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Title : Overtourism in small emerging island destinations: The ambivalent role of residential tourism

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Abstract :

Small island destinations are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities (climatic, health, economic) linked to their location (isolation, exposure to cyclonic risks) and their geographical characteristics (small size, high demographic pressure). The uncontrolled development of the tourism sector, on which the growth of many small island destinations depends [1], tends to reinforce these vulnerabilities. Among the dynamics contributing to this tourism entropy is the phenomenon of overtourism, which undermines the robustness of small island destinations that have been successful. Although widely studied [2] and mainly in successful destinations, overtourism is measured primarily using quantitative indicators based on international tourist flows [3].

However, these indicators, based solely on external inflows, are not particularly suited to emerging destinations where overtourism is beginning to occur and where tourist flows from outside the destination are moderate compared to domestic tourist flows. This is the case for certain isolated continental destinations or small emerging island destinations whose successful positioning is still in its infancy. In these territories, which are less exposed to tensions generated by external forces, it is domestic tourism, particularly

through its disorderly mobility, that can lead to localized forms of saturation, regardless of growth in international tourist arrivals. To our knowledge, this dimension of the analysis of overtourism through internal dynamics, such as disorderly mobility, remains largely unexplored in the literature. However, this possible internal origin of overtourism raises three issues at this stage and motivates the objectives of our research: first, to develop a method for understanding this phenomenon that does not involve understanding incoming flows, as is the case for overtourism of external origin; second, to identify the impacts of domestic overtourism when the victim of it may also be its generator. Exploring this dual approach is another objective of our research. Finally, we aim to provide managers of emerging destinations that have not yet been confronted with the tourism pressure with recommendations to contain the onset of this hidden form of overtourism.

To this end, since there are no quantitative indicators equivalent to those used to understand overtourism generated by external tourist flows, our research will focus on designing a model for analyzing overtourism using the framework of the well-being economy [4],[5] and is part of the Beyond GDP critique. From this perspective, overtourism is seen as a process of progressive degradation of individual and collective well-being, resulting from a perceived imbalance between the benefits and costs of tourism rather than simply exceeding visitor thresholds [6].

More specifically, in order to understand the role of residential tourism as an internal source of overtourism, our work will be based on the analysis of mobility channels, considering that the mobility of residents can cause local congestion, conflicts of use, and environmental pressure, without necessarily leading to an increase in external tourist flows [7]. This surprising finding is indeed a blind spot in the analysis of overtourism in these destinations. Furthermore, in our analysis, residents are viewed as dual economic agents, both guilty and victims, since they contribute to tourism while also being exposed to the negative externalities of its development. The challenge is therefore to understand how the dual economic role of residents, through their well-being, influences their perceptions and the thresholds at which the first signs of overtourism emerge in constrained territories.

Our field of study focuses on small island destinations, whose success is still in its early stages but which are already characterized by complex tourism dynamics, where moderate external tourist flows coexist with particularly dense internal residential mobility. In this context, the island of La Réunion represents a particularly relevant case study: it exhibits moderate external tourist flows, characterized by a low tourist-to-resident ratio (approximately 500,000 arrivals per year), while being marked by intense internal tourist mobility. This field, therefore, allows us to analyze the warning signs of overtourism at the sub-territorial scale and better understand the internal dynamics specific to island territories.

The methodology is based on a quantitative survey conducted among residents of La Réunion. The data are analyzed using factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the relationships between perceptions, well-being, attachment to the territory, and attitudes, with reference to Doxey's irritation model. This approach enables highlighting early perceptual signs of tourist saturation and identifying regulatory levers tailored to the internal dynamics of island territories. The expected results should highlight the structuring role of residential tourism in the emergence of localized forms of overtourism, through its effects on residents' subjective well-being and perceptions. They should thus suggest that well-being acts as a central mediating mechanism, enabling the identification of perceptual thresholds of saturation before the classic quantitative thresholds are reached and the early detection of signals useful for regulating residential tourism in island destinations.

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