

Understanding overtourism: What do Barcelona residents really think?

Philipp Wassler^{a,1,*}, Ángel Herrero-Crespo^b, Josep Rialp-Criado^{c,2}

^a Department of Management, University of Bergamo, Bergamo, Italy

^b Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Economics, Universidad de Cantabria, Santander, Spain

^c Department of Business, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

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ABSTRACT

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine overtourism from a residents' perspective in Barcelona, a city where protests against overtourism have become increasingly common. It identifies four key dimensions shaping perceptions: crowding, lack of security, pollution, and price increases/gentrification. Crucially, the findings frame overtourism as a social phenomenon that goes beyond visitor numbers and physical congestion, encompassing broader socio-economic, political, and environmental dynamics. The study further highlights how age, political views, education, and economic dependence influence residents' attitudes. Results show that overtourism is socially constructed and context-dependent rather than defined by quantitative thresholds alone, challenging traditional carrying capacity models. In doing so, the study advances the academic conceptualization of overtourism and opens new avenues for research that examine it as a complex social phenomenon.

1. Introduction

The term *overtourism* was named one of the words of the year by the Oxford Dictionary in 2018. After a temporary decline in relevance due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the term has regained significant media and academic attention. In 2024, resident-led overtourism protests across various European destinations consistently made headlines. Notable examples include 30,000 protesters marching in the Canary Islands (Euronews, 2024), the sabotage of holiday rental homes in Rome (Ansa, 2024), worker demonstrations demanding higher wages in Greece (Prakash, 2024), and perhaps the most radical incident: tourists being sprayed with water guns in Barcelona (Earnshaw, 2024). Further protests had been announced for the 2025 summer season in Mediterranean locations (Colzi, 2025) and have since happened.

Governments have also responded to the public outcry. In Florence, measures such as banning key boxes and loudspeakers for tour guides have been implemented (Nadeau, 2024). Spain has increased the collection of personal data and raised its tourist tax to €4 per night (Liroso, 2024), while Venice has limited group sizes to 25 and intensified restrictions on cruise ships (The Guardian, 2024). However, some

political leaders have downplayed the issue. Italy's former Minister of Tourism, Daniela Santanchè, argued that overtourism applies only to a small number of locations within the country (TTG Italia, 2024). Similarly, Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis stated that Greece does not experience overtourism overall but faces congestion in specific locations during peak seasons (Krinis, 2024).

Despite the heightened media attention, academic literature reveals a lack of consensus on how to define overtourism (Butler & Dodds, 2022; Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Gretzel, 2019; Koens, Postma, & Papp, 2018; Mihalić, 2020). It is, however, widely recognized that overtourism extends beyond overcrowding. It likely stems from a complex interplay of issues, including economic dependency and perceived structural inequalities among residents (Milano, Novelli, & Cheer, 2020).

Resident protests against overtourism have predominantly occurred in developed countries, where locals, often highly educated, tend to view tourism primarily as an economic activity from which they do not directly benefit, while enduring its negative impacts (Dodds & Butler, 2019a). Interestingly, these protests are largely absent in destinations with the highest global tourist numbers (Dodds & Butler, 2019b). This

* Corresponding author at: University of Bergamo, via dei Caniana, 2 24127 Bergamo, Italy.

E-mail addresses: philipp.wassler@unibg.it (P. Wassler), herreroa@unican.es (Á. Herrero-Crespo), Josep.Rialp@uab.cat (J. Rialp-Criado).

¹ Philipp Wassler, Associate Professor, Department of Management University of Bergamo Via dei Caniana 2, 24129, Bergamo (ITALY)

² Josep Rialp-Criado Full Professor, Department of Business, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain Facultat d'Economia i Empresa, 08193 Bellaterra, Cerdanyola del Vallés (SPAIN)

phenomenon has led overtourism to be labelled a “*first-world problem*” (Wassler, 2024).

Given that most protests are initiated by local residents, it is crucial to understand their perceptions of overtourism. For instance, Milano et al. (2020) highlighted “degrowth” campaigns among Barcelona residents protesting overtourism. However, the roles of social class, socio-economic disparities, gender inequalities, and capital concentration in shaping residents' perceptions of overtourism remain poorly understood (Milano, Novelli, & Russo, 2024). Consequently, addressing overtourism may require more than simply balancing resident and tourist needs from a management perspective; it necessitates an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics of a destination (Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Milano et al., 2024).

Resident perceptions matter not only because they may lead to visible acts of resistance or dissatisfaction, but also because they play a critical role in shaping the legitimacy and effectiveness of tourism governance. When local voices are excluded, policies risk being perceived as imposed rather than negotiated, which undermines both trust in institutions and compliance with regulations. Conversely, acknowledging and integrating resident perspectives strengthens policy legitimacy and ensures that governance frameworks are better aligned with community needs. This alignment is essential for sustainable destination management, as long-term success depends on balancing the interests of visitors with the well-being and support of host populations.

To explore overtourism as perceived by residents and to identify the economic, demographic, and socio-cultural factors involved, this study focuses on Barcelona, a major European tourist destination and a hot-spot for overtourism-related protests. A mixed-methods approach will be adopted. In the first phase, Barcelona residents will be surveyed and clustered based on their perceptions of overtourism. These clusters will then be compared using key variables such as age, gender, area of residence, economic dependency on tourism, education level, and income, which are established determinants of resident attitudes (e.g., Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Qin, Shen, Ye, & Zhou, 2021; Wassler, Nguyen, Mai, & Schuckert, 2019; Williams & Lawson, 2001).

