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# "The Overwhelmed City": Physical and Social Over-Capacities of Global Tourism in Venice

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Abstract: Venice is one of the most famous iconic destinations and one of the most emblematic cases of overtourism affecting a historic city. Here, social movements against tourism have emerged as a reaction to vastly unsustainable tourist flows that have had dramatic and transformational impacts on Venetians' lives. The aim of this paper is to investigate how tourism transforms the social, cultural, and everyday geographies of the city. The effects of tourism on the historic city are conceived as a process of continuous transformation and repositioning. Taking into consideration the most tangible daily practices of tourists (eating, sleeping, and buying) and the finer dynamics of Venice's tourism problem, we translate data on these practices into a temporal and spatial analysis to better understand how dynamic the texture of the city is in relation to the tourism subsystem. A comparison between 2008 and 2019 is conducted to evaluate the impact of tourism on residential uses of the city and measure the sustainability of growth of the tourism facilities. The investigation highlighted an impressive accommodation's growth, from 8.249 in 2008 to 49.260 in 2019 of bed places (497% growth) in the entire historical city, a similar expansion is also evident in the total number of restaurants that has increased by 160% in all districts and a variations of 4% in shops instead of a population decline of -13% in the same period. In addition, a residents' survey in spring 2019 was conducted to better understand the intensity of these impacts and the motives for depopulation and the anti-tourism movements. We focus on how tourism, if not managed and planned, radically changes the social and urban structures of the city and the lives of local residents. We conclude by presenting some local theoretical and practical insights into the touristic pressure, provided by citizens' associations on one side and policymakers on the other.

**Keywords:** overtourism; urban tourism; Venice; social impacts; residents' perception

#### 1. Introduction: Overtourism, a New Word for an Old Problem

Venice is probably one of the most famous iconic destinations and one of the most emblematic cases of tourism overcrowding, where problems related to its impacts are evident [1,2]. The city is a victim of its own tourism success. Over the last decade, while many scholars have been interested in the traditional debate concerning the impact of tourism, some have attempted new conceptualizations, others acquire a critical understanding of inequality and injustice generated by tourism [3], and in recent years, some have adopted the narrative of social movements challenging the tourism growth premise, with the subsequent coining of the terms "overtourism" and "tourismphobia" [4–7]. Indeed, overtourism occurs in a physical sense (too many people in one place or lack of control over visitor flow and regulation), as well as a psychological perception by residents (feeling hemmed in by tourism). As pointed out in a recent book edited by Cheers, Milano, and Novelli, "The term 'overtourism' is a neologism, but not necessarily a new concept. It is undoubtedly a complex phenomenon associated

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with the liveability of a place, the well-being of residents, visitor experiences, and the extent to which stakeholders have a direct or indirect involvement in tourism" [7] (p. 1). The term should also be related to what is more generally known as the tourist carrying capacity, that is, the maximum limit to tourism development [8,9].

Heritage cities have always attracted many visitors, generating benefits and costs. To put it simply, when the costs exceed the benefits, tourism development is no longer sustainable. Interventions become necessary because the pressure of tourism—with its economic power—modifies spaces, alters facilities, and blocks infrastructure. These changes are reflected in the inhabitants themselves, who in turn change attitudes, habits, and perceptions [10]. In this context, however, "overtourism" is not only related to the economic status quo but defines the occurrence of far too many visitors for a particular destination to absorb over a given period. Indeed, "too many" is a subjective term, and it is best defined in each destination relative to the number of local residents, hosts, business owners, and tourists [11]. From a social and perceptive point of view, tourists and residents grow increasingly annoyed with each other. Indeed, boundaries and practices have become more and more fluid; tourists and residents share the same urban amenities, spaces, and places, especially in some heritage cities. Divergence between tourists' and residents' practices are especially visible in their lifestyles or in peculiar uses of daily places [12–14].

There are different views on the positive and negative impacts of tourism on cities. In their analysis of urban tourism, for example, Ashworth and Page [15] affirm that only a small part of the physical space, services, facilities, and host communities of destinations is notably affected by tourism. García-Hernández, Calle-Vaquero, and Yubero [16], however, argue that the impacts of positive tourism can influence the destination as a whole, but negative effects are likely to focus more on surrounding areas. The case of Venice is different due its limited geographical space, or better, has become different during the last years because of the spreading pressure of tourism. Tourism pressure occurred not only in areas where the major attractions are located (St. Mark's Square, the Rialto Bridge, and Accademia), but also in all six districts composing Venice's urban structure (Cannaregio, Castello, San Polo, San Marco, Dorsoduro, and Santa Croce). Van der Borg, Costa, and Gotti [9] proposed a distinct view. Using the case of Venice, they asserted that the entire urban community is affected by tourism in cities, not only its physical spaces. In recent years, high tourism pressure in Venice has attracted public attention, especially regarding the numerous demonstrations by Venetians against tourism. Scholars' interest in the city is part of a long tradition in tourism studies. Residents' experiences and perceptions became popular research topics in tourism and recreation, especially in economic and quantitative studies [16–18]. In recent decades, many researchers have paid attention to residents' perceptions of the quality of life related to the impacts of tourism [19–22].

