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**Mitigating overtourism in Venice: the perspective of local businessowners**

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## **Abstract**

This research project focuses on exploring the current strategies implemented to promote sustainable tourism in Venice and understanding the effectiveness of these strategies in mitigating over-tourism from the perspective of local business owners. The study delves into the impacts of over-tourism on Venice, including environmental degradation, socio-cultural tensions, and economic dependency on tourism. Through semi-structured interviews with six local business owners, the research uncovers their awareness of over-tourism and their perceptions of the current strategies in place. The findings reveal a deep understanding of the detrimental effects of over-tourism on Venice's environment, economy, and socio-cultural fabric. While participants acknowledge various strategies such as tourist quotas, the cruise ship ban, and awareness campaigns, they express mixed perceptions about their effectiveness. The study highlights the urgent need for sustainable tourism practices in Venice and emphasizes the importance of strong enforcement of regulations, community involvement, and economic diversification to achieve a balance between economic growth and environmental preservation. The paper concludes by calling for further research with a larger sample group to better understand the locals' perspectives and behaviours and to compare strategies with other cities facing similar challenges.

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## INTRODUCTION

Venice is a world-known tourist destination with a beautiful landscape, unique architectural structures, and an exciting history. However, Venice has also become a symbolic example of an undesirable phenomenon known as over-tourism (González, 2018). Every year, around 30 million people visit the city, which is enormous compared to its size of just 156.9 km<sup>2</sup> (Valcárcel, 2018). This phenomenon brings several environmental and social consequences (Salerno & Russo, 2020). The impact is so severe that the locals are unwilling to live in the city, and the city is on the verge of becoming a "museum city" (González, 2018). Specific mitigating strategies include determining carrying capacity, providing affordable housing to the locals, and many more. However, the several strategies are not enough as the problem of over-tourism still exists. Therefore, the research aims to explore the current strategies implemented to manage promote sustainable tourism in Venice and understand the effectiveness of those strategies to mitigate overtourism from the perspective of local business owners.

### Background

Overtourism is an old problem in a new blanket, but it was not always called overtourism. However, there has been a drastic rise in academic attention since 2017, after being termed over-tourism in 2017 (Peeters et al., 2018; Dodds & Butler, 2019; Goodwin, 2017; Milano et al., 2019). The heightened attention is also due to the rise in negative consequences of tourism development worldwide, especially in European cities such as Berlin, Prague, Santa Monica, Hong Kong, Belfast, Venice, Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona, Shanghai, Amsterdam, Palma de Mallorca, Lisbon, Reykjavik and Dubrovnik (Peeters et al., 2018; Gert-Jan 2019). Overtourism is more complex than merely an increase in number of tourists. It indicates the acceleration and growth of tourism supply and demand and the use of the destination's natural ecological goods, destroying cultural attractions and negative impacts on social and economic environments (Mihalic, 2020). The escalation of overtourism is related to population growth, increased affordability, low-cost transport and accommodation, innovation, and technologies like social media (Dodds & Butler, 2019). The rapid influx of tourists in specific destinations is challenging the sustainable management of destinations, which leads to overcrowding and environmental and socio-cultural concerns.

### *The impact of over-tourism*

Overtourism has several impacts on the destination: economic dependency, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural tensions (Milano et al., 2019; Puczko & Rätz, 2000). The most visible and immediate consequence of over-tourism is environmental degradation, which has long-term implications. The increasing number of tourists places massive pressure on natural resources, leading to increased waste production, air pollution due to a surge in cruise and air transport, and higher water consumption. These factors can potentially damage the ecosystem permanently, reduce biodiversity, and significantly affect locals' quality of life (Koens et al., 2019). Moreover, there is a higher economic dependency on tourism, leading to destinations' vulnerability to trends and crises of tourism. This dependency can lead to neglect of other economic sectors, prohibiting the economic diversification of the locals and destabilizing when tourism numbers fluctuate. The socio-cultural impact has recently gained more attention than others as over-tourism has led to drastic socio-cultural shifts. As the number of tourists increases beyond the destination's capacity, the locals experience a decline in the quality of their lives. The feeling is due to overcrowding causing everyday difficulties such as traffic congestion, longer queues for services and difficulty accessing local amenities. (Dimitrovski & Crespi Vallbona, 2017; Mihalic & Kušcer, 2021; Nofre et al., 2018). (Dimitrovski & Crespi Vallbona, 2017; Mihalic & Kušcer, 2021; Nofre et al., 2018). The problem goes above everyday life when the price of housing increases and the difficulty in sustaining life increases. Gradually, the community will transform to cater to tourist preferences, leading to monoculture and diminishing the destination's unique character. The residents may feel the loss of local identity and have a sense of alienation where they feel foreigners in their own homes due to more visitors than residents, changing the social fabric (Dioko & So, 2017; Zucco et al., 2020). The potential long-term consequences of over-tourism are grave, underscoring the need for immediate action.

### *Overtourism in Venice and its impact*

Venice has become one of the symbolic examples of an undesirable phenomenon known as overtourism. The number of tourists has exponentially risen in decades, reaching around 28 million per year (Bertocchi and Camatti, 2022). Although tourism boosts the economy of Venice, it has several negative impacts, including environmental degradation and social disruption (Salerno & Russo, 2020). The benefit of economic boosts to the locals is also partial as there is a high number of day visitors, and only 5 million are tourists who spend 2.32 nights on average (Bertocchi and Camatti, 2022) and only 25% overnight (Valcárcel, 2018). The reason for over-tourism in Venice is

also like the global cause of over-tourism, especially prevalent in European destinations (Bertocchi et al., 2020). The economic benefits of tourism are not evenly distributed, with the majority going to large corporations and the local population facing rising living costs ((Wang & Tziamalis, 2023).

Even though the pattern of overtourism is global, the impact is alarming in Venice. The unmanaged tourism development has accelerated the degradation of the lagoon and cultural heritage sites, threatening the ecological and historical integrity of the destination (Azzahra & Nugrahani, 2022). The water level has been dropping more than 60cm, causing low tides and a feeling of empty canals and gondolas (La Vanguardia, 2018), threatening the city's existence. Moreover, the effect of climate change aggravated the situation. There is increase in incidence of floods and storms. St. Mark square is flooded forty to sixty times a year and this rate is increasing (Page, 2007). Some of other effects are beach erosion, coral bleaching and disrupted water supply (UNEP and WTO, 2005). The impact is not only limited to the environment but also extended to socio-cultural impact. The presence of more tourists than locals has disrupted the community, leading to a sense of alienation among Venetians. Therefore, thousands of residents are leaving the city, reducing the population from 175,000 in 1951 to 55,000 in 2017, a 66% decrease (La Nuova di Venezia e Mestre, 2017). The host-tourist relationship is also imbalanced due to such displacement of locals, leading to negative perceptions between locals. One of the reflections is the alienation of their city by locals. The overcrowding causes competition for roads, parking spaces, and many other services needed in everyday life, increasing the price of accommodation and everyday goods (Gutiérrez et al., 2017) and making the city unaffordable. The market in Venice has transformed its focus to serve tourists, ignoring the needs of the locals. It has created a dependency on the tourism industry, creating more vulnerability towards tourism trends fluctuation and developing mitigating strategies (Seguí, 2009). Even the tourists do not get an authentic experience of the city due to the absence of locals, risking the future of tourism at the destination (Hospers, 2019). The overall impact of tourism in Venice is so severe that its label as World Heritage (1987) has faced a threat by UNESCO to requalify and consider it in the vulnerable list of the organization (González, 2018).

### *MITIGATION STRATEGIES*

The over-tourism problem is being addressed in Venice, and the locals play a crucial role in the initiatives. Several strategies have been implemented to mitigate over-tourism and focus on 'sustainable tourism development ', which refers to a type of tourism that serves the needs of

visitors, the environment, locals and the related industries without compromising the current economic, social and environmental situation (Köchling et al.,2023). The government set a 'carrying capacity' for the city to manage the influx of tourists. Initially, there were simulations of the city's carrying capacity to 10 million visitors annually since 1980. However, in 1988, the capacity was rapidly upscaled to 14 million, addressing the need for infrastructure development of the destination, and it has been upscaled ever since (Bertocchi et al.,2020). There are also many strategies in a plan to mitigate cruise tourism, reflecting the complexity of implementation. Several proposals were in place, such as constructing a floating port at the entrance of the port, outside the island of MOSE (Modulo Sperimentale Elettromeccanico), building a fixed port co-located with existing infrastructure, or redirecting cruise ships to other cities such as Trieste or Ancona (González, 2018). The strategies are not only top-down through the government but also bottom-up.

