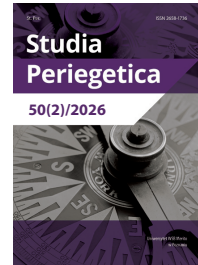


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Reframing Overtourism as Spatial Governance: Planning Mechanisms, Territorial Effects and Regional Interdependence

Abstract. Overtourism is now a central concern in tourism studies, urban governance and destination policy. Yet much of the debate still treats space as the setting in which pressure appears rather than as one of the mechanisms through which it is produced and felt. This article develops a critical interpretive review of overtourism research from the perspective of planning and regional studies. It brings together four main strands of scholarship: volume and carrying-capacity approaches, perception-oriented studies, governance and destination-management research, and political-economic critiques of touristification. The review shows that these strands have generated valuable insights, but that they remain less attentive to destination morphology, circulation, infrastructure, land-use change, housing transformation and interdependence across spatial scales. In response, the article proposes a spatial governance framework that explains how visitor pressure is produced, spatially mediated, institutionally filtered and translated into uneven territorial effects. This reframing helps explain why similar visitor volumes can produce different outcomes across destinations, and why durable responses require planning interventions that go beyond dispersal, reservation systems and pricing instruments.

Keywords: overtourism, spatial governance, tourism planning, touristification, regional studies

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1. Introduction

Overtourism has become one of the most visible and contested concepts in contemporary tourism scholarship. Since the late 2010s, it has been used to describe destinations where tourism growth is no longer experienced mainly as economic opportunity, but as congestion, resident frustration, environmental degradation, infrastructure strain, commercial displacement and conflict over urban and regional space (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Goodwin, 2017; Milano et al., 2019; Peeters et al., 2018). The term gained traction because it captures a number of pressure factors: the saturation of historic centres, the platformisation of accommodation, the erosion of housing affordability, the expansion of cruise-led visitation and the politicisation of tourism-led urban change (Cocola-Gant, 2016; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Novy & Colomb, 2019).

The spread of the term, however, has not produced a settled conceptual field. Overtourism research now focuses on different related aspects, including carrying capacity, visitor limits, crowding and social perception, destination governance, urban political economy, touristification, sustainability and post-pandemic recovery (Capocchi et al., 2019; Gössling et al., 2020; Źemła, 2020; Koens et al., 2018). This breadth is useful, but it also fragments explanation. Overtourism is variously treated as a numerical problem, a problem concerning subjective experience, a governance problem, a political-economic problem or a crisis of sustainability. These readings often overlap, but they do not yet provide a fully integrated account of how tourism pressure is territorially produced, spatially mediated and institutionally filtered.

Recent scholarship has also widened the debate beyond the initial 2017–2020 consolidation of the overtourism literature. Bibliometric and review work shows that the field is increasingly concerned with sustainability transition, governance capacity, platform-mediated accommodation, spatial measurement and planning responsiveness rather than only with destination-level crowding (Buitrago-Esquinas et al., 2023; Santos-Rojo et al., 2023). This recent shift is important for the present article because it justifies treating overtourism as a spatially mediated and institutionally governed process rather than as a simple excess of visitors.

One important gap is the limited integration of overtourism research with planning and regional studies. Much of the literature documents impacts well, but says less about the spatial mechanisms through which tourism pressure becomes disruptive. Destinations are often described as overvisited, saturated or under strain, while morphology, circulation systems, access constraints, land-use change, infrastructural bottlenecks and regional connectivity receive less analytical attention. Recent spatial-planning research makes a similar point, noting that strategic plans

may acknowledge urban tourism without becoming sufficiently responsive to its growth, regulation and territorial consequences (Klepej & Marot, 2024). Space is therefore present in the debate, but too often as the background rather than as an explanation.

The distinction has practical consequences. If overtourism is framed mainly as a problem of excessive numbers, policy responses tend to cluster around visitor caps, behavioural nudges, monitoring systems, pricing instruments and marketing-led dispersal. If, instead, it is understood as the result of a misalignment between visitor pressure, spatial form, mobility systems, housing markets and governance capacity, a wider planning agenda becomes visible. Land-use regulation, transport integration, public-space design, housing control, regional coordination and infrastructure sequencing then become central parts of the response rather than secondary considerations.

This article reviews overtourism research from the perspective of planning and regional studies. It is not intended as an exhaustive bibliometric inventory. Its purpose is to identify the main conceptual tendencies in the field, assess their explanatory reach and show where their treatment of space, scale and governance remains limited. In other words, the article develops a spatial planning critique of overtourism scholarship and advances a framework for future research.

The article makes three contributions. First, it clarifies the principal analytical tendencies in overtourism research and explains why several of them remain stronger at diagnosis than at spatial explanation. Second, it reframes space not merely as a descriptive background but as an explanatory mechanism by foregrounding morphology, circulation, infrastructure, land use, housing transformation and multi-scalar interdependence. Third, it develops a spatial governance framework that links pressure production, spatial mediation, regulatory filtering, territorial outcomes and feedback loops. The originality of the article lies not in adding another catalogue of overtourism impacts, but in relocating the explanatory centre of the debate from visitor numbers and managerial responses to the spatial and institutional mechanisms through which tourism pressure becomes territorially uneven.

