

Article

Tourism as an Opportunity or the Danger of Saturation for the Historical Coastal Towns

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Abstract: In the era of urbanization, small towns confront challenges in sustaining and preserving their essence and population. Historical towns have discovered their potential in tourism development, yet this opportunity often escalates into overtourism, particularly in renowned cruising destinations. This paper focuses on examples of coastal historical towns dependent on tourism revenue and faced with an excessive influx of tourists in the Mediterranean Region. The objective is to examine various cases across diverse geographical, cultural, and policy contexts to evaluate their success in achieving a balance between economic development and genius loci. This analysis seeks to identify the factors that contributed to the attainment of this equilibrium. Therefore, we selected case studies throughout the Mediterranean coast—from Saint Paul de Vence and Èze at the Azure Coast, Dubrovnik and Kotor in the Adriatic Sea, to Nafplio and Monemvasia in the Aegean Sea. The selected examples range from towns that are almost entirely depopulated to those that are suffocating from the influx of tourists. Observations on the spot and review of policies led us to the conclusion that the geography of the area and cultural values represent comparative (dis)advantages that can be influenced and shaped by policies from the time of the pre-tourist phase to the phase of overtourism. Even though the success of an early policy and the effects of investments aligned with it might be uncertain, pre-tourist policies turn out to be the most successful when it comes to balanced tourist-resident development. Determination of authorities to not only see economic benefit but also genius loci and quality of life of residents is crucial, too.

Keywords: historic coastal towns; Mediterranean; heritage; revival; overtourism; planning



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1. Introduction

The coasts of the Mediterranean Sea represent the historical birthplace of culture with numerous significant points of interest and are the world's leading tourism destination, expected to reach 500 million international tourists by the year 2030 [1] (Mejjad et al., 2022). There are locations worth visiting with iconic beauty, perfect integration of natural characteristics of the relief and climate, with interesting historical facts and events [2]. In one word, those places possess cultural heritage as an additional value, the combination of different attributes with spatial and visual aspects of built fabric and timeless architecture that makes them unique and unrepeatable. Culture, in the broadest sense, is a driving force for many cities, a component of attractiveness and competitiveness on the market, a vector for urban development, and one of the indicators of the quality of life [3,4]. However, even this region has its weaknesses, among which are excessive crowds during the season peak and concentration in certain cities and towns [5].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Tourism as an Opportunity

Tourism, as the main promoter of economic growth, was a logical choice in generating funds for maintaining cities with their historical functions, contexts, and events for self-sustainable revival instead of preserving them as museums [6]. It is usual to use the

convenience of location and heritage characteristics to promote and activate the content and create tourist offers and products as a brand [7]. Besides historical facts, marketing includes urban patterns, unique architectural panoramas, cultural events, boutique hotels or resorts, local climate, local gastronomy, and enology [7]. The influence of contemporary popular culture and social media should not be ignored either, as well as the need to visit places that were used as sets for films and series, where celebrities stayed or lived. Tourism required certain compromises to provide the basic conditions for numerous visitors [8].

Since the second half of the 20th century, there has been a growing appreciation and understanding of historic urban settlements and a desire for area-based conservation [9]. Through international organizations, including UNESCO, ICOMOS, and the Council of Europe, appreciation of cultural heritage has grown as a significant link in urban life and development, i.e., in the lives of its contemporary residents and communities [9–11]. Some sites were graded through the many-sided criterion analysis for gaining the status of UNESCO protection to preserve not just the physical elements but also traditions, environment, and other characteristics [7]. It is a challenge to preserve the valuable heritage while enabling modern life and disposal for tourists [12]. Due to the impossibility of meeting all the modern lifestyle requirements (modern interior design and size of rooms, access by car, heating installations, air conditioning, sewage, etc.), plus expenses for maintaining protected objects and rigid protection, the ancient and medieval coastal cities “spilled over” from their walls or remained abandoned [13]. In some cases, the inhabitants move out of the historic nuclei due to the crowds of tourists that do not allow comfortable living for residents [12]. The most vulnerable are elderly citizens who are still living in historical centers and are not interested in resettlement [14].

2.2. *Tourism as the Danger of Saturation*

Depending on the environment and attractions, some places have visitors throughout the year, others during a particular season. However, it often happens that the number of visitors significantly exceeds the number of inhabitants, thus reaching limits of carrying capacity.

The unrestrained inflow of tourists provokes discomfort in residents, introducing the terms “overtourism” and “tourismphobia” [15–17]. These terms describe conditions of a massive number of visitors overloading popular locations, pushing capacity beyond endurance limits, and serious degradation of the environment. Perkumienė’s and Pranskūnienė’s [18] integrative review reveals that while “overtourism” is a recent term, the underlying issues have been discussed in academia for over 40 years. The phenomenon has particularly affected major tourist destinations and has gained recent attention in literature focusing on tourism development models and sustainability.

Authors in the 1960s began addressing tourism’s negative impacts, highlighting concerns about environmental degradation and resident dissatisfaction. By the 1980s, discussions on carrying capacity emerged, aiming to determine the maximum number of tourists a destination could sustain without significant negative consequences. The concept of “visitor overkill” was coined during this period, emphasizing environmental sustainability and risks related to “tourismphobia” [19–23]). From the 1990s, the debate shifted towards greater emphasis on the responsibility of tourism actors and individual tourists. “Overtourism” gained significance as an alternative term to “Turismofobia” around 2016, with a focus on the socio-economic function of tourism and indicators like tourist traffic and accommodation density [23].

“Overtourism” was observed in major cities such as London, Paris, and Bangkok, leading to issues of congestion, failing infrastructure, and resident dissatisfaction. Goodwin highlighted how “overtourism” alters the character of places, causing irritation for residents and a loss of authenticity for tourists [24,25]. The trend has a significant impact on residents’ everyday lives and provokes antagonistic relationships between locals and visitors [26,27]. Many studies have examined the impacts of overtourism on these towns, shedding light on the various challenges and opportunities they face. Exploring the attitudes of residents

towards tourism development in small towns with cultural heritage revealed that residents had mixed perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development [28]. While some residents acknowledged the economic benefits tourism brings, others expressed concerns about overcrowding, loss of authenticity, and the disruption of local communities and their daily routines [29,30].

When the quality of local life is called into question due to overdraft and fulfilling touristic demands, there is a high chance that the quality of sightseeing impressions will collapse simultaneously [31,32]. “Overtourism” is the new term for the old problem [17,26], causing “disorders in the spatial, social, or economic sector and leading to deep disturbance of ordinary, everyday life in particular city areas and dissatisfaction and protest of locals against visitors” [27] (p. 62).

In response to these challenges, social movements have emerged, advocating for more sustainable tourism practices and a balance between the needs of tourists and the well-being of resident communities [33]. As a response to social movements, there was a necessity to integrate certain rules and create policies. Efforts to address overtourism in the Mediterranean have included visitor management strategies, such as implementing visitor quotas, promoting off-peak travel, and diversifying tourism offerings to spread out the environmental and cultural impact [34–36].