The organization «Comitato No Grandi Navi – Laguna Bene Comune» advocates banning large cruise ships from the Bacino di San Marco, particularly those exceeding 40,000 tons, to protect the delicate symbiosis between Venice and its lagoon (Pietrobelli, 2017). Different groups are creating innovative projects, such as an artistic project (Venecia (NO) está en venta) highlighting the contemporary problems of Venice through photography and video art, where the locals participate actively in the project. For instance, they contribute their personal stories and experiences to the project, providing a unique perspective on the impact of over-tourism. This active participation of the locals underscores their shared responsibility in addressing the issue (González et al., 2018). However, there have been several protests by locals due to their frustration with the impact of over-tourism. The Facebook group «Fuori le maxinavi dal Bacino di San Marco» raises voices expressing their frustration with the impact of cruise tourism. Initiatives like Venexodus, with the involvement of hundreds of protesters, raising voices against issues such as high rents and housing shortages, are some examples of public anger towards an increase in the number of tourists. These protests and initiatives reflect the growing concern among the locals about the adverse effects of over-tourism on their daily lives and the city's environment (González et al., 2018; García-Buades et al., 2022). The frustration is so severe that projects like Vogliamo Venezia's flash mob appeared before Palazzo Ducale, illustrating their rejection of the cruise industry's dominance (González et al., 2018).

The residents or the locals are essential stakeholders, and their opinions are of critical relevance for the sustainable development of the destination. They should have a say in developing tourism and

related strategies as those strategies can threaten the living conditions in their cities so that tourist destination managers can consider their voices (Genc and Duman, 2019). Moreover, the involvement of locals in different stages, such as planning, product development, and decision-making, is considered to satisfy the locals and provide a more welcoming experience for tourists (Gajdosik et al., 2018). Local business owners are the locals operating in high-tourist areas and dealing with the environment's day-to-day realities. Therefore, understanding their views on the strategies for mitigating over-tourism can provide insights into the effectiveness perceived by the locals. Hence, this research aims to identify different strategies to mitigate over-tourism to support sustainable tourism in Venice and understand how these strategies can be effectively implemented mainly through the locals' perspective, emphasizing their unique challenges and needs. The potential impact of this research on the tourism industry cannot be overstated, as it could pave the way for more sustainable and responsible tourism practices.

There are several relevant perspectives of local business owners for this study. They are a crucial stakeholder in the tourism industry, which also applies to tourism-heavy areas like Venice. The local business owner often depends heavily on tourists, so understanding tourism's economic impact on these businesses provides valuable insight into the positive and negative effects of over-tourism. Over-tourism is a situation which can lead to economic benefits and drawbacks for local businesses. The economic benefit to businesses is higher due to the many tourists. However, these benefits must be weighed against the potential economic drawbacks like living costs and services (Goodwin, 2017), which are highly experienced and analysed by the business. The effect is not just economic; they also have a high opportunity for business growth due to over-tourism, and they face challenges like overcrowding, strain on infrastructure, and different negative encounters. Therefore, they can provide a balanced view of the challenges and opportunities of specific strategies that accelerate effective tourism management (Milano et al., 2019). They also have direct contact with tourists in their everyday lives, allowing them to understand tourist behaviour, preferences, and patterns. So they can provide valuable information. Their involvement in managing over-tourism can be crucial. Local businesses actively understand the changes in tourism behaviour (Nofre et al., 2018), which helps them sustainably manage tourism. Their involvement is crucial for sustainable tourism growth (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). Thus, this paper includes the perspective of the local business owners.

With this research aim, the paper tries to answer the following research question:

The research question guiding this study is: **'What specific strategies are employed to promote sustainable tourism in Venice, and how do local business owners perceive the effectiveness of current strategies to manage over-tourism in Venice?'**

### Scope of the research

This research explores strategies to mitigate over-tourism, explicitly focusing on Venice's planned or implemented strategies. This perspective allows us to understand how these strategies can create a sustainable environment for tourists and local communities. The study also incorporates the viewpoint of the local communities, providing a unique and authentic understanding of the impact of tourism. It is important to note that the study primarily focuses on the strategies to mitigate over-tourism, setting it apart from other studies that may focus on sustainable tourism in general.

Overall, the study identifies several practical strategies to mitigate over-tourism in Venice. These strategies are analysed from the perspective of local business owners regarding current tourism practices, providing a realistic understanding of their potential effectiveness. Moreover, the study compiles the views of the local business owners to provide practical suggestions regarding the management of over-tourism in Venice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overtourism

Overtourism is simply the phenomenon of a popular destination or sight being overrun by tourists in an unsustainable way (Dickinson, 2024). The definition cannot be limited to this simple explanation. Further, The European Parliament TRAN Committee defines overtourism as the situation that arises in specific locations and at certain times due to the increasing impact of tourism that exceeds the threshold of ecological, social, economic, psychological and political capacity (Peeters et al., 2018). This definition covers all the effects of over-tourism, including the traditional social, economic and environmental aspects. The psychological and political capacity is uniquely defined in this definition, where psychological capacity addresses the capacity of both host and tourist to cope with the effect, and political capacity implies the incapability of local governments to control the consequences of over-tourism that affect the quality of life of the host community (Peeters et al., 2018). Even though addressing the consequences in all aspects is necessary, the

concerns about the effect on the local community are rising (Szromek et al., 2024). The management focuses on adapting tourists first and then adapting the residents (Pechlaner et al., 2019). This focus is impacting the residents and giving rise to more significant problems, such as alienation of the residents. Therefore, it is essential to make cities inhabitable even though stricter tourist regulations are required (Gonzalez, 2018). The overtourism is not about the number of tourists but also the perception of the impact the host and the tourists feel. According to the UNWTO study, overtourism is the impact of tourism on a destination that adversely influences citizens' perceived quality of life or visitor experiences (UNWTO, 2018). The satisfaction of tourists is essential for making the destination attractive, while the perception of the impact of locals is equally essential. The imbalance in tourism's perceived positive and negative impact can lead to the perception of overtourism among the locals (Kuščer and Tanja, 2018). For example, if locals perceive tourism as burdensome instead of beneficial, they may mobilize to prevent tourism development, halting tourism growth. Therefore, it is crucial to understand and address the perception of locals for the sustainable management of tourism. Hence this study, as per its aim, focuses on the local's perspective of overtourism rather than specific definition.

#### Effect of overtourism in Venice and dilemmas

The effect of over tourism is severe in Venice regarding the socio-cultural, environment, economic as well as the infrastructure of the city itself. There is influx of 60,000 tourist daily (Modak, 2017) in Venice exerting which pressure on the infrastructure, which was not designed for accommodating such a huge number at the same time. This crowding has led to several problems such as severe congestion due to narrow streets and small public spaces. To serve the crowd the high number of local businesses has transformed to tourism-related business, such as restaurants, souvenir shops, basically changing the whole landscape of the city and diminishing its historical significance (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019).

The environmental impact of overtourism in Venice is not limited to pollutions, extra waste or congestions like other cities, the problem is more profound. Due to its unique and fragile architecture, the huge increase in tourists and their transportation infrastructure is increasing erosion of city's banks and their wave wash are damaging the building and structures (Van der Borg et al., 1996; Yazdi & Khanalizadeh, 2017). It further increases the risk of flooding, which is also reflected by the increased number of flooding every year (Page, 2007). The city has symbiosis with its

lagoon, which makes it more vulnerable to the impact of overtourism as well as raising sea level due to climate change (World Bank Group, 2016). The restoration of ecological balance of lagoon during COVID-19 pandemic also reflected how overtourism clearly disrupt the ecological balance in lagoon (Braga et al., 2020).

The socio-economic dynamics in Venice is particularly significant, which has highly influenced the dramatic decline of Venice's local population inside the city. The reason of the decline is driven by the factors such as high living costs, persuasive presence of tourists and limited job opportunities (Walsh et al., 2021). The economic dependency of the city on tourism industry is very high contributing to 64.41% of all jobs (Camera di Commercio Venezia Rovigo, 2019). Dependency on tourism industry has reduced job diversity forcing residents to migrate for job opportunities. Moreover, the rise of Venice as a tourist destination has also attracted foreign investors, especially in sector of real estate, raising the price of properties, contributing to the gentrification of the city and displacement of locals due to high cost (Minoia, 2017; Pichler et al., 2014). The social environment is also disrupted due to the increased number of tourists. The city has transformed certain areas into nightlife hotspots due to the increase in number of tourists leading to noisy environment as well as increase in criminality and vandalism (Seraphin et al., 2018). The business serving local communities like vegetables and fish markets and other essential services has transformed into tourist-oriented shops which disrupted local business economy and services. This phenomenon is not limited to tourist area but also in less touristic areas (Pichler et al., 2014; Altun, 2021). The residential areas are also transformed to fit tourists changing into tourists' accommodations, and entry of Airbnb in the market has aggravated the situation (Walsh et al., 2021; Colomb & Novy, 2016).

