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# the rest: journal of politics and development

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Overtourism: A Local and International Challenge to the Iberian Peninsula and Italy

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an agent of climate change. It transforms land use and favours CO2 emissions, especially due to air travel. It consumes large amounts of water, particularly groundwater, to irrigate golf fields and supply swimming pools and water parks. In some regions, the relevant stakeholders are not concerned about environmental and sustainability matters. Particularly in the South of Portugal, where tourism is one of the main economic activities. Several Civil Society Organisations and NGO in Portugal, Spain, and Italy are raising awareness and confronting authorities. They advocate a more sustainable tourist model. How are central and local governments addressing the overtourism problem? With research on legislation and current negotiations, as well as content analysis of the press and social media, this article aims to identify and describe major concerns, proposals and solutions regarding tourism.

Historic Context and Introduction

The *Grand Tour*, practised from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, was a part of a gentleman’s education. It included mostly Mediterranean countries: Italy and Greece were mandatory, and visiting historical places was a main reason for travelling. Among many examples, there were visitors to Portugal who left us important narratives and descriptions of their travels, such as Thomas Cox’s *Account of the Kingdom of Portugal* in 1701 (Cox, 2007), and Léon Poinsard (1910), who divulged the social and economic structure of the country in the late nineteenth century: *Paysans, Marins et Mineurs*, giving important advice on how to improve agricultural production.

A list of those visitors to Portugal was produced by Mónica (2020), and they include Lord Byron in 1825, William Beckford in 1840, Hans Christian Andersen in 1866 (1972), Mark Twain in the Azores in 1867 (Twain, 1869), and many others. One of them was Lord Porchester, the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carnarvon (1866-1923), who travelled all his life, all year round and all over the world. He rented yachts to sail to South America, stopping in Lisbon, Madeira, and the Canary Islands; he spent time at Aix-les-Bains, Deauville, Florence and Portofino, and he only returned to London for the social season and to Scotland for hunting. His residence was Highclere Castle, where the TV series *Downton Abbey* was shot. In his travels, he always stayed in hotels with casinos, gambling, he went to horse races and even became interested in horse breeding and training. In the late nineteenth century, “wealthy tourists flocked to Egypt for little more than four months of the year, and the season was at its height in January and February”. They stayed at the Shepherd’s, the most famous hotel in Cairo: “its

terrace was the place to see and be seen”. And then he went on to become interested in archaeology: he financed and participated, with Howard Carter, in the excavation and discovery of the Tutankhamun tomb in 1922, which led to his death. He also “took much pleasure in his photography, recording local endeavour” (Carnarvon, 2022). Such travels were also described by the American heiress Consuelo Vanderbilt, who married the Duke of Marlborough in 1895 (Balsan, 2012). This lifestyle may be observed in movies such as *Death in Venice* (1971), a film by Luchino Visconti, from the book by Thomas Mann, and *A Room with a View* (1985), about young aristocrats in Florence, a film by James Ivory, based on the novel by E. M. Foster, 1908. And in Agatha Christie’s books.

**Figure 1: Lord Porchester, the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carnarvon, with his Camera**



Source: Carnarvon, 2022.

**Figure 2: The Colossi of Memnon, in Egypt, photographed by the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carnarvon**



Source: Carnarvon, 2022.

The Portuguese royal family also travelled all over Europe, particularly Dom Pedro and Dom Luís, both sons of Queen Maria II and King Consort Dom Fernando, who considered this to be an important part of their education. They visited their cousin Albert, Queen Victoria's Prince Consort, and spent time in Paris and the Germanic States to visit their sisters, married to German princes. In 1861, King Dom Pedro V died from typhoid fever, along with both his brothers, Dom Fernando and Dom João, after a hunting trip in the Alentejo region (Gomes, 1862). Prince Albert died a few days later in England from the same disease. Dom Luís was travelling in France and had to return to Portugal to succeed his brother on the throne. After marrying the daughter of King Victor Emanuel of Italy, and having two sons, as he was supposed to, Dom Luís embarked on a trip to Europe with his wife, Dona Maria Pia, in 1865, again to visit his sisters and also to visit his father-in-law in Turin and Florence. Even though there was a cholera epidemic in Portugal, they continued their journey for several weeks before returning home (Diário de Notícias, 27 October 1865, Almeida, 2013).

Wealthy Portuguese families also travelled quite extensively in the nineteenth century, mostly to go shopping in Paris and to visit the mountains and lakes of France and Switzerland, where they practised the new art of photography. An example was Carlos Relvas and his daughter Margarida, who went to Paris to visit the Universal Exhibition in 1889, and photographed the newly inaugurated Eiffel Tower, and then travelled to the Alps, where they also took photographs on glaciers. Both entered international art and photography exhibitions and competitions and won awards (Mesquita and Pessoa, 2003; Fonseca, 2015).

**Figure 3: A Portable Camera from the Late Nineteenth Century**



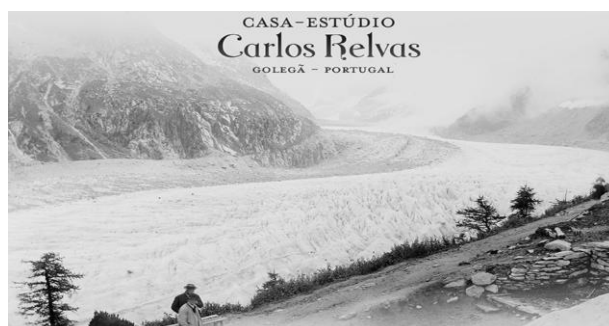
*Source: Author's Photograph*

**Figure 4: The Eiffel Tower in the 1889 Paris Universal Exhibition, Photograph by Carlos Relvas**



*Source: Mesquita, Pessoa, 2003*

**Figure 5: Carlos Relvas at the Mer de Glace, French Alps**



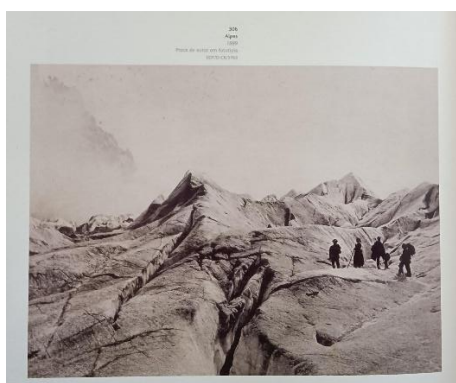
*Source: Município de Golegã, 2020*

**Figure 6: Carlos Relvas and his Daughter Margarida travelling in the Alps**



*Source: Município de Golegã, 2024*

**Figure 7: Carlos Relvas and his Daughter Margarida Travelling in the Alps, 1889**



*Source: Mesquita, Pessoa, 2003*

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, health tourism became a trend: sanatoriums for tuberculosis patients, usually on mountains or by the sea, and spas with thermal waters for all sorts of diseases. Switzerland was a pioneer, and Madeira Island was a popular destination, where Sissi, Empress Elisabeth of Austria, spent a few months every year.