Some forms of tourism (city breaks, cruises, apartment rentals, etc.) respond first of all to the new middle class, its financial power but also the chronic lack of time. Popular destinations are those that can combine sensual pleasures (relaxation, recreation, gastronomy) with intellectual satisfaction in the domain of culture [37,38]. This phenomenon, characterized by an excessive number of tourists visiting a particular location, has become a growing concern for small and middle-sized towns with cultural heritage [39]. Considering all of the above, the majority of cities focus on an offer that includes important and interesting historical facts, the importance and beauty of architectural heritage, unforgettable panoramas and vistas, museums and galleries, manifestations and events, the exclusivity of hotels, local gastronomy, and enology [40,41]. Competitiveness became tense because visitors generated significant profit.

Studies in Venice highlighted the impacts of cruise tourism and accommodation demand on sustainability and social sustainability. Solutions included good practices by destination managers and companies in various tourism sectors [42,43]. Research on Porto residents revealed negative effects such as crowding and inflation due to tourism growth, leading to manifestations of concepts such as “tourismphobia” and “overtourism”. “Overtourism” is identified as a future challenge in Portugal alongside sustainability and quality of tourism offerings [44,45].

The Mediterranean region has been particularly affected by overtourism, with popular destinations such as Barcelona, Venice, and Dubrovnik experiencing significant challenges due to the excessive number of visitors. The cruise industry has contributed to the crowd, forming regular sightseeing stations and constantly looking for new destinations, expanding the offer [46–50]. It has led to overcrowding in narrow streets of small towns, increased pollution, and added pressure on local resources and infrastructure [51]. The delicate ecosystems and historical sites in these areas are at risk of degradation and irreversible damage as a result of unchecked tourism activities [33].

Furthermore, the inadequacy of management and control measures taken by public stakeholders exacerbates the impact of overtourism on small and middle-sized towns with cultural heritage, causing frustration and resentment among the residents [29,35]. “The content of the historical city core with souvenir shops and restaurants is more adjusted to the needs of visitors than to citizens, including the pricing” [27] (p. 59). The residents are leaving somewhere else, and the whole area becomes only empty scenery of the historical architecture with accommodation for rent, probably of those residents who left because of the conditions caused by tourism (crowd, noise, pricing, and lack of basic functions) [52–54].

Not only residents are frustrated, but also tourists, whose impressions and sensations of architectural pearls during the peak tourist season are nullified by the invasion of visitors.

Overcrowded ambiance degrades the sightseeing experience and enjoyment, and generally, lowers the quality of the visit [55–57].

Despite anticipated shocks, tourism is expected to continue growing due to increasing affluence and technological innovation. Sustainable strategies are crucial to managing popularity waves and preventing the trivialization of key tourism spots [45,58–60]. Future studies are likely to focus on destinations dealing with “overtourism” and associated implications, exploring possible solutions. Butler’s [61] suggestions for creating alternative destinations or improving the resilience of existing ones are seen by [26] as crucial in mitigating “overtourism” pressures.

The question arises: How to accomplish an equilibrium between two rights: Freedom of travel and tranquility of residents [18,62]? This paper contends with examining various cases across diverse geographical, cultural, and policy contexts to evaluate their success in achieving a balance between economic development and *genius loci*, seeking to identify the factors that contributed to the attainment of this equilibrium.

2.3. Policy Approaches to “Overtourism”

In the literature on overtourism, scholars primarily engage with the conceptual framework of sustainable policy, as exemplified by [63]. Ref. [32] delves into city destinations, overtourism, and governance, noting a lack of research on how elected authorities manage conflicting interests among tourism stakeholders, businesses, communities, and residents. This necessitates a comprehensive approach from governments, drawing upon a diverse range of expertise and powers.

The concept of sustainable tourism, pioneered by [40,64], remains central to addressing overtourism. It emphasizes a balance between economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability, as defined by the UNWTO. Despite the theoretical groundwork, tourism destinations often prioritize economic growth within a capitalist socio-political system [65–67], leading to a gap between theoretical sustainability and practical implementation.

Ref. [68] highlights how sustainability, in line with sustainable tourism principles, encompasses economic, environmental, and socio-cultural dimensions with a multidisciplinary approach. Despite this alignment, tourism destinations often prioritize economic growth within a capitalist socio-political framework [65–67], leading to slow progress in implementing sustainable practices. This gap between theory and practice prompts the exploration of new or enhanced policy approaches [69–71].

Efforts to address overtourism often focus on adapting tourism practices, enhancing existing systems, and leveraging smart technological solutions. However, such adaptive measures may prove insufficient in the long term. Ref. [72] advocate for structural, long-term solutions that adopt a broader systems perspective in managing tourism.

Ref. [73] examines coping strategies in European cities, emphasizing the importance of conducting detailed cost–benefit analyses of tourism’s impact. Balancing competing interests and managing visitor flows requires a focus on the present realities of each locality to achieve an optimal outcome. As [26] indicate, governance is one of the main aspects of addressing overtourism. Therefore, we are examining the policy approaches embraced by the governments in the case study regions to scrutinize and evaluate their sustainability.

3. Materials and Methods

This research is designed as a case study [74] investigating the phenomenon of overtourism in the context of six locations in three regions within the Mediterranean coast. The authors have chosen the case study approach because it provides observation of the process and allows comparison of several examples. From the researcher’s perspective, the methodological suitability of the case study derives from the nature of the phenomena to be empirically explored and investigated [75], including field trips.

The problem is that tourism is the only option for the economic and demographic revival and survival of many middle- and small-size towns, including historical towns along the Mediterranean coast, where “the right measure” can be easily overstepped,

leading to overtourism and solely to economic revival but not demographic survival. Therefore, this analysis seeks to identify the measures that contribute to the attainment of equilibrium by examining cases from diverse geographical, cultural, and policy contexts. Generally, this paper investigates the impact of tourism on urban life inside heritage towns, looking for the optimal dosage that will ensure the vitality of the coastal touristic places.

The selected examples correspond to the criteria of small and medium-sized historical towns in the coastal area that are tourist locations. Small and medium-sized towns were selected due to the disproportion between their size and the number of tourists, which renders them most susceptible to becoming overwhelmed and reaching the limits of their “carrying capacity”.

The authors utilized various sources to acquire geographical, cultural, and policy characteristics of the selected towns. The chosen methods included observation and desktop research, occasionally supplemented with unstructured interviews.

3.1. Observation

Primary data were collected via the observation method [76], which is primarily used for qualitative research and gathering data about people, behaviors, and phenomena in their original setting. The advantages of observation data collection methods include direct access to research phenomena, high levels of flexibility in application, and the generation of a permanent record of phenomena for later reference. However, this method is disadvantaged by longer time requirements and high levels of observer bias [77].

The authors observed the situation in selected case studies, taking notes and photos during tourist seasons between May 2006 and August 2023. First-hand information was collected during this extensive time span, partly due to the goal of following phenomena longitudinally and partly due to the challenge of securing financing at once. As the fieldwork was funded through regular scientific research funding (institutional financing) that necessitated combining visits to serve multiple (not just one) objectives, this research required a broader timeframe. Specifically, first-hand information was collected in Kotor (May 2006 and August 2008), Dubrovnik (August 2022), Saint Paul de Vence and Èze (June/July 2013), and Nafplio and Monemvasia (August 2023). The goal of our research and manuscript was not to compare towns simultaneously but rather to examine the phenomenon of overtourism itself, regardless of the timing of its occurrence. We aimed to investigate the outcomes of the pressures overtourism creates in small to medium-sized towns and to analyze the policies that underpin these outcomes.

