

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTS OF AN EVER-INCREASING NUMBER OF TOURIST IN VENICE, ITALY.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the major and important sources of income for many countries and the world at large is the tourism industry. It is known to have brought direct effects on the social, cultural, educational, and economic sectors of national societies, and on their international relations as it brings large amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for good and services needed by tourists. In 2011, tourism accounted for 30% of the world's trade in services, and, as an invisible export, for 6% of overall exports of goods and services.

While tourism has great advantages on the income generation and employment rate of a country or region, it could also pose as a threat to the host community and environment. Therefore, the need for this study, which is to critically review the effects of the increase in population of tourists and evaluate the geographical, economic, political and social consequences of these effects on a selected tourist destination using Venice, Italy as a case study.

Venice is a historical city in Europe. It is as highly visited as many of the world's most visited tourist spots. It is locally known as La Serenissima and is located on the Adriatic Sea within north-east of Italy. The name was derived from the Venetian territory that takes account of the land opposite the lagoon. It was constructed on over a hundred surrounding plain islands (Hübner, 2018).

The formation of the city followed when rivers including the Brenta river, Sile river, and Piave river swept out deposits from the Alps, and then accumulated at the shore to create vast shoreline

over millennia. There are 3 linkages between the Venice lagoon and the Adriatic Sea caused by natural channels. Venice sits on a 414,6 km² area of land, alongside water reaching up to 257.7 km², and about 260,000 people living there (arguably 200,000 of them on the mainland) (Venezia Autentica, 2022).

Owing to its valuable geographical area, Venice became a foremost huge business metropolitan areas in the Mediterranean from the tenth century forwards, then was held as a "link" connecting the East to the West. Consequently, the city would become a transshipment site used for costly items from the Orient.

For many years, up to the 18th century, Venice was still held as affluent because it has artistic reserves, and it was among the initial metropolises to partially bank on tourists. About 30,000 tourists existed and registered at the start of the 1800s, then visiting Venice was regarded as being one of standard scholastic itinerary of Italian tourist (Fehr, 2019). In 2017, the city had 60,000 visitors daily on the average. The value of places of interest and products is degrading due to high tourism demand (Ganzaroli, 2007). (Ganzaroli, De Noni & Van Baalen, 2017).

Tourists are notably affected by tourist hotspots in European towns, like historical centers, buildings, and landscapes. Massive crowds immediately swarm such places and cities (Dodds and Butler, 2019).

Precisely, Venice does have to deal with visitor overload, native migration to neighboring metropolitan axes, and therefore is ruthlessly affected by "overtourism", a term which is frequently described by "Venice syndrome" (Milano, 2017, c).

There were around 70 million visits in 2017 alone, a growth of about 5.8% from 2016. The city is noted for diverse tourism offerings together with its top-level cordiality. Moreover, Venice has

popular structures like the St. Mark's Cathedral, St. Mark's Square, the Doge's Palace, the Rialto Bridge, and the Grand Canal, and receives a lot of tourists per year, while the city itself makes every effort to function smoothly (Dodds and Butler, 2019)



Figure 1 Crowds in Venice. Photo by David Bolt

Venice was identified by Van der Borg et al. (1996, p. 314) as "the city which most effectively exemplifies just what touristification implies for an urban area" in 1996. Venice has subsequently come to be among the most frequently referenced examples of the worldwide crisis of overtourism. As discussed in "The Venice Syndrome" (Pichler and Tielsch, 2012), one key issue that typifies overtourism in the instance of Venice is its steady decrease in population, which is a highly contentious concern fundamental to the anger and resentment of local progressive groups (Quinn, 2007; Cavallo, 2016; Minoia, 2017). In an instance when the population fell under 60,000 in 2008, a section of the community staged a faux 'memorial service' for the city. A monitor that displays the amount of people in Venice's historic center in actual time was erected in the windows of the Morelli pharmacy in Campo San Bartolomeo just before burial. The monitor was first opened on

March 21, 2008, with a reading of 60,699 on the Led display. By November 2018, the number had plummeted to 53,135 (Comune di Venezia, 2018a).