In the second phase, qualitative interviews will be conducted with tourism experts in Barcelona. These experts will be purposively sampled to interpret the findings from phase one and contextualise them within the city's economic, socio-cultural, and political framework.

The study thus aims to address the surprisingly under-researched topic of overtourism, shedding light on residents' motivations and the factors influencing their perceptions, using the case of Barcelona. Ultimately, it seeks to inform management strategies that collaborate effectively with the most affected local communities to mitigate the adverse effects of tourism in Barcelona and beyond.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overtourism

Overtourism is not necessarily a new problem (Dickinson, 2018; Dodds & Butler, 2019; Goodwin, 2017; Koens et al., 2018), but it has recently attracted greater attention due to a rise in academic contributions (Butler & Dodds, 2022) and a significant increase in media coverage (Cheer et al., 2019). According to Koens et al. (2018), the term originated in media discourse and only later entered the academic field through the publication of special journal issues. The topic has been defined in various ways, sometimes as a “trend” or as an evolution of older concepts in sustainable tourism to address contemporary issues (Veríssimo, Moraes, Breda, Guizi, & Costa, 2020).

Despite its urgency, overtourism is not yet well defined academically, and interpretations vary across research (Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Gretzel, 2019; Koens et al., 2018; Mihalič, 2020). Several main definitions must therefore be considered to approximate an understanding of the concept. Mihalič (2020, p. 1), in her comprehensive

review, describes overtourism as “among other things, the acceleration and growth of tourism supply and demand, the exploitation of tourism destinations' natural ecological assets, the degradation of cultural attractions, and negative impacts on their social and economic environments.” Dodds and Butler (2019a, p. 519), citing Milano et al. (2019), define it as “[...] the excessive growth of visitors leading to overcrowding in areas where residents suffer the consequences of temporary and seasonal tourism peaks, which have forced permanent changes to their lifestyles, access to amenities, and general well-being.”

The European Parliament (2018, as cited in Butler & Dodds, 2022, p. 36) offers another definition, describing overtourism as “the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds.” However, Butler and Dodds (2022) note that this official definition lacks specificity regarding its impacts, making it less suitable for empirical studies.

These definitions generally associate overtourism with overcrowding, but there is an important distinction. As Dodds and Butler (2019a, p. 33) argue, overtourism “represents a situation where visitor numbers overwhelm the available services and facilities, becoming a serious inconvenience for permanent residents.” Veríssimo et al. (2020) contend that overtourism should ideally be assessed through the perceptions of various actors in destinations, including both tourists and residents. Milano et al. (2024) emphasise that crowding is merely the visible aspect of overtourism, which is more deeply connected to social and economic inequalities. Gössling, McCabe, and Chen (2020) add that overtourism manifests as a kind of loss of control for residents, who must negotiate their perceived place identity. This complexity makes establishing a tourism threshold and managing overtourism challenging.

Overtourism has also been related to sustainable tourism, particularly “responsible tourism” as a potential countermeasure (Goodwin, 2011; Mihalič, 2016, 2020). Mihalič (2020, p. 2) highlights that the occurrence of overtourism is “the strongest practical evidence so far for the illusiveness of a sustainable and responsible tourism paradigm.” She states however, that there is a lack of empirical evidence to address this link in a scientific matter.

Indeed, while media coverage of overtourism protests has been extensive, empirical evidence in academic literature remains limited. This scarcity may stem from difficulties in defining overtourism and distinguishing it from other issues such as crowding, tourismphobia, and resident dissatisfaction. For instance, Smith, Sziva, and Olt (2021), in their study of overtourism in Budapest, found that tourism was only a minor factor in residents' dissatisfaction with urban development. Szromek, Kruczek, and Walas (2019) observed in their Krakow case study that overtourism perceptions were linked to conflicts among actors involved in destination management. Similarly, Namberger, Jackisch, Schmude, and Karl (2021) found comparable results in their study of Munich, Germany. Park and Kovacs (2020) found that in South Korea, residents vandalized local murals not as a simple local response to overtourism, but as a perception of unequal economic benefits from tourism.

Outside the academic environment, the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2019) has outlined several strategies to address overtourism. These include encouraging visitors to explore beyond overcrowded areas and peak times, promoting alternative itineraries, and updating regulations to support sustainable tourism. By improving visitor segmentation and developing experiences that benefit both locals and tourists, destinations can better distribute tourism's economic and social benefits. Enhancing infrastructure, engaging local stakeholders, and proactive communication with visitors are also emphasised. Finally, the UNWTO (2019) recommends monitoring tourism impacts and adjusting responses as needed to foster balanced, community-friendly tourism.

Most of these strategies suggest that mitigating overtourism requires prioritising the perspectives of key stakeholders, namely, locals and tourists. Media reports on overtourism often highlight resident protests,

as seen in numerous Mediterranean destinations in 2024. Understanding how residents perceive overtourism, along with their reasons for holding certain views about the industry, is therefore essential.

