



OVERTOURISM AND ITS IMPACT ON EVERYDAY LIFE IN KOTOR

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Abstract:

Tourism is one of the key drivers of development in Kotor, a city of exceptional cultural, historical, and natural value, but at the same time a sector whose uncontrolled growth brings significant challenges. Global trends indicate that cities experiencing strong tourist pressures are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of mass tourism. Kotor, as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is currently facing such a challenge. The phenomenon—manifested primarily through the mass arrivals of cruise ship passengers and excursionists arriving by bus—is increasingly shaping the daily life of the local community in this city. It is also degrading environmental quality and raising concerns about the preservation of cultural heritage. To ensure tourism remains an economic asset for Kotor while protecting resources and preserving authenticity, it is necessary to understand local perceptions of its impact on daily life and the environment. In this regard, a survey was conducted among Kotor residents using a structured questionnaire to explore their views, identify key challenges, and assess the community's readiness to support sustainable solutions. The findings reveal a high level of awareness among citizens about the need to regulate visitor flows, as well as widespread concern over the impact of cruise ships and excursion buses. Furthermore, respondents express limited trust in the current level of community involvement in tourism-related decision-making processes. At the same time, they emphasize the need for a formal Strategy for Sustainable Tourism Development, stronger institutional capacities, and a more participatory approach as essential steps toward mitigating the effects of overtourism and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the city.

Keywords:

overtourism, Kotor, local community, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary research, tourism is increasingly recognized as a phenomenon with dual effects: while it contributes to economic growth and the development of local communities, it can also generate serious challenges, particularly in destinations exposed to strong seasonal pressures and characterized by sensitive cultural and natural resources. Kotor, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Montenegro, represents a paradigmatic example of such dynamics. While tourism development in Kotor brings significant economic benefits, it simultaneously generates challenges related to excessive tourist pressure.

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The phenomenon of *overtourism*, defined as a situation in which the number of visitors exceeds the physical, infrastructural, and social capacities of a destination, has become increasingly pronounced in Kotor. It is particularly manifested through the mass arrivals of cruise ship passengers and excursionists arriving by organized bus tours. Such patterns of movement not only bring financial benefits, but also cause serious constraints in terms of cultural heritage preservation, environmental protection, and the quality of life of the local population. According to MONSTAT data (2025), 277,063 tourists stayed in Kotor in 2024, generating more than 1.36 million overnight stays. In the same period, 478 cruise ships with approximately 600,000 passengers arrived (Nikolić, 2024), while the number of daily visitors who arrived by bus is estimated to have reached around 700,000 (Luković, 2025). It is important to note that passengers from cruise ships and organized bus tours disembark directly in the city center. This area houses the core administrative, public, and institutional services, which further exacerbates the pressure on the city's daily functioning. Given the population of slightly more than 22,000 inhabitants (MONSTAT, 2024), it becomes evident that the city experiences a pronounced imbalance. This situation leads to overcrowded public spaces, strain on infrastructure, increased pollution levels, and significant disruptions to the community's everyday life.

In its latest report, UNESCO warned that Kotor, one of the most valuable assets of the world's cultural heritage, may be entered on the World Heritage in Danger List if Montenegro does not urgently provide effective protection and sustainable management of the area. Although some progress has been made, such as the preparation of certain strategic documents, the Kotor Sustainability Study and the suspension of planned quarries, key issues remain unresolved: lack of qualified experts, absence of a protective zone study, a Management Plan not yet finalized, and insufficient coordination between institutions. Of particular concern are the pressures of urbanization, infrastructure projects and intensive tourism, which is why UNESCO demands the introduction of a moratorium on construction, the reform of the legislative framework and the establishment of a functional management system. In addition, the need for the adoption of a special Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, based on a strategic impact assessment and integrated into the wider planning system, was emphasized, with a deadline for implementing all these recommendations by February 2026 (Portal Analitika, 2025).

This trend highlights the need for a detailed examination of the attitudes of the local population, whose views represent one of the key indicators of the destination's sustainability. The analysis of their perceptions and recommendations would contribute to the development of strategies that ensure a balance between the economic benefits of tourism and the protection of Kotor's cultural and natural values. Therefore, this research focuses on examining the attitudes of the local community toward the phenomenon of overtourism. Special attention is given to its ecological, socio-cultural, and economic consequences, as well as to potential measures that could help mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term overtourism appears more and more frequently in public discourse, especially recently, indicating the growing challenges in managing intensive tourist flows in urban areas. With more than half of the world's population residing in urban areas - and with expectations that this share will reach 70% by 2050 - the growth of urban tourism puts an additional burden on natural resources, infrastructure, mobility, and causes socio-cultural changes (UNWTO, 2018).