2. Review Design, Scope, and Analytical Procedure

This article uses a critical interpretive review rather than a formal systematic review. The aim is not to build a PRISMA-style inventory or to count the literature exhaustively, but to examine how overtourism has been conceptualised, which

explanations have become dominant and where important spatial and planning blind spots remain. The review therefore prioritises conceptual depth and analytical synthesis, while still maintaining enough breadth to represent the main lines of debate.

The review brings together three overlapping bodies of work. The first consists of overtourism-specific publications, including review articles, conceptual interventions, policy reports and widely cited empirical studies that helped stabilise the debate after 2017. The second covers adjacent tourism scholarship on carrying capacity, resident perceptions, destination management, sustainable tourism and tourism planning. The third draws on planning, urban and regional studies on touristification, mobility, spatial governance, land-use change, housing pressure, infrastructure networks, strategic spatial planning and multi-scalar territorial restructuring. By combining these areas of literature, the author is able to examine overtourism not only as an issue in tourism studies, but also as a broader spatial and governance problem.

The literature was identified through iterative searches in Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar and major publisher platforms, including ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, Wiley, SpringerLink, Emerald and MDPI. Search terms included overtourism, touristification, urban tourism, tourism planning, carrying capacity, resident perception, tourism governance, spatial governance, short-term rentals, housing pressure, mobility, infrastructure and regional planning. The review focused primarily on work published between 2017 and 2025, while retaining selected foundational texts from 2000 onward in tourism planning, urban studies, mobility studies and spatial planning where they remained necessary for conceptual grounding.

The main inclusion criterion was theoretical relevance rather than a fixed numerical threshold. The focus was on works that shaped the overtourism debate, clarified a major explanatory tradition, or helped identify spatial mechanisms that remain underdeveloped in tourism research. The selected studies were grouped according to their explanatory logic and assessed in terms of how each strand treats space and scale. Gaps identified at this stage were summarised in the form of a planning-oriented spatial governance framework. The approach is selective, but its selectivity is purposeful: it aims to diagnose recurrent assumptions and conceptual limits rather than to measure publication frequency.

Table 1. Review strategy and analytical scope

Component	Operationalisation in this review
Review type	Critical interpretive review aimed at conceptual clarification and framework development, rather than exhaustive bibliometric coverage.
Core literature domains	Overtourism-specific research; adjacent tourism scholarship on carrying capacity, perceptions, governance and planning; and planning, urban and regional studies work on touristification, mobility, housing, land-use change and spatial governance.
Search and identification logic	Iterative searches in Web of Science, Scopus, Google Scholar and major publisher databases, using combinations of keywords: overtourism, touristification, urban tourism, tourism planning, carrying capacity, resident perception, tourism governance, spatial governance, short-term rentals, housing pressure, mobility, infrastructure and regional planning.
Inclusion priorities	Works with clear conceptual influence, strong relevance to overtourism debates, planning or governance implications, or direct relevance to spatial mechanisms and scalar interdependence.
Analytical procedure	Studies were grouped by explanatory logic, assessed for their treatment of space and scale, and synthesised into a planning-oriented spatial governance framework.
Limitations	The review does not claim statistical comprehensiveness. Its contribution lies in conceptual synthesis and in repositioning spatial mechanisms at the centre of overtourism explanation.

Source: Own elaboration

3. Overtourism as an Expanding but Uneven Field

Although the term ‘overtourism’ became widely used only in the late 2010s, the problems it refers to have a longer history. Earlier tourism scholarship had examined crowding, resident irritation, carrying capacity, destination life cycles and the uneven socio-environmental effects of tourism growth (Mason, 2015; Page & Connell, 2020). Urban tourism research also showed how visitor economies restructure city centres, redistribute symbolic value and intensify competition over land and infrastructure (Ashworth & Page, 2011; Judd, 2003). What made overtourism appear distinctive was not the existence of tourism pressure itself, but the scale, speed and visibility with which these pressures accumulated under conditions of global mobility, digital intermediation and entrepreneurial destination promotion.

As a matter of fact, the conceptual roots of overtourism predate the recent popularity of the term. Doxey’s (1975) irritation model, Butler’s (1980) destination life-cycle framework and O’Reilly’s (1986) discussion of tourism carrying capacity already treated tourism growth as a process that could generate social irritation, spatial saturation and managerial limits. These earlier debates do not use the contemporary vocabulary of overtourism, but they help explain why recent scholarship has returned to questions of thresholds, resident tolerance, destination evolution and the spatial organisation of tourism pressure.

These debates also belong to a longer tradition of sustainable tourism and tourism planning, where growth is assessed in relation to community well-being, envi-

ronmental capacity, institutional coordination and intergenerational responsibility (Hall, 2008; Page & Connell, 2020; United Nations Environment Programme & World Tourism Organization, 2005). Recent policy work similarly stresses forward-looking destination development plans, coordinated governance structures and better evidence for destination decision-making (OECD, 2025).