The impact of tourism needs special attention compared to other tourist destinations due to its unparalleled historical, cultural, and environmental significance. The lagoon ecosystem of Venice is interlinked with the city's architecture which is highly vulnerable to the global phenomenon of climate change and rising sea levels, challenging the future of city's identity as well as survival (World Bank Group, 2016). The flood of 1960s is the incident that drew attention of international organisations stressing the urgent need for preservation (Deheyne & Shaffer, 2007). Venice has all year-round tourism i.e., 11 out of 12 months is considered high season of tourism unlike other destinations who are busy in certain seasons providing time for relaxation of environment and resident (Città di Venezia, 2020; Milano et al., 2019). On top it has created the economic dependency of tourism industry as well as the social impact of overtourism is amplified among the

residents, causing them to feel loss of identity in their own hometown (Milano et al., 2019). Moreover, its unique geographical characteristics also challenges the tourism management. The intricate network of canals, historic buildings, and limited spaces, which cannot be easily expanded or adapted without risking the irreversible damage to the cultural and environmental heritage is also a hurdle unique to Venice. Therefore, the dichotomy between economic benefit and socio-cultural impact as well as environmental impact all together is making Venice a complicated as well as fragile case of overtourism.

### Mitigating Strategies

In their proactive and vigilant stance, the Vatican is fully cognizant of the need to shield Venice from the impacts of overtourism. This shield reassures us that numerous strategies have been implemented to manage the effects of over-tourism and address the issue at its root.

#### Environmental measures

Despite Venice's vulnerability to rising water levels, the city has implemented practical strategies to defend against this threat. The embankments and walls, designed to mitigate the adverse effects of rising water levels, stand as a testament to our city's resilience. These measures not only protect against flooding but also ensure the safety and integrity of our structures, reassuring us of Venice's ability to withstand the challenges of overtourism (Fletcher & Da Mosto, 2019).

Moreover, the sewage system is essential in handling increased tourism waste, preventing pollution, and ensuring sanitary conditions (Fletcher & Da Mosto, 2019). These are the small mitigating steps. However, a high-level project, MOSE, also has challenges. The project, which has been running since 2003 and is yet to be fully operational, has mobile barriers built to protect the lagoon inlets and prevent high tides from rising above 1.1m. However, it has been tested only by rising partially, which could be more effective (Umgiesser, 2020).

Meanwhile, the complete closure of the lagoon inlets during high tides effectively prevents flooding. However, it is estimated to be harmful to the lagoons and their ecosystem. The closure can disrupt the natural flow of water, leading to changes in the lagoon's temperature and salinity. This closure can significantly impact the lagoon's ecosystem, potentially affecting its biodiversity and the city's aesthetic (Del Bello, 2018; Reimann et al., 2018).

There are several regulatory measures to control tourist flow. In 2017, Venice's Municipal Administration, which Mayor Luigi Brugnaro led, launched a comprehensive governance project. The project aimed to control the flow of tourists and integrate tourism with residents' daily lives (Peeters et al., 2018). Several vital measures were included in the project. A quote and entrance ticket must provide more access to highly congested areas, such as St. Mark's Square. The transportation system was also organized by readjusting the public transport navigation routes and diversifying landing ports for boats and buses. These measures have significantly reduced the disruption to residents' day-to-day lives, allowing them to navigate their city more easily. New regulations for tourist facilities have been implemented to manage the impact on local infrastructure, ensuring the prioritizing of the local community's needs. Venice has also implemented regulations to control boat traffic and reduce water pollution in the canals (Soriani et al., 2018). v

Moreover, integrating technology provided a new platform to access city services, monitor real-time tourist numbers, and convey information on congestion and other related issues. This technological integration, done in collaboration with mobile phone providers and rail network suppliers, has revolutionized tourist management by providing real-time data and enhancing communication among various stakeholders. In addition, the strategy also restructured the visitor tax, enhancing the tax and proper utilization of revenue to contribute to city maintenance. An effort was also made to encourage tourists to behave respectfully and responsibly to promote sustainable tourism practises by launching campaigns like the 'Ten Commandments', which were translated into multiple languages (Peeters et al., 2018). The Ten Commandments are the rules tourists should follow when they are in Venice, like not feeding pigeons, camping out, diving into the water of the Grand Canal and so on.

### Sustainable initiatives

Venice also launched a "Detourism" campaign to promote slow and sustainable tourism by offering alternative routes and itineraries (Bertocchi et al., 2020). The main target is to disperse tourists to less-visited areas and provide an authentic experience. The government stressed the importance of detourism and doubled the budget from 7000 euros in 2014 to 14000 euros in 2015 (Bertocchi et al., 2020). The advertisement for tourism is on hold by the government. However, the businesses still

promote tourism. On a regional level, the Region del Veneto adopted a demarketing and slow tourism strategy to promote other regional destinations ((Veneto, nd).

In 2017, the impactful awareness campaign "#EnjoyRespectVenezia" was introduced to inspire responsible tourism (City of Venice. 2017). This campaign encourages tourists to immerse themselves in the local culture. Its objectives include

- discovering hidden treasures of Venice,
- appreciating its exceptional beauty,
- trying local products and traditional Venetian foods, and
- seeing local sights with a knowledgeable tour guide.

The campaign also promotes responsible behaviour, such as avoiding swimwear or bare-chested walks, respecting the environment and art, and planning trips during less crowded times to avoid fines (the City of Venice. 2019).

In addition, the "Venezia Unica" program supports the concept of a Smart Tourism Destination where tourists are managed using technology. In this project, Internet of Things (IoT) technology is used to manage tourists' flow through a city pass system through a control room to monitor tourist flow (Bertocchi et al., 2020).

### Economic and Policy Measures

The city implemented economic measures to mitigate the adverse effect of over-tourism, balancing the economic benefit of tourism and preserving the city's cultural heritage and residents' quality of life.

#### Cruise ship ban

Venice enforced a ban on large cruise ships in 2017 to reduce the strain on the lagoon's environment and surrounding structures (Peeters et al., 2018). The ban also controls the tourist influx, further managing tourism. Large cruise ships are enormous in comparison to the structures of the city, posing a threat to architecture as well as the environment and safety, which is also represented by incidents like the 2019 crash with lots of risks (Comitato No Grandi Navi, 2017a). The cruise also contributes significantly to pollution and the surge of tourists, so the ban aims to redirect the cruise ship traffic to alternative ports, which can ease congestion in Venice and reduce the environmental

impacts (Li, 2024). The ban was first restricted to entering St. Mark's Basin and extended to Guidecca Canal in 2021. However, there is still use of other ports by cruise ships. The economic interest that is associated with cruise tourism complicates the enforcement of such banning in massive scale (Hussain, 2021).

### Tourist tax

Venice has introduced a tourist tax on overnight stays, depending on the location and type of accommodation. The tax adds revenue for further maintenance of the infrastructure and historical sites, compensating for the effect of tourism (Li, 2024). However, Li (2024) also argues the effectiveness of such tax in controlling the number of tourists or addressing the danger to the infrastructures.

### Day-tripper Fee

The tax on overnight stays was not enough to cover all the tourists. Therefore, the day-tripper fee was introduced. The fee is targeted as an economic measure for tourists in the peak season of April to mid-July. The fee aims to regulate the flow of tourists as well as generate income that contributes to reinvestment for the maintenance of the city and compensates for the impact of over-tourism. The fee applies to all day visitors entering the city from 8.30 am to 4.00 pm, except for residents, hotel guests and young children. There was also the introduction of fines for non-compliance. The fees and fines are expected to support the city's financial sustainability (Li, 2024).

Moreover, there are many policy measures in place to combat overtourism.

### Limiting Tour Group Sizes

Venice has capped the size of tour groups to 25 people starting June 2024. This policy applies to historic centres and famous nearby islands such as Murano, Burano, and Torcello. The cap is estimated to reduce the congestion that comes with a massive influx of tourists and improve the quality of experiences of the tourists (Wilson, 2024; Durbin, 2024). Further, there is a ban on the use of loudspeakers by the tour guides to minimize noise pollution and disturbance (Durbin, 2024)

## Smart Control Room

Venice established a Smart control room to enhance the monitoring and management of tourist flow (Bertocchi et al., 2020). The room uses cell phone data to track the number of tourists in real-time, providing insight into managing city capacity and regulating crowds effectively. This management helps reduce strains on infrastructure.

