



OVERTOURISM: POTENTIAL SHORT- AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

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Overtourism: Potential Short- and Long-Term Solutions

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Overtourism: Potential Short- and Long-term Solutions

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PREFACE

The P-Insights, short for “Productivity Insights,” is an extension of the Productivity Talk (P-Talk) series, which is a flagship program under the APO Secretariat’s digital information initiative. Born out of both necessity and creativity under the prolonged COVID-19 pandemic, the interactive, livestreamed P-Talks bring practitioners, experts, policymakers, and ordinary citizens from all walks of life with a passion for productivity to share their experience, views, and practical tips on productivity improvement.

With speakers from every corner of the world, the P-Talks effectively convey productivity information to APO member countries and beyond. However, it was recognized that many of the P-Talk speakers had much more to offer beyond the 60-minute presentations and Q&A sessions that are the hallmarks of the series. To take full advantage of their broad knowledge and expertise, some were invited to elaborate on their P-Talks, resulting in this publication. It is hoped that the P-Insights will give readers a deeper understanding of the practices and applications of productivity as they are evolving during the pandemic and being adapted to meet different needs in the anticipated new normal.

INTRODUCTION

Overtourism is becoming a major issue for cities across the globe [1]. In short, overtourism occurs when there are too many visitors to a particular destination. It can be defined as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors’ experiences in a negative way” [2]. In general, having too many visitors crowded in a certain place might not be a good experience for them (Figure 1). At the same time, the local way of life will be disturbed and affected at a certain level. Examples can be found both in the West and the East: for example, in cities such as Barcelona, Paris, Berlin, Reykjavik, Kyoto, Bali, and Macau. There are different discussions on the ways to tackle the issue of overtourism [3, 4]. However, for the purpose of providing some possible short- and long-term solutions to this problem, in this P-Insights report the author uses the strategies outlined by the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) in 2018 and supplements them with examples for discussion.

FIGURE 1

MACAU RUINS – RUINAS DE SAO PAULO CROWDED WITH TOURISTS.



Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS VISITOR GROWTH IN CITIES

In 2018, the UNWTO published a report entitled “Overtourism?—Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions” [2]. The report outlined 11 strategies relevant to coping with the issue of overtourism in cities (Table 1).

TABLE 1

ELEVEN STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS VISITOR GROWTH IN CITIES.

Strategy 1	Promote the dispersal of visitors within the city and beyond
Strategy 2	Promote time-based dispersal of visitors
Strategy 3	Stimulate new visitor itineraries and attractions
Strategy 4	Review and adapt regulations
Strategy 5	Enhance visitor segmentation
Strategy 6	Ensure local communities benefit from tourism
Strategy 7	Create city experiences that benefit both residents and visitors
Strategy 8	Improve city infrastructure and facilities
Strategy 9	Communicate with and engage local stakeholders
Strategy 10	Communicate with and engage visitors
Strategy 11	Set monitoring and response measures

Source: Modified from UNWTO [2].

Strategy 1: Promote the Dispersal of Visitors within the City and Beyond

Under this strategy, one of the ways to deal with overtourism in a city is to develop and promote visitor attractions and facilities in less-visited sections of the city and in surrounding areas. To take the example of the Hong Kong Wetland Park (HKWP), Hong Kong only covers an area of 1,106 km², and most tourists come to Hong Kong for shopping in the city. The HKWP is located in the New Territories, relatively distant from the city center, and this is therefore a good project to disperse visitors beyond the city.

According to a former manager of the HKWP [5], “Hong Kong Wetland Park is a world-class ecotourism facility combining conservation, education and tourism objectives.” To be more specific, the aims of the HKWP Project are to: 1) diversify the range of tourism attractions; 2) diversify visitors’ experience of natural heritage and wildlife; 3) foster public awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the inherent values of wetlands; and 4) marshal public support and action for wetland conservation (Figure 2).

The HKWP has a 60-ha Ecological Mitigation Area to compensate for the loss of habitats caused by the Tin Shui Wai New Town development. It is a buffer between Tin Shui Wai and the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site, a Millennium Capital Works Project to promote ecotourism, and a Special Area under the Country Parks Ordinance.

FIGURE 2

THE HONG KONG WETLAND PARK – TOUR GUIDE GIVING AN INTERPRETATION TO LOCALS AND VISITORS FROM MAINLAND CHINA.



Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

Strategy 2: Promote Time-based Dispersal of Visitors

This strategy encompasses different approaches. One is to stimulate events and promote dynamic pricing and experiences during off-peak months. The low season in Hong Kong is mainly from June to September, and during this time,

great discounts on travel and accommodation are usually on offer. In addition, the ancient Dragon Boat festival is held in June, and boat races and parties are held around the harbor, making it a unique cultural experience for tourists.

Strategy 3: Stimulate New Visitor Itineraries and Attractions

This strategy requires more creative and innovative thinking. There are at least three ways that Hong Kong can do better: 1) produce city guides and books highlighting hidden treasures; 2) stimulate the development of guided tours through less-visited parts of the city; and 3) create dynamic experiences and routes for niche visitors.

The Hong Kong Association of Registered Tour Co-ordinators (HARTCO) produced a guidebook to celebrate its 30 years of working for the industry and community of Hong Kong [6]. The book contains a wide range of articles on the different attractions and cultures of Hong Kong. The author of this P-Insights report is one of the honorary advisers to this association and contributed two articles for the guidebook to introduce tram travel in Hong Kong (Figure 3).

According to one study of visitors’ experiences of tram travel as an unconventional attraction in Hong Kong, this form of travel offers six different experiences, as summarized in Table 2 [7]. Promoting this type of niche market travel experience will definitely help to diversify the range of experiences on offer to visitors. Ultimately, such efforts will help relieve the issue of overtourism.

TABLE 2

SIX THEMES EMBEDDED IN VISITORS’ EXPERIENCES OF HONG KONG TRAMS.

Entertainment experience	Fun and enjoyment connected to tram riding
People watching	Watching or observing people and their activities on the streets
Historical experience	Recalling or understanding the history of trams and gaining a sense of connection to the past
Slow tourism	The motivations and experiential benefits related to slow mobility
Unique mobility	Experiences related to access and comparison with other transportation systems
Social interaction	Interaction with the servicescape and socialization with other tram riders

Source: Modified from Xu et al. [7].

FIGURE 3

THE AUTHOR HELPS TO PROMOTE TRAM TRAVEL IN HONG KONG.



Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

Strategy 4: Review and Adapt Regulations

Under Strategy 4, the UNWTO report suggested more than 10 different measures, such as reviewing the opening times of visitor attractions, regulation of access to popular attractions for large groups, and regulation and taxation of hotels and other accommodations while defining the carrying capacity of the city and of critical areas and attractions. For example, in 2017, the Institute for Tourism Studies (IFT) published a tourism carrying-capacity report [8]. It estimated that the optimal tourism carrying capacity of Macau was fewer than 110,000 people per day, or fewer than 40.1 million per year. The IFT found that in the 104 days covered by the survey, the number of tourists exceeded the optimal capacity on 22 days. To improve the city's tourism carrying capacity,

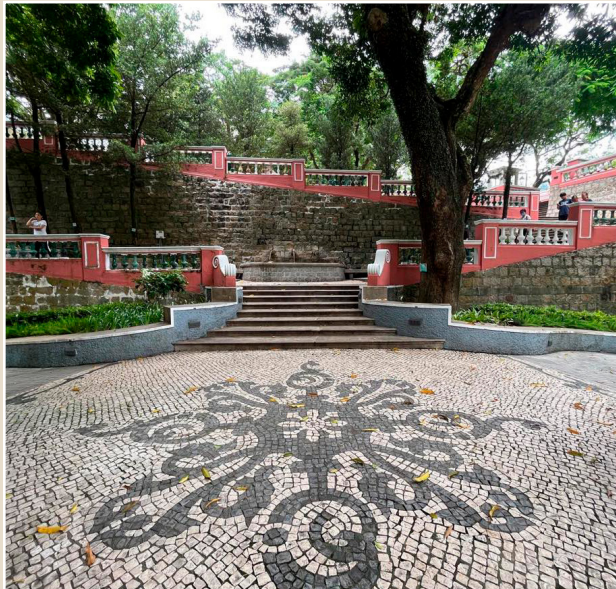
the IFT suggested that the Macau government should divert visitors to second-tier areas by applying smart technology or holding events. In addition, the report suggested that there was a need to conduct in-depth research on the background and behavior of visitors to understand their travel styles.