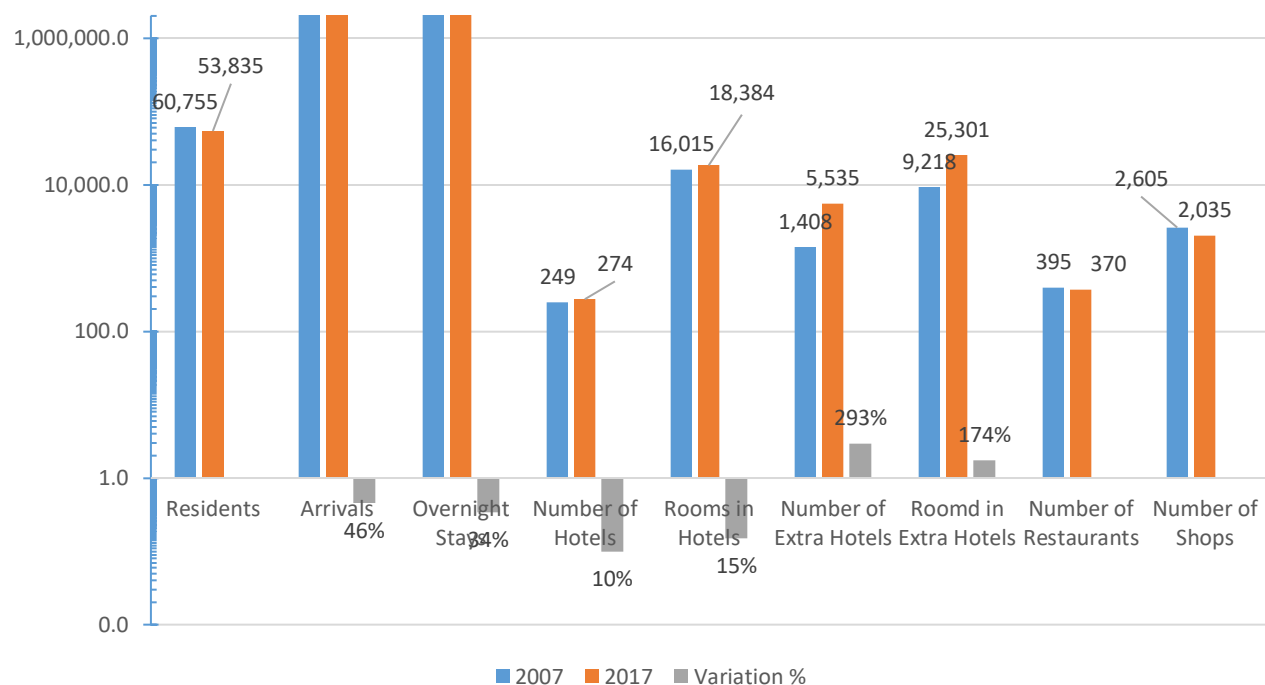
Venice is known to be a quintessential model of 'hypertouristification' as a result of its distinctive topographical urban assets, and even its physical and traditional appeal (Minoia, 2017). The city inhabitants have grown preoccupied with the problems introduced by tourism; news outlets publish pieces regarding touristic troubles almost every day, and housing authorities devote significant time and energy to the subject. This is mirrored in UNESCO's warnings to include Venice as an endangered cultural asset, owing to unsolved issues that came with tourism (UNESCO, 2015). On the 2nd of July 2017, a protest march #MiNoVadoVia (I do not leave) was staged on the shores of Riva degli Schiavoni. This gathered practically all the municipal committees, which are frequently notorious for their fierce feuds, and brought them together in record numbers to denounce out-of-control touristification. Additional similar programs were combined into #MiNoVadoVia, which makes clear allusion to the city's population decline as a result of what was called the tourist 'invasion.' The New York Times published an article with the title 'Venice, swamped by visitors, risks turning into "Disneyland on the Sea"' exactly one month after the occurrence (Horowitz, 2017). This is just one of several stories highlighting the potentially disastrous effects of tourism on city people.