More recent work strengthens this bridge between tourism studies and planning. Studies on strategic spatial planning, tourism-accommodation intensity and climate-resilient destination planning show that tourism pressure is not only a matter of flows but also of land-use regulation, urban form, zoning, infrastructure sequencing and neighbourhood-scale accommodation concentration (Kato, 2025; Klepej & Marot, 2024; Papageorgiou, 2025). These contributions make the planning dimension of overtourism more explicit and justify the article's focus on spatial governance.

Low-cost airlines, social media visibility, cruise expansion, online booking systems and short-term rental platforms have accelerated tourism concentration in already iconic places (Cheung & Yiu, 2022; Gil, 2024; Źemła, 2020; Peeters et al., 2018). Historic districts, waterfronts, island destinations and heritage cities have become focal points of intensified visitation. In many of these places, tourism no longer simply coexists with urban or regional life. It reshapes it through retail conversion, rental inflation, public-space congestion and the recoding of everyday environments as spaces of visitor consumption (Cocola-Gant, 2016, 2023; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Russo & Scarnato, 2018).

Institutional actors helped consolidate the debate. Goodwin (2017) framed overtourism as a challenge for responsible tourism. The European Parliament report by Peeters et al. (2018) translated it into a policy problem of continental significance, while the UNWTO report 'Overtourism'? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions (2018) gave it wider global visibility. Around the same period, journal debates and special issues further stabilised the term within tourism scholarship (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Milano et al., 2019; Novy & Colomb, 2019).

Even so, the field remains uneven in three respects. First, foundational debates continue to be shaped by a relatively small group of European urban cases, especially Barcelona, Venice, Amsterdam and Dubrovnik. Second, the literature tends to focus on typical topics addressed by tourism studies rather than planning or regional governance concerns. Third, overtourism is still frequently framed in terms of symptoms rather than through the territorial organisation that produces them. Recent systems-oriented research makes a similar point, arguing that overtourism analysis needs to move beyond isolated destination cases and engage more directly with geographical scale, spatial process and structural interdependence (Back et

al., 2025). The literature is now rich in accounts of crowding, pressure and protest, but less consistent in explaining why similar levels of tourism intensity generate different forms of disruption across destinations.

For planning scholarship, this unevenness matters. Tourism pressure does not operate on abstract surfaces. It is mediated through access systems, block structures, waterfront dependence, transit nodes, housing markets, public-space hierarchies, ecological thresholds and jurisdictional fragmentation. Without these dimensions, overtourism research risks narrowing both the problem and the policy repertoire available to address it.

4. Dominant approaches in overtourism research

The four strands of research reviewed below are not mutually exclusive. Each privileges a different explanation of why tourism pressure becomes problematic. Table 2 summarises their main contributions and the planning-related limitations that motivate the spatial governance reframing developed in this article.

Table 2. Dominant approaches in overtourism research and their spatial limitations

Approach	Main explanatory logic	Key contribution	Planning/spatial limitation
Volume and carrying capacity	Overtourism occurs when visitor numbers exceed physical, ecological, social or infrastructural capacity.	Makes pressure measurable and helps justify limits, caps, and capacity management.	Often treats destinations as containers and gives limited attention to morphology, flow concentration and infrastructure.
Perception and resident-visitor relations	Overtourism becomes problematic when tourism is experienced as crowding, loss of place, irritation, exclusion or reduced well-being.	Shows that overtourism cannot be reduced to visitor counts and that tolerance varies by context and social group.	Often captures attitudes well, but pays less attention to the material arrangements that produce those perceptions.
Governance and destination management	Overtourism reflects weak coordination, poor monitoring, inadequate visitor management, or insufficient stakeholder collaboration.	Provides practical tools such as timed access, dispersal, data dashboards, behavioural campaigns and stakeholder coordination.	Often favours operational management over stronger planning instruments such as zoning, housing control, mobility integration and regional coordination.
Political economy and touristification	Overtourism is produced by urban entrepreneurialism, platform capitalism, property investment, touristification, and uneven power relations.	Connects tourism pressure to housing markets, displacement, commodification, protest, and the right to the city.	Offers strong critique, but is sometimes less explicit about how planning institutions can translate critique into territorial intervention.

Source: Based on the reviewed literature

4.1. Volume, Carrying Capacity, and Destination Pressure

Volume-based reasoning remains one of the strongest continuities in overtourism research. Many studies treat overtourism as a condition in which visitor numbers exceed a destination's social, ecological, physical or infrastructural capacity (Muler Gonzalez et al., 2018; Seraphin et al., 2018). Although the language of overtourism is newer than the classic carrying-capacity debate, the underlying logic is often similar: there are too many visitors relative to the space, infrastructure or tolerance available.

This perspective has clear advantages. It makes the material reality of tourism pressure visible and helps explain congestion, queuing, waste accumulation, noise and stress on public services. It also gives policymakers apparently actionable indicators, such as footfall, bed capacity, transport saturation and seasonal peaks. In practice, volume-based reasoning is attractive because it translates a complex socio-spatial issue into metrics that seem manageable.

Its limits are equally clear. Thresholds are rarely fixed: the same number of visitors may be manageable in one destination and highly disruptive in another because morphology, infrastructure, governance and timing differ. Volume-based accounts can also become circular, explaining overcrowding by reference to too many people and too many people by reference to overcrowding. Finally, they often underplay distribution. Destinations are not homogeneous containers; congestion and conflict cluster around particular corridors, nodes, waterfront edges, mobility chokepoints and symbolic landmarks.