Strategy 5: Enhance Visitor Segmentation

Identifying and targeting visitor segments with a lower impact according to the specific context and objectives of a city is one of the measures under this strategy. Tailoring attractions and services to specific groups can disperse visitors to less-crowded areas. For example, the Macau government promotes weekend walking tours as an alternative to visiting UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In order to avoid crowds, visitors can explore the fringes of the Historic Centre where the gardens and historical buildings are quiet, beautiful and have a unique Portuguese style (e.g., S. Francisco Garden shown in Figure 4 and Clube Militar de Macau shown in Figure 5).

FIGURE 4

S. FRANCISCO GARDEN.



Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

FIGURE 5

CLUBE MILITAR DE MACAU.



Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

Strategy 6: Ensure Local Communities Benefit from Tourism

The main goals included in this strategy are increasing the level of employment in tourism, creating decent jobs, promoting the positive impacts of tourism, and creating awareness and knowledge of the sector among local communities. The case of Kerala, India, is a good example of the strategy. The Kerala state government established the Responsible Tourism Mission to ensure that local communities benefit through the creation of shared value [9]. The aims of the Responsible Tourism Mission are to make tourism a tool for the development of village and local communities, eradicate poverty, and give emphasis to the empowerment of women. It claims that responsible tourism is about “making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.”

Strategy 7: Create City Experiences That Benefit Both Residents and Visitors

Under strategy 7, a smart measure for coping with overtourism is to develop a city to fit residents’ needs and desires and consider tourists as temporary

residents. To address the challenge of overtourism, Barcelona has sought to treat visitors as temporary residents since 2004 [10]. In other words, the city authorities seek to integrate visitors and foster coexistence. The aims are to increase the positive impacts of tourism in the city and make tourism more sustainable. This strategy can change the dynamics of tourism and the host–guest relationship. Finally, the city creates visitor experiences that benefit both residents and visitors.

Strategy 8: Improve City Infrastructure and Facilities

One way to improve a city’s infrastructure and facilities is to create a city-wide plan for well-balanced, sustainable traffic management. An effective measure is to create safe cycling routes and stimulate bicycle rentals. The city of Amsterdam is a good example. It is a cycling city and one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the world, with many bike paths (Figure 6) and easy-to-find bike parking spaces (Figure 7). Its citizens have spent their lives cycling since they were children [11].

FIGURE 6

AMSTERDAM: A CYCLING CITY.



Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

FIGURE 7**EASY BIKE PARKING IN AMSTERDAM.**

Source: Dr. Alan Wong.

Strategy 9: Communicate with and Engage Local Stakeholders

Tackling the issue of overtourism is not an easy task. A top-down approach cannot be used; rather, a strategy that involves different stakeholders, in particular, local people, is required. Tourism management groups that include all stakeholders should be established, and meetings should be held regularly for better communication. In addition, it is necessary to conduct regular research among residents and other local stakeholders. The case of Sagada in the Philippines is a good example of how stakeholder collaboration can be used to tackle overtourism. A study of overtourism in Sagada [12] used different qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participant observations, and informal conversations, to collect data from 2017 to 2019. The findings indicated that through stakeholder cooperation, the problems brought about by the influx of tourists can be softened. The study concluded that overtourism can be alleviated.

Strategy 10: Communicate with and Engage Visitors

Strategy 10 includes measures such as creating an awareness of the impact of tourism among visitors and educating visitors about local values, traditions, and regulations. Education can be a long-term solution to overtourism; this will be discussed further later in this report. To give an example in Portugal [13], the city of Coimbra is struggling with an excess of tourists and difficult management challenges. A potential solution to this overtourism problem is to provide tourists with informal educational activities associated with alternative tourism products in neighboring or peripheral small towns, with the aim of fostering an in-depth knowledge of the area that emphasizes its culture. Ultimately, this strategy should help to divert tourists and visitors from the overloaded tourism sites.

Strategy 11: Set Monitoring and Response Measures

The different measures involved in applying strategy 11 include: 1) monitoring key indicators, such as seasonal fluctuations in demand, arrivals, and expenditures, patterns of visitation to attractions, and visitor segments; 2) advancing the use of big data and new technologies to monitor and evaluate tourism performance and impact; and 3) creating contingency plans for peak periods and emergency situations. Again, the city of Barcelona is a good example to illustrate this strategy [10]. Barcelona publishes monthly forecasts of visitor numbers for each day, reporting all events or activities that involve 10,000 or more people; when the forecast exceeds 70,000, the calendar is marked in red, and residents can then avoid congested areas or the city altogether. For example, in September 2018, there were three days when the forecast was over 200,000, one of which was close to 300,000.