A covert approach (without notifying subjects about observation) was utilized because individual behaviors were not observed. The emphasis was on estimating spatial accessibility, urban and communal solutions, and the distribution of visitors in space. Therefore, the observations were predominantly structured, with data collection conducted using predefined variables but with the flexibility to embrace unexpected aspects if they appeared relevant.

3.2. Desktop Research

Desktop research offers several advantages, including its cost-effectiveness, accessibility, and efficiency in obtaining a broad overview of the subject matter [78]. Moreover, it allows researchers to explore a wide range of viewpoints, enhancing the depth and comprehensiveness of their analysis. Desktop research, i.e., literature review, was applied in this research as a secondary data source.

This method involved gathering information from various written sources, such as books, academic journals, reports, urban plans (land cover), legal acts, and online statistics (demographic data, tourist visits, and budget revenues). By scrutinizing previously published studies, documents, and datasets, researchers gained valuable insights into the overtourism phenomenon in the Mediterranean region and beyond. This allowed for contextualization of the findings. Combining desktop research with observations aimed at

decreasing limitations, such as the potential for outdated online information, as well as the challenge of synthesizing diverse sources into a coherent narrative.

3.3. Interviews

Despite their limitations, interviews with convenience sampling remain a valuable tool for collecting qualitative data, particularly in situations where time and resource constraints necessitate a practical and efficient approach to participant recruitment [79]. Our research design did not initially involve interviews. However, the opportunity that presented itself at several locations was seized (one interview in Dubrovnik and the other in Kotor). We talked to the residents and individuals who worked in the historical towns. These data served to gather in-depth information about the experiences, perspectives, and behaviors of residents. Given that the interviews were unstructured, we utilized them as a supplement to our two primary data collection methods. This resource was limited by the lack of proficiency in the local language at all locations.

3.4. Data Analysis

The comparison method can be particularly useful in social science research, allowing researchers to gain insights into the effects of different factors or interventions and make comparisons across different contexts or populations [80].

Data analysis involved descriptive and numerical comparisons of the data collected for each case study. The methodical workflow relied on the description of similarities and differences in approaches to using tourism for the revival of historic places and their outcomes regarding “overtourism”. The positive/negative relationship between the recognized approaches and their outcomes enabled us to make conclusions about the effectiveness of measures applied and estimate the effectiveness of measures to be taken.

The anticipated outcome of the case comparison is to identify general policy approaches. Considering the overall relevance of the sustainability framework in tourism development, we assessed the impact of the identified policy approaches on relevant sustainability dimensions such as economic, social, and environmental. Additionally, we evaluated the identity dimension, which is crucial for small and medium-sized coastal historical towns. All sustainability dimensions are assessed and graphically presented through the lens of context-specific (dis)advantages of small and medium-sized coastal towns, identified in the course of the analysis. We examine the opposites of possible outcomes: depopulation-crowds, devalued-expensive, shallow sea bottom-deep sea bottom, and no heritage protection-international heritage protection.

The level of pressure on different policy approaches is graded as strong (3 points), medium (2 points), and mild (1 point). Regardless of the quantification, the evaluation is applied as a qualitative estimation (similar to the Likert scale in [81], where the quantification assists in indicating the level of pressure. The final result provides an understanding of which policy approach exerts the least, i.e., the most pressure on sustainable development. Finally, this allowed us to recommend a policy approach for the future development of small and medium-sized historical coastal towns.

3.5. Case Studies

In the context of “touristification” and “overtourism”, we focused on the small historic towns because they are the least flexible and usually depend on fragile and vulnerable societies, structures, and facilities that can be easily harmed by intrusion and pressure in the process of globalisation and the emergence of mass tourism [82–84]. Residents suffer the most from this transformation, which deteriorates their physical, cultural, and social environment.

In this research, we have selected areas within the scope of the Mediterranean basin, known as one of the most visited regions in the world. We have chosen six case studies, grouped into three pairs. Each pair represents similar towns in terms of geographical, cultural, and social milieu, while also maintaining uniqueness and difference between the pairs. The selection was guided by the following criteria (Figure 1; Table 1):

- All cases are under protection for its cultural and/or natural heritage;
- the old town remained intact;
- there is a new settlement beyond old-town walls;
- the demographic size of the towns is in scale of small or medium;
- the influx of tourists significantly exceeds the number of inhabitants, scaling up to 1:1000;
- present conversion of buildings (and land) from their original designation to touristic amenities;
- towns are in different phases of “overtourism”;
- recognized attempts to regulate the number of tourists via policies and other development documents (either to increase, preserve or decrease).

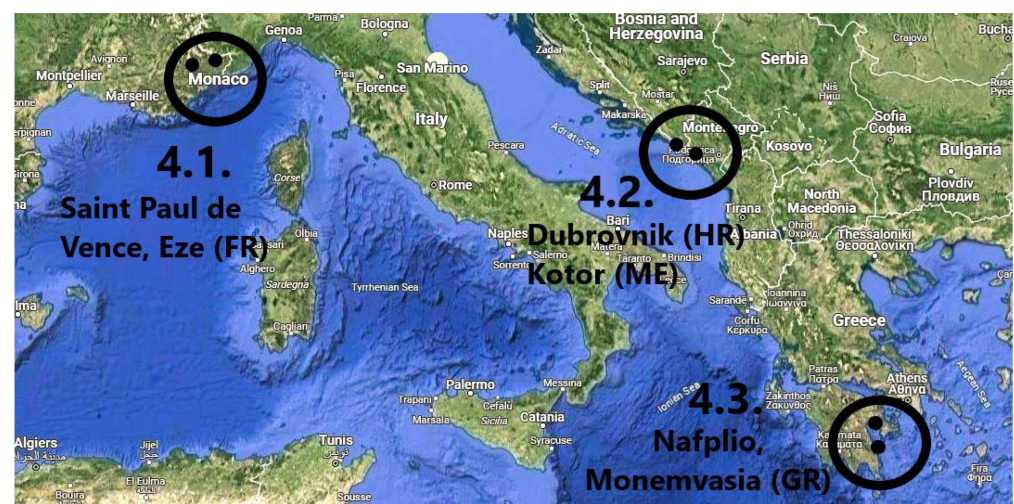


Figure 1. Case study locations 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 (source: base layer—Google Maps, processed by the authors).

Table 1. Features of the case studies (source: observations and [85–99]).

Characteristics	Locations on the Mediterranean Sea and Surrounding					
	Western Mediterranean Coast—France 4.1.		Adriatic Sea Coast—Croatia and Montenegro 4.2.		Eastern Mediterranean Coast—the Aegean Sea, Greece 4.3.	
	Saint Paul de Vence	Èze	Dubrovnik	Kotor	Nafplio	Monemvasia
Location	On the hills in the hinterland		Directly at the sea	Directly at the sea (deep in the bay)	Directly at the sea	Directly at the sea (on the island)
The ratio between the land cover of the old town and the modern settlement *	1:6	1:2	1:7	1:7	1:11	1:4.5
	* An approximate calculation was carried out by the Authors for this paper, using Corina data and QGIS software (version 2.6)					

Table 1. Cont.