Some studies have begun to move beyond simple thresholds by examining intensity, concentration and temporal bunching rather than aggregate counts alone. This is an important corrective. Yet even where pressure is mapped more carefully, the explanation often remains centred on volume rather than on the spatial conditions that turn volume into friction. From a planning perspective, the key question is not only how many visitors enter a destination, but how they are channelled, concentrated, delayed and recirculated through urban and regional systems. Carrying-capacity discourse identifies pressure, but it does not always explain how that pressure is territorially mediated.

Recent spatially detailed methods reinforce this point. For example, high-resolution GPS approaches have been used to construct tourism intensity-density measures, while neighbourhood-scale tourism-accommodation intensity analysis in Kyoto demonstrates how accommodation concentration can create localised hotspots even when citywide averages appear moderate (Kato, 2025; Mashkov & Shoval, 2023). Such evidence suggests that overtourism indicators need to be sensitive to spatial distribution, not only to aggregate demand.

4.2. Perception, Emotion, and Resident-Visitor Relations

A second body of work interprets overtourism through social perception, emotional response and resident-visitor relations. The concern here is not simply objective density, but how tourism is lived in everyday settings: as irritation, exclusion, crowding, loss of place identity, frustration or declining well-being (Cheung & Li, 2019; Gössling et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). This literature has been important in showing that overtourism cannot be reduced to visitor counts. Tourism becomes problematic when it is felt as socially excessive, spatially intrusive or normatively illegitimate.

In this context, the phrase “normatively illegitimate” refers to tourism development that may be economically profitable or formally permitted, but is perceived as socially unfair, ethically unacceptable or incompatible with residents’ everyday use of place. Examples include the conversion of ordinary housing into short-term rentals, the replacement of local services by visitor-oriented consumption and the occupation of public space in ways that reduce residents’ practical access to their own neighbourhoods. This normative dimension connects contemporary overtourism debates to earlier work on resident irritation and to more recent research on anti-tourism mobilisation and communal resistance (Doxey, 1975; Duignan et al., 2022; Milano et al., 2019).

Perception-oriented studies also helped move the field beyond simple threshold models. By foregrounding subjectivity and social tolerance, they show that the meaning of tourism pressure is shaped by power, expectations, dependence on tourism income and local context. A level of tourism intensity that is accepted by one group or in one governance setting may be rejected in another.

The limitation is that perceptions do not arise in a vacuum. Perceptions of crowding, hostility or dispossession are produced through the material arrangement of streets, housing, commerce, access systems and infrastructure. Many perception-based studies capture attitudes effectively, but they often do less to explain how specific spatial arrangements produce those attitudes. Spatial disruption is therefore sometimes translated into psychological variables without enough attention to the mechanisms that generate it.

This criticism should not be overstated. Some studies do address neighbourhood change, the loss of everyday services and the erosion of place identity. The issue is rather that space is often treated as context rather than as a central analytical mechanism. For planning and regional studies, this distinction is important. Resident discontent is not only a matter of social tolerance; it is also shaped by land-use reorganisation, overloaded mobility systems, the prioritisation of public spaces and the displacement of everyday services by visitor-serving functions.

4.3. Governance, Management, and Operational Control

A third strand of research focuses on governance and destination management. It examines policy tools, coordination mechanisms, digital monitoring, visitor dispersal, timed access, data-driven management, stakeholder collaboration, urban planning regulation and urban overtourism management frameworks (Bouchon & Rauscher, 2019; Calle-Vaquero et al., 2020; Camatti et al., 2020; García-Buades et al., 2022; McLoughlin & Hanrahan, 2019; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017). This work is valuable for practitioners because it addresses what public authorities and destination managers can do when pressure intensifies.

Its main strength is practical problem-solving. Rather than treating overtourism as an abstract conceptual issue, governance studies identify immediate levers of intervention. They also recognise that destinations are governed by complex constellations of municipalities, tourism boards, heritage authorities, mobility agencies and private actors. This attention to institutional coordination is an important contribution.

The weakness is a tendency towards managerialism. Governance is often reduced to better information, better coordination, better communication or better visitor steering. Reservation systems, crowd monitoring, marketing-led redistribution, behavioural campaigns, pricing measures and smart-city tools may be useful in some settings, but they frequently address symptoms more readily than structural causes. They rarely confront harder questions of housing conversion, speculative real-estate investment, cruise dependence, land-use mono-functionality or the transformation of neighbourhoods into tourism-oriented consumption zones (Calle-Vaquero et al., 2020; Cocola-Gant & Gago, 2021; Mikulić et al., 2021; Russo & Scarnato, 2018).

This distinction is crucial. Destination management can smooth pressure, but it cannot necessarily reverse deeper territorial restructuring. A planning perspective therefore requires governance to be understood more broadly: not only as operational management, but as regulation, zoning, infrastructure planning, mobility integration and regional coordination.