2.2. The role of residents

Residents are one of the primary stakeholders in successful tourism development, and managing their involvement is a delicate issue. Their support or opposition is often a decisive factor in the success of tourism initiatives and a key catalyst for overtourism concerns. Research on residents' attitudes toward tourism employs diverse approaches, commonly emphasising themes such as reliance on anthropological and psychological frameworks, recognition of communities as heterogeneous entities with varying degrees of support for tourism, and examination of the socio-cultural impacts arising from the resident–tourism dynamic (Mason & Cheyne, 2000).

Given that residents' support is crucial for the development and implementation of tourism in a destination, studies frequently focus on factors influencing residents' perceptions of tourism, as well as on segmentation analyses (Sharpley, 2014) to identify key influences shaping these attitudes. Various studies have identified factors that impact residents' attitudes, generally classified as extrinsic or intrinsic (Harrill, 2004). Extrinsic factors include aspects such as the intensity, type, and seasonality of tourism, along with the national level of development. Intrinsic factors encompass economic reliance on tourism, community attachment, proximity to tourist areas, interactions with tourists, personal values, social identity, and demographic characteristics (San Martín, García-de los Salmones, Herrero, & Pérez, 2018). Socioeconomic factors such as age, gender, income, and duration of residence are also linked to residents' attitudes, although findings in these areas are mixed (Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Perdue et al., 1990; Wassler et al., 2019).

Spatial proximity to tourism activity is another significant variable, with studies suggesting that residents closer to tourism areas may exhibit different levels of support or opposition. Some research indicates more negative attitudes among these residents (Harrill & Potts, 2003), while others observe more positive views (Belisle & Hoy, 1980) or no significant difference (Wassler, Schuckert, Hung, & Petrick, 2018). Recent studies propose that geographical proximity only partially influences attitudes toward tourism, as residents often develop coping mechanisms to mitigate negative impacts from the industry (Sandven, Jørgensen, & Wassler, 2024).

Additionally, economic factors are consistently shown to influence attitudes, with residents who benefit financially from tourism generally holding more favourable views (Qin et al., 2021; Williams & Lawson, 2001). However, this economic relationship is complex, as residents may seek to balance financial gains with a desire to minimise negative socio-cultural effects (Cooke, 1982; Evans-Pritchard, 1989). Interestingly, some studies find that those directly involved in the tourism sector can hold more critical views of the industry (Haukeland, 1984).

Recent studies also emphasise a relational approach between residents and other stakeholders, focusing on concepts such as emotional solidarity between residents and tourists. This concept explores shared experiences and connections rather than conflicts, linking resident attitudes to factors such as social distance, welcoming disposition, emotional closeness, and empathy (Hasani, Moghavvemi, & Hamzah, 2016; Thyne, Woosnam, Watkins, & Ribeiro, 2022). Further research examines the antecedents of emotional solidarity, including shared beliefs and behaviours (Woosnam, Aleshinloye, Strzelecka, & Erul, 2018).

Research specifically related to anti-tourism protests also suggests that residents are influenced by political attitudes. Research shows that anti-tourism protests have often been protests against neoliberal urbanisation (Brenner & Theodore, 2002), where the tourism sector is associated with privatisation mechanisms in urban centers (González-Reverté and Soliguer Guix (2024). These so-called new social urban movements (Buechler, 1995), have looked specifically into Barcelona,

where tourism is represented as responsible for gentrification (Cocola-Gant & Lopez, 2020) and resident displacement (Cocola-Gant & Pardo, 2017) among others. González-Reverté and Soliguer Guix (2024) highlight that political attitudes underlying anti-tourism protests are usually multifold, reflecting not only local issues but also global ideological frameworks.

Overall, research on resident attitudes offers varied findings that are difficult to generalise across all studies. This variability may stem from treating residents as a homogeneous group rather than acknowledging diverse attitude segments (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Sharpley, 2014). Cluster analyses have been used to segment attitudes within subgroups, such as in Davis, Allen, and Cosenza's (1988) study, which identified categories like "haters" and "lovers" among Florida residents. Other studies have found clusters ranging from very negative to very positive attitudes (Aguilo Pérez & Rosselló Nadal, 2005; Pavlić, Portolan, & Puh, 2020). Generally, though not universally, the most positive segments focus on economic benefits, while the most negative emphasise social and environmental drawbacks (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003).

Certain studies link clusters to specific factors; for instance, Aguilo Pérez and Rosselló Nadal (2005) examined clusters by income and residence location, while Andriotis and Vaughan (2003) associated more positive attitudes with higher education levels. Sharpley (2014) critiques this approach, noting that while clusters and defining variables are documented, the reasons behind these perceptions often remain unexplored. Wassler et al. (2018) address this gap by combining cluster analysis with interviews to explore Hong Kong residents' collective beliefs, applying a similar method in Vietnam (Wassler et al., 2019).

Despite these advancements, explanations for residents' attitudes toward tourism often remain simplistic (Zhang, Inbakaran, & Jackson, 2006), with limited theoretical depth, particularly concerning contextual factors (Ap, 1990; Liu & Var, 1986; Sharpley, 2014). Evidence suggests that a rational cost–benefit analysis may not fully capture residents' attitudes toward tourism (Chen, Li, & Ma, 2025; Farmaki, 2024; Hadinejad, Moyle, Scott, Kralj, & Nunkoo, 2019), particularly regarding their perception of overtourism.