## Heritage management

The policy regarding tourism also aligns with the recommendations given by UNESCO, as Venice is considered a world heritage. Banning large cruise ships from the lagoon is an example of aligning with the recommendations. The banning prevented the inclusion of Venice in UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites in danger. (Hussain, 2021)

## Community driven actions

The locals of Venice are facing the impacts of over-tourism, so they are responding to those consequences. There are several activities on social movements to protest the actions and provide suggestions showing willingness "to react and not to suffer passively" (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019). The social groups informed about the impact of over-tourism and its long-term consequences have grown stronger and reflect their interest to intervene in the urban political discourse, making space for the voices of the locals to fill the governance gap and further contribute to more determined policies to protect Venice (Bertocchi and Visentin, 2019).

Many local groups are trying to influence the decisions of the people in power to react to the complex tourism problem in Venice through their actions. The protest started as early as the early 2000s with the establishment of social movements like Venessia.com, which is still active. Venessia.com has actively worked on its action with the belief that Venice is losing its soul, and the local government are not doing enough to mitigate it. They organized the protest by staging a funeral for the city to symbolize the death of Venice. The same issue was pressed by the Venexodus parade in 2016. The movement advocated for the issue of depopulation and the transformation of the city into a theme park (Stanchev, 2018; Araya López, 2021). 'No Grande Navi' is another movement known for their dramatic demonstration, such as dressing as pirates to chase away cruise ships. It was a pivotal demonstration that attracted attention and contributed hugely to the advocacy for the removal of large ships (Colomb & Novy, 2017). Some local groups are also active in

housing policy advocacy, emphasizing housing prices and policies to maintain a stable local population and preserve the city's cultural heritage and sustainability (Minoia, 2017).

However, resistance reflects a growing awareness among locals to react to the impact of over-tourism and a willingness to intervene in tourism discourse. They have been pivotal in raising interest in the long-term consequences of over-tourism and influencing policy changes. However, one cannot deny that the higher of tourists make the city's economy. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the city's vulnerability, with many destinations struggling to maintain their infrastructure in the absence of tourists (Aldao et al., 2021), a stark reminder of the immediate impact of the pandemic. This has also impacted the local economy. So, only some residents agree to reduce the number of tourists and control tourism development as it is a significant source of income (Rasoolimanesh and Seyfi, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the perspective of local business owners as they are essential stakeholders. Their views on the current strategies to manage overtourism and promote sustainable tourism can provide valuable insights to balance economic benefit with the need for sustainability (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020).

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological and philosophical aspects of the research, detailing the qualitative research design, data collection methods and data analysis techniques. The researcher's standpoint, influenced by social constructivism, significantly shapes the research process, from the choice of research methods to the interpretation of results, which will be discussed further in this chapter. Further, the following section describes the justification of qualitative and elaborate research design, data collection and analysis. Additionally, it outlines the research context, focusing on the phenomena of overtourism in Venice.

### Philosophy of research

The philosophical viewpoint of the researcher is not just a starting point, but a guiding light that connects the research philosophy to the research paradigm. It explains the position, or the perspective of the individual researcher takes. It is based on the researcher's own's belief and assumptions about the nature of the reality, the nature of the knowledge and how can the knowledge be acquired (Bryman, 2012). It is more personal and specific to the researcher and how the researcher views the world, conducts the research and interpret the result. In this paper, the researcher believes in relativism where the researcher believes that the reality is dependent on the context and perspectives of individuals or cultures.

The paradigm is a world view that consists of the beliefs, values, and techniques shared by members of a particular scientific community and shaped by the assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge. It is a fundamental belief that guides the researcher to answer questions like what should be studied, how to conduct research, and how results should be interpreted (Bryman, 2012), which is of paramount importance. A paradigm explains how to examine social phenomena, being grounded on one's beliefs or assumptions while enquiring about social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2007). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the philosophical standpoint and identify which research paradigm best aligns with the research paradigm.

The research paradigm that guides the current research is constructivism. Constructivism explains that knowledge comes from prior knowledge, experiences, perceptions and understanding of the surroundings (Kim, 2001). The paradigm explains that individuals create their sense and meaning of the world, and they create meanings based on their experiences as well as interactions with the

world (Bryman, 2016). This philosophy fits the study as it aims to understand the complex social phenomena surrounding sustainable tourism development in Venice, placing the locals' viewpoint and fits the philosophical standpoint of the researcher. The researcher with the relativism standpoint believes that reality is multiple and can be created or recreated during the interaction and the researcher cannot stand away from the research done (Bryman, 2012). Similarly, constructivism aligning with realism explains the reality is socially created and dependent on the culture, context and experience of the individual. The explained philosophical standpoint and the paradigm shapes the research and shapes the methodology to understand the perception of the local business owner through interaction during interview. The paradigm also allows the researcher to explore the dynamic and context-specific nature of the strategies and understand the perceptions of their effectiveness by interacting with local business owners.

This study, with its constructivism paradigm, delves deep into understanding the perception of the local business owner and their individual experiences regarding the strategies employed to mitigate over-tourism. This approach highlights and comprehends the lived experiences of research participants from their viewpoints, facilitating an understanding of their subjective truths rather than merely identifying common factors through two-way conversation during interview (Wang, 2015).

### Research Approach

The research can be conducted through an inductive, deductive, and abductive approach, which involves applying the theory (Saunders et al., 2016). The inductive approach, however, stands out for its ability to fill the gaps in knowledge between the assumptions and the conclusion, which needs to be improved in the deductive approach, which focuses on either rejecting or accepting the assumptions (Bryman, 2016). The study focuses on understanding the perceptions of local business owners, which is facilitated by the more open-ended investigation done by inductive approaches. The nature of over-tourism is complex and context-specific, which requires a deep understanding of the unique factors that may emerge during the data collection process, which may not be addressed by a deducted approach focusing on proving the existing theories. The inductive approach, with its adaptability, provides the flexibility needed to capture the dynamic and diverse experiences of local business owners. The study starts by observing the over-tourism phenomenon and adopting strategies to mitigate its effects. The research moves forward by collecting data regarding all the possible perceptions of the strategies implemented in Venice and surrounding countries. Thus, this

approach helps explore new theories about strategies that can help mitigate the effect of over-tourism in Venice.

### Methodological choices

The research's philosophy and approach form the research method. There are three research approaches: quantitative, qualitative and mixed method (Bryman et al., 2016). The quantitative method focuses on the relationships between variables and the statistical methods to understand their nature (Creswell and Poth, 2018). In contrast, the qualitative method investigates people's experiences, interactions, and meanings interpreted by the individual (Leavy, 2017). It aims to explore an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by reflecting on 'what', 'why', and 'how' questions of the related phenomenon (Antwi and Hamza, 2015). Moreover, this approach is context-driven and appropriate for small groups independent of the nature of participants' responses (Collis and Hussey, 2003), which aligns with the paper's aim.

The paper aims to gather in-depth information about the effectiveness of strategies for mitigating over-tourism, which can be considered a social or cultural phenomenon. The paper explores the current strategies and understands how the local business owners perceived them by gathering data related to their life experiences, emotions, attitudes and behaviours of the individuals (Bryman et al., 2016). The research question in this paper aims to explore how the local business owner perceives the effectiveness of current strategies in the context of the impacts of over-tourism. The research question, 'How do local business owners perceive the effectiveness of current strategies in the context of the impacts of over-tourism?' Guides the study and helps focus the data collection and analysis. So, the knowledge is created by the interaction between the interviewee and interviewer, further shaping the direction of the interactions, which seeks multiple truths or answers depending on the lived experience of both roles. Thus, the qualitative method seems more appropriate as it helps obtain more in-depth data about the research topic.

### Data collection method

The data regarding the research can be gathered either by collecting primary or secondary data, which are unprocessed (Hirose and Creswell, 2023). The primary data are collected directly from the respondents, while the secondary data are gathered either from previous literature or data collected from other parties (Mazhar et al., 2021). In this paper, secondary forms the study base and explained in the literature review, helps us understand the current knowledge on over-tourism, and justifies the research question presented in the introduction and literature review section. In

contrast, the primary data collected in this paper answers the research question. The methods of collecting primary data in the qualitative method can be individual interviews, group interviews, observation, and review of documents (Marshall and Rossman 2006). This paper employs semi-structured interviews to collect primary data.

### Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are conversations that occur during human encounters. In the encounter, the interviewee and interviewer emphasize creating a social reality by exchanging information between them to understand the subject as the interviewee sees it (Bryman et al., 2016). The interviewee is asked why they are doing what they are doing, which further helps develop the knowledge that will help in understanding their behaviour (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott,2003). Therefore, in this paper, interviewing the local business owners can help gain a detailed understanding of their experiences.