Recent governance research supports this broader interpretation. Mihalic and Kuščer (2022) show that destination management factors influence residents' irritation and quality of life, but their model also confirms that management is effective only when it addresses the conditions through which negative impacts are generated. Similarly, comparative work on urban governance responses emphasises participation and local planning capacity, while evidence on short-term rental regulation indicates that regulatory stringency can reduce listings and professionalisation but may have weaker effects on the spatial concentration of touristic-

fied neighbourhoods (Bei & Celata, 2023; Sarantakou et al., 2025). These findings strengthen the argument that overtourism governance must combine operational visitor management with territorial regulation.

4.4. Political Economy, Touristification, and Urban Contention

A fourth strand offers a more structural and critical account. Rather than viewing overtourism mainly as a matter of excessive numbers or weak management, this literature situates tourism pressure within urban entrepreneurialism, platform capitalism, housing commodification, degrowth debates, place-based displacement and struggles over access to urban space (Cheung & Yiu, 2022; Cocola-Gant, 2016, 2023; Colomb & Novy, 2017; Fletcher et al., 2019; Gil, 2024; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2018; Novy, 2018; Novy & Colomb, 2019; Ojeda & Kieffer, 2020). In this reading, overtourism is not an accidental imbalance but a territorial outcome of wider modes of accumulation and governance.

This scholarship has made a decisive contribution by showing that tourism pressure is often inseparable from property markets, symbolic branding, infrastructure investment and selective urban redevelopment. It also explains why overtourism becomes politically contentious: not because tourism is simply too successful, but because it reorganises who can inhabit, use and benefit from urban and regional space. Recent work on touristification and short-term rentals further shows that housing pressure is not only a matter of rent inflation or physical displacement, but also of place-based dispossession, assetisation and the erosion of everyday neighbourhood functions (Cocola-Gant, 2023; Gil, 2024).

Recent evidence has sharpened this argument by linking touristification to housing assetisation and neighbourhood-scale displacement. Research on short-term rental expansion in Croatian tourism communities demonstrates residential displacement effects, while recent urban studies of short-term rentals interpret platform accommodation not only as touristification but also as a strategy of housing assetisation (Gil, 2024; Stojčić et al., 2024). These findings are directly relevant to spatial governance because they show that overtourism is partly produced through land and housing markets that require planning instruments rather than only tourism-sector measures.

The challenge is that this strand does not always translate critique into a planning response. Critical urban analyses diagnose touristification, displacement and contestation with considerable clarity, yet they may say less about how planning systems can intervene beyond critique. For a planning journal, this is a key issue. Structural critique is necessary, but it needs to be connected to institutional and territorial mechanisms of response.

5. What the Literature Underplays: A Spatial Planning Critique

5.1. Space as Backdrop Rather Than Mechanism

The most persistent weakness in overtourism research is the under-theorisation of space. In many studies, space appears as a passive stage onto which tourism pressure is projected. Destinations are treated as if they simply receive different quantities of visitors. From a planning perspective, this is inadequate. Space is not a neutral container. It is produced, organised, regulated, circulated and hierarchically structured (Faludi, 2000; Graham & Marvin, 2001; Massey, 2005).

This point matters because overtourism is experienced through spatial mediation. A compact historic core, a dispersed open landscape, a cruise-oriented waterfront and a ferry-dependent island do not convert visitor pressure into disruption in the same way. Narrow lanes, controlled entrances, segmented street networks, steep topographies, fragile ecologies and single-mode access systems can intensify pressure regardless of absolute visitor volume. Spatial form is therefore not simply where overtourism happens; it helps determine how it happens.

A fair critique should also acknowledge that some studies do discuss concentration, centrality and neighbourhood transformation. The difficulty is that these spatial observations are often appended to arguments about crowding, attitudes or political economy rather than used to reorganise the explanatory core of the field. Space is acknowledged, but it is not consistently theorised as a mechanism that mediates, filters and amplifies tourism pressure. This is precisely where planning scholarship can make a stronger contribution.

5.2. Neglect of Circulation and Infrastructural Interfaces

A second blind spot concerns mobility and infrastructure. Much overtourism scholarship examines destination image, crowding and resident dissatisfaction, but pays less attention to the systems that process visitor movement. Transport terminals, pedestrian corridors, ferry piers, rail stations, coach parking, last-mile circulation, waste services, sanitation and water capacity are often treated as secondary matters, although they are frequently decisive in producing pressure. This is especially important in light of the mobilities perspective, which understands movement, access, transfer and infrastructural interfaces as constitutive of social and spatial life (Graham & Marvin, 2001; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007).

The omission is analytically costly. Overtourism is often less about visitors statically occupying a place than about the mismatch between flows and processing

systems. Arrivals and departures bunch at particular times. Corridors become overburdened. Transit and attraction use become coupled. Public-space dwell time increases. Service infrastructures are pushed beyond their intended rhythms. In many cases, what is experienced as ‘too many tourists’ is also a failure of circulation, interface design or infrastructural fit.

Planning research is well placed to address this problem because it is concerned with movement, capacity, access and service provision. Integrating these dimensions would make overtourism analysis more territorially grounded and would reduce the tendency to treat tourism pressure as a purely behavioural or perceptual matter.