Although the term overtourism itself has only recently appeared in public discourse, it describes phenomena that have been discussed in academic literature for decades, with debates on the harmful consequences of tourism dating back to the 1960s. From a theoretical point of view, contemporary debates about overtourism, as well as cultural, social and ecological limitations of the sustainability of continuously growing mass tourism, are not entirely new. What is new, however, is the fact that the general public, and indirectly some policymakers, today increasingly recognize the potentially harmful effects of its continuous quantitative growth (Koens *et al.*, 2018).

Even earlier, the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined tourism capacity as the maximum number of visitors that does not lead to the degradation of the physical, economic, or cultural environment, nor does it impair the experience of tourists (UNWTO, 2018). Skift, a media and research company specializing



in tourism, is considered to be among the first to popularize the term overtourism, through its analyses and articles, especially from 2016 onwards, pointing out its negative impact on destinations and local communities. Since then, multiple definitions of this term have been offered. According to the academic partners involved in the research project on this phenomenon, overtourism means the impact of tourism activities on a destination that negatively affects the perceived quality of life of the local population and/or the experience of visitors. The Partnership for Responsible Tourism defines it as a situation in which hosts or guests feel that the number of visitors exceeds an acceptable level, resulting in a deterioration of the quality of life or the visitor experience in a given area (UNWTO, 2018). Similarly, Koens *et al.* (2018) describe overtourism as an excessive negative impact of tourism on local communities and/or the natural environment.

Butler (2018) makes a clear distinction between the concepts of overtourism and overpopulation, emphasizing that overtourism does not simply mean a large number of visitors or a high level of destination occupancy. Instead, he refers to a situation in which tourist influx overwhelms existing infrastructure and services, with the visitor experience becoming a significant nuisance for local residents (Capocchi *et al.*, 2019; Butler, 2018).

According to Benner (2019), the growing public concern about mass tourism stems from an increasing understanding that, while it brings economic benefits, it also generates significant cultural, social, and environmental costs. Especially in certain market segments, such as cruise or “bus” tourism, local economic benefits can be minimal, while the burden on the population and ecosystems of destinations such as Venice or Dubrovnik is extremely high. In a broader sense, overtourism is a situation in which the volume and structure of tourist activity exceed the carrying capacity. Therefore, the occurrence of overtourism depends not only on the number of visitors, but also on their behavior and other qualitative factors that go beyond purely numerical analysis.

The literature singles out three key factors that contribute to the appearance of overtourism (UNWTO, 2018): (I) an excessive number of visitors, especially expressed during the season, which leads to a feeling of overcrowding and loss of space for local residents; (II) negative behavior of tourists, manifested in the creation of crowds, noise and disruption everyday life; and (III) excessive dominance of the tourist economy in the area, where the infrastructure intended for tourists changes the appearance and function of the city, causing residents to feel a loss of control over their own environment.

Dodds and Butler (2018) propose an analytical framework that identifies three main groups of factors that enable the development of overtourism. These factors are: agents of growth, technology, and power (Hospers, 2019; Dodds and Butler, 2019):

- Agents of growth include the increase in the number of tourists. This growth is driven both by experienced travelers who travel more frequently and by the emergence of new groups of visitors.
- Technology plays a significant role in encouraging overtourism. The development of transportation and communications has led to simplified reservation and travel procedures, more accessible forms of transportation (such as low-cost airlines and cruise ships), as well as intensive promotion of destinations through social networks.
- Power refers to the fact that tourism, unlike other industries, is a locally focused activity. In addition to direct employment, it also generates numerous indirect jobs in sectors such as construction, hospitality, transport, and other services.

The congestion caused by tourism is not exclusively a tourist problem. It arises when the resources and infrastructure of the city, or its individual parts, become overloaded. However, these facilities are used not only by tourists, but also by local residents and daily travelers, which leads to competition in the use of space and services. In addition, phenomena such as the expansion of short-term rentals through digital platforms are not limited to the tourism sector, but also significantly affect the real estate market (UNWTO, 2018).