OTHER STRATEGIES TO MANAGE OVERTOURISM

Overtourism and Ecotourism

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) claims that ecotourism is the solution to overtourism [14]. It holds the view that overtourism is the result of tourists and the residents of a tourism destination not having a partnership relationship. According to its research, the people, culture, environment, and natural resources of a community should be the most integral parts of tourism. There are many discussions on what ecotourism involves [15]. However, there are some common characteristics that constitute the basic principles of ecotourism [16]:

1. Minimizing physical, social, behavioral, and psychological impacts;
2. Building environmental and cultural awareness and respect;
3. Providing positive experiences for both visitors and hosts;
4. Providing direct financial benefits for conservation;
5. Generating financial benefits for both local people and private industry;
6. Delivering memorable interpretative experiences to visitors to help raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climates;
7. Designing, constructing, and operating low-impact facilities; and
8. Recognizing the rights and spiritual beliefs of the indigenous people in a community and working in partnership with them to create empowerment.

Although implementing these basic principles of ecotourism will not totally eliminate the problem of overtourism brought about by mass tourism, it will definitely help to decrease the level of the problem.

Overtourism and Tourism Taxes

Tourism taxes are controversial [17]. Some cities, such as Amsterdam, Bali, Barcelona, Bhutan, Venice, and Manchester, have already introduced a tourism tax, and others are planning to do so. It is unclear whether such taxes will deter people from traveling to a destination to ease the problem of overtourism. The taxes are generally too low to deter visitors, but they do enable local authorities to raise money to fund the management of tourism (e.g., to pay for the removal of litter).

Overtourism and Technology

Mohanty et al. stated that overtourism is becoming a global issue for cities [18]. Overtourism is a complicated issue related to different interconnected causes. The challenge is that it has an impact on different parts of a city. Overtourism, which is always related to the sustainability goal, is being addressed through structural policy efforts and the use of technology. Currently, the smart city idea is also being applied to the problem of overtourism in many European cities.

Macau is a good example of a city in Asia which is applying technology to tourism and expects to cope with its overtourism issue. Meneses [19] claimed that: “Macau is already a smart city... although it cannot be the top level in the world... it can be middle level or above. Actually, Macau is better than many developed cities and countries.” One positive innovation in Macau is the introduction of an app for transportation management. Macau residents can easily obtain information about the bus situation, parking availability, road conditions, etc., which helps to enhance their quality of life. Tourists can obtain travel information, such as crowd density and travel planning, through the government app.

The traveling experience can also be enhanced through augmented reality (AR) technology. Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU) and Companhia de Telecomunicações de Macau have revealed plans to jointly conduct a spatial big data analytic study on the needs and preferences of tourists in Macau, leveraging the research expertise of PolyU’s Laboratory for Smart City and Spatial Big Data Analytics [20]. The project aims to optimize Wi-Fi facilities in Macau and to develop data-mining algorithms/tools to analyze the activities and behavioral patterns of tourists in the city. These measures will not only

help improve Macau's urban planning and tourism management and enhance the experience of tourists but will also serve as a test for the development of smart cities in the Greater Bay Area.

Overtourism and Education

Earlier in this report, it was explained how the city of Coimbra in Portugal is dealing with overtourism by diverting tourists to nearby small towns through educational and cultural programs. Researchers elsewhere are now calling for educational interventions to overcome the problem of overtourism [21]. Another group of researchers is investigating overtourism from a tourism education perspective [22]. Education can be a transformative, strategic tool to tackle overtourism and its related negative impacts.

CONCLUSION

This report outlined 11 strategies proposed by the UNWTO to address visitor growth in cities. It then explained different measures under each strategy and gave examples to demonstrate how the strategies can be implemented. The discussion highlighted other strategies related to managing overtourism, such as ecotourism, tourism taxes, and adoption of technology. Overtourism is a complex interaction of different societal, economic, and ecological factors and developments and is therefore a complex, multidimensional issue. There is no quick fix or single, comprehensive solution to the problem. Currently, more research is focusing on the relationship between overtourism and education. Education is being used as a transformative and strategic tool to tackle overtourism and it could be a long-term strategy to resolve overtourism issues.

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