5.3. Managerial Responses Overshadow Planning Interventions

A third weakness is the dominance of managerial solutions. Overtourism policy debates often revolve around timed ticketing, data dashboards, visitor education, smart surveillance, promotional dispersal and dynamic pricing (Camatti et al., 2020; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; UNWTO, 2018). These tools can reduce immediate pressure, especially in high-demand heritage sites, but they often leave the underlying spatial conditions untouched.

This managerial orientation reflects a wider tendency in tourism policy, where flexible coordination and stakeholder management substitute for stronger territorial regulation (Bramwell, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Dredge & Jamal, 2015). In overtourism contexts, the limits of that model are clear. When housing is converted into short-term rentals, local commerce is displaced by visitor-serving retail or entire districts become dependent on tourism demand, technical management measures are not enough.

A planning perspective broadens the policy horizon. It asks how zoning, land-use controls, public-space design, transport integration, commercial regulation, strategic spatial planning and regional spatial strategies can reshape the conditions under which tourism pressure is produced (Calle-Vaquero et al., 2020; Faludi, 2000; Klepej & Marot, 2024). The shift is not merely semantic. It moves the discussion from destination management as operational adjustment to spatial governance as territorial restructuring.

5.4. Weak Treatment of Scale and Regional Interdependence

A fourth problem is scale fragmentation. Many overtourism studies focus on single attractions, historic quarters or neighbourhoods. Yet overtourism is produced across multiple scales. Global mobility systems feed national tourism strategies;

national policy influences platform regulation; regional transport channels visitor flows; local governance manages public space and infrastructure; and neighbourhood change records the most immediate social effects. These scales interact rather than simply add up. This multi-scalar character also resonates with planning and urban-regional theory on rescaling, state spatiality and the governance of interdependent territories (Back et al., 2025; Brenner, 2004).

Weak scale integration limits both explanation and intervention. A destination may appear to suffer from localised crowding when the deeper drivers lie in airport expansion, regional accommodation growth, cruise scheduling, investment regimes or national tourism promotion. Conversely, local measures may fail not because they are poorly designed, but because they are operating at the wrong scale.

The regional dimension is especially underdeveloped. Pressure in core destinations is often inseparable from wider systems of transport, accommodation, labour mobility, platform regulation and policy coordination. Gateway cities, peripheral destinations, island-mainland linkages and metropolitan hinterlands shape where tourism intensity accumulates and whether it can be redistributed without simply relocating the problem. Planning and regional studies offer tools for analysing this interdependence, but overtourism research has only partly integrated them. Recent systems-oriented work and destination policy guidance therefore rightly stress multi-scalar interventions, strategic destination planning and stronger evidence bases for decision-making (Back et al., 2025; OECD, 2025).

This multi-scale aspect is also visible in recent empirical work. Spatial analyses of tourism-accommodation hotspots show that pressure can emerge at the neighbourhood unit, while regulatory studies of short-term rentals indicate that platform cooperation, municipal enforcement and national legal frameworks interact in shaping outcomes (Bei & Celata, 2023; Kato, 2025). The relevant governance scale is therefore not always the same as the scale at which residents experience the problem.

6. Towards a Spatial Governance Framework

These limitations highlight the need to reframe overtourism as a problem of spatial governance. In this article, spatial governance refers to the relations through which tourism pressure is produced, channelled, concentrated, normalised and contested through spatial form, mobility systems, land-use patterns, property transformation, infrastructural capacity and multilevel institutions. The concept shifts attention away from the assumption that pressure translates directly into disruption.

Tourism growth becomes overtourism only through particular territorial mediations, regulatory filters and scalar arrangements.

The value of this perspective is that it treats overtourism as a mediated and recursive process rather than as the automatic effect of visitor growth. Tourism pressure does not move mechanically from numbers to impacts. It is filtered through urban form, access systems, infrastructural thresholds, regulatory regimes and scalar politics. Similar visitor volumes can therefore generate very different outcomes depending on how destinations are spatially organised and institutionally governed. Table 3 translates this argument into a set of planning-oriented questions.

Table 3. Operationalising the spatial governance framework

Framework dimension	Analytical question	Planning implication
Pressure production	Which market, platform, branding, connectivity, event, cruise or investment processes concentrate tourism demand?	Look beyond visitor counts to identify the economic and institutional drivers of concentration.
Spatial mediation	How do morphology, access dependence, street hierarchy, public-space capacity, ecological fragility, and infrastructure affect visitor flows?	Treat spatial form and mobility systems as explanatory mechanisms, not as background conditions.
Governance regimes and regulatory filtering	Which regulations, planning instruments, housing policies, mobility controls, and intergovernmental arrangements absorb, displace, or intensify pressure?	Shift analysis from destination management to territorial regulation and spatial planning.
Outcomes and territorial effects	Where do crowding, displacement, ecological stress, service overload, commercial restructuring, and resident dissatisfaction become concentrated?	Analyse impacts as uneven territorial effects rather than as generic destination-level outcomes.
Scalar politics	Which neighbourhood, municipal, regional, national, and transnational processes interact to produce or govern the crisis?	Design responses at the scale where the driver operates, not only where symptoms become visible.