The interviewee can be organized, semi-structured or unstructured (Opoku et al., 2016). The organized interviewee may restrict the in-depth conversation between the interviewee and the interviewer. In contrast, the unstructured interviewee can be broad, losing the information needed to answer the research question (Opoku et al., 2016). So, the semi-structured interview is selected for this research as it helps guide the interview and allows space for the exchange of lived experience in detail, establishing rapport and diving deep into the subject.

The interview guide guides the semi-structured interview. The guide (as shown in appendix 1) contains open-ended questions that allow free-flow conversation. It consists of demographics-related questions, following the impact of over-tourism they felt in Venice, the strategies known to the interviewee, their perception of the strategies, and their suggestions. The guide was not strictly followed, but all the questions were discussed, eventually providing spaces for the interviewee to express their opinions. The interview is started with the background information to establish the context of the interview. Further, the questions regarding the impact of tourism in business to develop the conversation and have balanced insights of both positive and negative impact of tourism in business. The next step focuses on the overall tourism scenario as well as its impact on the business to understand the real-life effect of overtourism. Further digging deep into the current strategies and the perception of participants about those strategies. The next question leads to explore their views on the suggestion which they think can improve the situation or manage it and what are the challenges to implement it. At last, laying open ended question for providing the opportunity express their views and feelings about the topic. Overall, the questions of interview

guide are designed to align with the research aim, ensuring the comprehensive coverage of research question and promote the clarity and engagement.

The participants in this paper are local business owners in Venice who work closely with tourists and feel the daily impact of over-tourism. One of the inclusion criteria for selecting the participants is that they have lived in Venice for more than ten years and have owned a business in Venice for more than five years. The limit for living in Venice is set for ten years, as UNESCO warned to set Venice on the endangered list in 2016, so the limit covers the participants who have had the before and after experience of the period. The other inclusion criteria include the participants being over 18 and able to speak English, as the interviewer can only communicate in English. The inclusion criteria help recruit participants who can share their experiences and provide insights on the issue of over-tourism and its strategies.

The sampling method used in this paper is the snowballing technique. The first participant came to contact through the personal network, and the participants referred someone they knew for an interview as requested by the interviewer. The other participants are found using the same technique. There are a total of six interviewees in this paper. The interviews are conducted between May 15th and July 15th, 2024. They were conducted online, as the participants were in Venice and the researcher was in Copenhagen, Denmark. Verbal consent was obtained and recorded from every participant before the interview.

### Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analysis includes identifying, analyzing and reporting the pattern within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a commonly used method in qualitative studies (Bryman, 2016). In this type of analysis, the key themes are extracted from one's data to explain the research topic and answer the research question (Bryman, 2016). Themes are the codes (as shown in appendix 2) that are discussed in the data that fit the research question, the scope of research and the field of the study. So, it can be defined as recurrent and distinctive features reflected in the interview data as the participants describe their perceptions or experiences relevant to the research according to the researcher (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 150). The identification of the themes is affected by the previous literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the understanding and knowledge of the researcher, and the use of common sense (King & Horrocks, 2010). The pre-determined themes are mainly the initiatives taken to mitigate the over-tourism which further laid foundation for the awareness level among the

participants about the strategies and perception of those strategies. So, the qualitative data can generate different themes depending on the research question or the researcher. In this research, two groups of themes are identified. The first group are the predetermined codes that are identified through literature, while the others are the new themes that emerged during the coding process. All the codes are explained in the results section of this paper.

The interview is conducted online, i.e., on Facebook, WhatsApp, and Viber. These are the commonly used platforms by the participants. Interviews are recorded as audio files. The extra backup of the audio files is stored on the USB hard drive so that it can be used in case of file loss. The names of the files are saved as Interview1, Interview2, and so on for convenience and identification. The researcher listened to the audio file and transcribed it. The transcription is typed and saved in the MS Word file with the same name as the audio files. The audio clips are played several times to understand the real meaning and feelings of the participants. The notes are made in the transcription files to reflect the emotional meaning of the conversation, which is also felt while reading the transcript. The audio files are listened to multiple times, and the transcript is checked against audio to confirm the accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The transcript is anonymized for confidentiality.

The themes are chosen and analyzed based on the six steps of Clarke and Braun (2017) as a guideline, which are 1) familiarizing oneself with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) investigating themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) explaining and naming out themes, and 6) developing the report. After the data transcription, the transcripts are read and reread several times to familiarize the reader with the data and understand the overall content. The initial code may be visible as the researcher knows a literature review. However, familiarization with the data helps identify the novel codes in the conversation. The codes in the transcripts are colour-coded, and notes are made. Then, the codes are investigated and categorized into different themes. The codes are reviewed, and themes are appropriately explained, further summarising them to form a concrete answer to the research question.

### Ethical considerations

Several ethical considerations are adopted during the studies to ensure the protection and respect of the participants while answering the research questions. The primary focus was to avoid harm to the participants (Resnik, 2021) by ensuring that participants were not exposed to any psychological, social or economic harm. The questions in the interview guide are designed to be non-intrusive and

related to the research aim to avoid distressful discussion. Throughout the interview, the researcher identifies and mitigates any potential distress. The researcher is also respectful and sensitive towards the participants throughout the interview by being attentive towards the participants' comfort and needs.

Moreover, ethical approval is obtained from the participants before every interview. The informed consent is explained and taken. They are informed that they are free to withdraw whenever they feel uncomfortable to ensure the rights and well-being of participants and enhance the credibility of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants are maintained to ensure privacy and safety. Personal information is anonymized or pseudonymized in all the data used in data analysis and reporting (Kaiser, 2009). All the data are securely stored in files that the researcher can only access. There may be no obligation to anonymise the business as the research may not cause potential harm to them (Flick, 2018). One of the major factors is the participants' comfort (Wiles et al., 2008). The participants were asked if they were comfortable to disclose their identity and they denied it. So, the name of the participants and their business were anonymised. The other factor may be that business may not have seen value in being recognized in the research (Tracy, 2010).

Further, the information is also conveyed to the participants to maximize transparency throughout the process. Participants are informed about the progress of the study and the use of their data. The participants are also given the opportunity to review their own transcripts for member-checking to ensure their perspectives are accurately represented. This process helps ensure the validation of the findings and the creditability of the findings.

### Limitations

Even though the study is designed and implemented with a scientific foundation and previous studies, the current paper has limitations. The sample is selected through snowball sampling, which impacts the diversity of the sample groups. The sample may provide an in-depth insight into those groups; however, the generalizability of the findings is due to the relatively closed group of small samples. The sample may not represent the wide range of experiences and perspectives of all business owners of Venice. Future research can focus on more extensive and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, a semi-structured interview collects data on the personal experiences and opinions of the participants, which may be in the context of the individual and may lead to individual bias. As the

data is also self-reported, there is a chance of social desirability bias, where the participants answer what they believe is expected. The other issue is also memory bias. The answers are based on their comparison of past as well as present situations, which may be influenced by their capacity to retain memory. Therefore, the triangulation of the data with other sources, such as official reports or other studies, can help reduce these biases. The interviews are conducted online, which may restrict the capturing of body language and cues. This paper attempts to anticipate the use of member-checking to capture the meaning of their conversation.

## RESULTS

Six interviews were conducted, and all the participants were male. All the participants were above 40 and met the research's eligibility criteria. The inclusion criteria are that the participants are over 18, can speak English, have lived in Venice for 10 years and have done the business for 5 years. Table 1 presents the anonymized names of the participants and their information. It contains the anonymized names of the participants, their ages, the total number of years they have lived in Venice, the type of business they are doing, and the total number of years they have done the business.

S.No.	Anonymized name	Age (Years)	Lived in Venice (Years)	Type of Business	Business done (Years)
1	P1	43	12	Souvenir shop	7
2	P2	41	41	Glass makers	15
3	P3	46	11	Restaurants	6
4	P4	55	29	Cafe	19
5	P5	47	11	Guesthouse	6
6	P6	59	15	Travel Agency	6

### Awareness about over-tourism

The participants demonstrate a profound awareness and comprehension of over-tourism, which is evident in their detailed explanations and analyses of various topics. This deep awareness and

understanding are a testament to their extensive experience and direct observation, as they are at the forefront of interactions with tourists and the local community.

### Environmental Concerns

All the participants express significant concerns about the environmental impacts of over-tourism. P2 and P4 show a heightened level of concern about the environmental changes linked to over-tourism. This heightened concern may be attributed to their longer tenure in Venice compared to other participants.

P4 states, "The water level is so fluctuating... sometimes it is too low, and sometimes there is flood... damaging the city banks... it was not like this when I came here first time ... nearly 29 years ago."

P2 states, "... the city has changed since my childhood ... the water is not same, it is dirty... before it was so fresh... not anymore... the change has gone so rapid in recent years."