The bottom line is that “more doesn’t always mean better.” When the number of visitors exceeds a certain threshold, negative economic, social, and/or physical effects may occur for the city (Hospers, 2019; Van Gorp *et al.*, 2019), which represents a serious challenge for local stakeholders. First, overtourism can lead to economic problems related to the phenomenon of the “tragedy of the commons” (Hospers, 2019; Hall and Page, 2006). Tourists mostly visit public or semi-public attractions, such as cathedrals, museums, or events, but most of their consumption goes to supporting services such as accommodation, hospitality, tourist tours, and



souvenir shopping. Incomes from those activities often end up with private entrepreneurs, while institutions that manage primary cultural assets do not generate sufficient income to cover the costs of preservation, management and maintenance. Such attractions behave like common resources - insufficiently regulated and exposed to excessive exploitation. In this context, tourists become “free users” who, although unknowingly, harm the interests of the city through their collective actions. The result is an excessive burden on the urban infrastructure, pollution, and degradation of space. Ultimately, the local population is the most affected. Secondly, overtourism also has social consequences, especially in terms of impairing the quality of life of residents (Hospers, 2019).

The local community plays a key role in the tourism industry, as it contributes to the socio-cultural, political, and economic sustainability of the destination (Anuar ANA *et al.*, 2017; 2019). The social and cultural impacts of tourism can be analyzed through residents’ attitudes towards tourists and tourist activities. These attitudes often develop through several stages: euphoria, apathy, irritation or disruption, and finally antagonism (Bogdanović and Radović, 2024; Doxey, 1975). In recent years, there has been a growing trend of negative attitudes of the local population towards tourists, corresponding to phases of irritation and antagonism. This trend results from the perception of overcrowding, noise, and other disturbances attributed to visitors (UNWTO, 2018). Authors highlight that residents often have little or no influence on tourism development, which leads to a sense of alienation in their own living spaces. Consequently, privacy, social cohesion, and opportunities to participate in community decision-making are often lost (Capocchi *et al.*, 2019; Moscardo, 2011). At times, residents feel pushed out of their own city and no longer welcome in spaces they once considered their own (Hospers, 2019). Rangus *et al.* (2018) note that overtourism is closely related to the central challenges of sustainable tourism. Excessive tourism does not only affect destinations that are overpopulated or at the edge of ecological capacity, but also generates social tensions between visitors and local residents.

In the academic literature, certain urban destinations have become synonymous with overtourism, leading to the use of terms such as the “Venetian syndrome” as a metaphor for this phenomenon and the process of depopulation of historic urban centers (Capocchi *et al.*, 2019; Martin *et al.*, 2018). It is especially expressed in cities with historical cores and limited spatial capacities, such as Venice, Dubrovnik, and Kotor recently. Venice and Dubrovnik are among the most well-known European destinations that face the challenges of overtourism. Both cities have implemented various measures to mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism, particularly in relation to cruise tourism and the excessive number of daily visitors. Thus, the number of daily visitors in Venice is limited (Cerini, 2021) with the mandatory payment of an entrance fee of 5.00 euro and 10.00 euro (Lesom, 2024), the limitation of tourist groups to a maximum of 25 people (Wright and Symons, 2023), as well as limiting the docking of large cruise ships in the port (Wilson, 2025). In Dubrovnik, in response to overtourism, local authorities have introduced measures to limit the number of tourists. These include controlling the capacity of cruise ships in the port and limiting the number of daily visitors (Dubrovnik Port Authority). These measures represent an attempt to achieve a balance between the economic benefits of tourism, the preservation of cultural and natural heritage and the quality of life of the local population. At the same time, they serve as an instrument to prevent the removal of these cities from the UNESCO World Cultural Heritage List, considering the warnings sent to them by UNESCO (Hussain, 2021; GSTC, 2021).



METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to examine the perceptions and experiences of Kotor's local population regarding the phenomenon of overtourism. Special emphasis is placed on its effects on everyday life, quality of life, and the preservation of cultural and historical heritage. Special attention is focused on understanding the specific problems and challenges that residents face, as well as identifying possible solutions that could contribute to reducing the negative consequences of mass tourism. For this purpose, a survey questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. The questions were formulated to include personal observations and attitudes of Kotor residents about the impact of overtourism on everyday life and the urban environment.