Source: Own elaboration

The framework contains four dimensions and one cross-cutting principle. The first dimension is pressure production, which refers to the drivers that intensify tourism demand in particular places and periods: destination branding, low-cost connectivity, cruise scheduling, platform-mediated visibility, event programming and investment-led accommodation growth. Pressure production is therefore not reducible to aggregate tourist numbers. It is a politically and economically organised process of concentration, often reinforced through platform economies, property markets and infrastructure investment (Cheung & Yiu, 2022; Gil, 2024; Graham & Marvin, 2001).

The second dimension is spatial mediation, which remains one of the least developed elements in overtourism research. It describes how pressure is pro-

cessed through urban and regional form: street hierarchies, gateway conditions, bottlenecks, enclosure, waterfront dependence, dispersion potential, public-space capacity, transport interfaces, ecological fragility and infrastructural resilience. Spatial mediation explains why the same demand profile may produce compression in one destination, friction in another and more distributed saturation in a third. The inclusion of spatial mediation also responds to the newest planning-oriented literature, which shows that urban tourism must be considered within strategic spatial planning and that fine-grained accommodation intensity can be used to identify areas requiring zoning or volume-control interventions (Kato, 2025; Klepej & Marot, 2024).

The third dimension includes regulatory filtering and governance regimes. The term 'governance' is used in a broad, explicitly planning-oriented sense. It includes zoning, housing regulation, public-space management, mobility planning, route design, infrastructure investment, heritage controls, platform regulation and intergovernmental coordination. Regulatory filtering captures the fact that institutions do not simply respond to pressure after it appears; they shape which forms of pressure are absorbed, displaced, intensified or normalised (Calle-Vaquero et al., 2020; Faludi, 2000; OECD, 2025).

The fourth dimension comprises outcomes and territorial effects. These include crowding perception and resident irritation, but also displacement, place standardisation, ecological degradation, service overload, commercial restructuring and uneven regional development. Treating these as territorial effects rather than generic impacts keeps attention on how consequences are spatially distributed and socially differentiated.

The cross-cutting principle is scalar politics. The relationship among the four dimensions is not linear. Pressure production, spatial mediation, governance regimes and outcomes are continually reworked across neighbourhood, municipal, metropolitan, regional, national and transnational scales. This multi-scale perspective is essential because many apparently local overtourism crises are generated through wider networks of transport investment, accommodation markets, platform regulation and destination branding (Back et al., 2025; Brenner, 2004).

Seen in this way, overtourism is best understood as a recursive territorial process. Pressure generates strain; spatial arrangements convert that strain into specific forms of friction; governance regimes filter, defer or intensify those frictions; and the resulting outcomes reshape later rounds of investment, regulation, resistance and destination promotion. The framework therefore does more than list variables. It helps explain why overtourism takes distinct forms, why managerial fixes often disappoint and why durable responses require spatial intervention rather than behavioural adjustment alone.

Fig. 1 summarises this argument by presenting overtourism as a recursive process rather than a linear movement from tourist numbers to impacts.

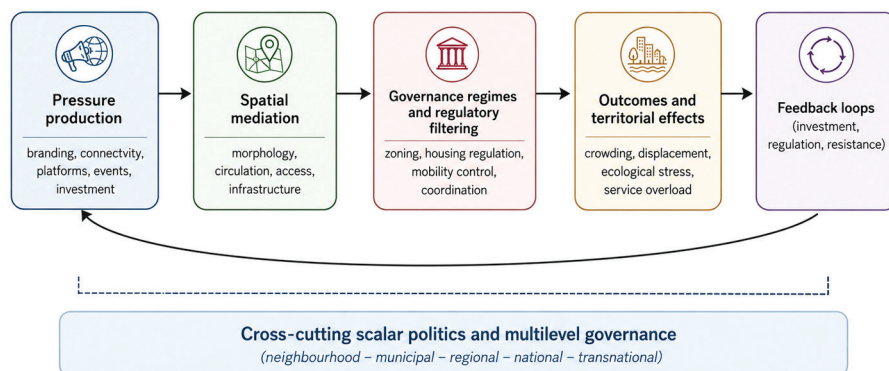


Fig. 1. Spatial governance framework for overtourism: recursive relations among pressure production, spatial mediation, regulatory filtering, territorial effects, and multilevel scalar politics
Source: Own elaboration

7. Future Research Agenda

In view of the above, a planning-oriented overtourism agenda should move beyond general calls for ‘more research’ and ask sharper questions about mechanism, scale and regulation. Four propositions follow from the critique developed above.

Proposition 1: overtourism mechanisms vary systematically by spatial morphology. Historic cores, open landscapes, waterfront districts, islands, pilgrimage sites and resort corridors should not be treated as interchangeable containers. Comparative research should examine how enclosure, porosity, centrality and access dependence shape different forms of crowding, displacement and policy failure.

Proposition 2: mobility systems and infrastructure are constitutive conditions of overtourism, not secondary variables. Future studies should move beyond attraction counts and resident attitudes to examine pedestrian movement, intermodal transfer, terminal design, service capacity, waste systems and water stress. This would make the field more legible to planning and public policy scholarship.