What is far more striking, though, is the profound influences of tourism on exponential population loss, rather than the comparisons with Disneyland. The logical expression that describes the Venice scenario is that if there is continuous upsurge in the number of visitors, the city is surely going to continue to experience and inverse effect on its population.

Venice is undoubtedly congested, having about 10,182,829 rapid visits in 2015. Agreeing with the Venice City Council, around 34 million day travelers entered the city in 2015. (Milano, 2017, c).

Because of the above-mentioned features, the historical center of the city has the highest density of tourist accommodations. Most of the facilities for housing and vacation residences is in the historic center. These trends are the cause of the population drop, which decreased from 78,165 in 1990 to 55,583 in 2015. (Milano, 2017, c).

Evolution of Tourism in Venice 2007–2017 (From Città di Venezia, 2017 and Comune)



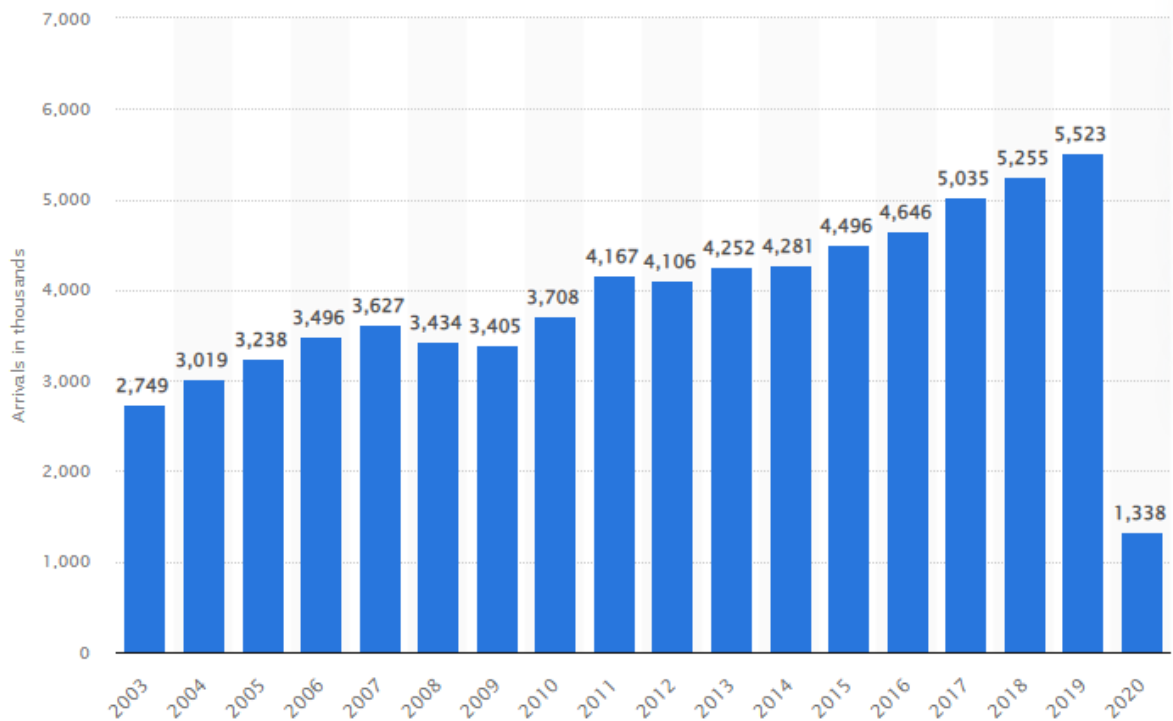


Figure 3 Tourist influxes in Venice from 2003 to 2020 (in 1,000s)

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2.0 STATE OF TOURISM IN VENICE

In past few years travel market has benefited from an ever-increasing supply of low-cost transportation, lodging, and preparation. Over 1.5 billion international visitors were recorded in 2019 (Venezia Autentica, 2022). However, most tourism sector players are more concerned with profit than with long-term sustainability.

Currently, mass tourism – which is described as when thousands of people travel in large groups – affects tourism centers, and the sector in some of the most major attractions has become a problem instead of a resource. Venice has now become one of them, and it is in a lot of trouble.