The phenomenon of overtourism is also associated with the problematic relationship between tourists and hosts and the continuous exchange between the two. This has generated recent waves of anti-tourism protests in enduringly popular European cities such as Venice, Barcelona, Amsterdam, Rome, and Dubrovnik [1,14,23,24], as well as in other parts of the world, such as Central America [25] or in the Southeast Asia. The increasing conflict between host communities and tourists has led to the emergence of new urban social movements in different localities. In the Mediterranean area, for example, it has encouraged the emergence of the Network of Southern European Cities against Touristification. Cities such as Barcelona, Ibiza, Palma de Mallorca, Malta, Florence, and Venice, among others, are part of this network and aim to share common problems and local solutions [26]. The debate concerning the backlash of social movements against the pressure of tourism is not something new, but a common platform has emerged based on shared problems caused by touristic saturation, urban social issues and justice, touristic growth reinforced by neoliberal politics, and gentrification. On this platform, new paradigms for fighting the transformation of the city into a tourism destination are debated.

In Venice, the poster child of overtourism, social movements against tourism have emerged as a reaction to vastly unsustainable tourist flows that have had dramatic and transformational impacts

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on the lives of Venetians, among other things. The aim of this paper, following previous work that measured the rate of touristification in the city's districts [2], is to investigate how tourism transforms the social, cultural, and everyday geographies of Venice.

The effects of tourism on the historic city are conceived as a process of continuous transformation and repositioning. Taking into consideration the most tangible daily practices of tourists (eating, sleeping, and buying) and the finer dynamics of Venice's tourism problem, we translate the growing numbers of restaurants and bars (eating), accommodations (sleeping), and shops (buying) into a temporal and spatial analysis to better understand how these changes occurred on the texture of the city and how they could affect the residents' perception and the formal, socioeconomic, and symbolic aspects of the city landscape in relation to a tourism subsystem.

First, we examine the contemporary touristification of Venice, through a "panoramic" overview, and develop the debate through a literature review. Then a comparison between the transformations that occurred in 2008 and 2019 is conducted and the results are spatialized to show how and where effects have grown in the historic city center. Our analysis also evaluates the impact on and changes in residential and liveable uses of the city, as well as measures the sustainability of the growth of tourism facilities. We focus on how tourism, if not managed and planned, radically changes the social and urban structures of the city and local residents' lives. "Overtouristification" is not simply a problem of management and prices but has a relevant impact on the long-term well-being of communities. Finally, to understand these impacts, we also present the results of a questionnaire we conducted with three queries about inhabitants' current perceptions of tourism pressure in order to better locate and evaluate local impressions.

## 2. Venice: The Flooded City

On Sunday 2 June 2019, as if taking part in the worst disaster movie, the MSC cruise ship "Opera", a 275-meter-long ship weighing 65 tons, crashed into a wharf (close to the Marittima Terminal) and a tourist boat in Venice, injuring five people. In the era of social media, the news spread throughout the globe in a couple of minutes, and the images of the cruise ship slowly but inevitably advancing towards the dock were quite impressive [27,28]. Immediately afterwards, the Comitato No Grandi Navi ("No Big Ships Committee", an activist group born in 2012, hereafter also referred to as "the Committee") organized a protest at the crash site (For more details on the protest against cruise tourism and the environmental impact of the cruise ships on the Lagoon, see Vianello [29]). One week later, on Saturday June 8, a big demonstration was organized by the Committee, with large and across the board participation by local associations, some political parties, and especially citizens who were not necessarily previously involved in protests or activist groups. The demonstration drew thousands of people and started close to the crash site along the Giudecca Canal, marching to the heart of the city, St. Mark's Square (Figure 1). The impact of cruise tourism is just one side of the multilayered phenomenon called "touristification," but this battle became a sort of synecdoche of the tourism problem's complexity. Indeed, while the main goal of the demonstration and the Committee was to ban large cruise ships from St. Mark's basin (and possibly from the Lagoon), the protest was also an opportunity for many associations and citizens to openly voice their dissatisfaction with the seemingly unlimited, uncontrolled flood of tourists [30–33].

Taking into consideration intangible effects, Wang and Pfister [34] argued that the attitudes of residents towards tourism are also influenced by non-economic values. In the case of Venice, this assumption is ambivalent, because tourism has become a sort of monocultural economic driver for the city. The job market has gone in that direction as well and has narrowed considerably, making it difficult to find jobs outside the tourism sector. This causes the social fabric to lose its "socio-ecological" complexity. Using the metaphor coined by D'Eramo [10] (pp. 72, 142–143), Venice is becoming a kind of Company Town, where development depends on only one "industrial" sector, in this case, tourism. This produces not only impacts at an economic level but at social, cultural, and environmental levels as well, creating an internal rift between those who are employed (and interested) in tourism and

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those who are not. Obviously, there are nuances to this rift, as there are other groups with interests in tourism besides official employees, for example, people with part-time jobs in food services (mostly students), people with a job (in other sector) who rent housing to tourists, and especially a small galaxy of non-qualified positions (for example, welcoming people for Airbnb or other peer-to-peer platforms, cleaning staff, and workers for events, etc.). This juxtaposition between those who have direct or indirect interests in tourism and those who are excluded from the tourism business exacerbates contrasts, fragments social cohesion, and raises the level of protests surrounding the city's tourism debate. Instead of involving citizens and policymakers and looking at collaboration between various social groups, the possible (and desirable) dialogue about tourism management is moving towards an almost critical position rather than towards a shared field. In such a field, proposals that engage marginalized groups in a participatory and ethical production of solutions and in sharing benefits can improve the situation [35–39].



Figure 1. No Grandi Navi protest in St. Mark's Square after the cruise crash (source, author).