**Figure 8: Penhas da Saúde Sanatorium, Serra da Estrela, Portugal, 1940**



*Source: Jesus, 2010*

**Figure 9: Vidago Spa Grand Hotel, in Chaves, North of Portugal, 1885**

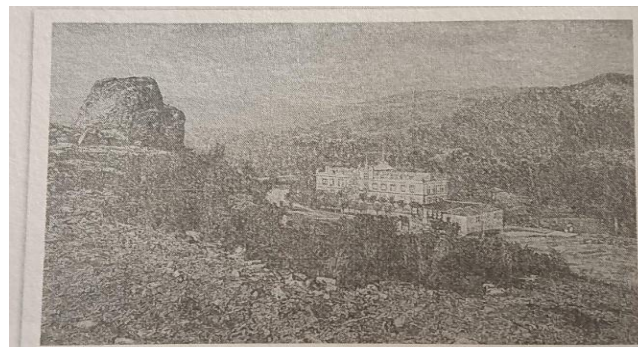


Fig. nº 100 - "O Grande Hotel de Vidago", Cliché de D. Margarida Relvas  
*Ilustração Universal*, Ano II, nº22, Lisboa, 6 de junho de 1885, p. 169.

*Source: Photograph by Margarida Relvas, published in Ilustração Universal, II, n. 22, Lisbon, 6 June 1885, p. 169, Fonseca, 2015*

**Figure 10: Vidago Spa Palace Hotel, Opened in 1910, Nowadays**



*Source: Vidago Palace Hotel, n.d.*

In the twentieth century, some European countries introduced state-sponsored tourism. In Portugal, the Estado Novo regime created FNAT – The National Foundation for Joy at Work, in 1935, creating structures for the vacations of the working class<sup>1</sup>. Hotels were built in the best locations, and they are still there for associates to enjoy, under the INATEL Foundation. In France, after World War II, in 1950, the Club Mediterranée introduced the concept of vacations for working people. Social tourism was developed since 1948, after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights statement that “Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and to periodic holidays with pay”<sup>2</sup>.

**Figure 11: FNAT – The National Foundation for Joy at Work, a hotel in Albufeira, opened in 1956. Later became Inatel**



*Source: YouTube, 2016*

And then, the nineteen sixties were the beginning of the road to disaster. The democratisation of tourism forced the end of an exclusive and elitist activity and provided the means for middle-class travel and vacations at attractive beachfront and mountain resorts for an enlarged number of people. Small fishing villages in the South of Spain and Portugal, as well as the Greek Islands and all over the Mediterranean, were transformed into cities with large buildings that are only used seasonally, as was the case of Torremolinos (Zamora, 2019), Marbella, Ibiza, Palma de Mallorca, and Albufeira, in the Algarve. When the Faro airport, in the Algarve, was inaugurated in 1965, the English started coming, following celebrities such as Cliff Richard, Tom Jones and Bonnie Tyler, who bought holiday homes in Albufeira (Revez, 2019). In the seventies, large hotels and resorts started being built, and luxury tourism became a reality, particularly in Vilamoura and Quinta do Lago, replacing fishing as the main economic activity of the region (Sena, 2023). And former mountain villages in the French and Swiss Alps, whose main occupation was cattle breeding and cheese making, were transformed into ski resorts, also with seasonal activities (Hiroz, 2021).

Tourism was quickly transformed into mass tourism, and then into overtourism, with a substantial impact on the environment. Even though drought periods are a feature of the Mediterranean region, tourism is now greatly responsible for water scarcity, which has grown in the South of Portugal and Spain since intensive agriculture was introduced, and tourism has reached its highest levels. Even with 2025's rainy winter, water reserves in the Algarve region have not achieved their full potential: dams were under 60 per cent capacity in June 2025. Tourism consumes large amounts of water, particularly groundwater to irrigate golf fields and supply swimming pools and water parks (Roxo, 2023). In general, tourism is one of the causal agents of climate change, as it generates transformations in land use and favours CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, especially due to air travel. “This mass tourism activity obviously has important environmental repercussions. (...) The tourist activity

<sup>1</sup> INATEL, n.d.

<sup>2</sup> UN, n.d.

generates a relevant carbon footprint since it requires large amounts of energy, with increases of more than 60 per cent between 2005 and 2016” (Dorta-Antequera et al., 2024).

In Portugal, 26.5 million tourists visited in 2023. Visitors come mostly from Spain, the UK, France, and the USA. The Spanish tourist industry represents 12.8 per cent of its GDP and 12.6 per cent of jobs; over 85 million foreign tourists visited Spain in 2023 (placing the country in second place worldwide, after France). International tourists spent approximately 126 billion euros. In 2024, there was a 10 per cent growth to 94 million tourists (Bailey, 2025). In Catalonia, 18 million tourists visited in 2023, 12 million in Barcelona. In April 2024, Catalonia was the Iberian region with the lowest water reserves, and water scarcity is directly related to tourism. Restrictions on water consumption have already been applied. Regarding Italy, for example, Venice has 30 million foreign tourists every year; in 2017, the city received an average of 60,000 visits per day.

However, in some regions, the relevant stakeholders of the tourist industry are not concerned about environmental and sustainability matters. Particularly in the South of Portugal, where tourism is one of the main economic activities. The Algarve has been known for decades as a popular tourist destination. Recently, the West Coast of Alentejo has been discovered, and investors are calling this region “The new Hamptons”. International celebrities are buying properties, and resorts are being built on top of cliffs and dunes, damaging the ecosystem and consuming enormous amounts of water, particularly for golf courses. Troia, Melides and Comporta: the empire of seashore golf courses, when Portugal is going through extreme drought?

Several CSOs – Civil Society Organisations and NGO – Non-Governmental Organisations in Portugal, Spain, and Italy are raising awareness and confronting authorities. Particularly, they advocate a more sustainable tourist model. Local government is also changing public policies.