2.0.1 The population of Venice has decreased from 175, 000 it was in 1951 to 50,000 in 2022.

The population of Venice continues to decline steadily for many years now according to data. This consistent reduction can be explained by several factors including:

- A rise in the living costs
- Housing costs are rising.
- A decline in living standards
- A scarcity of youth-friendly environments
- A scarcity of well-paying jobs

All these factors can be intrinsically associated with the effects of Venice's enormous surge in mass tourism (Venezia Autentica, 2022).

Certainly, certain business owners and international businessmen take advantage of the circumstance to lure tourists and earn handsomely (Venezia Autentica, 2022). However, genuine services and stores have been and continue to be suffocated by rising rents, a shrinking native population demand, and the rivalry of tourist traps luring tourists in with cheap surplus goods or frozen meals.

Venice is a lovely and special metropolis that must be protected only by natives, since they're the only ones with the essential expertise (and affection). As a result, the loss of Venice's residents is among the most serious dangers to the city's existence. If Venice continues to lose its people, it will surely lose the skills and knowledge that has made it live and thrive for centuries without residents.

Unfortunately, youth of today are being driven to leave the historic center due to a lack of meaningful employment and overpriced accommodation, forcing them to abandon their ambition of residing in their hometown. Currently, the Venice age index is much above 2.80. This means that for every kid under the age of 15, there are nearly three adults over the age of 64. This, combined with a 35 percent drop in the number of people aged 20-34 from 2001 to 2011, doesn't really bode well for the city.

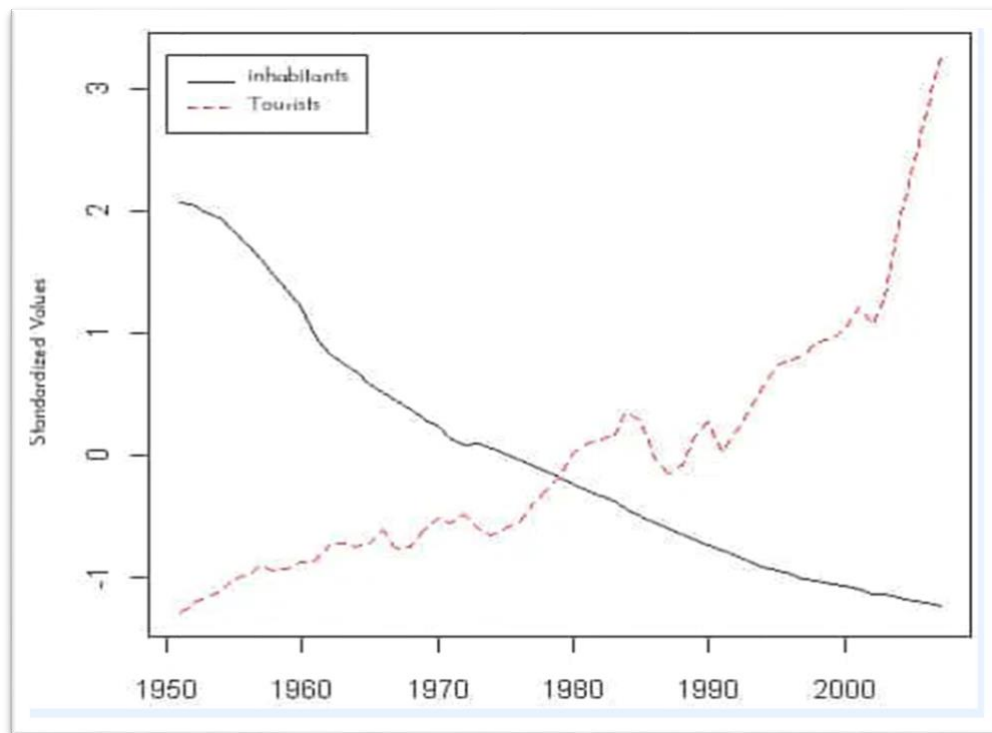


Figure 2 Trend showing the number of natives and the number of tourists in Venice since 1950.