The debate about the tangible and intangible impacts of tourism on the city's social spaces is also associated with increasing frictions between inhabitants and tourists, as highlighted by the emergence of urban social movements, organizations, and associations in many European destinations [6,26]. The problematic relationship between visitors and inhabitants and the overlap between the two has generated recent waves of anti-tourism protests and Venice has its own part in this wave of an anti-tourism movement [40]. Therefore, the intensification of unsustainable tourism practices, the economic pressure of tourism exemplified by gentrification, and the expanded effects of short-term holiday rentals (such as Airbnb) on all urban areas, including peripheral zones, have commodified historical cities and favored a growing discontent between both hosts and guests. It is also remarkable how tourism has changed recently. Today, each of us is a potential tourist and part of the problem of fostering unsustainable touristic practices. For different reasons, purposes, and because of curiosities or necessities, we exercise our mobility. In the early 2000s, travel and tourism scholars sought to place "mobility at the heart of our understanding of tourism" [41] (p. 134), [42]. The "new mobilities paradigm" helps us understand global tourism in the context of other social and spatial travel processes while paying attention to the production and consumption patterns of both tourists and residents, all influenced by similar (and also opposite) gazes and performances in different places [43,44].

It can be argued that sustainable tourism across Europe's historical cities remains elusive, with the industry not fully comprehending how to achieve desirable sustainability goals [45]. Tourism has a Janus-faced character [46]; indeed, for many destinations, tourism has become the most important economic development vehicle, yet it is also the most problematic and complex to tackle and come

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to terms with. The paucity and ineffectiveness of regulations has doubtlessly increased residents' vulnerability and livelihoods in Venice. Over the past two decades, free market principles have been followed "dogmatically" by the various local government administrations. This can be seen for example in the liberalization of retail stores, where the pre-existing network of small shops, manufacturers, and workshops has made way for enterprises largely focused on tourism traffic, with little direct relevance to Venetian culture [32,47]. It can also be seen in the internationalization of real estate, especially housing, which has exacerbated the crisis of housing affordability for local Venetians [2] (p. 23).

## 3. Materials and Methods of Analysis: Eating, Sleeping, and Buying

The aim of this research is to underline the physical and social impacts of tourism on the historical center of Venice, analyzing its effects on the city's six districts (sestieri in Venetian). Looking at the urban form of Venice, there are central districts that are historically affected by tourism pressure. This is the case for San Marco and San Polo, which contain the most famous sights, such as St. Mark's Basilica, the Duke's Palace, and the Rialto Bridge. For this reason, these areas are also the most densely populated in terms of tourists, hotels, and purveyors of souvenirs. The southern part of the city, i.e., the district of Dorsoduro that includes the Giudecca Island was once home to cotton mills, traditional shipyards (namely squeri in Venetian), and factory workers. Today, it could be considered a sort of museum district, with the famous Accademia Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Punta della Dogana. The Santa Croce district, located in the northwest, experiences growing tourism pressure because of its location and the presence of cars, buses, and cruise terminals have made it into an excellent transportation hub for visitors. The two remaining districts, Cannaregio and Castello, have still managed to maintain a balance between tourism and residential activities, but with growing difficulty. These districts are more densely populated and have been historically the residential and working-class areas of the city. In Castello, the Biennale of Art is located, and in Cannaregio we find the railway station.

The physical and social concept of overtourism (surpassing carrying capacity) and the impossibility of moving facilities and visitor flows outside (due to Venice's geographical limits) has led to the entire destination of Venice being considered a historical city more than a destination with a historical center or area. To carry out our research, we considered urban changes that have occurred in the city in the last 10 years (2008 to 2019). What we would like to highlight and understand are the spatial patterns of the tourism industry and how the increase in tourism has threatened the social sustainability of the historical city and affected the entire historical city center. Before delving deeper into the analysis, it is necessary to briefly describe the two trends that have characterized Venice for several years now. These are the depopulation of the city, because of local residents leaving, and the continuous growth of the tourism sector, represented by an increase in the number of day trippers and overnight stays. Some data can easily demonstrate this. In 1951, the historical city of Venice reached its highest number of residents. Almost 174,800 people were living in its six districts. Today, on the one hand, only 30% of that number remain, namely 52,988 inhabitants [48]. On the other hand, the number of tourists from all over the world grows every year (with a trend of +3% of overnight stays in 2017 to the previous year, [49]. People arrive at one of the most popular tourist-historic cities in different ways, from low-cost flights to luxury cruise ships, as described by Visentin and Bertocchi [2]. From 2008 to 2018, the number of tourists arriving in the historical city increased from 2,075,000 to 3,156,000. This growth is astounding if we also take into account overnight stays which have grown from 5,677,000 to 7,862,000 [49] (pp. 16–39). To this data we should add daily commuters and workers. According to an estimate by Carrera [50], yearly commuter numbers in Venice are estimated at about 7.5 million, to which 17.5 million annual day trippers are added. These figures suggest that the number of people who daily crowd the "calli" (streets in the Venetian dialect) includes around 20,500 commuters and 66,800 day-tripping tourists.

A mixed-method approach was applied to analyze the rate of growth of the tourism subsystem and, in relation to that, the physical and social impacts within a destination. Taking into consideration the

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major activities of tourists, i.e., eating, sleeping, and buying and connecting them to tourism facilities, this research aims to, first, show how the urban texture of tourist-historical cities can change without a sustainable tourism growth approach and, secondly, measure (un)sustainable tourism's impact. Using this analysis, we aim to create tourism indicators that can monitor tourism and guide decision-making processes. The calculated indicators for the six districts of the historical center of Venice were developed according to the conceptual models of the main elements important to overtourism [51]. They follow the UNWTO Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism report (MST), which provided a useful categorization of tourism's characteristic products and activities (tourism industries). Data regarding official tourism facilities (number and type of hotel and extra hotel accommodation, restaurants and bars, and shops) were collected from the open data platform of the municipality of Venice with reference to the situation of January 2008 and January 2019 (http://dati.venezia.it/). Data on the number of residents [48] and tourists [49] were collected from there as well. The data about Airbnb listings (January 2019) were taken from an open dataset provided by the web platform "InsideAirbnb" (http://insideairbnb.com/).