How are central and local governments addressing the overtourism problem? What are the proposals and solutions? Methodology is based on the definition of concepts from dictionaries and scientific articles, followed by research on legislation, current negotiations, and content analysis of the press and social media. A database was constructed with news and social media posts regarding actions by municipalities, CSOs and NGO on the subjects of tourism, the environment, heritage, territories and the quality of life of local citizens. A selection of case studies was chosen for its relevance to a comprehensive analysis of the different responses to our research questions, reflecting local government’s behaviour regarding citizen participation. Some actions by CSO are described to perceive their methods and effectiveness, highlighting differences between cases in rural and urban areas. However, the type of responses by local and central government has been varied, and economic interests have proven more important than their citizens’ and territories’ best interests, particularly in Portugal. In sum, this article aims to identify and describe the state of the art on tourism, major concerns and challenges, and proposed solutions.

## Definition of Concepts

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, “Tourism: the business of providing services such as transport, places to stay, or entertainment for people who are on holiday”<sup>3</sup>.

Tourism can stimulate economic growth, foster cultural exchange, and support conservation efforts that protect the world’s most remarkable places (Brajcich, 2024). It’s a recreational field with a diversity of forms and forces. An exception in space and time, which has fragmented “into niches and sectorial models”. It’s increasingly central to lifestyles, economies and territories, and it also

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<sup>3</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, n.d. (a)

encompasses “useful” forms: solidarity tourism, scientific, “humanitarian”, and others (Bourdeau, 2018).

Concerns over negative impacts of tourism were already reflected in the United Nations World Tourism Organisation’s Manila Conference in 1980, which produced orientations regarding the promotion of internal tourism and cultural tourism, and the protection and preservation of the environment, and the natural, historic and cultural heritage of each country. This was the foundation of the concepts of internal tourism and rural tourism, alternative tourism and responsible tourism, defined as all forms of tourism that respect the hosts’ natural, cultural and built heritage, and the interests of all the parties involved: residents, guests, visitors, tourist industry, and government. Responsible tourism diverges from mass tourism when it uses resources that are managed by local communities, with small-sized companies; it prioritises direct contact with local residents and environmentally friendly development, authenticity and local assets and potential, on a small scale, and a limited number of visitors (Joaquim, 1997).

Just as responsible tourism, sustainable tourism is now a mainstream tourism paradigm, primarily based on a balance between economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability. The fierce economic and social academic debate on tourism’s positive and negative impacts leads to novel discussions regarding capacity and acceptable limits and on mass tourism and its alternatives, such as eco-tourism (Mihalic, 2020).

Cultural tourism includes the consumption of heritage goods (from built heritage to gastronomic heritage, arts and crafts, and others); agro-tourism itineraries, rural tourism, and housing tourism. Graça Joaquim established four types of tourism and places: 1) White tourism: winter and sports-related; 2) Green tourism: rural spaces; 3) Blue tourism: sea and lake shores; 4) Lights tourism: small and medium-sized towns. As of 1997, this researcher wrote about responsible tourism regarding conflicting visions: tourism as an environmental predator versus tourism as an environmental protector. Mass tourism in beachfront cities and sensitive ecosystems: it represents a conflict with nature; on the other hand, there is green tourism, sustainable, discreet, representative of the future, with a positive and complementary relationship with nature. The concept of carrying capacity applies to tourism in order to respond to a limit on ecosystems. When this limit is attained, ecosystems can no longer return to a satisfying balance. There are three carrying capacities: ecological (when there are unacceptable ecological impacts), tourist (when tourist experiences become unsatisfactory) and social (when unacceptable social changes occur) (Joaquim, 1997).

This is where overtourism becomes a problem: “the situation when too many people visit a place on vacation, so that the place is spoiled and life is made difficult for the people who live there”<sup>4</sup>. It is a complex phenomenon associated 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. 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. Heritage cities have always attracted many visitors, generating benefits and costs. When the costs exceed the benefits, tourism development is no longer sustainable (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019).

It’s also a manifestation of unsustainable tourism, with the acceleration and growth of tourism supply and demand, the use of tourism destinations’ natural ecological goods, the destruction of their cultural attractions, and negative impacts on their social and economic environments. These have rendered tourism irresponsible—and this has led to today’s stronger focus on implementing

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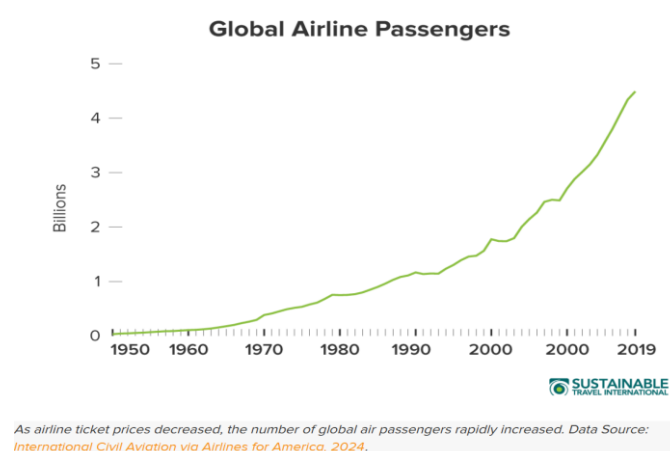
<sup>4</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, n.d. (b)

responsible tourism paradigms based on sustainability. It manifests in its too-high numbers and too-high negative impacts on the environment (Mihalic, 2020).

Overtourism occurs when too many visitors flock to a destination, exceeding its ability to manage them sustainably and leading to negative impacts such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, strained infrastructure, reduced quality of life for residents, and a diminished visitor experience. In other words, it's when we love a destination to death. When tourism development is poorly managed, unchecked growth can overwhelm destinations and detrimentally impact the environment, local communities, and visitor experience. This is an urgent challenge for many of the world's most popular travel destinations (Brajcich, 2024).

The main problems and impacts of overtourism may be summarised as: i) housing prices and availability; ii) drought and water scarcity in the Mediterranean region; iii) climate change: transformations in land use, air travel; iv) environmental stress and ecosystem degradation, pollution, noise; v) luxury resorts: water waste due to pools, landscape management, and golf courses, creating additional strain on local freshwater resources; vi) crowded cities and congestion; vii) gentrification (neighbourhoods, housing and shops), social and cultural impacts in local communities; viii) tourists drive up prices for goods and services; ix) tourismphobia. In sum, there are open conflicts between the economy and the environment, with municipalities and private interests on one side, versus citizens and residents on the other. Cruise ships are a major concern. And the job market narrows, "making it difficult to find jobs outside the tourism sector. This causes the social fabric to lose its 'socio-ecological' complexity. 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 those who are not". There are also increasing frictions between inhabitants and tourists: "emergence of urban social movements, organizations, and associations in many European destinations. The problematic relationship between visitors and inhabitants and the overlap between the two has generated recent waves of anti-tourism protests" (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019).