The reduction in transshipment is among the causes of the steady increase in number of tourists. Each year since 2015, Venice has welcomed up to 30 million visitors in a city with a surface area below 8 km². Nevertheless, this surge has indeed gone along with a fall in typical duration of visit for tourists & a switch in touristic activities that continues to cause chaos for Venetian people & commercial services.

Until about the 2000s, the mainstream of visitors typically stayed in Venetian lodging house for some nights, then stay for a few days going round the whole metropolis and gaining insights about the lifestyle & culture (Venezia Autentica, 2022).

In past few eons, together with a year after year astonishing growth in proportion of visitors, the means of gaining access to the city does not remain the same: several tourists now travel there for just a day or few hours, thoroughly changing the city's sociological, financial, and touristic elements. For many months in a single year, Venice takes in an immense human wave that arrives nearly every day leading to traffic congestion.

To worsen the situation, as a result of its tiny distribution of sizes, the city is not capable of making picnic or relaxation spots available, leading to people sitting for rest and dining on bridges, tight passageways, home doors, and store windows, further congested the city. Passageways & channels in the city are equivalent to paths & intersections in some certain towns, notwithstanding their form. Obstructing these passageways is a dependable approach to make Venetians upset.

Overseas investors and investment funds have used this opportunity by buying stores on the busiest roads to exhibit their low-price products, enticing passing visitors and selling surplus plastic materials that are, at best, worthless. They have really been determined to be harmful in the worst-case scenario. Another issue would be that Italy has a high rate of unemployment but no minimum wage, and all these enterprises take advantage of the situation: employees struggle to make ends meet even in Mestre (where rents are much lower), while their employer destroys locally and family-owned businesses as well as shops.

3.0 WARNING SIGNS OF OVERTOURSIM AS SEEN IN VENICE

Literally put, 'overtourism' within this context refers to an influx of too many tourists in a brief span of time for a specific destination to handle. Moreover, 'too many' is a relative concept that is best described in terms of the number of locals, hosts, entrepreneurs, and visitors in any destination. The causes of overtourism in Venice are diverse and multidimensional. Most of the same variables that cause problems in Venice also exist in places like Barcelona, Reykjavik, Dubrovnik, and certain other major tourist attractions (Milano et al., 2018). Overtourism, on the other hand, has far-reaching consequences that go beyond living standards.

Overtourism affects the equilibrium of economic activities that appear to be critical in trying to define a living urban space with time, as demonstrated in Venice: native gastronomy, the blend of merchandises in sales stores, and the kinds of music in pubs all tend to satisfy the tastes of tourists, and thus may not be sufficient to take care of the natives (Vettese, 2016; Zanini, 2017; Erbani, 2018). Deconstructing Venice's 'touristic scenario is, in fact, analogous to unlocking a Pandora's box filled with unpleasant stuff.

UNESCO's warnings to add Venice to its list of endangered sites, first in 2015 and then even more forcefully in 2017, are perhaps the strongest indication that Venice is in jeopardy. The judgment was postponed till 2018, and it was noted that:

“The exceptionally high tourism pressure on the city of Venice has resulted in a partial functional transformation in Venice and the historic centres of the Lagoon, caused by the replacement of residents’ houses with accommodation and commercial activities and services to the residents with tourism- related activities, that endanger the identity and the cultural and social integrity of the property” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 14).

The extreme condition of the city's depopulation is among the most physical and obvious causes of tourist demands on the city (Comune di Venezia, 2018a). The issues associated with touristification of many cities and islands with identical conditions throughout the Mediterranean Sea were emphasized at a conference devoted to 'Living on an Island' on 13 April 2018.

4.0 IMPACTS OF OVERTOURISM ON VENICE

4.0.1 Economic impacts

Positive impacts

Tourism, if correctly controlled, can aid the alleviation of poverty. Through the establishing of a financial advantage from traditional & natural assets, they habitually make available a new revenue stream. Tourism is an exclusively labor-intensive business with very minimal competition (UNEP & WTO, 2005). Owing to this, it becomes apparent that tourism produces fresh job opportunities & that the scope of commerce options is getting bigger. Participants of a study admitted to the fact that of tourism being their prime source of earnings. Consequently, tourism helps to make available a prospect for promoting humanity's welfare & wealth.