Characteristics	Locations on the Mediterranean Sea and Surrounding					
	Western Mediterranean Coast—France 4.1.		Adriatic Sea Coast—Croatia and Montenegro 4.2.		Eastern Mediterranean Coast—the Aegean Sea, Greece 4.3.	
	Saint Paul de Vence	Èze	Dubrovnik	Kotor	Nafplio	Monemvasia
Population	2903 (1990) 3179 (2020) (municipality)	2446 (1990) 2222 (2020) (municipality)	1557 (2016) (old town) 43,770 (2024 municipality)	961 (2011) (old town) 22,437 (1991) (municipality) 22,601 (2011) (municipality) 21,916 (2023) (municipality)	11,897 (1991) 14,714 (2024) (municipality)	3616 (1990) (old town) 1299 (2011) (old town) ~15 permanent residents (2021) (old town) 4660 (2024) (community) 21,898 (2024) (municipality)
Number of visitors per day on average	~6800	~5000	~4100	~2400	~4100	~931 in the Lakonia Region, only with an overnight stay in a hotel
Ratio between inhabitants and visitors	1:725	1:820	1:1000	1:920	1:105	1:62
	* An approximate calculation was carried out by the authors for this paper, based on data on the number of inhabitants and the average number of tourist visits daily					
Heritage protection	Protected as a historical monument (national level)		UNESCO Heritage List		Protected as a historical monument (national level)	
	NATURA 2000					
Port capacity	Ships larger than 3000 passengers + crew	Ships larger than 3000 passengers + crew	Ships larger than 3000 passengers + crew	Ships larger than 3000 passengers + crew	Ships of up to 1000 passengers	Only yachts
Distance from the port	Ville-Franche-sur-Mer by Nice, distance 27 km form SPdV and 9 km form Eze		4 km distance (town outskirts)	In the city centre	In the city centre	2 km distance, nearby the main cost
Conversion of buildings within the old town	To artistic manufactures and workshops, galleries, souvenir shops	To hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops	To rental units, souvenir shops	To rental units, souvenir shops	To restaurants, artistic and craft shops	To hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, museum
Maximum real estate price EUR/m ²	~18,000		~8000		~6000	
	* An approximate calculation was carried out by the authors for this paper, based on reliable data, with conversion to the maximum average price of different types of real estate (apartments, villas, old buildings, new buildings) at the level of the region, i.e., wider locations 4.1., 4.2., and 4.3.					

4. Results

4.1. The Azure Coast—Saint Paul de Vence and Èze—Revitalization and Reviving (Location 4.1.)

Alpes-Maritimes is a part of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur in south-east France, situated between the Mediterranean Sea and the Alps. The French Riviera (French: *Côte d’Azur*), with its numerous attractive cultural and historical places, has more than 10 million tourists a year and represents the second leading tourist destination in the country, after Paris, with a 12.5% share of the whole tourism market in France [100,101] (Figure 2). The region benefits from 300 days of sunshine per year and 115 km of coastline. The main attractions of the region include cities: Nice, Cannes, Antibes, and the city-state of Monaco, but also surrounding small cities and villages with heritage values, such as our case studies.



Figure 2. Saint Paul de Vence (left) and Èze (right) (source: authors' unpublished archive).

According to available data, this area hosts 50% of the world's superyacht fleet, has 17 golf courses, and nearly 14.5 million passengers per year that pass through Nice Côte d'Azur Airport [102–106]. Tourism as a favoured and dominant activity accounts for about 75,000 jobs, and in 2022, estimated more than 70 million overnight stays are almost back to the level of visitors recorded before COVID-19 in 2019, with approximately 11 million visitors, including 53% of foreign travellers [102,105]. This area represents an important global real estate market, with 23.2% of available housing being second homes [7].

The examples of the two settlements of Saint Paul de Vence and Èze represent a model of strategy for revitalization and reviving confirmed through the planning process [100,101] (Table 2). Both places accommodate, through their fortification gates, about several thousand visitors per day, mostly in organised groups. Created in the Middle Ages, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, they had to experience different changes and adjustments, spread beyond established limits, go through the shutdown of some functions and the introduction of new ones, decay, and various updates. These places barely survived the 19th and 20th centuries because inhabitants left and moved to larger settlements, mostly because of employment opportunities [107–109]. Abandoned construction collapses often because the maintenance of protected heritage is far more expensive [110].

In the case of Saint Paul de Vence, the exit strategy was contemporary art, i.e., the opening of the Museum-Memorial "Fondation Maeght" with a private collection of masterpieces and later several galleries, as well as the setting of sculptures of modern art in public space. This kept the buildings busy and their maintenance profitable. The place became widely known and appreciated among visitors and lovers of art and design. The fact that several persons from public life (primarily from sectors of art—artists, writers, actors, etc.) lived in or visited the town contributed to the branding [111,112]. It was a spontaneous opportunity, well used in strategies for economic and demographic renewal, built into urban plans [113], resolving the problem of migrating and abandoning together with concerns of protection of historical heritage.

The motto of the town Èze, "Isis Moriendo Renascor" ("In Death I am Reborn"), and the symbol of the Fenix bird, give the best description of its destiny, standing as a museum-town with only a few original inhabitants living inside the fortresses [108]. The position in the hills (400 m altitude level), just above Monaco, is used for its brand because of the astonishing views over the Principality. The important factor for the survival of this settlement is the decision to change the designation of buildings from residential to a hotel of high standard. Luxury apartments are situated in old houses, and other buildings are adapted for small shops and restaurants. Also, a local perfume store, "Fragonard's", as well as irresistible French food and wine, round off the attractive offer of this small enclave. Besides exclusive and limited accommodation, more than 5000 other tourists per day visit the village [114]. The majority of visitors originate from cruisers; as day-trippers they do not stay overnight. After spending a few hours in the town, they just walk around, enjoy the perfectly preserved and restored architecture within the walls, small squares, streets, and passes, the charming atmosphere, and take pictures of the beautiful scenery.

One of Èze's prime attractions is its renowned exotic garden, which welcomed 7000 visitors during the Easter weekend of 2023. Housing a diverse collection of 300 plant

species, the park now grapples with its popularity. To manage the influx, the local authorities are contemplating the implementation of mandatory reservations for each visit. Additionally, the surge in visitors has posed challenges regarding parking availability, as the current facility offers only 90 spaces. To address this issue, a new underground car park with a capacity of 350 spaces is scheduled for inauguration in the autumn [113].

Because of the morphology of the terrain and narrow, steep, and paved streets, usually in the form of steps, there is no traffic inside the town walls, and parking for vehicles of visitors is located at the foot of the hill. However, now there is an opposite need—not to attract, but to consider measures on how to regulate or limit the number of visitors to a reasonable amount.