The growth of overtourism may be attributed to the democratisation of global travel over the last two decades (Ali, 2016). Brajcich has produced a list of causes: a) growth of the global middle class; b) low-cost tour packages; c) post-pandemic travel boom: "revenge travel"; d) relaxed visas and tourism policies; e) cheap flights and travel accessibility; low-cost air travel: in 2019, there were 4.5 billion flights taken globally, nearly triple the amount just two decades earlier; f) the cruise industry: massive influx of tourists to a destination all at once can strain local infrastructure and cause congestion; g) the rise of short-term rentals: *airbnb* and others; h) social media as a source of travel inspiration: sharing of trip photos and videos has cultivated a sense of peer pressure; influencers; films / TV series; i) "Overmarketing" of destinations; j) digital nomads: locations with reliable internet, co-working spaces, lower living costs, abundant leisure activities, and favourable visa regulations are particularly attractive to them; destinations like Lisbon have become popular digital nomad bases; however, the influx of foreigners with higher spending power can drive up local housing prices, leading to conflicts with residents (Brajcich, 2024). Also, platforms such as *Booking.com* and *Tripadvisor*, that facilitate visibility and cheap reservations, and divulge short-term rentals (Alcântara and Nascimento, 2025).

**Figure 12: Global Airline Passengers**

Source: Brajcich, 2024

As a reaction, residents demonstrate a “growing intolerance of and dissatisfaction with the uncontrolled flood of tourists” (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019). There is a growing discomfort regarding tourism because of the perception of loss of rights and quality of life (Cañada et al., 2024). The exponential growth in tourism activity experienced throughout the world over the past half-century has been increasingly questioned by an expanding body of activists and critical researchers. Global tourism has become one key factor in the process of environmental degradation at a planetary scale. Therefore, new concepts arise: post tourism, hyper-tourism and trans-tourism.

Post-tourism may be defined as having an internal logic in which play, oblique posturing, and ludic transgression interact with artifice, assumed inauthenticity and pastiche, the clash of opposites, provocation and even cynicism. The main attraction is no longer thought to be solely of a geographical, landscape or heritage nature but is above all seen as being centred on the sensation and experience offered by events, shows and festivals or by hybrid recreational experiences, novelty and entertainment. For example, leisure parks, spectacles, shows, events, unusual “spots” and the ephemeral.

Hyper-tourism was conceived from the notion of hypermodernity. A technological, geographical and cultural intensification of the meaning and forms of tourism pushed to their limits in terms of ostentatious consumption, psychological release and a break with common sense. Driven by a “further, higher, stronger, more expensive” one-upmanship in terms of mobility, high-tech and luxury, with prestigious over-developments and services, ultra-sophisticated facilities and oversized events in an elitist logic: for example, new cruises, space tourism, palace stays and giant shopping or recreational centres.

Trans-tourism, which echoes transmodernity, goes “beyond” tourism. Refers to practices and representations of recreation that are marked by ethical voluntarism (social, environmental, economic) and a search for existential coherence based on mixing the recreational universe with daily life, agriculture, heritage, art(isanship), education, personal development and even spirituality. Driven by a logic of learning collectives and territories, it is seen as a kind of dialogue between everyday life and tourism, between amateur and professional registers and between ordinary places and tourist places (Bourdeau, 2018). Regenerative tourism may be included in this definition: it goes beyond sustainable tourism and minimising impact, and it includes a contribution to the improvement of the territory and to empower local communities. It “seeks to leave destinations in a

better state than they were found. It draws inspiration from regenerative agriculture, which emphasises restoring ecosystems and enhancing biodiversity”<sup>5</sup>.

In Portugal, trans-tourism has been practiced in rural Portugal for some decades. Since the nineteen sixties rural exodus, “agriculture has no longer been the main activity, and new forms of occupation in rural areas have arisen. From rural tourism to promotion of heritage, both material and natural, many public policies have been put in place in order to attract people, families and private companies to rural territories” (Almeida, 2022). There are new uses for the rural space in Portugal. It’s now associated with leisure and entertainment, by using existing resources to attract a population in need of stimuli that allow them to free themselves from a repetitive urban daily life and prone to a certain nostalgia for nature and a return to the past. Leisure in the Portuguese rural world includes traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, spas, as well as new activities: off-road tours with all sorts of vehicles, hiking, bicycle and horseback rides; cultural visits and heritage consumption: buildings, castles, churches, gastronomy, arts and crafts; rivers, dams and reservoirs meant for electricity production and for irrigations, now are also used for water sports, rowing, fishing (Almeida and Melo, 2007).

Agrarian landscape has mostly been transformed into leisure space or into places of nature conservation, mainly associated with tourism (Eusébio et al., 2017). People visit these areas to consume the unpolluted air, natural resources, tradition and heritage (Carneiro et al., 2015, Silva et al., 2016). The utilitarian function of the rural world as a supplier of food and raw material has been replaced by ‘theme parks’ for alternative lifestyles. Tourism and heritage have provided new roles and uses to rural areas: these post-agricultural spaces are suffering ‘McRuralisation’ processes of globalization, with uses associated with consumption by new actors (visitors, tourists and environmentalists) (Figueiredo, 2013). Natural and built heritage are the most important touristic resources that low-density territories have to offer (Almeida, 2022).

On the other end, undertourism is the opposite of overtourism. It has already entered academic discussion as a term. It’s the situation when a city or other holiday destination does not receive many tourists or enough tourists. It is also an increasingly common marketing tactic being used by less-frequented destinations. But it also refers to destinations where the impact on tourism players means that tourism does not contribute to the quality of life in the destination in the long run and that stakeholders are irritated by insufficient tourism opportunities and benefits (Mihalic, 2020).