Negative impacts

Although tourism benefits the economy as described earlier, there are downsides to it. One of these is that tourism employment is dangerous and given voice to, restricting the scope of facilities available to consumers. The hazard of social decline also exists. Additionally, the commerce architecture is shifting, with established fiscal segments fading and fresh models developing in the tourism industry (Milano, 2017, a). In Venice, it is continuously being observed that relic stores are now getting substituted by those who sell run-of-the-mill needs (Vianello, 2016).

The Venetian politics has now shifted its attention to metropolitan businesses. The denationalization of elements of significant community assets like the commuter terminal, the “Biennale Foundation”, various ancient citadels, & the Armory location are cases in point of the said shift. Thus, a movement in the direction of property and event-driven development has now materialized into a way of reiterating & reinforcing the status of Venice as a destination for tourism whereas aiding the Venice's economic growth (Canestrelli and Costa, 1991, a).

4.0.2 Ecological impacts

Positive impacts

The growth of Venice's facilities as well as the fiscal backing of protection of natural surroundings through tourism, so long as the profits get utilized for this reason, are already good consequences (Job and Weizenegger, 2003).

Negative impacts

Firstly, changes in climate have protracted implications for tourism, yet tourism also harms the environment, particularly by causing climate change, resulting in a negative effect of tourism.

The dangerous effects of climate change which include the continuous climbing sea levels, raising the severity and frequency of floods and storms, coastal erosion, and interrupted water supplies, all present additional dangers to Venice (UNEP & WTO, 2005). It is worthy of note that the floods being seen in Venice imply that St. Mark's Square continues to be inundated forty to sixty times every year, contrasted to the 4-6 times yearly flood that was observed before the start of the century (Page, 2007).

Venice also continues to battle the challenge of parking, road overcrowding, & the ruin of ancient landmarks owing to visitor misuse and carelessness. Pollution of the environment (Van der Borg et al., 1996; Yazdi & Khanalizadeh, 2017), and trash accumulation are similar challenges faced by Venice (Van der Borg et al., 1996; Yazdi & Khanalizadeh, 2017). (Milano, 2017, a).

Where cruise ships in Venice are concerned, they also cause environmental pollution through the release of tiny particles, nitrogen oxides, and sulphur oxides, which are reported to account for about 20%-26% of all shipping ambient air pollution. Passenger ships contribute about 12% of overall air pollution in Venice (Neumeier, 2019, c).