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to analyze residents' perceptions of overtourism in Barcelona, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. Following the framework proposed by Wassler et al. (2018; 2019), a two-stage methodology was applied. The first stage involved a cluster analysis to categorize residents based on their perceptions of overtourism, while the second stage used in-depth expert interviews to contextualise and refine the findings. This methodological design ensures a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by triangulating quantitative data with qualitative insights.

3.1. Quantitative stage: Cluster analysis of residents' perceptions

The first phase of the study aimed to analyze residents' perceptions of overtourism and identify distinct clusters of individuals based on their attitudes toward tourism. Barcelona was selected as the case study due to its prominence as one of Europe's main urban destinations (Euromonitor International, 2023) and its recent history of social movements protesting excessive tourism (Earnshaw, 2024).

3.1.1. Survey design and data collection

To capture a comprehensive view of residents' perceptions, an online survey was designed using a structured questionnaire that included questions on the following aspects (Appendix I):

- Perception of overtourism in the city
- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Ideological positioning
- Economic dependence on tourism

- Opinions regarding the future development of tourism in Barcelona

The measurement of residents' perceptions of overtourism was based on the scale developed by [González-Reverté \(2022\)](#), which assesses the impacts of tourism on local communities. Since there is no universally accepted scale for measuring overtourism, a consultation with tourism academics via LinkedIn and Trinet led to the selection of this scale as the most suitable for the study. All items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Ideological positioning, economic dependence on tourism, and opinions on future tourism development were measured using categorical variables, following Gonzalez Reverté's (2022) methodology.

Data collection was conducted with the support of a market research company, which invited participants from an online panel of Barcelona residents aged 18 and older. In order to avoid bias in the responses due to seasonality, the fieldwork took place during October 2025, a month of moderate tourism in the city, compared with the peak period of July–August and the relative calm of Winter (<https://observatoriturisme.barcelona>). A non-probabilistic sampling method was used, with quotas established to ensure representativeness in terms of age, gender, and district of residence. The data collection process adhered to ISO 26362:2009 standards, ensuring response quality and reliability. Control questions were embedded in the survey to maintain respondent attention and consistency.

A total of 610 valid responses were obtained. The demographic characteristics of the sample are summarised in [Table 1](#).

This robust sample size enabled meaningful segmentation of residents based on their perceptions of overtourism, as well as the characterization of the clusters in terms of socio-demographic attributes, ideological stance, economic reliance on tourism, and perspectives on future tourism development.

3.1.2. Data analysis: Clustering approach

A two-stage clustering process was applied, combining hierarchical and non-hierarchical methods. Hierarchical clustering was first used to determine the optimal number of clusters, following the stopping rule suggested by Hair et al. (2010). The identified clusters were then refined using non-hierarchical clustering techniques to ensure accurate group assignment.

To explore significant differences among clusters, statistical analyses such as ANOVA and cross-tabulations were conducted. Variables analysed included age, gender, education level, occupation, income, and involvement in tourism, as these are well-documented determinants of residents' attitudes toward tourism in the existing literature.

3.2. Qualitative stage: In-depth expert interviews

The second stage of the research sought to contextualise the quantitative findings through expert interviews. These interviews provided additional depth to the analysis by incorporating professional insights on the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of overtourism in Barcelona (Appendix II).

Table 1
Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample.

Variable	%	Variable	%
Gender		Education	
Male	48.7	No studies / Primary education	0.8
Female	51.3	Secondary education	35.4
		Higher education	63.8
Age		Occupation	
18 to 34 years	25.6	Employed	66.2
35 to 44 years	19.0	Retired / Pensioner	23.9
45 to 54 years	16.1	Unemployed	3.9
55 to 64 years	15.2	Student	4.9
65 or more years	24.1	Housework	1.0

Purposeful sampling was used to recruit experts and scholars from various institutions in Barcelona and beyond, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives. Experts were selected based on their knowledge and experience in tourism research, urban planning, and public policy.

In addition to their academic expertise, all the experts lived in Barcelona and surrounding municipalities, thus having a first-hand understanding of the tourism development in the city. [Table 2](#) provides an overview of the selected experts.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing for in-depth discussions while maintaining a standardized framework. The interview guide included the following key topics:

- Evaluation of the clusters identified in the quantitative stage
- Formation processes and implications of different resident perceptions
- Broader discussions on overtourism in Barcelona
- Tourism management strategies and policy recommendations
- Historical, cultural, and economic factors influencing tourism perceptions

Experts were presented with the findings from the cluster analysis and asked to assess the validity and implications of the identified resident segments. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and thematically analysed to extract key insights.

3.3. Integration of findings

Following the methodology proposed by [Wassler et al. \(2019\)](#), data from both stages were synthesised to provide a comprehensive overview of residents' perceptions of overtourism in Barcelona. This integration process involved triangulating the cluster analysis results with expert interpretations, offering a nuanced understanding of the underlying cultural, historical, economic, and social factors shaping tourism perceptions.

To enhance the reliability of the findings, experts were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the final results. Where necessary, adjustments were made to refine the conclusions and ensure the study's validity.