Further, he adds, "...before there were many fish... you could catch them. But now there are no fish... no birds... no sea plants... everything is gone."

Other participants are more concerned about the visible environmental effects of over-tourism, extra waste, impact on infrastructures, and floods, as these may be the concerns affecting them daily or more talked about in the community during the conversations. P3 also reflects it.

P3 states, "...the water level goes so up... it affects everything... everyday life, business...everyone is troubled during that time."

### Socio-Cultural Impact

All the participants are concerned about the number of residents moving out and the city losing its local identity and culture. Moreover, they have described the city as just the next tourist destination, which is reflected as a "theme park" in the literature (Stanchev, 2018; Araya López, 2021).

Although he is a travel agent, P6 is concerned about the adverse effects of the city's development according to the needs of tourists. He states, "...The city is developing only for tourists, not for people living here... so people are moving out... the city cannot run without local people for a long time."

P2 also states, "the city is not itself now...my all friends have moved out... there is no sense of community..."

## Economic dependency

As business owners, all the participants are acutely aware of the influence of tourism on their income and the city's economy. However, they also share a common concern about the risks of over-reliance on the tourism industry.

P1 states, "my shop is totally dependent on tourists... if they do not come my business is no more..."

However, they are also concerned about the risks of over-reliance only on the tourism industry.

P1 also states, "... it is risky to have business only relying on tourists... there are many like me..."

P5 explained the frustration of dependency on the tourism industry and the inability to find a balance.

P5 states, "...my guesthouse is full of tourists... they are my income source, but it is too much... I feel I am in my business all the time surrounded by tourists all the time... even when I am in market, in my own community... I feel sad... I am earning, but I don't feel happy... I wish there were more opportunities here ... "

The economic concerns mentioned by the participants also align with the issues raised by the literature (Walsh et al., 2021; Colomb & Novy, 2016). Peeters et al. (2018) mentioned the risk of economic dependency on tourism and the need for economic diversification.

## Perception of current strategies

Similar to the awareness of the effects of over-tourism, the participants are aware of different strategies adopted by Venice to mitigate the effect. However, they present mixed opinions about different strategies during the interview.

### 1. The MOSE project

All the participants mention the MOSE project. This may be due to its high advertisement and long development period (Umgiesser, 2020). Although the project is a high-level project, its effectiveness is doubted. Three out of the 6 participants present high doubt about the effectiveness of such expensive projects. P2, P4, and P6 mention the project and feel it is a successful project.

P2 says, "...the MOSE is a hopeful project... it will stop flood... at least minimise some effect. "

However, others mention MOSE as a high-investment, low-impact project.

P3 says, "...it took a long time... and now the government cannot guarantee that it will stop the flooding..."

P5 states, "... a lot of time and money is in MOSE project but there is doubt in its success... the gate was partially closed but it did not work properly... there was still flood..."

The literature also questions the effectiveness of the MOSE. Its effectiveness in preventing flooding has yet to be thoroughly tested (Umgiesser, 2020). The previous studies also add the effect of the MOSE projects on the lagoon's ecosystem and biodiversity (Del Bello, 2018; Reimann et al., 2018), which all participants should mention.

## 2. Tourist Quotas and economic measures

P4 and P5 considered the Quota system a practical step adopted by local authorities. Similarly, P1, P2, P3, and P6 considered a ban on the number of tourists or entrance tickets a positive step, but they doubted the strict enforcement of these measures.

P1 states, "... quotas are allocated, but it is not fully implemented... there are many people and crowd...it is acting like just next revenue for government ..."

P3 says, "... there are different rules and prices, but people still come by paying those price... maybe this system is not working in Venice... quota system is not supervised responsibly..."

The above feedback is consistent with Li (2024), who calls for better enforcement and practical implementation of such policies. ‘

## 3. Cruise Ship ban

All the participants except P2 perceive the ban on cruise ships as an effective strategy. They see banning cruise ships as a crucial step for protecting the city's environment and infrastructure.

P1 states, "...the ban of cruise saved the city... otherwise, there were many problems... the water is more stable... the water bank is saved..."

However, P2 explained the cruise ban in more detail. He explained, "... the cruise is banned, but only in certain areas... so you can still see some of them docking in the banks... it is not fully banned.... So, there should be a more detailed plan." The reason to still see the cruise ship may be that the ban is limited to ships weighing over 40,000 tonnes and only on specific ports (Pietrobelli, 2017). The view of the need for a detailed plan also aligns with the discussion raised by Hussain

(2021), which addresses the need for rigorous enforcement of broader policy measures to dissolve the issue.

#### 4. Detourism and awareness campaigns

The participants appreciate initiatives from different levels to promote sustainable tourism practices. P1, P2, P3, and P4 explained the government's action against overtourism. However, they also expressed their concern about the project's effectiveness and growth.

P1 says, "... I have heard in news... government is not advertising for more tourists..."

P4 states, "... government is trying to keep tourists away... but it will be good only for future... it necessary to do now..."

In addition, participants mentioned awareness campaigns. P2, P4, P5, and P6 state different approaches to #EnjoyRespectVenezia, which inspire people to respect the locals and gain mutual respect.

P2 says, "...the campaign #EnjoyRespectVenezia is rising... now people know about things... tourist needs to behave (smiles sarcastically) ... but it was important to start..."

P6 states, "... the people coming are trying to connect more with local culture, ... try local food, art and more local things... many are also asking information about local guides... "

However, participants also mention that the impact of these campaigns is limited due to strong policy support and meaningful changes. P1, P2, P4, P5, and P6 need the slow growth of such campaigns and the need for policy to boost such campaigns.

P1 states, "... I think that is good...of course, it's slow..."

P5 states, "... there are many campaigns... they are very good ... but it is hard to continue if there is no hard policy..."

The participants do not mention any active involvement in such campaigns; however, they are well-informed about their effect's steps and viewpoint. This can be interpreted as a high level of campaign awareness among participants.

## Suggestions for additional measures

The participants also add further solutions that are important for mitigating the impacts of over-tourism further. They are explained below:

### 1. New laws and stricter regulations

Many statements from the participants indicate the need for new laws and strict implementation of them. They agree with many steps already taken; however, stricter laws can make the plan and projects more effective. P1, P2, P5, and P6 clearly mention that the new and stricter law should be enforced to control tourism and mitigate its impact.

P1 says, "... there may be several other strategies, but implementation should be stronger...the strong law that says no to certain things ... (umhhh) if I give example if it says 20,000 can enter than it should be 20,000 coming in... others are said no..."

P5 says, "... the protest, the strategies... how much difference will it make... not long run if there is no strong rule to follow it... it won't be possible without strong enforcement..."

P6 states, "... I don't see it stopping without something very strong law or force to stop them... do not take me wrong, I support all those movements, but it goes up and down... so how can it go long run without policies..."

As the participants are aware of the condition of over-tourism and its impact and of different campaigns to mitigate its impact, they may have experienced the upsides and downfalls of different campaigns. Therefore, they may have felt that designing and implementing different strategies is not enough to mitigate overtourism. Strict laws and vigorous enforcement of them are also needed to back up those strategies.

### 2. Community involvement

Five out of six participants mention the need to involve local communities in decision-making. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 explain the need for community participation in one way or another during the conversation.

P2 states, "... there must be many people deciding... but if there is no local voice, it may be worthless, isn't it... I think all protests will stop if locals are planning those..."

P3 states, "... local people are saying it all the time about all these effects... but they are not heard...I think locals are the experts... it is their life... but no one understands that..."

P5 says, "...local people should have a say in how tourism in their area is managed..."

P6 says, "... we, locals, know what is best for our city ... but it is not important for government...there should be space for locals in planning process than only they will follow the strategy later..."

The recommendation of the local community is also recognized by the growing bodies of literature, which address the need for participatory governance models incorporating locals and their input in tourism planning and management (Dodds & Butler, 2019).

### 3. Promotion of Off-Peak Tourism

Two out of six participants mention promoting off-peak tourism to mitigate the impact of over-tourism. P3 and P4 mention off-peak tourism for Venice.

P3 says, "... sometimes there are too many tourists and sometimes there are few... if the people come in other season than it is less crowded, and everyone can enjoy ..."

P4 says, "... why are tourists not coming in October, there is not flood every year... they can really enjoy quiet Venice at that period..."

The encouragement of travel during off-peak seasons can evenly distribute tourists throughout the year, reducing pressure on the city at one time. This approach is supported by Peeters et al. (2018), where the researcher discusses the temporal management of tourism to alleviate overcrowding and its associated impacts.