In addition, a residents' survey in the spring of 2019 was conducted to better understand the intensity of these impacts and the motives for depopulation and the anti-tourism movements. Of the inhabitants living in the historical center, 12% replied, and we collected 6272 opinions.

Using these data, the study develops an analysis regarding two key aspects of tourism carrying capacity, physical-facility capacity and social-perceptual capacity [52] (p. 224). Combining a quantitative analysis of tourism infrastructure data (level of tourist development) with qualitative aspects (the level of tourism congestion and crowding of local activities perceived by residents), this research attempts to understand the impacts of tourism and the use (and overuse) of the tourist-historical city of Venice.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion: The Physical and Social Impacts on the City and Its Residents

#### 4.1. Physical-Facility Capacity

The physical facility of a tourism destination entails the major tourism subsystem that affects the historical city. This is connected to the main tourist activities while travelling, whether tourists travel for business or leisure reasons. In both cases, the spatial impacts of tourism development can transform cities' social patterns, and cause problems or conflicts with local residents' lifestyles. In addition to an analysis of the accommodation sector, we take other activities related to the tourist subsystem into consideration, in particular, the food sector (restaurants, bars, and pizzerias, etc.) and shopping (food, non-food, and mixed shops), in order to evaluate the changes that occurred in the urban structure of Venice. Taking those sectors as case studies of the physical-facility capacity of Venice's city center, we compare their prevalence and their spatial diffusion in the year 2008 and today (2019). To better situate these changes in their spatial context, we examine the pressure of each subsystem per single district. Finally, we calculate the impacts on the resident community.

#### 4.1.1. Sleep: Accommodation Sector

As Venice's city center is a global urban destination, its accommodation sector has seen a huge revolution in its features and typology. In addition to the continuous development of the official accommodation system (hotel and extra hotel facilities), this transformation of space and functions is characterized by the growth of sharing-economy activities related to tourism, especially peer-to-peer short-term holiday rentals offered on the Airbnb platform [53–55]. This is evident by the variation in the percentages of the total number of beds between 2008 and 2019 (Table 1). The growth is impressive, from a rise of 227% in the already "touristified" district of San Marco to a rise of 1635% in the San Polo district. All districts are ready to host tourists nowadays, showing a range of ratios between 6.4 beds for tourists for each 10 residents (Dorsoduro) and three tourist beds for each resident for the San Marco area (Table 1 and Figure 2).

In addition to the Airbnb phenomenon, it is necessary to remember regional law 33/2002, which made the opening of new extra-hotel facilities (e.g., bed-and-breakfasts) easier and less costly in terms

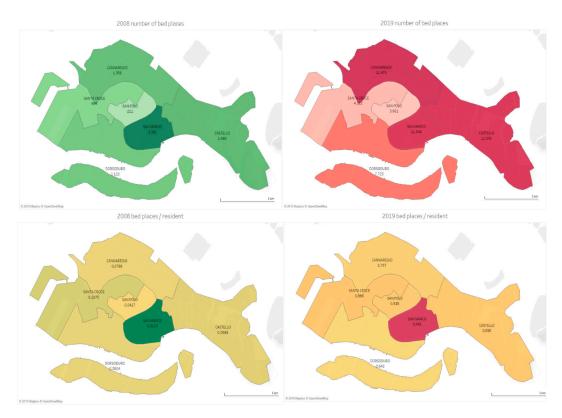
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of money and time. On the one hand, this was a useful strategy to develop tourism in the entire region, but on the other, it was tragic for Venice, who started to see homes changing from residency purposes to tourism before Airbnb's growth.

These dramatic changes of Venice's urban structure are shown by the variation % impacts 2008 to 2019 (Table 1), with extremely high rates of growth.

Table 1.	Accommodation situation and its impact on the local community	, 2008–2019 (authors'
elaboratio	on on open data Municipality of Venice: http://dati.venezia.it/).	

	2008 Residents	2019 Residents	2008 Number of Beds	2019 Number of Beds	Var% 2008–2019	2008 Beds/Resident	2019 Beds/Resident	Var% Impacts 2008–2019
Cannaregio	16,993	15,147	1356	11,473	746%	0.08	0.76	849%
Castello	15,140	12,868	1496	11,043	638%	0.10	0.86	769%
Dorsoduro	13,467	12,013	1110	7723	596%	0.08	0.64	680%
San Marco	4169	3632	3381	11,048	227%	0.81	3.04	275%
San Polo	5060	4477	211	3661	1635%	0.04	0.82	1861%
Santa Croce	5471	4851	695	4312	520%	0.13	0.89	600%



**Figure 2.** Spatial impacts of the accommodation sector on Venice districts, 2008–2019 (authors' elaboration on open data Municipality of Venice: http://dati.venezia.it/).