4. Findings

4.1. Quantitative stage: Cluster analysis of residents based on perceptions toward tourism

In order to identify segments of residents according to their perception of overtourism in Barcelona, we employed K-means cluster analysis using, as classification variables, the items in the scale developed by Gonzalez Reverté (2022) to assess the impacts of tourism in urban contexts. Prior to conducting the clustering analysis, we tested the psychometric properties of the scale using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Similar to the original research of Gonzalez Reverté (2022), the results obtained in this analysis using a Varimax rotation show that the items form two distinct factors (accounting for 61.72% of the variance). The first factor (38.15% of the variance) includes all items related to negative impacts of tourism, while the second (23.57% of the variance) aggregates the items referring to positive impacts of tourism. [Table 3](#) summarises the factor loadings of each item to the corresponding factor, as well as the value of Cronbach's alpha in each case, which confirms the internal reliability of the factors.

Once the psychometric properties of the scale were tested, all 12 items were used to conduct the K-means cluster analysis, which identified three distinct groups based on residents' assessment of tourism impacts ([Table 4](#)). ANOVA results revealed statistically significant differences among the three clusters for all items, indicating heterogeneous perceptions of tourism's impacts (both positive and negative) among residents.

Table 2
Expert Profiles.

Code	Areas of Expertise	Employment Type
P1	Business & Economics	Coordinators of Official Master's Degree in Hotel Business Management Deputy Coordinator of Studies of a Master's Degree in Research in Economics and Business.
P2	Entrepreneurship	Director of a University of Tourism and Hotel Management Professor of Tourism and Hotel Management Coordinator of a PhD in Tourism within Human Geography Coordinator of a Minor in Entrepreneurship and Social Innovation
P3	Tourism Geography	
P4	Tourism Sociology	
P5	Tourism Geography	
P6	Entrepreneurship	Coordinators of Official Master's Degree in Hotel Business Management
P7	Business & Economics	Coordinators of Official Master's Degree in Hotel Business Management
P8		

Cluster 1 ($n = 280$, 45.9%) exhibits a moderate assessment of both the positive and negative consequences of tourism. This segment associates tourism with rising prices, housing shortages, and a decline in quality of life, but also acknowledges its role in economic growth. Cluster 2 ($n = 196$, 32.1%) has a highly negative perception of tourism, reporting strong concerns about its drawbacks and giving very low ratings to its benefits. Finally, Cluster 3 ($n = 134$, 22.0%) is the most favourable toward tourism, assigning low ratings to most negative impacts while recognising its positive economic contributions to the city. This segment attributes the city's problems to causes other than tourism and strongly associates tourism with economic growth.

These findings indicate that concerns about overtourism are not universally shared in Barcelona and that residents' perceptions of

Table 3
Results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis.

	Factor 1 (Alpha = 0.90)	Factor 2 (Alpha = 0.82)
Tourism is responsible for the increases in prices	0.73	
Tourism is responsible for the lack of housing	0.76	
Tourism is responsible for the closure of local shops	0.78	
Tourism is responsible for the lack of public safety	0.74	
Tourism harms the image of Barcelona	0.74	
Tourism impedes the preservation of local customs and traditions	0.76	
Tourism harms the quality of life of residents	0.77	
Tourism is responsible for economic growth		0.70
Tourism is responsible for social aspects improvement		0.86
Tourism is responsible for cultural improvement		0.84
Tourism is responsible for environmental impact	0.70	
Tourism contributes to improve my wellbeing and benefits me		0.76

Table 4
Results of cluster analysis.

	Final cluster centers			ANOVA	
	Cluster 1 (N = 280)	Cluster 2 (N = 196)	Cluster 3 (N = 134)	F	Sig
Tourism is responsible for the increases in prices	5.53	6.52	3.93	205.16	0.00
Tourism is responsible for the lack of housing	5.42	6.42	2.81	378.18	0.00
Tourism is responsible for the closure of local shops	4.32	5.96	2.08	356.56	0.00
Tourism is responsible for the lack of public safety	4.18	4.96	2.37	117.90	0.00
Tourism harms the image of Barcelona	3.88	5.23	2.11	233.60	0.00
Tourism impedes the preservation of local customs and traditions	4.01	5.64	2.22	246.91	0.00
Tourism harms the quality of life of residents	4.96	6.54	3.12	377.19	0.00
Tourism is responsible for economic growth	4.90	3.46	5.12	84.39	0.00
Tourism is responsible for social aspects improvement	3.59	1.82	3.50	119.34	0.00
Tourism is responsible for cultural improvement	3.85	2.08	4.05	119.89	0.00
Tourism is responsible for environmental impact	4.62	5.54	3.26	129.32	0.00
Tourism contributes to improve my wellbeing and benefits me	3.30	1.53	3.64	127.27	0.00

tourism impacts are diverse and varied.

To gain a deeper understanding of the demographic profiles within each cluster, we conducted additional analyses to characterise them based on socio-demographic variables. The results of Chi-square tests (Table 5) reveal a statistically significant association between cluster membership and age, education, and occupation (p -value <0.05 in all cases).

Specifically, Cluster 2 (“Negative”) consists of a higher proportion of middle-aged individuals (35 to 54 years old), who have attained higher education and are employed. In contrast, Cluster 3 (“Positive”) comprises a larger percentage of older individuals (over 54 years), who have completed secondary education and are retired. Meanwhile, Cluster 1 (“Moderate”) is distinguished by a higher proportion of young adults (18 to 34 years) and students compared to the other groups.