A growing trend is antitourism and tourismphobia, defined by opposing tourism and by intellectual and cultural responses to mass tourism that attach disrespectful or negative meaning to terms such as “tourist” and “tourism”. In response to these negative representations of tourists and tourism, other visitors try to avoid everything known to be “touristic”. Antitourism is connected to the negative impacts of mass tourism and destination mobilisation using the motto “Tourists go home.” “Aversion to tourism” or tourism “rejection” is a result of the negative effects of tourism development. From the perspective of local residents, antitourism starts after visitor carrying capacity is reached and perceptions of quality of life begin to decline. Residents' contentment with the growth of tourism in terms of visitation and impacts turns into dissatisfaction and irritation, resulting in their opposition to tourism development, projects, or presence. In such circumstances, overtourism is met with mobilised or organised movements of irritated destination residents acting against the development of tourism and social movements being organised to oppose growth projects. Similarly, the new meaning of antitourism can also be applied from the visitor perspective: antitourism or antivisitation from the visitor perspective starts after visitors' carrying capacity limit has been reached: overall visitor satisfaction with the destination turns into dissatisfaction and visitors react by leaving and avoiding the destination in the future. Overtourism and antitourism give

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<sup>5</sup> GSTC, (n.d.)

ground to the socio-political dimension of sustainability, which should be given more attention in the sustainability paradigm context. Tourismphobia describes forms in which antitourism manifests, such as organised movements and pressures. One instance is discrimination expressed against visitors, as epitomized by the slogans “tourists you are terrorists” and “no tourists allowed” observed in Barcelona (Mihalic, 2020).

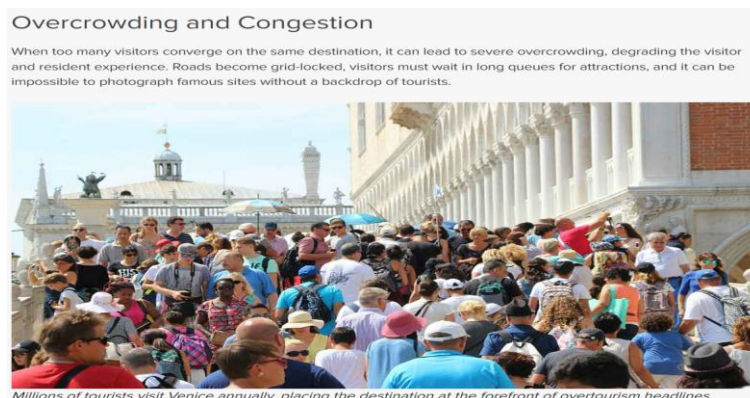
Many anti-tourism movements or ‘resistant identities’ are voicing their concern regarding the continuously growing number of tourists visiting Europe. Anti-tourism protesters have been particularly virulent in Spain and Italy. The reasons for this rise of anti-tourism are varied and include the fact that large number of visitors are putting the UNESCO World Heritage status of some destination at risk (Seraphin et al., 2018).

### Case Study Venice

Venice has become almost synonymous with overtourism. It’s one of the most emblematic cases of overtourism affecting a historic city. With a population under 60,000, the city receives 30 million visitors per year. Tourist beds rose from 8,249 in 2008 to 49,260 in 2019 (497 per cent growth). Total number of restaurants has increased by 160 per cent. In the same period there was a population decline of –13 per cent (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019).

Venetians compare this to living in a “theme park.” In 2019 there were huge protests by many associations and citizens who openly voiced their dissatisfaction with the seemingly unlimited, uncontrolled flood of tourists, particularly from cruise ships, with the moto: “*No Grandi Navi!*” These protests led to innovations and reactions: cruise ships were limited and banned from St. Mark’s basin and the Lagoon. A tourist tax had already been introduced in 2011, and tourists who spend the night now contribute to the cost of the city’s maintenance. There is also a day-tripper fee since 2022: a €5 charge for short-term visitors; the policy is targeted at cruise excursionists and bus tours. Turnstile-like entry points that can regulate access to popular areas. There’s advance booking for certain major sights, and the use of surveillance cameras and mobile phone data to monitor tourist numbers in real time, allowing city police to redirect flows or temporarily close crowded bridges. The city has imposed rules (and fines) to curb unruly tourist behaviour – like banning sitting and picnicking on the church steps of St. Mark’s, and recently capping tour group sizes to 25. Venice’s government insists these measures are necessary to prevent “Venicide,” the death of Venice by mass tourism (Brajcich, 2024).

**Figure 13: Rialto Bridge, Venice**



Source: Brajcich, 2024

## Case Study Balearics, Spain

In 2023, the Balearic Islands (Majorca, Menorca, Ibiza and Formentera), home to around 1.2 million people, received 14.4 million tourists. Tourist tax: 6€. Local problems caused by tourism may be summed up to impact on the ecosystem; deterioration of public services; gentrification; increase in cost of living. There was an open letter in several different languages by seven environment CSO from Maiorca, Spain, asking tourists not to come (Postal, 2025).

## Case Study Canary Islands, Spain

With a population of 2.24 million, the Canary Islands received 15.2 million tourists in 2024; 4.36 million tourists in the first three months of 2025. It generates 40 per cent of job opportunities, which creates an economic monoculture (Pimpão, 2025). Platform “Canary Islands have a limit” raised protests on 18 May 2025, with slogans “Canary Islands not for sale”; “Canary Islands no longer a Paradise”; “Gran Canaria has exceeded its limit, tourists go home”. Their demands: regulation of short-term rentals; freezing of new tourist constructions (UOL, 2025).

**Figure 14: Protests in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria**



Moradores pedem mudança no modelo de turismo nas Ilhas Canárias, em Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Espanha, em 18 de maio de 2025  
Imagem: Borja Suarez/REUTERS

Source: UOL, 2025.

**Figure 15: Protests in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria**



Homem protesta contra excesso de turistas nas Ilhas Canárias: "Turistas, vão embora"  
Imagem: Borja Suarez/REUTERS

Source: UOL, 2025

## Case Study Barcelona

Barcelona is a major case of touristic massification, ever since the 1992 Olympic Games and the enlargement of its airport in that same year. It has 1.7 million residents. In 2024 there were 15.5 million overnight tourists, a 30 per cent increase from 2023. Tourism accounts for 14 per cent of the city's income and 150,000 jobs. There are 152,000 hotel beds for visitors and 60,000 tourist apartment beds. Also, in 2024 there were 800 cruise ships with 1.6 million cruise ship passengers, who only stay for a few hours (Guy, 2025). The Basilica de la Sagrada Familia receives 18 to 22 million visitors per year. In Barcelona there have been massive demonstrations against excessive tourism. The major concern is the price of housing: according to the municipality, rentals have increased 68 per cent over the last decade, and there are not enough for residents, with negative consequences on local commerce, environment and working conditions. Several investment funds are "occupying" the city, by buying entire buildings and forcing old tenants to leave, in order to convert apartments into short-term rentals. In some buildings, residents resisted. There is a tenants' union in the city that protects resistance actions and collective actions. For example, in Casa Orsola, tenants refused to leave and the municipality bought the entire building, maintaining low rents for old residents (Alcântara and Nascimento, 2025). Local residents are protesting regularly, led by the "Neighbourhood Assembly for the Dismantling of Tourism" – a serious case of tourismphobia, with "rage against tourism".