Proposition 3: housing and land use change should be treated as core dimensions of overtourism. Short-term rental expansion, buy-to-let investment, commercial conversion and tourism-led mono-functionality are deeply planning-re-

lated issues. Research that fails to integrate them will continue to underestimate the structural character of tourism pressure.

Proposition 4: overtourism should be analysed through multi-scalar regional systems rather than isolated destination sites. Core tourist districts are shaped by wider networks of transport, labour, accommodation, logistics, platform regulation and governance. Future work should therefore examine metropolitan-regional flow management, gateway effects, island-mainland dependence and the politics of inter-jurisdictional coordination (Back et al., 2025; OECD, 2025).

The application of a sufficiently comprehensive method is a final priority. The field would benefit from research designs that combine textual analysis, policy analysis, mobility data, land-use evidence, housing-market indicators, infrastructure assessment and comparative spatial analysis. Such designs would make it easier to trace how overtourism is assembled across scales rather than simply registered where conflict becomes visible. They would also strengthen the dialogue between tourism scholarship and planning research by making mechanisms, rather than only impacts, empirically observable (Back et al., 2025; Klepej & Marot, 2024).

In particular, future studies should combine qualitative interpretation with spatially explicit evidence such as GPS-derived movement patterns, accommodation intensity indicators and land-use or housing-market datasets. This would allow researchers to test whether tourist pressure is generated by total volume, spatial concentration, infrastructural bottlenecks, accommodation conversion or interactions among these mechanisms (Kato, 2025; Mashkov & Shoval, 2023; Stojčić et al., 2024).

8. Conclusion

Overtourism has become an important concept for understanding the contradictions of contemporary tourism development. The literature has made real progress in documenting visitor pressure, crowding, resident discontent, governance experimentation and political contestation. The field nevertheless remains analytically uneven. Too often, overtourism is reduced to numbers, attitudes or operational management. These perspectives illuminate important dimensions of the issue, but they do not fully explain why tourism pressure becomes disruptive in the specific forms it does.

The central argument of this article is that overtourism should be reframed as a spatial governance problem. It is not simply excessive visitation. It is the outcome of a misalignment among visitor pressure, spatial organisation, mobility systems,

land-use change, property transformation, infrastructural capacity and governance arrangements. Reframing the problem in this way restores space from backdrop to mechanism and expands the repertoire of response from managerial adjustment to territorial intervention.

For planning scholarship, this perspective brings tourism more directly into debates about morphology, mobility, housing, infrastructure, public-space regulation, regional coordination and multi-scalar governance. For policy, it shows that durable responses require more than controlling tourists. They require the redesign, regulation and coordination of the territorial conditions through which tourism operates. The spatial governance framework developed here provides a basis for more comparative, mechanism-oriented and planning-relevant overtourism research.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

MZL: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, investigation, methodology, project administration, resources, software, supervision, validation, visualization, writing — original draft, writing — review & editing.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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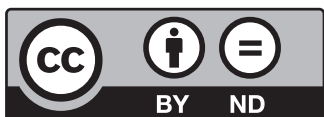
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Zjawisko nadmiernej turystyki jako kwestia zarządzania przestrzennego: mechanizmy planowania, skutki terytorialne i współzależność regionalna

Streszczenie. Nadmierna turystyka to jedno z kluczowych zagadnień w badaniach nad turystyką, zarządzaniu miastami i polityce destynacji turystycznych. Jednak w toczącej się debacie przestrzeń nadal w dużej mierze traktuje się jako kontekst, w którym pojawia się presja turystyczna, a nie jako jeden z mechanizmów, poprzez które jest ona wytwarzana i odczuwana. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia krytyczny przegląd dotychczasowych badań na temat nadmiernej turystyki z perspektywy planowania i badań regionalnych. Obejmuje on cztery główne nurty badawcze: podejścia oparte na liczbie

odwiedzających i pojemności turystycznej, badania skupiające się na analizie postrzegania, badania dotyczące zarządzania destynacją oraz polityczno-ekonomiczną krytykę turystyfikacji. Z przeglądu wynika, że pomimo cennych wniosków, jakie dostarczają wspomniane nurty badawcze, reprezentujący je autorzy nadal mniej uwagi poświęcają kwestiom morfologii, cyrkulacji ruchu, infrastrukturze, zmianom w użytkowaniu gruntów, transformacji mieszkaniowej i współzależności występujących na poziomie różnych skali przestrzennych. W związku z tym autor proponuje koncepcję zarządzania przestrzennego, która wyjaśnia genezę presji turystycznej, mechanizmy przestrzenne, poprzez które presja ta się objawia, mechanizmy instytucjonalne, które ją kształtują, oraz wynikające z niej nierównomierne skutki terytorialne. To nowe ujęcie pomaga wyjaśnić, dlaczego podobna liczba odwiedzających może rodzić odmienne skutki w różnych miejscach i dlaczego trwałe rozwiązania wymagają interwencji planistycznych wykraczających poza działania mające na celu rozpraszanie ruchu turystycznego czy też wprowadzanie systemów rezerwacji oraz instrumentów cenowych.

Słowa kluczowe: nadmierna turystyka, zarządzanie przestrzenne, planowanie turystyki, turystyfikacja, studia regionalne



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