However, as shown in Table 5, there are no statistically significant differences between clusters in terms of gender (p -value = 0.19), income (p -value = 0.36), or district of residence (p -value = 0.33). To further investigate district-based differences, we examined clusters both independently by district and by aggregating them into two categories: “touristic” (Sants-Montjuïc, Sant Martí, Gràcia, Eixample) and “non-touristic” (Ciutat Vella, Nou Barris, Les Corts, Sarrià-Sant Gervasi, Sant Andreu, Horta-Guinardó).

Specifically, the districts were classified based on available statistics on the city’s most visited locations and the availability of tourist accommodation (<https://observatoriturisme.barcelona>). In both cases, no significant differences were found based on respondents’ district of residence (p -value for independent districts = 0.40; p -value for touristic vs. non-touristic districts = 0.33). Nevertheless, the data indicate a higher percentage of individuals residing in touristic districts within Cluster 2, who hold more negative views toward tourism in the city.

Additionally, we analysed the relationship between cluster membership and ideological positioning, dependence on tourism, and

Table 5
Cluster characterization: socio-demographic profile.

	Cluster 1. Moderate (N = 280)	Cluster 2. Negative (N = 196)	Cluster 3. Positive (N = 134)	Total sample
Gender (Chi-square = 3.29; p -value = 0.19 n.s.)				
Man	45.7%	48.5%	55.2%	48.7%
Woman	54.3%	51.5%	44.8%	51.3%
Age (Chi-square = 23.81; p -value = 0.00**)				
18 to 34 years	31.4%	23.0%	17.2%	25.6%
35 to 44 years	17.1%	25.5%	13.4%	19.0%
45 to 54 years	15.0%	17.3%	16.4%	16.1%
55 to 64 years	13.9%	13.8%	20.1%	15.2%
65 or more years	22.5%	20.4%	32.8%	24.1%
Education (Chi-square = 8.00; p -value = 0.09*)				
No studies / Primary education	0.4%	1.5%	0.7%	0.8%
Secondary education	37.5%	28.6%	41.0%	35.4%
Higher education	62.1%	69.9%	58.2%	63.8%
Occupation (Chi-square = 22.53; p -value = 0.00**)				
Employed	67.1%	72.4%	55.2%	66.2%
Retired / Pensioner	22.1%	19.9%	33.6%	23.9%
Unemployed	2.9%	5.6%	3.7%	3.9%
Student	7.1%	1.0%	6.0%	4.9%
Housework	0.7%	1.0%	1.5%	1.0%
Income (Chi-square = 10.92; p -value = 0.36 n.s.)				
1.000 euros or less	5.4%	5.1%	6.0%	5.4%
1.001–2.000 euros	14.3%	13.8%	9.7%	13.1%
2.001–3.000 euros	20.4%	22.4%	16.4%	20.2%
3.001–4.000 euros	14.6%	21.4%	19.4%	17.9%
More than 4.000 euros	23.9%	15.8%	24.6%	21.5%
Do not answer	21.4%	21.4%	23.9%	22.0%
District of residence (Chi-square = 2.22; p -value = 0.33 n.s.)				
Touristic	47,14%	54,08%	50,00%	50,00%
Not touristic	52,86%	45,92%	50,00%	50,00%

** Significant at 95% confidence level; * Significant at 90% confidence level.

opinions on the future development of tourism in the city. The results, summarised in Table 6, indicate statistically significant differences among clusters across all considered variables.

Specifically, Cluster 2 (“Negative”) is characterised by a higher proportion of left-leaning individuals with no economic dependence on tourism, who strongly support a reduction in tourist numbers. In contrast, Cluster 3 (“Positive”) has a higher percentage of individuals identifying as “centre-right” or “right,” who advocate for maintaining or increasing tourism activity in the city. Finally, Cluster 1 (“Moderate”) exhibits the least ideological bias, includes a higher proportion of individuals economically dependent on tourism, and has a more neutral stance on the future development of tourism in the city.

4.2. Qualitative stage

4.2.1. General perception of Overtourism in Barcelona

The quantitative data show that a majority of respondents believe that tourism in Barcelona should not increase, or at least should remain the same, and our interviewees largely confirmed that tourism has hit a critical threshold in the city as perceived by its residents.

One interviewee (P6) mentioned that “we [Barcelona] have returned to pre-pandemic numbers and some quantitative indicators even seem to surpass those figures.” Another (P1) stated that “there are numbers that clearly show that year after year we are breaking records for tourist arrivals.” Some of the most clearly visible negative impacts were thus highlighted.

Interviewees mentioned overcrowding (P2; P8), security issues (P2), pollution (P5), and price increases and subsequent gentrification (P1; P2; P5; P8) as clearly visible negative impacts of tourism in Barcelona. They also noted that government initiatives have largely been futile due to the inherent difficulty of managing tourist numbers.

Overtourism, as perceived from a residents’ perspective, is, according to our respondents, a reality in Barcelona, although they were invited to be critical in light of the quantitative data and clusters presented to them. For example, P6 mentioned that “from what I get from the media, there seems to be a certain sense of ‘tourismophobia’ from part of society. I don’t know if it is exacerbated by the media; I am personally not sure that it is so widespread.” Another (P7) noted that “tourism [in Barcelona] is a highly polarising issue; there are people who are very much against it or very much in favour.” P8 added that “we, all of us

Table 6
Cluster characterization: Ideological positioning, dependency on tourism and opinion tourism evolution.