The survey was created using the Google Forms platform. It was anonymous to ensure objectivity and was distributed electronically via e-mail and social networks. Conducted in October 2024, the survey included 150 residents of Kotor from different age groups, educational levels, and economic statuses. The questionnaire consisted of multiple-choice (closed-ended) questions. This format enabled quantitative analysis of respondents' attitudes and perceptions, facilitated statistical processing, and allowed comparisons between different respondent groups. The questions were designed to cover key aspects of the research problem, and the provided answer choices ensured standardization and offered a more precise insight into dominant attitudes. After data collection was completed, all responses were statistically processed and analyzed, and no sample was rejected, allowing a clear and systematic presentation of the local population's attitudes and experiences regarding overtourism in Kotor.

The results of this research can serve as a basis for creating strategies and measures that would enable a balance between the development of tourism and the quality of life of the local population, while preserving the natural and cultural heritage that makes Kotor a unique destination.

RESULTS

The survey, conducted on a sample of 150 residents of Kotor, provided a clear sociodemographic profile of the participants. The first set of questions referred to gender, age, educational level, and employment status. The results show that the majority of respondents were women (66.7%), while the most represented age group was 30–40 years. This may suggest a higher level of awareness and readiness to perceive the consequences of overtourism. The educational profile of the respondents was notably high: 56% held a university degree, and 22% had a master's or doctoral degree. This structure indicates that the attitudes were formed within a relatively well-educated and professionally active population, which is further supported by the fact that 85% of the participants were employed, thereby strengthening the representativeness and relevance of the sample.

In terms of understanding the concept of sustainable tourism, 75% of participants agreed that it implies the effective management of natural, cultural, and social resources. This reflects a high level of awareness of the importance of responsible and well-planned tourism development. A smaller share of respondents (19.3%) emphasized profitability as a key determinant. Furthermore, the near-unanimous agreement (97.3%) that tourism must be controlled in order to be sustainable indicates that the control of tourist flows is recognized as a necessary step in mitigating its negative impacts.

One of the most impressive research findings relates to the perception of the impact of the frequent arrivals of cruise ships and excursion buses - both on the environment as a whole and on the daily life and quality of life of Kotor residents. The obtained data indicate a strongly negative attitude of the majority of the respondents towards these types of tourist traffic. According to the results, 74.7% of respondents believe that the presence of cruise ships in general has a negative effect on the biodiversity of the Bay of Kotor. In addition, 84% point out that the number of cruise ships arriving daily has an unfavorable impact on the normal functioning and everyday activities of the population. Given the limited spatial capacity within the city core, this concentration of visitors places an additional burden on public areas and infrastructure. Regarding road traffic, 89.3% of respondents consider the impact of excursion buses on air quality negative, and as many as 94% express dissatisfaction with their influence on the overall quality of life of the local community. Respondents particularly emphasize that buses disembark large numbers of tourists directly in the city center, further straining limited



urban space and creating congestion in both traffic and pedestrian areas. These results clearly indicate that the local population recognizes the excessive arrivals of large tourist vessels and road carriers as one of the key drivers of overtourism in Kotor. They associate this phenomenon with the degradation of natural resources, the disruption of urban functionality, and the reduction of quality of life.

Furthermore, the analysis of the results shows a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the need to regulate tourist flows in Kotor, specifically through the introduction of restrictions and strategies aimed at reducing the negative effects of mass tourism. The majority (89.3%) support limiting the number of excursion buses on a daily basis, while 85.3% advocate introducing restrictions on the number of cruise ships. Only a small percentage of the respondents oppose these measures or remain undecided. These findings clearly confirm the prevailing perception that the intensive influx of buses and cruise ships negatively affects both the quality of life and the functionality of urban infrastructure. In this regard, the Municipality of Kotor announced the introduction of a set of measures, whose implementation began in June this year (2025). These measures are being implemented in phases, with the aim of mitigating the negative effects of mass tourism and preserving the city's functionality during the tourist season. Planned interventions include limiting the number of bus excursions through the electronic reservation system, increasing parking fees in the city center, stricter regulation of passenger transportation from cruise ships, and the introduction of penalties for non-compliance. Although potentially challenging for certain economic actors and tourist operators, these steps are expected to contribute to establishing a more sustainable model for managing tourist flows and to improving the quality of life of the local population (Luković, 2025).