## DISCUSSION

This paper aims to understand different strategies employed in Venice to promote sustainable tourism and explore how the local business owners perceive the effectiveness of current strategies. The result from this study also aligns with the existing research focusing on the impact of over-tourism in Venice. In this paper, the business owners deeply understand over-tourism and its detrimental effects on the environment, economy, and socio-cultural fabric. This awareness may be due to the day-to-day interaction of the participants with the locals as well as tourists. Moreover, they are also local, as they have lived in Venice for more than ten years and are also affected by the negative impact of over-tourism.

### Environmental and socio-cultural impacts

The participants in this paper underscore several immediate environmental and socio-cultural impacts, which align with documented challenges in Venice (Van der Borg et al., 1996; Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019). The environmental impacts, such as floods, infrastructure damage due to water levels, and pollution, are of immediate concern. The socio-cultural impacts, including the city's transformation into a 'theme park' and the loss of local identity, are also pressing issues that demand urgent attention. These concerns highlight the immediate need for policies that manage tourist numbers and preserve cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2018; Kuščer & Tanja, 2018).

### Effectiveness of current strategies

The participants have mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the current strategies. According to the participants, the strategies for restricting tourists' quotas and the cruise ship ban also need strict implementation and face challenges. The mixed reaction may be due to the dilemma of strategy development and implementation. For example, the MOSE project was planned and started long ago. However, the completion and effectiveness of the project could be better.

Similarly, the other strategies and regulations are well-planned and well-intentioned, but their success depends on comprehensive planning and strict implementation, as suggested by Li (2024) and Hussain (2021). In addition, the awareness campaigns cannot stand alone. So, they should be backed up by regulatory measures to gain the desired output, as indicated by Fletcher & Da Mosto (2019).

### Additional measures

The additional measures suggested in this paper for holistic tourism management are stricter regulations, community involvement, and promotion of off-peak tourism. Strict regulations are considered essential factors as well as additional factors for the designing, implementation, and success of the strategies, according to this paper. They are, moreover, involving local benefits in the policies and projects in several ways. Engaging locals can make the implementation easy as their involvement during planning ensures that the plan and policies are based on the local realities and protect the vulnerable (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). In addition, off-peak promotion of tourism is also an effective strategy to mitigate over-tourism. It helps distribute tourist numbers more evenly throughout the year, reducing pressure on the city's infrastructure and providing a better visitor experience. This strategy, if implemented effectively, could bring a positive change to the current situation in Venice.

## Economic benefits and sustainability

The economic benefit of tourism is the centre of discussion in this paper, as the participants' businesses depend on tourism. However, they regularly stressed the need for sustainability, focusing on the need to diversify the income sources of the locals. The economic benefit of the tourism industry complicates the balance between the benefit and its negative impact. The higher dependency on the economy of the city is high risk and complicates the process of managing over-tourism (Peeters et al., 2018). Therefore, this paper also points out the need for policies to balance the economic and socio-cultural dimensions. The policies must address the issues related to the balance between economic and socio-cultural dimensions to ensure long-term sustainability (Walsh et al., 2021; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). This balance is crucial and requires careful planning and implementation to ensure the long-term sustainability of Venice's tourism industry.

In addition to the strategies and measures discussed in the results section, it is important to consider the role of collaboration and cooperation among all stakeholders in addressing the challenges of over-tourism in Venice. Effective communication and partnership between government bodies, local businesses, residents, and tourists are essential to implement sustainable tourism practices successfully. Furthermore, innovative solutions such as the use of technology and data analytics can play a crucial role in managing tourist flows and minimizing the environmental impact of mass tourism. By leveraging smart technologies, Venice can implement real-time monitoring systems to track tourist numbers, optimize transportation routes, and reduce congestion in popular tourist areas. Moreover, education and awareness-raising initiatives should be a key focus in promoting responsible tourism behaviour among visitors. By educating tourists about the importance of preserving Venice's cultural heritage, respecting local traditions, and minimizing their environmental footprint, we can create a more sustainable tourism industry that benefits both the city and its residents. It is also imperative to consider the long-term economic sustainability of Venice beyond tourism. Diversification of the local economy, support for small businesses, and the promotion of sustainable industries can help reduce the city's dependency on tourism and create a more resilient economy. In conclusion, addressing the challenges of over-tourism in Venice requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates environmental, socio-cultural, economic, and technological solutions. By implementing comprehensive strategies, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and promoting responsible tourism practices, Venice can ensure the long-term sustainability of its tourism industry while preserving its unique cultural heritage for future generations to enjoy.

## Limitations

Similar to other research, this paper also presents specific strengths and limitations. The paper addresses the issue of over-tourism in Venice and its strategies from the unique perspective of local business owners. These owners, economically benefiting from the high influx of tourists, are also affected by its negative impact, making their viewpoint a blend of different positions within the community. This unique position makes them a strong voice of the locals, a perspective not extensively addressed in the common topic of this paper. Their perspective is not just unique, but also one that we should all respect and consider in our discussions on over-tourism, as it is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

The sample for this paper is selected through snowball sampling, a method where existing participants recruit future participants from among their acquaintances. This may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the participants are business owners who have lived and have done business in Venice for a certain period. This makes a homogeneous group and restricts the findings to the viewpoint of the specific group rather than all business owners. There are six participants, so the sample size is relatively small, so limited viewpoints may be included. The interview is done through telephone conversation. Unlike a physical conversation, this medium may limit the profound connection between interviewer and interviewee. There is a limitation to understanding body language as only the face is visible during the conversation.

The paper is prone to several biases. The participants may be prone to information bias, as the information reflects their perception. This means that their responses may be influenced by their personal experiences and beliefs, potentially skewing the findings. The participants may also answer the questions that are more desirable or that they think they are expected to answer, which may alleviate the bias. This means that they may provide responses that they believe the researcher wants to hear, rather than their true opinions, which can also affect the accuracy of the findings.

Tourism is rapidly changing globally, so the tourism trend in Venice can also be influenced by the global tourism trend, which is not included in this study. Including global trends and strategies can provide more concise information about the effectiveness of strategies to mitigate the effect of over-tourism.

## CONCLUSION

The paper provides valuable insight into local business owners' perception of over-tourism in Venice, covering its effects, current strategies to mitigate the effects, and their perceived effectiveness. Overtourism, a term used to describe the situation when the number of tourists exceeds the carrying capacity of a destination, is a significant issue in Venice. The findings highlight the significant environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impact of overtourism in Venice, which is environmental degradation, local displacement, and economic overdependence on tourism.

This paper also presents the mixed perception of local business owners regarding the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to mitigate over-tourism. It highlights a crucial issue: the doubt about the strategy's effectiveness is focused on something other than the strategy itself rather than its implementation. The enforcement of policies such as tourist quotas and the cruise ship ban needs to be more consistent, undermining their potential effectiveness. Therefore, the improvement in implementation and enforcement of the strategies is highlighted by this paper for addressing over-tourism effectively.

The need for sustainable tourism practices in Venice is not just evident; it's urgent. This paper points out that achieving sustainability in tourism requires the development and enforcement of strong regulations. It can be achieved by integrating the local community and increasing their involvement during planning phases, as well as decreasing the economic dependency on tourism. The balance can be achieved by preserving Venice's environmental and cultural heritage while maintaining economic growth, which is also a necessity of the city. This urgent need should concern us all and motivate us to take immediate action.

The paper recommends that there should be strict enforcement of the current strategies in Venice to mitigate the effect of overtourism. Moreover, the new regulations and strategies should be developed with the involvement of local communities to ensure that they are contextually relevant and socially inclusive. However, the paper also emphasizes the need for more comprehensive future research. This research should focus on gathering more data by including a larger sample group to better understand the viewpoints of the locals. It may also be quantitative in nature to understand the preferences and behavior of the locals for more effective management of the strategies. The study could also be longitudinal, focusing on the long-term impacts of current or newly developed strategies. In addition, future studies can also focus on comparing the strategies and their

effectiveness with other cities that are facing similar problems of over-tourism. This comparison may help in identifying best practices and developing innovative solutions, which is crucial for the effective management of over-tourism.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1: Interview Guide*

#### **Background Information**

Can you please introduce yourself and tell me about your business?

What type of business do you operate?

How long have you been operating in Venice?

#### **Tourism and Business Impact**

How has tourism impacted your business?

What positive effects have you experienced?

What challenges have you faced due to tourism?

#### **Understanding Overtourism**

What are your thoughts on sustainable tourism?

How would you describe the current situation of tourism in Venice?

What are the main problems you see with the current level of tourism?

How has overtourism specifically affected your business operations?

#### **Current Strategies in Venice**

Are you aware of any strategies currently implemented by Venice to manage tourism? What are these strategies?

How effective do you think these strategies have been in managing overtourism?

What specific aspects of these strategies do you find effective or ineffective? Can you please explain

#### **Suggestions for Improvement**

What additional strategies do you think could help manage overtourism in Venice? Can you elaborate in detail.