## 4.1.2. Eat: Restaurants and Bars

Although several studies have focused on the quality of the food sector in Venice [56,57], more has to be done to better understand the impacts of mass tourism on the diffusion, popularity, and replacement of food and beverage facilities in Venice's historical center. What is remarkable is that, even if the number of residents has experienced a significant drop between 2008 and 2019, the total number of restaurants has increased by more than 10% a year in all districts (Table 2). The physical impacts are showing in Table 2 and Figure 3, where it is clear that the initial situation of the San Marco district in 2008 (two restaurants for each 100 residents) has been almost equaled by all other districts in 2019, deteriorating San Marco's situation and destabilizing two less touristic areas, San Polo and

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Santa Croce. These two districts are, for different reasons, more strongly affected by the growth of restaurants and bars. San Polo is close to San Marco and is connected to it by the Rialto Bridge, one of the most important sights of the city. The Santa Croce district can be considered Venice's gate. In this area one finds all the car parks (for example the Tronchetto Island), the bus and tram terminal (Piazzale Roma), and the cruise ships' wharfs. If we see the growth in these districts as a consequence of the intensification of tourism pressure, the other three areas, Cannaregio (+160%), Castello (+181%), and Dorsoduro (+190%) show that the distribution of food and beverage facilities affects the entire historical city center; a sort of wildfire effect. The ratio remains less impressive just because these areas are the most populous of the city, but the variation in percentage underlines that this trend is valid for the peripheral areas as well.

**Table 2.** Food and beverage sector and its impact on local community, 2008–2019 (authors' elaboration on open data Municipality of Venice: http://dati.venezia.it/).

	2008 Residents	2019 Residents	2008 Number of Restaurants	2019 Number of Restaurants	Var% 2008–2019	2008 Restaurants/100 Residents	2019 Restaurants/100 Residents	Var% Impacts 2008–2019
Cannaregio	16,993	15,147	97	252	160%	0.57	1.66	191%
Castello	15,140	12,868	83	233	181%	0.55	1.81	230%
Dorsoduro	13,467	12,013	71	206	190%	0.53	1.71	225%
San Marco	4169	3632	87	182	109%	2.09	5.01	140%
San Polo	5060	4477	41	114	178%	0.81	2.55	214%
Santa Croce	5471	4851	45	115	156%	0.82	2.37	188%



**Figure 3.** Spatial impacts of food sector on Venice's districts, 2008–2019 (authors' elaboration on open data Municipality of Venice: http://dati.venezia.it/).

## 4.1.3. Buy: Shops

The evolution and distribution of commercial structures in Venice's city center is well described by Zanini, Lando, and Bellio (2008), who demonstrated the reshaping of the city in terms of retail business. Their work monitors the increase of stores dedicated to tourists between 1976 and 2007, showing the touristification in some districts and the "progressive marginalization of some areas (those

exclusively supplying residents' demand) excluded from the tourist routes" [36] (p. 17). Our research is an attempt to develop this study on the basis of the growth of commercial facilities and not on the type of shops, emphasizing the relationships with, impacts on, and distribution of spaces and residents. The commercial structure of Venice did not expand in the same way as the other two tourism subsystems. A 4% average growth (Table 3 and showed in Figure 4) for the entire destination seems natural for a city (to underline the shops degrowth of Dorsoduro district) in terms of total number of shops. The problem is always the same. There are new and more shops but there are less residents as potential customers (see the ratio per 100 residents). This is probably not related to the number of shops but to their typology. Assuming that the trends encountered by Zanini, Lando, and Bellio [36] are still going in the same direction since 2008, Venice today is characterized by a majority of shops dedicated to tourists and visitors, more than to residents and workers. There has been a visible increase in the number of restaurants, pizzerias, and, especially, ice-cream shops, many of which are now installed in refurbished inns and shops or small warehouses (normally located on the ground floor), and are a direct result of the need to address the demand of both tourists and work commuters. Tourism has also triggered an increase in the number of sunglasses and clothes stores, especially those located along the routes towards the central zone. These mainly comprise branches of well-known Italian stores.

**Table 3.** The commercial sector and its impact on local community, 2008–2019 (authors' elaboration on open data Municipality of Venice: http://dati.venezia.it/).

	2008 Residents	2019 Residents	2008 Number of Shops	2019 Number of Shops	Var% 2008–2019	2008 Shops/100 Residents	2019 Shops/100 Residents	Var% Impacts 2008–2019
Cannaregio	16,993	15,147	477	509	7%	2.81	3.36	20%
Castello	15,140	12,868	430	472	10%	2.84	3.67	29%
Dorsoduro	13,467	12,013	296	273	-8%	2.20	2.27	3%
San Marco	4169	3632	856	882	3%	20.53	24.28	18%
San Polo	5060	4477	384	392	2%	7.59	8.76	15%
Santa Croce	5471	4851	162	177	9%	2.96	3.65	23%



**Figure 4.** Spatial impacts of commercial sector on Venice's districts, 2008–2019 (authors' elaboration on open data Municipality of Venice: http://dati.venezia.it/).

## 4.2. Social-Perceptual Capacity

In addition to the analysis of the physical changes that occurred in the city center, we also conducted a residents' survey in the spring of 2019. Understanding residents' perceptions of the impacts of tourism on their daily lives is important to evaluate the emerging antagonistic feelings towards the pressure of tourism and the level of saturation and concerns regarding the excessive and pervasive presence of visitors in the everyday spaces and lives of inhabitants. Consequences can entail a permanent change in their lifestyles and more difficult access to amenities, with tangible and intangible damage to their well-being. In this section, we present and discuss the results of an online survey [58]. To disseminate the questionnaire, personal contacts and local associations have been the base for reaching a relevant number of inhabitants, using social-media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Our objective was to evaluate residents' social perception of tourism pressure. For this reason, we took into consideration only questionnaires filled in by people actually living in the historical city center of Venice. We collected 6272 opinions from 12% of the residents.