Local government's solutions: on February 2025 the Spanish Government and the Communes of Catalonia have agreed to double the tourist tax from 3.40€ per person per night, with an increase of up to 15€ in luxury hotels, and allocate 25 per cent of its income to combat the housing crisis, in a new package of fiscal measures to deal with the impact of tourism and combat property speculation. Tourist on cruise ships pay 6.5€ for disembarking. There was also a prohibition of "pub crawls" – no alcohol consumption allowed on the streets; and no smoking on the beach (Bailey, 2025). Mayor Jaume Collboni announced that the city would revoke the licenses for the 10,000 licensed tourist apartments in 2028 to help create more affordable housing (Goodman, 2025). Barcelona will become the first European city to end licenses for vacation rentals, requiring owners to offer them as long-term lodging at capped rents by 2028 or put them up for sale (Alderman and Bautista, 2025). The latest development was the closure of two of the city's cruise ships' terminals, with "only" five remaining (Guy, 2025).

**Figure 16: Protests in Barcelona**



Source: Calle, 2024

**Figure 17: Protests in Barcelona**

Source: Lusa, 2025a

### Case Studies Lisbon and Porto

Portugal has received international focus on its housing market. Economic policies attracted foreign financial funds and real estate companies. Golden Visas, launched in 2012 to encourage the purchase of property by non-residents, along with policies to facilitate the renovation of buildings and special tax incentives, contributed to the reinforcement of international investment. This situation has created a growing challenge of housing affordability: the cost of housing is significantly high compared to the income of the population. Thus, a housing accessibility crisis (Azevedo et al., 2024). Real estate prices rose 50 per cent from 2012 to 2018 and in 2025 they continue to rise 7.4 per cent a year in Portugal, 6.8 per cent in Lisbon, 4.9 per cent in Porto<sup>6</sup>. Together with the tourist boom there was considerable urban renewal, with old buildings converted into expensive apartments, hostels and short-term rentals. New modern restaurants replaced the old *tascas*, known for its poor hygiene and disregard for sanitation rules. Old commerce was cleaned up, almost *disneyfied*. International brands replaced most traditional and historical shops. Cities became overcrowded with tourists, hostels, tuk-tuks, cruise ships, pollution, over priced housing, and transportation cannot respond. Old neighbourhoods were gentrified, celebrities moved to Lisbon and Porto, local residents and families moved out. Cities are losing permanent population. As short-term holiday rentals have doubled from 2014 to 2018 in downtown historical neighbourhoods, the resident population has diminished by 8,000. New licences were suspended in 2019 in civil parishes where the local accommodation/housing ratio is above 2.5 per cent (Raposo, 2024).

With such problems as excess tourism; affordable housing versus gentrification of old neighbourhoods; expensive students' residencies, creating discriminatory access to university education; standardisation of commerce, eliminating local and national products and traditional shops; there is also increasing pollution, garbage and traffic.

With the tourist industry, business flourishes, guides are making money and the "Sustainable Tourism" concept is used to sell tour packs, with bicycle tours and yoga classes...

<sup>6</sup> Idealista, n.d.

**Figure 18: The Sustainable Tourism Strategy**



*Source: Photo by the author.*

However, Lisbon has been invaded by tuk-tuks, go cars, and segways, who occupy public space.

**Figure 19: Tuk-tuks in Lisbon**



*Source: Leandro, 2025*

**Figure 20: Trams in Lisbon**



*Source: Visit Portugal, n.d.*

**Figure 21: Trams in Lisbon**

Source: Dom Pedro, n.d.

Lisbon has had modern public transportation since the nineteenth century. And beautiful trams. It doesn't need an import from Asia. Tuk-tuks are a nuisance for locals, they are very noisy and underpowered. They constantly obstruct the capital's narrow streets and viewpoints as they queue up one behind another where the potential clients are. Since 2025 restrictions were enforced: they were forbidden in 337 streets in Lisbon and 9 streets in Porto. And there are new rules for parking spaces (MadreMedia, 2025, Sobral, 2025). "The focus of this measure is clearly to reduce the negative impact of these vehicles on traffic and on residents' daily lives, taking into account a better balance between this type of tourist activity and the quality of urban mobility" (Leandro, 2025).

Cruise ships are also a challenge: floating buildings in front of Alfama disrupt the old town and are an insult to over 2,000 years of maritime exploration and adventures. They create air pollution, noise pollution and fuel pollution in the Tagus River waters. Locals don't benefit from these crowds, because the cruise companies already have all the services negotiated beforehand so they can take their commission. It also generates mass tourism for only a few hours, there is not even time for a proper meal. Regardless, the municipality inaugurated a cruise terminal in 2017, advertising it as "a reference in the international cruise market", which "places Lisbon among the best served ports in this activity"<sup>7</sup>. In 2023, 700,000 passengers landed in Lisbon, coming first from the United Kingdom, the USA in second, followed by Germany and Canada. According to the port administration of Lisbon, cruise activity had a direct economic impact on the city of over 83 million euros (Lusa, 2024). However, *Cidadania LX*, a local citizens platform, issued a request to remove the cruise ship terminal from its location, using other European capitals as examples. For now, the municipality's policy maintains its position, disregarding the interests of concerned citizens<sup>8</sup>. It has, however, doubled Lisbon's tourist tax to 4€ per night in 2024, plus a 2€ tax per day for cruise ships' passengers. In the last ten years, this tax has generated over 260 million euros, used for financing urban hygiene and investments in specific urban equipment such as the Navy Dock, the Museum of the Royal Treasury and the Museum of the 25<sup>th</sup> April Bridge (Lusa, 2025b).

<sup>7</sup> Porto de Lisboa, n.d.