Contemporary spatial and urban planning in France, based on the principles of respect to ecological sustainability and creative economy, has a spectrum of hierarchically organised plans, starting from *Directives territoriale d'aménagement*—DTA (regional planning level), *Schema de coherence territoriale*—SCOT (metropolitan planning level), *Plan local d'urbanisme*—PLU (local planning urban document) in compatibility with *Programme local de l'Habitat*—PLH (housing planning), and *Plan de déplacements urbains*—PDU (mobility/transportation planning) [115].

These plans provided a satisfactory base to ensure the survival of historical places, allowing the expansion of the modern part of the settlement outside the fortress and implementing measures to preserve and conserve the historical entity by making an adequate change of purpose to maintain the vibrancy and function of the place. Tourism was represented as the most suitable commercial activity that would attract visitors and tenants and provide the economic prosperity needed to finance preservation while at the same time giving the impression of vitality, either in the form of accommodation capacities or the promotion of interesting concepts such as the art scene.

Table 2. Urban plan solutions as a base for the touristic revival of Saint Paul de Vence and Èze (source: observations by the authors, based on solutions and proposed measures in Plan local d'urbanisme—PLU for SPdV, 2020 and Plan local d'urbanisme métropolitain—PLUM for Eze, 2019 [113,116,117]).

Proposed Measures in the Sphere of Urban Planning		
	Similar Measures	Distinct Measures
Saint Paul de Vence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accepted fact that the town is primarily for tourists, the content is adapted to their interests, the daily crowds do not have a large impact due to few residents, instead of citizens tourists are greeted by sellers and restaurateurs; - tourists must handle their own crowding, so visit plans have to be reorganised; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating a new part of the settlement beyond the medieval walls (residential mostly, with public services, hotels, and accommodation); - conversion into artistic ateliers and galleries, craft manufacturers and workshops, souvenir shops, restaurants, museums, and memorial houses.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - active protection of heritage by converting old and abandoned buildings for tourist purposes; - secured connection with the coast for easy access for tourists; - restriction or prohibition of motor traffic, creating parking facilities for cars and buses, information centres and toilets are placed outside of the fortified part of the city. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small settlement in front of the city walls, with specific commercial contents (perfumery); - conversion into luxury hotel accommodation, restaurants, and souvenir shops; - planned additional parking places (underground garage).
Èze		

4.2. The Adriatic Sea- Dubrovnik and Kotor—At the Threshold of the Carrying Capacity (Location 4.2.)

Dubrovnik in Croatia and Kotor in Montenegro are cities with historical towns on the Adriatic coast. They are historically and culturally important centres and UNESCO-listed sites [118,119]. Dubrovnik is famous for its well-preserved medieval walls, which encircle the old town and offer stunning views of the city and the Adriatic Sea. There are

numerous churches, palaces, and monasteries built in Renaissance and Baroque styles, showcasing the city's rich cultural heritage [120]. Kotor's old town is renowned for its medieval architecture, ancient city walls, and picturesque streets. Its architecture reflects its Venetian heritage, with landmarks such as the Cathedral of Saint Tryphon and the Church of St. Luke showcasing Venetian Gothic and Renaissance styles [121]. The status of cities under the protection of UNESCO provides great opportunities but also brings significant responsibility in the area of restoration of the monumental heritage, constant care, and a specially provided budget for the maintenance of the monumental fund.

Tourism has always been a development opportunity, but the extent of inflow has gotten out of control, now threatening to suffocate cities and significantly reduce the quality of the tourist offer (Figure 3). Mass tourism in Dubrovnik has resulted in a decrease in the number of residents in the World Heritage site (old town), gentrification of the World Heritage site area, touristification, and commodification of heritage, high dependence on tourism (monofunctionality), and degradation of authenticity and tradition [122].

Decades ago, cities eagerly welcomed guests from the first cruisers as a new kind of massive organised tourism [123,124]. Now, suffering the consequences of overcrowding, they are considering strategies for how to distribute the number of cruise ships and tourist arrivals, as it happens that seven ships arrive at the same time daily [125–128]. Another issue is the increasing the number of Airbnb or Booking.com accommodations, making cities hollow without regular residents and leaving them to short-term tenants [129]. The effects of the Airbnb phenomenon may be positive as well as negative because of upgrading, adaptation, and reusing of the buildings or opening new businesses and contributing to the local economy, but may cause gentrification, eviction, and residential segregation [122,130,131].

The additional issue in the gentrification of Dubrovnik is that rental and second-home residences are not owned by locals but usually by wealthier foreigners. Therefore, the jet set, who want to enjoy the Mediterranean climate and ambiance, prevails in the town, and almost the only locals are retirees (not necessarily old) [122]. The rise in real estate prices, but also the basic costs of living, forces local people to sell their houses and move to less expensive locations in the area. The crowds and commotion during the day and night, parties, and incidents in public spaces cause discomfort for residents. Crowds, degradation of experience, threatened heritage, and failure of infrastructure and traffic organisation brought Dubrovnik in 2018 to the infamous third place on the list of cities to avoid [132–134].

In neighbouring Kotor, pressure on the existing infrastructure and environmental quality has been created, especially in the summer period, i.e., during the season. On the outskirts of the historical core of Kotor, there is constant demand for new building land for renting apartments, to the extent that the UN organization threatened in 2017 to remove Kotor from the World Heritage List because immoderate construction threatens the main attraction [135]. This was a sign of awakening to the authorities, so they decided to introduce a temporary moratorium on new construction [125,136]. According to the shop owners interviewed, the most significant inconvenience is the huge fluctuation in clientele. There are parts of the year when the town is completely empty, as opposed to the summer season and particularly the days with cruise ships, when the crowds are unbearable.

To prevent the negative effects and to take control over the impact of tourism on the lives of protected historical towns, local authorities were forced to create strategies with a set of measures that should introduce order and restrictions. Cross-border cooperation has been established based on the "Respect the City" project and the Tourism Development Strategy, which is being implemented in Dubrovnik (Table 3). The project relies on integrative, cross-sector, and social innovation partnerships within short-, mid-, and long-term measures for sustainable tourism experiences for all: Residents, travellers, businesses, communities, and nature. The primary measures had the aim of introducing order into the dress code and behavior of tourists with the implementation of more strict penalties for misbehaviour and reducing congestion in tourist bus traffic [122,137,138].

It was concluded that joint actions lead to problem resolution, i.e., the cooperation between Dubrovnik and Kotor should be extended to other cities that are on cruise compa-

nies' itineraries to jointly participate in creating the schedule of cruise ship arrivals [139]. Organising the cities on the routes of cruise companies is necessary, harmonising the needs of the destinations with the needs of the tourist industry, because everything should be done to make cities tailored to the citizens [140]. However, from the citizen's point of view, a reduction in the size of the ships might be the only solution for overcrowding (based on the interviews).



Figure 3. Dubrovnik (left) and Kotor (right), (source: [132]).

Table 3. Management measures, organization, and urban planning (source: based on [132,133,141, 142]).