The six districts were merged into three more homogeneous areas (Centre, North, and South) for three reasons. First, the districts that we joined present relevant historical, social, and "tourist attractiveness" affinities. Second, the results of the physical impact analysis gave us the opportunity to notice some common trends and similar problems. Third, we could better spread our questionnaire over groups of people living in similar conditions. Therefore, we merged the San Marco and San Polo districts (called Center Venice), Santa Croce and Dorsoduro (South Venice), and Cannaregio and Castello (North Venice).

Three questions were proposed for the investigation of the inhabitants' perceptions of tourism pressure in order to better understand their reactions and reasons behind the friction between visitors and hosts:

- The first question was about overcrowding and its impacts on daily life. (How much does overcrowding affect your daily life? Choose from 0 = not at all to 5 = very much);
- The second question sought to investigate residents' intention to move out of Venice. (Have you ever thought about moving out of Venice? Why?);
- The last question was intended to comprehend what were possible reasons that pushed out residents. (If you thought about moving out, what are the main motivations? (1) lack of services for residents (shops, groceries, cinema, hairdresser, etc.); (2) too many tourists; (3) life has become too expensive; (4) Venice is itself inconvenient; (5) lack of jobs; (6) possibility to rent out their house; (7) personal reasons.).

Residents' feelings regarding overtourism are geographically distributed in a homogeneous way, proving once again that overcrowding and negative impacts related to tourism are spread out equally in the historical city. The following results demonstrate that there are no substantial differences between residents from different areas: they show a high value from 4.2 to 5 in North Venice, from 4.3 to 5 in South Venice, and from 4.4 to 5 in Center Venice; extremely high averages (Table 4). However, thoughts about leaving the city are stronger in the southern part, where 22% of total interviewees would be ready to leave the historical city center as compared with the other areas (13% in North Venice and 8% in Center Venice).

**Table 4.** Levels of social capacity of residents by Venice area (data from the residents' survey).

District	Avg. Tourism Stress from 0 to 5	Residents that Have Thought about Moving out	Reason to Move: Too Many Tourists	Reason to move: Lack of Services for Residents (Shops, Groceries, Cinema, Hairdresser)	Reason to Move: Life Has Become too Expensive	Reason to Move: Venice Is Itself Inconvenient	Reason to Move: Lack of Jobs	Reason to Move: Personal Reasons	Reason to Move: Possibility to Rent out House
Centre Venice	4.4	8.40%	20.49%	20.51%	19.55%	18.93%	19.82%	17.44%	22.30%
South Venice	4.3	22.37%	27.44%	29.04%	28.55%	25.89%	31.35%	30.81%	29.05%
North Venice	4.2	12.77%	52.08%	50.45%	51.90%	55.18%	48.83%	51.74%	48.65%

Residents' motivations for moving out of Venice's city center endorse the physical impacts described above, without substantial differences between districts. The negative externalities caused by changes in the urban texture described above are strongly felt by the local community. As a matter of fact, the most common reasons (Figure 5), ranked by frequency, are related to the following:

- 1. The number of tourists and overcrowding in the city (see Section 3);
- 2. The lack of services for residents (mainly shops and other facilities, see Section 4.1.3);
- 3. Life being too expensive for Venetians (this could open a discussion on the general increase of rental prices due to Airbnb, similar peer-to-peer platforms, and the liberalization of the real estate market, see Section 4.1.1);
- 4. The lack of jobs (outside the tourism market, see Section 2);
- 5. The inconvenience of a city that has been turned into a tourism monoculture (see Section 2);
- 6. Personal reasons (not attributable to tourism's impacts);
- 7. Possibility to rent out their house (big trend, described in Section 4.1.1).

In Figure 6, the level of tourism overcrowding perceived by residents increasingly affects the entire island, reinforcing the perception that the environment is more hospitable to tourists than to residents. Indeed, the average of tourism stress in the South (Santa Croce e Dorsoduro districts with an average score of 4.3 to 5) and North (Cannaregio and Castello districts with an average of 4.2) is comparable with results in the center (San Polo and San Marco districts with an average of 4.4). We cannot compare these results to similar surveys (due to the absence of these data), but we can assume that the detrimental effects on residents' well-being and the generalized perception of being "invaded" by tourists everywhere, in spite of tourism having grown for several decades, has been intensified by the introduction of Airbnb and the large territorial spread of this kind of accommodation (and other short-term holiday rentals). This could be the last straw for the island's local residents and may well constitute the most important driver in the establishment and amplification of anti-tourism movements. As shown in Figure 5, the deficiencies evident in the management of tourism flows and the associated regulation of tourism facilities and infrastructure are strong driving factors that influence residents' opinions. In addition, as seen in Figure 5, similar reasons for residents' moving out and similar opinions emerged in the three investigated areas. The more common reasons for the abandonment of the city are the same and also equivalent in the order of preference for the Center, the South, and the North, i.e., first, too many tourists; second, lack for services; and third, the cost of living.

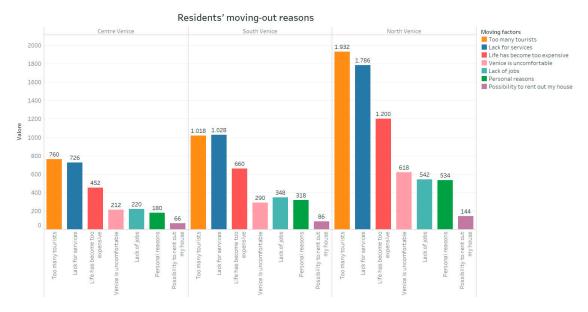


Figure 5. Resident's moving-out reasons (data from the residents' survey).