	Cluster 1. Moderate (N = 280)	Cluster 2. Negative (N = 196)	Cluster 3. Positive (N = 134)	Total sample
Ideological positioning (Chi-square = 21.58; p -value = 0.00**)				
Left	32.9%	44.4%	27.6%	35.4%
Center-left	30.0%	29.1%	27.6%	29.2%
Center	21.4%	13.3%	19.4%	18.4%
Center-right	11.8%	11.2%	17.2%	12.8%
Right	3.9%	2.0%	8.2%	4.3%
Economic dependence on tourism (Chi-square = 32.66; p -value = 0.00**)				
None	63.9%	85.2%	76.1%	73.4%
Low	17.5%	9.2%	12.7%	13.8%
Medium	10.0%	3.1%	9.0%	7.5%
High	6.8%	1.5%	1.5%	3.9%
Evolution of tourism activity (increase/decrease) (Chi-square = 185.53; p -value = 0.00**)				
Decrease	55.7%	94.4%	20.9%	60.5%
Stay the same	38.2%	4.6%	65.7%	33.4%
Increase	6.1%	1.0%	13.4%	6.1%
Evolution of number of tourists (increase/decrease) (Chi-square = 180.69; p -value = 0.00**)				
Decrease	52.1%	91.8%	20.1%	57.9%
Stay the same	41.8%	6.1%	61.9%	34.8%
Increase	6.1%	2.0%	17.9%	7.4%

** Significant at 95% confidence level; * Significant at 90% confidence level.

involved with the city and its issues, think along the same lines – it's not about going out with signs saying 'tourists go home' or throwing water on them. What needs to happen is a change in the management model."

4.2.2. Generational gap and Overtourism – Significant

As the cluster analysis shows, overtourism perception in Barcelona is strongest among millennials (Cluster 2).

Various explanations have been offered by our respondents, including increased awareness of negative impacts (P3), support for more extremist politics (P5), greater engagement in leisure and work activities in the city centre (P1; P6; P7; P8), need for housing (P1; P3; P7), safety concerns (P7), and occupations not related to tourism (P1; P6; P8).

For example, P4 mentioned regarding the millennials in Cluster 2 that "of course, if you work and live there [Barcelona city centre], you have constant contact with tourists and the effect of tourism... this will have negative effects on the quality of life, mobility, consumer prices, and leisure activities." P6 stated that "middle-aged people who have a job or are unemployed, but don't work in the tourism sector, may see more of the negative side of tourism. When they go to work, they face traffic jams or overcrowding."

Our respondents also noted that a more moderate attitude in Cluster 1 among the youngest respondents is based on a shift in local culture. P5, for example, mentioned that "young people are more pragmatic because they are more adapted to the reality they know... a young person can't compare the current situation of Barcelona with how it was before, because they have nothing to compare it to." As such, they were considered as "adapted to a tourist-driven Barcelona" (P5). P3 stated that "I don't see them as very critical... but on the other hand, they are also not very optimistic," while P4 reported that "young people struggle more to position themselves."

It was also mentioned that young people generally see more opportunities (P1; P6; P7) in tourism, as they study the subject at university, seeing it as "a chance" (P6). P7 added that this might likely be caused by them experiencing "both the benefits and negative effects of tourism. As a young person, you get a lot of good things; you have music festivals meant for tourists but which you can also enjoy as a local. From these to outdoor cinemas, without tourists, they probably wouldn't organise it, right?"

Tourism education was also mentioned as fostering more moderate views in Cluster 1: "[younger people in Barcelona] often study tourism, hospitality, or in restaurant schools, vocational programmes, or university degrees [related to tourism]."

Others were more critical of the younger generations in Cluster 1. For instance, P1 stated, "society is going to hell. Even young people are not complaining anymore; where are we going as a society? ... maybe there is a problem; until 30 they haven't really thought of leaving home, so they don't realise the cost of housing." He furthermore noted, "they [young people] are a pure contradiction ... they might say they are ecologists, but they get on a plane to visit a friend somewhere and buy from Shein or Temu...".

For the most positive and oldest cluster (Cluster 3), respondents said that they are likely the least prone to manifest overtourism sentiments, as they "have more stable finances and are less concerned about costs" (P5; P7), are more politically conservative (P6), less dependent on moving through different districts (P7), and more directly related to the economic benefits of tourism (P1). P5 summarised Cluster 3 as "these are older people, already retired, let's say, who have a more settled life or more certainty, maybe not financially, but I would dare to say yes, given the information on income [in the quantitative data]." This allows them "to have a second residence, the ability to move away to other places, and escape the negative effects, since they don't interact as much as Cluster 2, who live and work in the city."

4.2.3. Politics and Overtourism – Significant

Based on our cluster analysis, the group most susceptible to

overtourism in Barcelona (Cluster 2) was politically more left- to far-left-leaning than the other groups.

This was explained by two main factors according to our respondents: first, a higher focus on social rather than economic impacts (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7), and second, ideology (P5; P6; P8), including what some described as "left-wing xenophobia."

