give any answers. The analysis of the answers concerning the social effects of mass tourism, especially its influence on whether the residents are happy or unhappy with the amount of tourists in the city and any complaints concerning the symptoms and inconveniences connected with the level of tourism in certain neighbourhoods, indicated that the mentioned aspects usually are not considered as significantly influencing the level of the quality of life of the residents of Wroclaw and Poznan. The experts' opinions allow to draw the conclusion that managing tourism in both the analysed cities is based on the "growth paradigm". The positive influence of tourism is noticed regarding the economic and socio-ecological results. It can be concluded that adopting an integrated approach in the tourism development policy that aims at socio-economic and environmental benefits, can act counter to the negative effects of mass tourism and overtourism.

4. Experts' opinion on the possibility of the optimisation of the mass tourism solutions in Poznan and Wroclaw

The issue of the optimisation of mass tourism solutions in the analysed cities was subjected to an assessment of the respondents that included the following mechanisms: managing streams of tourists, cooperation of entities interested in the tourism initiatives in the city, and cooperation between the high-tech and design sectors in the field of finding innovations in tourism. In the face of the solutions proposed for mass tourism and overtourism, the respondents expressed an opinion that in Poznan there is a need for managing the stream of tourists, mainly through creating marked walking routes, adequate leisure areas, scenic viewpoints, and organised forms of sightseeing, and that such actions are partly noticeable in this city. Yet the opinions of experts in Wroclaw were divided, about three-fifths thought that there is such a need and the rest that there is no such need regarding the opinion of the respondents on the initiatives of the local authorities supporting creation of alternative walking routes to relieve the areas visited by the highest number of tourists. However, when the intensity of tourism is low, alternative tourist products can result in shifting resources and attention from the area that created this product, thus, it would be better to propose several high-quality tourist products than a dozen or so of mediocre quality. The respondents also referred to the existing tour programmes and creation of new walking routes directed towards different target segments leading through areas outside the cultural city centre, along with innovative solutions concerning tourist attractions. In Wroclaw, the opinions of the respondents on the creation of alternative walking routes in order to lower the burden on the traditional ones were divided. Some of them thought that creating new routes is not necessary because the

existing ones are already very attractive for the tourists and finding equally attractive alternatives would be difficult. Others thought that the municipal authorities of Wrocław should definitely support such initiatives. It was also pointed out that it is not necessarily about relieving the existing routes, but about young tourists choosing individual sightseeing trips who are not necessarily interested in traditional itineraries and get to know the city following, for instance, a street art path. Concerning preventing and alleviating the overtourism in the city, the experts in Poznań stressed the possibility of creating regional tourism products, including components of the tourist product offer of the city but also of its satellite areas and the creation of alternative routes. The respondents listed the economic benefits connected to the level of tourists' spend during longer stays in the region, not only in the city, and the possibility of making a better use of the regional tourism infrastructure. Moreover, the significance of the slow travel trend was pointed out. The need for this type of travelling can be met thanks to the areas outside the city. The study also analysed the possibilities of using the effects of synergy between the entities interested in tourism initiatives, e.g. organising events, congresses, conferences, in the optimisation of the process of mass tourism development in the cities. In Poznań, the respondents indicated the existing initiatives such as the cooperation platform between the local/regional tourism organisations and the city's Convention Bureau as well as initiatives aiming at the organisation of events promoting tourism, e.g. Poznań for half-price, among which the following were mentioned: creating a common tourist product offer, agreeing on the dates of hosting events, congresses, and conferences, creating packages of advisory services facilitating finding service providers, creating a cooperation network to obtain events, activities of associations obtaining events and support of the city's authorities, a tourist card for the region, promotion of the tourist product offer, and wider cooperation with tour guides. In Wrocław, the respondents listed: periodic meetings and programmes of entities interested in tourism initiatives, joint organisation of events, joint projects of different associations, organisation of meetings by the city authorities aimed at networking, creating a common tourist offer, agreeing on the dates of events, congresses, and conferences; holding urban games was also mentioned. The experts participating in the survey recognised that employing new information technologies can support the influence on tourists' activity, the deconcentration of tourist traffic, and the better utilisation of tourism infrastructure. They also supported the validity of cooperation between the high-tech sector and innovative solutions in tourism. In Poznań, the following examples were mentioned: internet applications, booking systems for tourism services, systems of city bikes/scooters, while in Wrocław apps helping to use the tourism infrastructure, and a tourist card. In addition, the experts considered the possibility of cooperation between the design sector and the innovative solutions for city tourism as a factor making the urban area more attractive, their localisation can provide a tool to control the streams of tourists.

5. Conclusions

The results of the survey concerning Poznan and Wroclaw allow for the conclusion that the problem of mass tourism, especially overtourism, does not occur in these cities. Placing tourism infrastructure and tourism attractions in different areas, creating tourist products including urban and suburban areas, cooperation and coordination in undertaking tourism initiatives, utilising information technologies and design to develop tourism innovations, can facilitate a natural relief from the periodical overburdening that does not require significant formal regulatory and limiting mechanisms. Regulatory and limiting actions implemented in cities known for their mass tourism and overtourism do not need to be implemented in Poznan and Wroclaw. In the analysed cities, tourism is seen through the prism of its economic effects that are perceived as its very significant positive aspect, while the negative socio-environmental effects received less attention. At the same time it becomes necessary to monitor this phenomenon in order to be able to prevent the possible socio-environmental and economic consequences. In order to improve the quality of tourism in the city, it is possible to design new tourism spaces and mark out new or revitalised spaces due to the excessive number of tourists in city centres. The development of tourism in a city should focus on its good quality and innovative tourist products. In cities where the tourist product offer comprises a significant part of their services, it is necessary to focus on improving the quality of the existing tourist products, including the possibility of their better distribution in the urban area and proper access to them. Modern tourists are more and more experienced and demanding, and they are more critical towards the inconveniences resulting from the excessive number of tourists and tourism services. On the other hand, they are increasingly influenced by the suggestions of marketing and trends in tourism. This makes it difficult to optimally channel tourist traffic in a city without inducing negative feelings in tourists and limiting the access to tourism attractions characteristic for mass tourism and overtourism, and at the same time enabling the reasonable modelling of this phenomenon.

Overtourism is easier to notice and measure, and its emergence and influence can cause negative opinions among the local population and local government. That is why it is easier to talk about the limits of the benefits in a micro-spatial scale in the case of overtourism than mass tourism. These benefits at some point exceed the limits and they can change into losses or excessive costs for the residents and for the city as a management environment. The issue here is the proper, or at least the approximate assessment of the occurrence of the limit of the marginal cost in an economic and social approach. Seeing the limits of the benefits resulting from overtourism in a certain area (e.g. a neighbourhood) will occur in the social approach first, and that can be expressed with adequately selected measures derived from the analysis of public opinion on experiencing the inconveniences of permanent congestion caused by the maximum overcrowding. Exceeding the marginal limit of

economic benefits in the overtourism of a certain area is usually delayed due to the *de facto* significant, often very substantial economic benefits for the affected residents. They accept substantial incomes for a longer time, tolerating physical and living inconveniences of their environment up to the point when they face the problem of feeling the need to move to a different place and start life in a new environment which might be inconvenient, especially for the elderly.

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