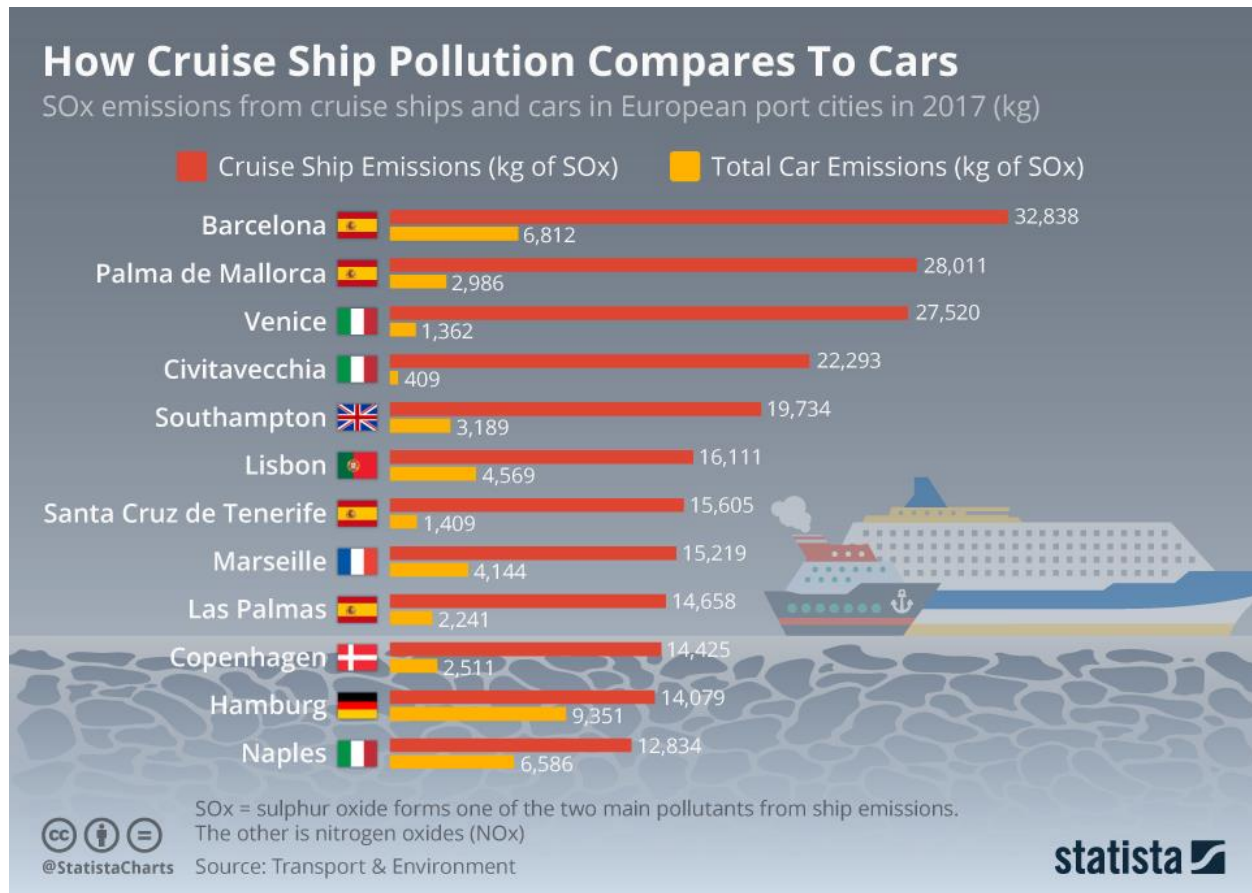


Figure 3 Cruise ship pollution compared to cars

Statista.com

4.0.3 Social impacts

Positive impacts

Image, data management, and specialized steps to promote tourist protection and security all have policy consequences. Having a security management system available to ensure that tourists are safe has a beneficial effect on the security of locals (UNEP & WTO, 2005).

Furthermore, residents recognize that visitors bring along a plethora of new perceptions and development, by which the city may profit and thrive. Citizens gain new ideas and can learn from one another through socializing with people from other backgrounds, cultures, traditions, and languages.

Negative impacts

The loss of a sense of social integration among residents is among the negative repercussions of overtourism, which affects the lifestyle of the natives of Venice and contributes to a diminution in socio and cultural linkages. Other issues include rising overcrowding, traffic, gentrification and privatization of public places, as well as an expansion in the real-estate investment industry fueled by tourism. Growing rent and buying prices, as well as price inflation in everyday experiences, indicate a defeat or decline in buying power of the inhabitants of Venice. The parity of buying power between residents and tourists alike is decreasing (Milano, 2017, a&b). The increased supply of tourist rental units platforms like Airbnb is contributing to the increase in the prices of residential property (Milano, 2017, c).

CONCLUSION

Form available information, Venice continues to be arguably one of smallest city in the world, even with the smallest population but what is most surprising is the number of visitors it gets yearly, which, from statistics is greater than that experienced by many countries and cities that are double and even triple the size of Venice. The question remains that how does the small city of Venice accommodate that large number of visitors every year? Are the resources enough to cater for both residents and visitors? What does this hold for the sustainability of the city? These and

many more questions need to be asked. This article has successfully put together all the information known about the statistics of tourist activities in the city and as expected the city does not seem to be strong enough to continue to handle such influx per year. Venice is overcrowded with tourists, and it has been explicitly stated in this article that Venice is suffering from overtourism which should be looked to be relevant parties. Should tourism in Venice be reduced or is it possible to expand the capacity of the city to continue to receive these influxes yearly? These questions can help us in designing both short term and long-term interventions. One thing that this article has helped to reemphasize is the fact that Venice is suffering from overtourism.

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