<sup>8</sup> Cidadania LX, 2025

**Figure 22: Cruise Ships Docked at Lisbon's Cruise Terminal, View from Alfama**

Source: Lusa, 2024

On 8 November 2024, there was a “popular initiative” by a citizen organisation called “Housing Referendum Movement” demanding a referendum regarding short-term rentals’ licences. A petition was presented with over 11,000 signatures, 6,500 of them by local registered voters. On 3 December, there was a public discussion at the Municipal Assembly, with a high level of participation. It’s interesting to analyse the arguments presented by both sides: 1) the “Housing Referendum Movement” dreams of a future when neighbourhoods are inhabited, and neighbours may build solidarity ties and live as a community, as in the past; 2) on the other hand, a local councillor argued that airbnbs are always presented as a scapegoat; the housing problem was not just caused by tourism; there are thousands of abandoned properties that should be placed on the market and there should be more incentives towards new buildings for social rental. In fact, there are over 47,740 vacant buildings, almost 15 per cent of Lisbon’s total housing stock. Short-term rentals represent less than two per cent of the housing market (Santiago, 2025).

The referendum question was supposed to be: “Do you agree to amend the Municipal Regulation for Local Accommodation so that the Lisbon Municipality, within 180 days, orders the cancellation of local accommodation registered in properties intended for housing?” The question was evaluated by the Constitutional Court of Law, and it was rejected for lack of control over the petition’s signatures. It would be the first time that a referendum took place in Lisbon, and also the first time in Portugal by citizens’ initiative. For the referendum to be binding, there should be a turnout of over fifty per cent.

In Porto, during the Easter Holidays 2025, most tourists were Spanish. Streets were crowded and hotels were full (occupancy rate 90 per cent). Shopkeepers complained that tourists are just passing by with their trolleys. They don’t buy a single product. “Spanish tourists don’t even eat at restaurants, they buy food in supermarkets. Americans spend more money, and they buy our arts and crafts”. On the other hand, tourists complain that Porto is now the same as any other city. “The buildings are beautiful and unique, but there is no local commerce. Shops are the same as in Spain” (Cruz, 2025). And if you’d like to visit Lello’s bookshop, with its famous staircase which inspired Harry Potter’s author J. K. Rawlin, who lived in Porto and worked there as a teacher before starting to write one of

the most successful sagas ever, you have to buy a ticket, book in advance, and wait in line. The value of the ticket voucher may be discounted with the purchase of a book<sup>9</sup>.

**Figure 23: Lello Bookstore in Porto**



*Source: Livraria Lello's Facebook page*

**Figure 24: Lello Bookstore in Porto**



*Source: Livraria Lello's Facebook page.*

### **Case study Comporta, Alentejo, Southwest Coast of Portugal**

The Alentejo region seashore has wide beaches located in the Southwest Alentejo and Vicentine Coast Natural Park. It was a peaceful and almost deserted region, with only a few villages and scattered houses, where older people lived their retirement in small houses, some rich families spent their summers hidden in pine forests, and middle-class families used to go camping. Recently, this region was discovered by investors who are calling it “The new Hamptons”. International celebrities bought properties, and resorts are being built on top of cliffs and dunes, damaging the ecosystem and consuming enormous amounts of water, particularly for golf courses. Troia, Melides and Comporta: “the empire of seashore golf courses”, when Portugal is going through extreme drought? (Fazendeiro, 2023). Nowadays, 60 per cent of the houses in the municipality of Grândola cost over a million euros

<sup>9</sup> Livraria Lello, n.d.

(Cabrita-Mendes, 2025). And real estate prices are rising 25 per cent per year in the region<sup>10</sup>. Campsites were closed and beach access was restricted, disregarding Portuguese law of Maritime Public Domain, all the way from 1864<sup>11</sup>, which states that all maritime shores belong to the State, and all beaches are public and have free access.

Several CSOs and NGO in Portugal are raising awareness and confronting this trend. Particularly, they advocate a more sustainable agricultural and touristic model. For example, *Dunas Livres*<sup>12</sup>, with contributions from crowdfunding, have presented a legal case against the implementation of the large-scale tourism project called Na Praia, located in the Tróia Peninsula, financed by Sandra Ortega, heir to Spanish fast-fashion Inditex (Zara, Pull & Bear, Massimo Dutti, Bershka, Stradivarius, Oysho, Zara Home). This resort is being constructed over the dunes, and it limits beach access to a privileged elite. A lawsuit was filed in 2022 against the Municipality of Grândola, questioning the licensing process of this project, from its controversial Environmental Impact Statement to the start of construction without a permit, and the undeniable and irreversible destruction of endemic plant species protected by European law. They were able to halt the construction (which had begun illicitly) through a media precautionary measure. However, the mayor of the municipality of Grândola was able to convert the project into a PIN – Project of National Interest, a classification that offers legal protection in public administration and territorial planning, resulting in the continuation of construction and the total destruction of the dune habitats and their vegetation across the 198 hectares of this project.

**Figure 25: The Tróia Peninsula with Resorts and Golf Courses**



Source: Pinto IL, 2023

Demonstrations by concerned citizens have taken place in Grândola on 25 April 2023. This municipality is the symbol of the Portuguese Revolution of 25 April 1974, because the Revolution's theme song was "Grândola Vila Morena", where "the people are in command". Apparently, international resorts are above the law, and the people are no longer in command. On the 2024 parade to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution, a sign read: "1974 – Carnation Revolution; 2024 – No water for carnations". Carnations were also a symbol of the revolution, but water is no longer available to irrigate them, because it's being used for intensive monoculture and tourism resorts. The subject has been extensively divulged in the media, and there was an award-winning documentary on public television that denounced the situation (Pinto IL, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Idealista, 2025

<sup>11</sup> Confirmed by Law n. 54/2005, 15 November 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Dunas Livres, n.d.

Because of the huge increase in resort developments and luxury tourism in Grândola's seashore, this municipality has multiplied its tax income from real estate transactions: from two million euros in 2012 to 33 million euros in 2022. With a 139 thousand euros deficit in 2012, it now has a 27 million surplus. However, local residents are not satisfied with the municipalities' performance, since the extra income is not being applied in services, such as transportation, health, the fire department, day care and schools. Affordable housing is a problem for the new and growing workforce, and even for resort owners who must buy buildings to accommodate their staff (Ramos et al., 2024). The high media visibility that came with the development of the "New Hamptons" (Fazendeiro, 2023; Parnell, 2023) has caused a reaction by the municipality: in 2024, there was a new PDM – Municipal Master Plan proposal with a reduction of tourist beds, which was open to public discussion. All the local CSOs participated and issued statements remarking the fact that Grândola municipality borrowed beds from neighbouring municipalities, hence maintaining the excess of tourist beds (30 thousand predicted, more than double the resident population) and the environmental impact (water and ecological resources) of the new projects under construction. After over eighty written contributions by private citizens and CSOs, on 17 December 2024, the new PDM was approved by the municipal assembly as it was in its previous version, totally ignoring the proposed changes. Construction continues.