Regarding the actors of sustainable development, the majority of respondents (54%) identify local self-government as the key driver of activities, while 22% emphasize the role of citizens. A further 12% highlight the importance of tourism companies or remain undecided. This distribution reflects the prevailing perception that institutional capacities and political will play a decisive role in shaping tourism policy. At the same time, the results show a significant deficit of participation: 75.3% of respondents believe that the local population is insufficiently involved in tourism policy-making, 20.7% that it is not involved at all, while only 4% consider the level of involvement satisfactory. These findings clearly indicate that the absence of a participatory approach may constitute a serious obstacle to the implementation of sustainable strategies.

A very high level of consensus is also observed regarding the necessity of adopting a formalized Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy: 93.3% of respondents consider such a document essential, while only 4% believe it would have minimal or no effect. This finding reflects the local population's awareness of the importance of a strategic planning approach that simultaneously ensures the protection of cultural heritage and guides the future course of tourism development.

In the context of the problem of overtourism, the respondents recognize the existing traffic infrastructure (97.3%), which proves insufficient to accommodate the influx of visitors, as the greatest obstacle to the sustainable development of tourism. Along with the excessive number of cruise ships and excursion buses (54%), these factors constitute the core of the overtourism problem in Kotor. Additional challenges include the lack of hotel accommodation capacity (35.3%), an insufficiently qualified tourism workforce (31.3%), and political instability (23.3%). Other factors, such as weak promotional campaigns (6.7%) and limited involvement of the local community (14%), are mentioned less frequently, yet they contribute to the complex picture of obstacles the municipality is facing.

Finally, the results reveal that 70% of respondents believe tourism in Kotor has surpassed the limits of sustainability, 20% remain undecided, while only 10% consider the situation still acceptable. These views reflect residents' deep concern about the intensity of tourist flows and their impact on the environment, the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, and the quality of everyday life, thereby confirming that overtourism is recognized as a key challenge to the long-term sustainability of the destination.



CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the presented results, it can be concluded that the local population of Kotor recognizes overtourism as a serious and multidimensional problem that directly affects the environment, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the quality of everyday life. Particularly noteworthy is the recognition of the negative effects caused by the large number of cruise ships and excursion buses, whose intensive arrivals strain urban infrastructure, generate crowding in public spaces, and disrupt the city's functionality. At the same time, residents clearly emphasize the need for a strategic approach to regulating tourist flows, with measures to limit the number of cruise ships and buses, alongside the adoption of a formal Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy, as essential steps toward mitigating the adverse consequences of mass tourism.

Although local self-government is recognized as a key actor in the creation and implementation of sustainable tourism policies, the research findings indicate insufficient involvement of citizens in this process, thereby significantly reducing the legitimacy and effectiveness of the proposed measures. Beyond institutional mechanisms, the importance of a participatory approach is emphasized – one in which the local population actively engages in decision-making, ensuring that development priorities reflect community needs. Only through such an inclusive model can a balance be achieved between the economic benefits of tourism and the long-term sustainability of Kotor as a destination of exceptional cultural and natural value.

This clearly indicates the urgency of action and the need to steer tourism in Kotor towards sustainable practices that protect both the community and its heritage, with particular emphasis on regulating visitor intensity, improving infrastructure, and strengthening local community participation.

To address the challenges of overtourism and enhance the sustainability of Kotor's tourism model, several key measures are recommended. These include conducting a comprehensive carrying capacity assessment to determine the optimal number of visitors, introducing quotas and time-slot systems for cruise ships and excursion buses to reduce congestion, and promoting visitor dispersion and spatial decentralization by developing alternative tourist routes and experiences. Furthermore, the use of economic and environmental instruments, such as port or entry fees, could help internalize tourism-related costs. Finally, strengthening community-based tourism and participatory governance - by empowering local entrepreneurs, ensuring transparency, and fostering cooperation among stakeholders - represents a cornerstone for creating a more balanced and resilient tourism system.

Similar practices have been successfully implemented in other World Heritage cities, such as Venice and Dubrovnik, where visitor caps and cruise ship quotas have proven effective in reducing tourist pressure while preserving cultural and environmental integrity. Drawing on such experiences could provide valuable guidance for Kotor in developing a locally adapted sustainable tourism management framework that preserves both its community and heritage for future generations.

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