Short-Term Measures (2018)—Mostly within Organisational Measures and New Technologies	Mid- and Long-Term Measures (2019 and 2020 and Beyond)—Oriented on Planning and Developing New Capacities
<p>Restrictions of organised one-day excursions to the Old City on monthly, weekly, and daily bases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - limit to 8000 cruise passengers per day - better coordination and distribution of the passenger embarkation and disembarkation time with the Port Authority 	<p>Capacity Building and Communications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visibility and activities launch of the “Respect the City” project - education and awareness-raising activities for locals and the tourist sector - involvement of media, designers, experienced sustainable development community experts and activists, volunteering centres, and civil society in “Respect the City” project
<p>Relief of public spaces, and the reclaiming of usurped public areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 20% decrease in the use of public area spaces for restaurants and cafes open gardens - 80% decrease in the use of public areas for booking stands on critical points - limited delivery time and entry into the city centre 	<p>Integrated and sustainable urban planning methods and models for balanced development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introduction of strategic risk management - creation of specialized urban development studies and urban plans - creation of a polycentric urban development with new attractions - creation of sustainable and smart tourism development projects about mobility and visitor management integrated solutions
<p>Smart Services Integration for Better Mobility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - introducing a smart info system for forecasting the number of people in the city - providing a real-time information platform (mobile application) for visitors - introducing tourist cards for reservations and ticket purchases - Smart parking, Alter Eco, car sharing 	<p>Development of traffic, alternative public transportation, and mobility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - intensifying the boat taxi services and integrated eco-transport solutions - development of park and ride, park and sail, and system of public and public-private garages - construction of new roads, tunnels, city entrance, and main crossroads investments

4.3. The Peloponnese—Nafplio and Monemvasia—Agreeable Magnitude (Location 4.3.)

On the coast of eastern Peloponnese and Aegean Sea, there are “must-see”, “still hidden gems of Greece”, and “unspoiled” Nafplio—charming Venetian port and first Greek capital and Monemvasia—the unique Byzantine’s island fortress (Table 4) [143,144].

Nafplio has all the qualities to be a favourite destination that everyone is happy to return to: It is an accessible and pleasant city, layered and multicultural, easy to navigate with enough points of interest, well spatially organised, and irresistibly elegant, romantic, and iconic in its appearance (Figure 4). Above the old part of the city, rounded into a unique pedestrian zone within a clear orthogonal grid of streets, directly connected to the yacht marina and port for medium-sized cruisers, there are two fortifications [145]. The building fund was used meticulously and followed the regulations for interventions in protected areas, according to determinants for historical and traditional settlements as well as landscapes, based on the Greek Law 4858/2021 “Sanction of the Code of Legislation for the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General” [146]. It underwent renovation and was well maintained.

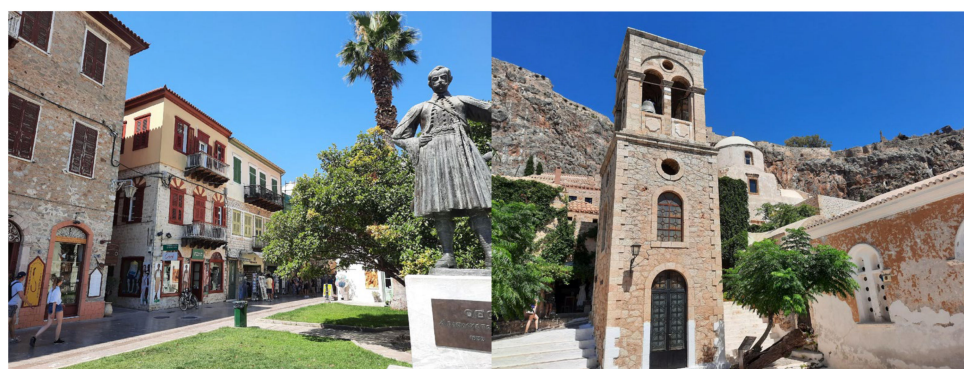


Figure 4. Nafplio (left) and Monemvasia (right), (source: authors’ unpublished archive).

The impression is that the city successfully copes with the volume of tourist visits, especially day trips. It possesses adequately positioned and dimensioned parking lots, tourist signs for orientation, and easy navigation to monuments, museums, and squares. The arrival schedule of ships, organised walking tours of the city, the existence of tourist buses that drive to the fortress, electric trains that travel along the peripheral streets, and boat tours, as a unified system are functioning well. Nafplio has implemented measures such as controlling the number of tourist buses allowed in the city centre and limiting access to certain popular places [147]. It is a real revelation to visit a tourist place where there is nothing excessive, especially no crowds and congestion, endless lines of people moving through narrow passages like in Santorini, Rhodes, etc. The city itself is not only an isolated historical core but also a much larger modern part spreading along the bay, which leads to its “normal” everyday life, apparently independent of tourist attractions in the old town. It also seems that visitors have a deep respect for this place, not because of its importance in history and fascination with what we call *genius loci*, but because they can truly enjoy themselves dedicatedly and relaxed, even if it is a short visit [148–151].

Monemvasia, as its name suggests “only one way-path”, is more difficult to reach and requires travelling by land across the entire peninsula, located on a small and geologically interesting island, connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus. The modern settlement retreated in front of the unique location and formed on the nearby coast, so that now the residents of the new part go to work in the old town, with jobs mainly in the tourist sector. Narrow and steep streets make it impossible to get into the city walls by car, so the vehicles are parked at the parking lot at the beginning of the island. Access is provided without long delays for delivery and taxi vehicles, with a turnpike in front of the main city gate.

Thanks to the importance and uniqueness of Monemvasia, the Ministry of Culture defined strict protection measures before the town became a tourist attraction. Nevertheless, there are requests to include the location in a more massive visit by cruise ship operators, even though it is already evident that such an influx of tourists has brought serious problems to other cities and unbearable saturation.

Some developments, such as the brand-new museum, have been built in reconstructed and adapted buildings, which is one more attraction that has helped preserve the site. Like Èze in France, a recent surge in tourism has led to numerous buildings being restored and converted into exclusive hotels with apartments located in old houses, and most of the other buildings have shops intended for tourists and restaurant facilities.

The prescribed measures protect the medieval urban matrix and defend against new and inappropriate construction, requiring as a precondition for issuing a permit for any reconstruction the prior submission of the original archival project, photographs, or recorded condition of the building, and the new project that must fit in stylistically with the surrounding area [152]. The proposed cable car from the lower town to the upper fortifications and monuments will provide better accessibility to tourists but also emergency services. The construction of the cable car was included in the Culture Ministry's program with the European Recovery and Resiliency Fund and has been budgeted at EUR 6800,360, but provoked some objections from the public. The lift construction has not yet been implemented, but the plan, considering the source of funding and EU support and the process of public bidding in progress, is very serious and certain [153,154].

Table 4. Sustainable development measures for Nafplio and Monemvasia (source: observations by the authors; [154,155]).