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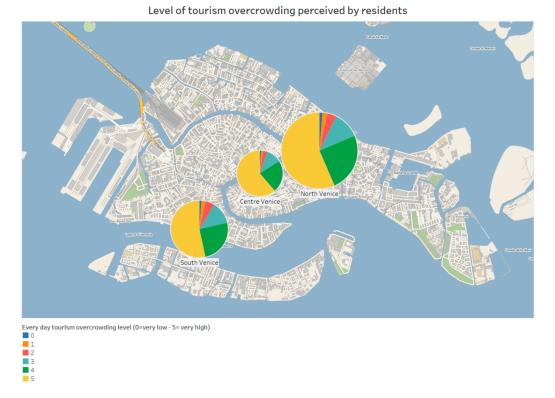


Figure 6. Level of tourism overcrowding perceived by residents (data from the residents' survey).

## 5. Conclusions and Some Theoretical and Practical Insights

## 5.1. Conclusions

Recently, increasing numbers of tourists and the changing trends of the tourism sector are two of the most important characteristics that affect destinations. This is particularly true when looking at historical and heritage cities [59–62]. The recent growth of tourist flows constitutes not only a threat to the conservation of heritage (tangible and intangible) but also strongly influences the well-being of residents, who face physical, social, economic, and cultural challenges that undermine their quality of life. In some European cities, such as Venice, Barcelona, or Amsterdam, the debate has been taken to the streets, and significant social mobilization is taking place with very "belligerent" positions against tourism. These are superficially associated with tourismphobia, especially by the media and some politicians. Recently, new contributions regarding the different aspects of overtourism have emerged [63–68], underlining the impacts on residents' communities and the aggravation of the consequences of uncontrolled tourism growth in urban and cultural destinations.

As we saw in the previous sections, the tourism sector has strongly impacted the evolution of Venice and its historical city center, especially in the last ten years. The city has maintained its tourism attractiveness despite increasing overcrowding, however, its daily uses and intangible heritage have changed profoundly. This evolution has influenced the city's urban and social structure, and facilities for tourists have spread over all six districts (accommodation, shops, restaurants, and bars), also through the refurbishment of abandoned production areas. This has led to the far-reaching transformation of commercial and residential structures, which are more and more adapted to tourist demands, increasing possible friction and points of contact between visitors and residents. The Venetian overtourism loop was well described by Russo in 2002 [1]. Our results show that today, this loop is more alarming and unhealthier for the "city ecosystem" than before, with a strong impact on the urban texture and social cohesion of the destination. Uncontrolled growth of the accommodation sector (Cannaregio +746%, Castello +638%, Dorsoduro +596%, San Marco +227%, San Polo +1635%, and Santa Croce +520%) has caused all residents of the city to suffer from the negative impact of

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tourism (Centre Venice a score of 4.4 to 5, South Venice 4.3 to 5, North Venice 4.2 to 5, see Table 4). Some now consider moving away from Venice (15% of those interviewed, representing 2% of the total number of residents). This represents a further intensification of physical and social impacts on the city (as visible in the situation of 1.2 tourist beds for each resident).

After having illustrated the overall situation of overtourism in Venice, the results point out potential methods of measuring different tourism capacities of a destination, evaluate their development, and assess if there are conditions of overcapacity. The accommodation sector and food and beverage facilities are continuously growing in the entire historical city, even in the peripheral area. There was less tourism considered in the area, only ten years ago (in particular the Castello and Cannaregio districts or the Giudecca Island), and residents concentrated there while trying to avoid massive tourist flows. Commercial structures have been stable in terms of numbers but have changed in terms of what they sell. Especially in what were considered areas with less tourism, high percentages of residents are now suffering from a lack of services such as shops, groceries, cinemas, and hairdressers (20.51% in Center Venice, 29.04% in South Venice, and one in two residents of North Venice or 50.45%, see Table 4). In the northern and southern districts, the general situation has been exacerbated for residents, as shown by the ten-year variation of the physical (number of facilities) and social (facilities per number of residents) impacts, which it is almost always positive and runs into three digits. This situation also clearly emerged in the survey, which demonstrated inhabitants' growing intolerance of and dissatisfaction with the uncontrolled flood of tourists. As early as 1991, Canestrelli and Costa [8] warned policymakers and public authorities about the possibly increasing risks associated with uncontrolled tourism development in Venice. Nevertheless, so far, little has been done to develop a system of governance capable of making the development of tourism compatible with the economic and social well-being of Venice's inhabitants and the sustainability of the complex Lagoon environment.

## 5.2. Theoretical Insights

The growing friction between the local residents and the tourists is, from one side, the result of a diffused anti-tourism narrative and, from the other side, the result of uncontrolled and unplanned strategies implemented by local administrations, who are more devoted to the promotion and commodification of urban structures that increase the attractiveness of the destination than to devising new strategies to increase the well-being, social cohesion, and job possibilities for citizens. There used to be a prevailingly optimistic view, which emphasized the contribution of leisure and tourism to urban development [66], often as part of major renovation operations. The emergence of new collective mobilizations and the recent waves of anti-tourism protests have attracted increasing global and local attention. As we show, through the maps in Section 4 (Figures 2–4), the transformations have led to more and more touristification of the entire island, making the environment more hospitable to tourists than to its residents.