Again, there is a problem of a type of tourism that deprives citizens of their rights and damages a sensitive ecosystem, affecting the quality of life of residents and traditional users of the territory.

### **Local Government's Response to Overtourism**

In Spain and Italy, municipalities have responded by capping visitor numbers and reservations; introducing and raising tourist taxes and fees; managing tourist behaviour and flows; encouraging responsible behaviour, reducing nuisance to residents, and spreading tourist presence more evenly in space and time. In Spain, "specific actions include the obligation to address the sustainability of the tourism sector as a whole, and to raise awareness and inform both tourism workers and tourists about the sustainable use of resources. (...) some tourist companies (hotels, apartments) have been developing efficiency actions in the management of water and energy in their facilities (...) Obtaining certificates or quality seals (ISO 5001 or Biosphere hotels seal) has become a brand image of the tourism company" (Dorta-Antequera et al., 2024). "The Spanish government on Monday (19 May) ordered Airbnb to remove nearly 66,000 listings from its platform, widening a crackdown on tourist rentals as it seeks to alleviate a housing crisis that has become among the worst in Europe" (Alderman and Bautista, 2025).

In Portugal, local government is still encouraging overtourism by allowing new resorts and the increase of cruise ships, new short-term rentals and tourist shops against traditional commerce. It's definitely not listening to residents and local citizens' associations. Tourist guides are still directed towards the same crowded spaces. Instead, they could advise tourists towards the diversity of the territory, especially rural areas, castles, rural hotels, and not solely focus on downtown areas in big cities like Lisbon and Porto!

### **Proposals by Specialists**

Sustainable tourism is a major issue defined as "quality of life centred tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, socio-cultural, and natural impacts and responsibly addresses destination stakeholders (host communities and industry), visitors, and the socio-political environment" (Mihalic, 2020).

Responses include calls for reversing the trend in pursuit of touristic degrowth; discussions of sustainable tourism development; de-touristification as a downsizing of tourism, particularly within

very touristified spaces, combined with a process of degrowth-inspired economic diversification; de-commodification of tourism, leisure and recreation (Murray et al., 2023).

There is also “trexit”, a term that is short for tourism exit. Its approach is suggested by the anti-tourism movements (Seraphin, Sheeran, Pilato, 2018). In order to prevent overtourism, strategic planning, regulation, and proactive management are necessary; there is “the urgent need to manage visitation and protect the integrity of popular destinations (...) controlled short-term rentals can help alleviate overtourism by distributing tourists across different neighbourhoods, reducing the pressure on city centres and hotspots. Additionally, short-term rentals can promote cultural exchange and supplementary income when residents rent out rooms” (Brajcich, 2024). On the other side, visitors can take action by staying informed about overtourism issues, making conscious travel decisions that help distribute tourist traffic, and engaging in sustainable behaviours to minimise their negative impact. Simple actions like visiting at off-peak times, respecting cultural norms, reducing waste, and supporting local businesses can make a difference (Brajcich, 2024).

Another important measure could be aviation taxes in Europe, with a foreseeable increase in prices, which would limit air travel. Some NGO are advocating for different experiences, more nature oriented than the traditional beach and bars packages in the Algarve region or the Balears in Spain. Within a framework of post-tourism concepts (Bourdeau, 2018), mountain resorts and spas, with hiking programs and gastronomy, events, shows, and festivals, have entered regional programs and attraction strategies, some supported by interior municipalities (Almeida, 2017).

Proximity tourism is the most desirable solution for holidays: geographic proximity with emphasis on local destinations, using low-carbon emissions transportation. Why not staycations: vacations at home? Or one day travels? And most important: domestic diaspora tourism, the return to hometowns, traditionally rural, to visit friends and family. Inland territories can benefit from local tourism, and this represents an opportunity to develop sustainable and responsible frameworks (Cañada et al., 2023).

Scholars from Barcelona have presented the most radical (and even elitist) proposals, with emphasis on local communities: 1) to reorganise touristic activities; 2) to replace long distance tourism with proximity tourism; 3) to degrowth; 4) to promote quality tourism, with high income tourists; 5) collective mobilisation against growing airport infrastructures; 6) to reduce cruise ships’ infrastructures; 7) to increase local community facilities; 8) public policies and regulations regarding touristic sites and against city touristification; 9) deconcentration of touristic activities – this does not mean a decrease in the neighbourhoods and districts most affected by tourism, but rather that tourist capital expands to other places; 10) to end international tourist promotion; 11) to limit terraces in bars and restaurants to recover sidewalks and to ensure the neighbours rest; 12) to impose limits on short-term rentals; 13) collective and sustainable mobility; 14) to impose limits on air and cruise travels and domestic flights that may be replaced by trains, as France did in 2023; 15) prohibition of private jets (Cañada et al., 2023).

## Conclusions

Tourism, if not managed and planned, radically changes the social and urban structures of the cities and the lives of local residents. 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 opportunities for citizens (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019).

To answer the initial research questions: in Portugal local government hasn't been on the side of citizens and the environment. Citizen's organisations haven't been successful on their concerns, legal actions and protests. On the other hand, in Venice and Barcelona local government has given stricter and more efficient responses to citizens' protests. However, according the local specialists, these measures aren't enough. The proposals are very challenging, even radical, and they face resistance from corporations and economic interests that pay important municipal and government taxes, therefore, they have a privileged connection to the local and national governments.

The European Commission issued a report stating that, because of the housing problem and the pressure felt from the short-term tourist accommodation market, particularly in popular urban and holiday areas, "Portugal should consider long-lasting measures to control the rapid rise in rental prices. This could be achieved by i) further regulating short-term tourism rentals in pressured areas, by ii) enacting rent regulation measures to protect the most affected groups, and iii) by assessing the supply of vacant, derelict or underused homes both in the public and private stocks in the most affected cities promoting their availability" (Commission Staff Working Document, 2025). In sum, enforcing a "housing first" policy (Relvas, 2025).

Barcelona has become a case study for the European Union: a group of members of the European Parliament formed a special committee to observe the housing crisis; on May 2025 they visited Barcelona in order to produce a report on good practices based on this city's policies (Calle, 2025). Maybe the Portuguese government and municipalities could learn from Barcelona!

In sum, overtourism is a local and international challenge that should be addressed on a multi-level government framework focused on, not only economic gains, but mostly environmental concerns and the quality of life for local residents. That is the only way to make the tourist experience pleasurable for everyone involved.

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