Town	Development measures
Nafplio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The moderate and steady influx of tourists, seasonal timetable of arrivals of tourists from cruisers during the morning when there are not many other tourists and residents in the city, living afternoon for locals and stationed tourists; - dispersion of content and functions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) networking with other significant places in the surroundings; (b) accommodation facilities in the new part of the city, nearby villages and beaches; - good traffic connections, adequate street matrixes and capacities for stationing traffic, the appropriate location of the port, short distances and clear walking routes within the city, organised tourist transport for sightseeing (bus, electric train, boat); - General urban plan of Nafplio (adopted, [156]).
Monemvasia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderate advertising and branding; - the natural impossibility of docking large cruise ships; - strict conditions for the preservation of the building fund, permanent work on maintenance by the municipal multidisciplinary body (architects, civil engineers, archaeologists, etc.)—the quality-of-life committee considers every request for reconstruction or restoration and issues permits; - balancing act between preservation and modernity: installation of sewage system, running water and electricity in the middle of the 20th century; - special traffic and parking regime, as well as delivery of goods, plans for a cable car/lift; - Modification of Monemvasia's general urban plan (in progress).

4.4. Policy Approach Sustainability Evaluation

The geographical context of maritime towns has the advantage of being located on or near the coast, which presents an opportunity for tourism development. However, the geography of the seabed determines the types and sizes of ships that can approach them, thereby influencing the number of tourists they can accommodate simultaneously. Larger ships and cruisers result in higher crowd saturation and more significant disruption to local life. Consequently, this can contribute to the depopulation of permanent residents.

Regarding cultural context, some towns are designated with international titles and receive protection for their historical and cultural values, such as UNESCO sites, which enhances their popularity. However, if the geography of the seabed permits the docking of large cruisers, these towns and entire regions may experience traffic congestion and immense crowds, which are not enjoyable for locals or tourists.

As the previously presented analysis showed, coastal historical towns develop policy approaches to produce positive and control negative tourism aspects. **The tradition-preservation policies** (to the highest extent applied in Greek cases) aim to preserve the original values of the towns by maintaining a lifestyle similar to the time of their construction—without motorized vehicles. They contribute to the enjoyment of tourists but challenge the lives of residents and the communal maintenance of towns (need for alternative ways of waste collection, postal services, goods delivery, etc.).

Attraction policies (to the highest extent applied in French cases) aim at the enhancement of the attractiveness of destinations for visitors, whose expenditure is reinvested into the maintenance of the built heritage and the life within the historic city. This includes initiatives such as the opening of museums, the development of parks, the restoration of historical buildings for tourist accommodation, as well as restaurants and cafes offering local cuisine and reflecting the local way of life. When the effects of such policies are carefully managed, the benefits are mutual for both tourists and residents.

Ultimately, towns, where tourist attraction policies have borne fruit (e.g., Dubrovnik and Kotor), are compelled to devise **restriction policies** to regulate the number of simultaneous visitors, the size of ships allowed to dock in the port, property ownership rights based on origin, and similar measures. Such policies have a positive effect on the quality of life for residents, although it is questionable whether this effect is sufficient, particularly in the case of overtourism. They are conditionally favourable for tourists as well; on one hand, tourists must plan and announce their visit in advance, but if they do so timely, their enjoyment of the city visit will be enhanced.

In Figure 5, we graphically illustrate the evaluation of the pressure exerted by policy approaches on sustainability dimensions. The analysis conducted so far indicates that the pressure on small and medium-sized historical coastal towns depends on factors such as geographical and cultural heritage context, with the main concerns being demographic depopulation and economic devaluation. Sustainability dimensions are evaluated with regard to each pressure factor.

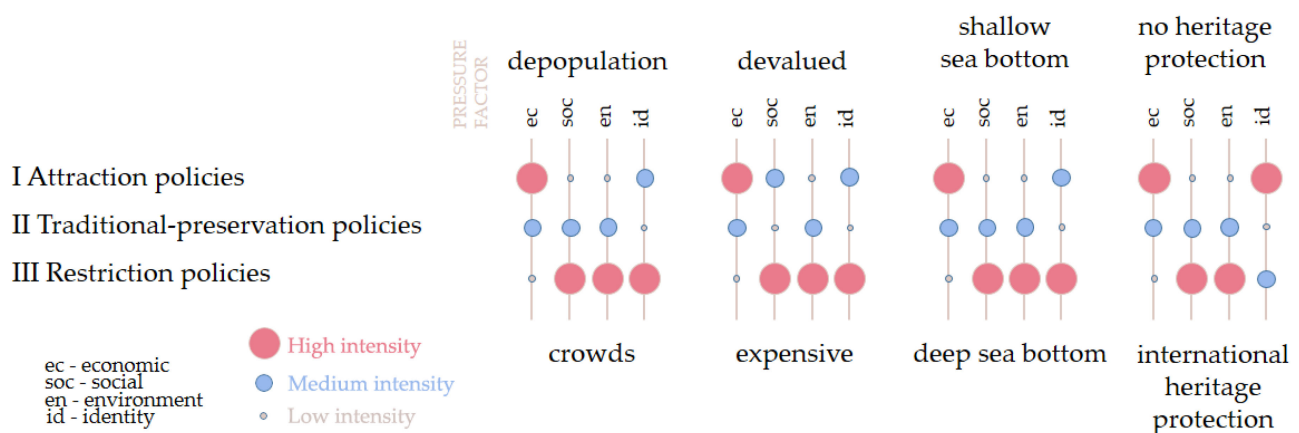


Figure 5. Pressure of policy approaches on sustainability dimensions (source: authors).

As outlined in the methodology, the highest pressure is scored with 3 points, moderate pressure with 2 points, and mild pressure with 1 point. Consequently, we obtained 30 pressure points for attraction policies, 27 pressure points for tradition-preservation policies, and 39 pressure points for restriction policies. This indicates that tradition-preservation policies exert the least pressure on sustainable development, whereas restriction policies exert the most pressure.

5. Discussion

We identified three different policy approaches in our case studies. However, the definition of tourism development, especially regarding overtourism threats, is complex

and multifaceted. As emphasized by [23,157], there is no one-size-fits-all solution, or at least there should not be. The success of these measures varies depending on the specific destination and the extent to which they are implemented and enforced [22]. As we can see from the cases analyzed within this study, active planning and the application of measures are more successful if applied before excessive development. However, overall, these policies and approaches have shown some level of success in addressing overtourism in all cases in the Mediterranean region. In Dubrovnik and Kotor, where overtourism was a major issue, the implementation of visitor quotas and limits has helped reduce overcrowding and preserve the city's cultural heritage [33,158,159], but it has not solved the issue.

Each tourism destination appears to follow a tourism cycle, regardless of when it starts—whether now or decades ago. At the point of the deterioration of cultural and architectural heritage and the commencement of tourism development, tourism was welcomed by all stakeholders and residents. Therefore, the aim of policies has been to attract tourists [52]. With the arrival of tourists, economic, social, and environmental changes begin to occur. Thus, academia has been interested in addressing tourism impacts on social and environmental aspects for over 50 years (e.g., [160–166]). The newest concern, which emerged in the 2010s, is tourism gentrification as a negative aspect of economic development in tourist destinations (e.g., [82,124,167]). Hence, there has been a shift in the focus of policies from the preservation of tangible heritage (i.e., architecture) to the preservation of social aspects and the quality of life for original residents (i.e., intangible heritage), as seen in the cases of Dubrovnik and Kotor. Ref. [118] contends that the previous consensus, which focused on quantifying tourists for economic development purposes, must now consider all sustainability dimensions. This approach aligns with our recommendation that development is crucial for heritage preservation but needs to be carefully controlled, preferably through the adoption of tradition-preservation policies. Ref. [26] further suggests that census efforts should engage local stakeholders to prevent touristification and museification of destinations, potential outcomes of the attraction policy approach.