What roles should local businesses, government, and the community play?

#### **Challenges and Feasibility**

What challenges do you foresee in implementing these additional sustainable tourism strategies?

How do you think these challenges can be overcome?

## **Conclusion**

Do you have any additional thoughts or suggestions on how to manage tourism sustainably in Venice?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences or ideas?

## **Interviewer I**

P1 Responses "Hi, I am the happy business owner of a wonderful little souvenir business located in the centre of Venice. I am forty-three years old, and for the last twelve years, I have had the honour of living in this beautiful city. I've been in love with Venice's rich history, culture, and natural beauty over this period, and it's inspired me to share a little bit of it with tourists from all over the world. " Hi, I am the happy business owner of a souvenir shop, a wonderful little souvenir business located in the centre of Venice. I am forty-three years old, and for the last twelve years, I have had the honour of living in this beautiful city. I've been in love with Venice's rich history, culture, and natural beauty over this period, and it's inspired me to share a little bit of it with tourists from all over the world.

In my experience, over-tourism has had a profound impact on Venice. My shop is totally dependent on tourists... if they do not come, my business is no more. It's a risky situation to rely solely on tourists. I've observed many like me in the same predicament.

I've noticed various strategies implemented to tackle over-tourism. The MOSE project, for instance, is seen by some as a hopeful initiative that may help minimize flooding effects. However, there is considerable doubt about its effectiveness. From what I've seen, a lot of time and money has been invested, but the project's success is still uncertain.

Tourist quotas and economic measures have been introduced, but their implementation is lacking. I think quotas are allocated, but it is not fully implemented... there are many people and crowds... it is acting like just next revenue for government.

On the subject of the cruise ship ban, I believe it has been effective. The ban of cruise ships has saved the city... otherwise, there were many problems... the water is more stable... the water bank is saved.

However, there is still some confusion because the ban only applies to certain areas and ships over a certain weight, so a more detailed plan might be needed.

Regarding awareness campaigns and detourism efforts, I've heard that the government is trying to keep tourists away, but it will be good only for the future... it is necessary to do now. While initiatives like #EnjoyRespectVenezia are rising, the impact has been slow and limited, as without strong policy enforcement, progress is hard to maintain.

In terms of additional measures, I strongly believe in the need for new laws and stricter regulations. There may be several other strategies, but implementation should be stronger... the strong law that says no to certain things ... if it says 20,000 can enter, then it should be 20,000 coming in... others are said no. Also, involving the local community in decision-making is crucial. Local people should have a say in how tourism in their area is managed. Finally, promoting off-peak tourism could also help, as encouraging travel during less crowded times could reduce pressure on the city.

Overall, Venice needs a balanced approach with stricter enforcement and better community involvement to manage tourism sustainably.

## **Interview II**

P2 Responses "Hi, I am 41 years old and a glassmaker. I have lived in Venice all my life, and I have been a business owner here for 15 years."

P2 expresses deep concerns about the environmental changes linked to over-tourism, saying, "...the city has changed since my childhood... the water is not the same, it is dirty... before it was so fresh... not anymore... the change has gone so rapid in recent years." He further adds, "...before there were many fish... you could catch them. But now there are no fish... no birds... no sea plants... everything is gone."

P2 is also troubled by the socio-cultural impact of tourism on Venice, noting, "the city is not itself now... my all friends have moved out... there is no sense of community..."

When discussing current strategies, P2 expresses some optimism about the MOSE project, stating, "...the MOSE is a hopeful project... it will stop flood... at least minimize some effect." However, he is less convinced about the cruise ship ban, explaining, "... the cruise is banned, but only in certain areas... so you can still see some of them docking in the banks... it is not fully banned.... So, there should be a more detailed plan."

P2 mentions, "...the campaign #EnjoyRespectVenezia is rising... now people know about things... tourist needs to behave (smiles sarcastically) ... but it was important to start..."

P2 also stresses the importance of community involvement in managing tourism, stating, "... there must be many people deciding... but if there is no local voice, it may be worthless, isn't it... I think all protests will stop if locals are planning those..."

Lastly, P2 emphasizes the need for stricter laws to control tourism, suggesting, "... the protest, the strategies... how much difference will it make... not long run if there is no strong rule to follow it... it won't be possible without strong enforcement..."

### **Interview III**

P3's Responses "Hi I am a owner of a restaurant aged of 46 years old and residence of Venice Italy since 2013 and I have the restaurant experience for more than 6 years. "

Awareness about Over-Tourism: He states, "...the water level goes so up... it affects everything... everyday life, business... everyone is troubled during that time."

Socio-Cultural Impact: "... local people are saying it all the time about all these effects... but they are not heard... I think locals are the experts... it is their life... but no one understands that..."

Perception of Current Strategies: He states, "...it took a long time... and now the government cannot guarantee that it will stop the flooding..." Regarding the quota system, he says, "... there are different rules and prices, but people still come by paying those prices... maybe this system is not working in Venice... quota system is not supervised responsibly..."

Suggestions for Additional Measures: "... sometimes there are too many tourists and sometimes there are few... if the people come in another season, then it is less crowded, and everyone can enjoy ..."

### **Interview IV**

P4 responses "Hi, I am 55 years old and have lived in Venice for 29 years. I have owned a café in the center of Venice for 19 years. Here are P4's responses, categorized by topic:

Awareness about over-tourism: "The water level is so fluctuating... sometimes it is too low, and sometimes there is flood... damaging the city banks... it was not like this when I came here first time ... nearly 29 years ago." "... the city has changed since my childhood ... the water is not same, it is dirty... before it was so fresh... not anymore... the change has gone so rapid in recent years."

"...before there were many fish... you could catch them. But now there are no fish... no birds... no sea plants... everything is gone."

Socio-Cultural Impact: "... the city is developing only for tourists, not for people living here... so people are moving out... the city cannot run without local people for a long time."

Perception of current strategies: Tourist Quotas and Economic Measures: "... quotas are allocated, but it is not fully implemented... there are many people and crowd... it is acting like just next revenue for government ..."

Detourism and Awareness Campaigns: "... government is trying to keep tourists away... but it will be good only for future... it necessary to do now..."

Promotion of Off-Peak Tourism: "... why are tourists not coming in October, there is not flood every year... they can really enjoy quiet Venice at that period..."

## **Interview V**

P5's responses, categorized by topic

Awareness about over-tourism: "My guesthouse is full of tourists... they are my income source, but it is too much... I feel I am in my business all the time surrounded by tourists all the time... even when I am in market, in my own community... I feel sad... I am earning, but I don't feel happy... I wish there were more opportunities here ..."

Economic Dependency:- "My guesthouse is full of tourists... they are my income source, but it is too much... I feel I am in my business all the time surrounded by tourists all the time... even when I am in market, in my own community... I feel sad... I am earning, but I don't feel happy... I wish there were more opportunities here ..."

Perception of Current Strategies: P5 states, "... a lot of time and money is in MOSE project but there is doubt in its success... the gate was partially closed but it did not work properly... there was still flood..."

Detourism and Awareness Campaigns: "There are many campaigns... they are very good ... but it is hard to continue if there is no hard policy..."

New Laws and Stricter Regulations: "... the protest, the strategies... how much difference will it make... not long run if there is no strong rule to follow it... it won't be possible without strong enforcement..."

**Interview VI**

P6 responses "Hi, I am 59 years old and have had a travel agency for more than 6 years. I have been in Venice for 15 years. "

Awareness about Over-Tourism: "The city is developing only for tourists, not for people living here... so people are moving out... the city cannot run without local people for a long time."

Socio-Cultural Impact: "The city is developing only for tourists, not for people living here... so people are moving out... the city cannot run without local people for a long time."

Perception of Current Strategies: The MOSE Project: "...the MOSE is a hopeful project... it will stop flood... at least minimize some effect."

Detourism and Awareness Campaigns:"...the people coming are trying to connect more with local culture, ... try local food, art and more local things... many are also asking information about local guides..."

Suggestions for Additional Measures:

New Laws and Stricter Regulations:"...I don't see it stopping without something very strong law or force to stop them... do not take me wrong, I support all those movements, but it goes up and down... so how can it go long run without policies..."

Community Involvement: "...we, locals, know what is best for our city ... but it is not important for government...there should be space for locals in planning process than only they will follow the strategy later..."

*Appendix 2: Themes and their codes*

Themes	Codes
Awareness about overtourism	Environmental effect, socio-cultural impact, economic dependency

Perception of current strategies	The MOSE project, Tourist Quotes, economic measures, cruise ship ban, detourism, awareness campaigns
Suggestions for additional measures	New laws, strict regulation, community involvement, promotion of off-peak tourism