This situation has led to a growing number of social movements and associations that centre their protests on the quality of life and well-being of local residents in the face of the pressure (economic, social, cultural, and environmental) that the growth of tourism has reinforced [67]. The emergence of grassroots-led social movements responds and corresponds to bottom-up processes driven by cross-scale citizens and associations. One such case is the event *Un'altra città è possible* ("Another city is possible"), organized in Mestre on 18 May 2019 by a group of citizens in collaboration with the association *Poveglia per Tutti* ("Poveglia for Everyone"). This meeting was important because the organizers aimed to create a large network between existing entities (associations, movements, individual citizens, and non-organized groups) to build a platform for discussion in a participatory way. Its goal was to identify priorities and projects for a liveable city and to try and influence policymakers. After the meeting, an open day workshop was organized on 29 June on 10 themes identified during May's event (additional information on it [69]).

These events could be under-interpreted as a reaction to a situation related to the unsustainability of the tourist phenomenon, but the responses and proposals coming from this variegated "urban

fabric" demonstrate a certain willingness on the part of the inhabitants to react and not suffer passively. In this way, they are not just a response to tourism per se. The different platforms that seek to influence policymakers' decisions are increasingly revealing themselves as lobbies capable of producing knowledge, participation, and solutions. They succeed in this thanks to the skills they were able to put into play and thanks to the experiences accumulated in other associations with both political and cultural, social and geographical different origins and scopes (association methods). At the beginning, we referred to the Comitato No Grandi Navi. In addition to this group, we also have to mention other important social movements and associations that are working not against tourists but to legitimize themselves as stakeholders in Venice's tourism and the Venice Administration. Examples include the following: the activism of the Venetian *Poveglia per Tutti* ("Poveglia for Everyone") for common goods; the Gruppo 25 Aprile ("25 April Group") for a sustainable management of tourism and for a socially inclusive and respectful tourism; O.Cio Osservatorio Civico Indipendente sulla casa e residenzialità ("Civic and Independent Observatory for housing and residency"), the outcome of a series of meetings and discussions between Venetian associations, individual citizens, and some researchers, which was established in 2018 to analyze the housing issue in insular Venice; Venezia Autentica ("Authentic Venice") which promotes a positive impact on the local artisan community; and Generation 90"), an association of young people living in Venice who work to find new ways and perspectives for a liveable Venice that is not only related to tourism. In all these social movements, a critical discourse is present that started from a reaction to the commodification and resistance to tourism. However, we can observe a variety of themes related to a global critique involving a number of contemporary globalized issues, from neoliberal politics to the exploitation of the city and common goods to the environmental sustainability of the delicate ecosystem represented by the Venice Lagoon.

## 5.3. Practical Insights

Managerial implications also emerge from these research findings. It is clear that a tourist-historical city without a strategic plan will easily face problems like overcrowding, negative externalities, and strong impacts on the resident community. In Venice, these phenomena had stronger repercussions for the more relevant dynamics of the city. Venice urgently needs management plans, new strategies, and an overall vision not only focused on the tourism sector but also on non-tourism productive categories. To draft some implications, we decided to cluster two different operations, policies and a new perspective.

Regarding tourism policies, Venice's municipality has introduced some initiatives, with others in the works. To protect a delicate environment like Venice from excessive tourism traffic and to avoid situations of overcapacity, most commonly, regulations are considered a solution to the problem. These fail to take into account the reasons for the excessive and quick growth of tourist facilities (accommodations and restaurants), as a consequence of the promotion of the destination. In destinations affected by overtourism, therefore, it is common that solutions to the problem are formulated without having a sustainable development plan for the city in place.

The ones already implemented or currently being deployed regard the tourist tax, which was introduced in Venice in 2011 in order to let tourists who spend the night contribute to the cost of the city's maintenance. Currently, the municipality is developing a new tax to involve not only tourists but also a huge part of day trippers. It has recently introduced the "contribute for access to Venice" for this category of visitors (it will be fully operational from 2022), which aims at "reducing the extra costs, for example, cleaning, waste collection, and city maintenance." The total amount collected through the tourist tax and the "contribute for access" will be equally redistributed among residents in the form of major cleaning and maintenance of the city (see <a href="https://www.comune.venezia.it">www.comune.venezia.it</a>). Strategically, the information provided by the results in both textual and visual forms shows the need for other policies regarding the limitation of the growth of the number of tourists and tourism subsystems. The diffusion of Airbnb needs to be regulated, as other destinations such as Amsterdam, Berlin, and Barcelona have

already done, in order to limit the urban changes related to this trend and curb the conversion from residential to tourist use. A discussion should be opened as soon as possible to limit the expansion of the number of listings or the number of bookable days per year. Other regulations should take into account the uncontrolled development of the food and beverage sector, which is transforming Venice into open air-restaurant and commercial businesses, enforcing more authenticity to prevent the city center from becoming a large souvenir shop.

We assume, in the context of Venice's historical center, that it is also crucial and indispensable to find ways to monitor, control, and regulate the tourism flows. This will likely take the form of trying to put a daily limit on tourists and visitors, as the newest points of the tourism management agenda are drafted (the creation of a smart control room is in progress).

However, new perspectives need to be developed. Focusing only on regulating tourism is not a comprehensive solution to invert, even partially, the trend underlined in the previous paragraphs. The municipality of Venice has drafted some new policies for the destination governance plan of 2017 [66] that turns attention to residents' quality of life, rather than looking only at tourist services and facilities' issues (results need to be evaluated in the future).

Advanced policy plans to make Venice more competitive in other productive sectors should be developed in order to make the historical city more attractive to new residents and to help the old residents, promoting different businesses and traditional activities not related to tourism. Focusing on policies that are not directly related to the management of tourism could represent a new wave able to overturn Russo's vicious circle [1], shifting global and local attention from tourism to the reactivation of other urban ecosystems, services and uses.

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