The principle of resolving the fate of the old districts and settlements through “a static conservation—museumification” is no longer acceptable and rarely applied [12]. In contrast, dynamic rehabilitation involves integrating the heritage into the trends with the inclusion of the past and specific characteristics of contemporary life [168]. The old quarters can be saved only if they keep their residents and continue to participate in social and economic developments with the necessary adjustments [169]. Urban planning is the strategy for joining interests that integrates sustainable development, the process of urban rehabilitation, intense improvement of living conditions, strengthening of local identity, authenticity, and diversity, and increasing economic competitiveness, particularly in the sphere of clean industries such as tourism and culture [170]. Adequate land use is the best form of heritage conservation [171]. If the return of the original use is no longer possible, it is necessary to find a designation that will, with minimal intervention, preserve the character of the site [172].

Tourism has a significant impact on historical places, making them more livable and self-sustaining in the economic and heritage preservation aspects, provoking regeneration, but attempts must be made to establish frameworks in which a certain level of quality of the visit will be ensured [57]. Urban renewal and revitalization strategies are excellent options for stopping extinction and starting revival, considering not only physical components but also social and economic components [170,173]. Pontrandolfi and Manganelli [174] advocate that the spectrum of interventions ranges from finding compromises between protection and residents' needs to changing purpose with compatible, usually commercial, cultural, touristic, or public functions.

Ref. [175] notices examples of cities that would fit to users of attraction policy approaches, as well as restriction policy approaches: Previous promoting themselves as pleasant destinations to fulfil the strategic goal of securing income from the tourism branch, the latter considering how to avoid overcrowding and saturation by introducing certain limitations. It is a challenge to find balance and the best way to limit negative effects and

keep the benefit of tourist visits, especially if the touristic development policies succeed. According to [176], it is not realistic to avoid annual tourism, but a thoughtful, comprehensive, and multidisciplinary strategy for moderation should be implemented for all exposed to excessive visitor flow. Therefore, careful and sensitive planning is required [176] in light of the tradition-preservation policy approaches. Income from tourism, although useful in maintaining the architectural heritage, must not become the primary goal [177].

Stakeholders that directly or indirectly earn from tourism might not complain about oversized visits, and they might not be interested in a mild, consensual, and considerate policy approach. However, those inhabitants from exposed quarters that do not participate directly in the share of revenue have serious complaints [27]. If locals, due to difficult living conditions and halted development caused by heritage protection conditions and restrictions, moved to other less expensive and crowded places, towns would be turned into scenery for tourists [52]. So, it is about the scale that goes from lifestyle disorder to serious social and economic questions [55,56], rising prices, especially rents, and social changes connected with it, such as gentrification [47,53,82,129,178]. Jover and Díaz-Parra [178] are even asking, “Who is the city for?”.

Andrade et al. [179] emphasize the necessity of developing policies to maximize the benefits of cruise ship tourism while mitigating its negative impact and promoting coexistence between visitors and inhabitants for the long-term sustainability of both tourism and local activities. In the context of European port cities, they systematized five types of policies based on their creators: International guidelines, case studies, policies of public entities, collaborations between public and private agents, and literature reviews. Our findings complement theirs by focusing on the phases of development and shifts in approach—from economic to sustainable to social considerations.

However, finding a sustainable solution remains a complex challenge. Unlike mass tourism, sustainable tourism is more community-driven, socially responsible, focused on the quality of the vacation experience, and promotes responsible consumer behavior [180]. It respects the principles of size, nature, characteristics, and capacities for accepting visitors of cultural assets and of the local population that establishes a threshold of tolerance. The organization of sustainable tourism involves several components: Strategy planning in using resources, detailed selection and creation of new activities, defining implementation measures of the strategy and monitoring indicators, promotion and marketing of the product, and providing services and facilities with respect to cultural heritage and nature [40]. It also requires conducting a previous analysis of the positive and negative impacts and effects on the environment and society [37]. All of the mentioned should be included in strategic and urban plans focused on creating opportunities for the further development of the settlement as a tourist destination.

Some aspects and measures in the most sustainable approach to tourism development, according to [181], have to point out restrictions on the number of visitors to not disturb the residents and local life. Some cities consider charging entrance to old cores as a measure to discourage tourists and fill the budget at the same time [182]. Dubrovnik charges significantly for the walk on the city walls. The limitation of visitors by day, rules concerning communal order, creation of arrival schedules, or dispersion of events are just some of the additional organisational and managerial measures. Similarly, the promotion of off-peak travel has shown positive results in destinations such as Spain, where visitor numbers have been more evenly distributed throughout the year, reducing the strain on infrastructure and resources during peak season [183].

6. Conclusions

The contribution of this study is in the review and comparison of examples from which we learn about elements influencing overtourism. The limitation of this research is the lack of longitudinal data that allows the comparison of case studies over an identical period. Nevertheless, this paper explores a range of contexts and approaches.

The geography of a region and its cultural heritage embody both comparative advantages and disadvantages that can be moulded and influenced by policies, spanning from the pre-tourism phase to the phase of overtourism. In general, we identified three types of policy approaches: Tradition-preservation policies, attraction policies, and restriction policies. The scores revealed that tradition-preservation policies exert the least pressure on sustainable development, whereas restriction policies exert the most pressure. The analysis also suggested that attraction policies tend to be used in the initial phase of tourism development, whereas restriction policies are applied in phases after overtourism has already occurred and impacted the town.

Therefore, we advocate for the application of tradition-preservation policies from the very beginning or as **pre-tourism policies** to yield the most successful outcomes in fostering a balanced development between tourists and residents, economic upsurge, social justice, and the preservation of historical identity, culture, and architecture. This underscores the importance of proactive planning and strategic interventions to mitigate potential negative impacts and maximise the benefits of tourism for both the local community and visitors, before negative impacts occur.

The determination of authorities to prioritise not only economic benefits but also the preservation of the *genius loci* and the quality of life of residents is equally crucial. This underscores the importance of adopting a **holistic approach** to tourism management that takes into account the unique character and identity of a destination, as well as the well-being of its residents. By valuing and safeguarding the intrinsic qualities that make a place special, authorities can ensure that tourism development enhances rather than detracts from the overall living experience of residents.

A high concentration of appealing small towns along the Mediterranean coast ought to serve as points of **dispersal for tourists**, even those arriving via large cruisers. The predominant means to economically sustain life in small historic cores is through tourism development and complementary activities, which extend to all facets of community existence. As with most individual and collective decisions, **moderation is paramount**. However, future research endeavours should aim to establish a more precise (potentially quantified) measure of the optimal balance between the economic benefits derived from tourism and the potential disruption to the functional lives of residents in tourist destinations. Also, further research should look for more flexible solutions in the development of tourist hot spots and the dispersion of attractions as a tool for decreasing overcrowding.

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