The general left-leaning nature of our quantitative sample was attributed to the fact that "Catalonia tends to be more left-wing, which ties to the fact that there was a time when Esquerra [left-wing political party] had a clearer stance on independence from Spain [than other parties]" (P8).

In terms of focus on social impacts, respondents mentioned that on the left there is a stronger need for "controlling tourism [with more restrictions]" (P2). P4 explained that "these people [with more left-leaning political views] are going to expect to be more protected by the public sector and for the public sector to provide more. This group [Cluster 2] is the most educated but also the one with the highest unemployment rate, so it's logical." P7 added that "left-wing people would say that not everything is tolerable in terms of economic growth and want limits to certain externalities caused by this growth [i.e., perceived overtourism]."

The ideological aspect was closely related to this but added further nuance. P6 mentioned that "from an ideological standpoint, especially in recent years, the left has taken a more critical position on tourism, highlighting the negative impacts of the tourism industry." According to P5, overtourism on the left "is not represented as tourismophobia, but as urbanophilia, as a defence of the city. This should not be stigmatised as hatred for tourists but as aspiring to a certain quality of life in the city." P5 also noted that the ideas behind anti-overtourism movements "go beyond just tourism; they have to do with globalisation dynamics and other factors."

P5 defined this as a form of "left-wing xenophobia," explaining that "the same rejection that people feel towards tourism is also directed at immigrants. At its core, it's a form of xenophobia – right-wing xenophobia: rejection of poor immigrants; left-wing xenophobia: rejection of wealthy expats and tourists. But in reality, both represent the same rejection of outsiders." He continued, "tourists are seen as rich people with money, and they are viewed differently. But this phenomenon—the left's criticism of tourism—is exactly the same as the right's criticism of immigration. Both are about acculturation, invasion, this idea that they are invading us and destroying our customs and traditions."

The prevalence of this sentiment among middle-aged millennials was explained as "the older you become, often the more conservative you grow (Cluster 3)" (P3), and "younger people vote more moderately" (P1).

4.2.4. Economic dependence, education, and Overtourism – Significant

Our respondents highlighted that there is a relationship between higher levels of education and lower levels of economic dependency on tourism in the context of Barcelona, which leads to a more negative view of overtourism (Cluster 2).

P7, for example, stated that "they [Cluster 2] have a negative view on tourism because tourism doesn't affect them financially at the end of the month when they receive their paycheck." According to P8, the same group "when they go out to enjoy the city, whether for cultural or leisure activities, to eat or to walk with their family, they encounter the negative effects of tourism. From a direct economic perspective, though, they don't benefit at all."

It was also mentioned that generally, highly educated people in Barcelona do not work directly in the tourism industry, whereas this is more common among lower-educated individuals and immigrants (P1, P5). P1 stated, "there are many people working – lots of immigrants – and there are structures where you can host many people with relatively little operational staff in the hotel, so the number of people benefiting in terms of employment is low." P5 added, "the tourism sector is a bit basic in terms of activities, so what people do in their jobs is not so complex ...

the kind of skills needed are completely different [from higher-educated skills].”

In addition, it was noted that younger people who are still studying (Cluster 1) are often employed in the tourism sector and thus have a higher economic dependency (P5, P6, P8). Accordingly, “they [Cluster 2] can afford to be critical of something that doesn't benefit them personally.” P4 confirmed that “it's easier to be critical when you're not that dependent on tourism.”

P5 added that, generally, higher-educated millennials in Barcelona “might not work or be economically connected to tourism. They work in companies that are located elsewhere but live in Barcelona [and thus feel the negative impacts].”

In terms of education specifically, in addition to the relatively low educational requirements for most jobs directly related to tourism, P6 said that the highly educated tend to be more critical because “there's a higher level of knowledge and access to information. These are more informed people... and there might be greater awareness [about the negative impacts of tourism].” On the other hand, the more moderate view on overtourism in the youngest cluster (Cluster 1) was justified by the fact that younger people are often studying tourism and hospitality degrees, where they are becoming more informed about the real nature of the industry (P1).

4.2.5. Area of residency, gender, income, and Overtourism – Not significant

Several factors were found not to be relevant to the identified clusters, including area of residence, gender, and income.

While gender was hardly discussed as a plausible factor, several respondents expressed surprise about the non-significance of the district of residence (P3, P4, P7). However, several plausible explanations were provided. P7 stated that “it's easy to argue that the positive and negative effects of tourism affect all Barcelona citizens. I would even say that it

affects those outside of Barcelona too. I live just next to Barcelona, and real estate prices rise a lot because of tourism as well. So regardless of whether you live in a touristy neighbourhood or not, you can be aware.” On the other hand, “people who have tourist rental apartments and businesses benefit from being residential in touristy areas” (P7). P8 mentioned that “those of us who don't live in touristy areas still have contact with touristy areas,” which affects transit, parking, security, and public transport.

In terms of income, respondents noted that, unlike dependence on the tourism industry, “regardless of your income level, the positive and negative impacts of tourism will affect you in the same way” (P7).

5. Discussion and conclusion

As this study's aim is to explore overtourism as perceived by residents, a framework conceptualizing overtourism from a residents' perspective is proposed based on our Barcelona case study (See Fig. 1).

Based on our data collection, overtourism from a residents' perspective manifests as a perception of excessive (1) crowding, (2) lack of security, (3) pollution, and (4) price increases/gentrification. This confirms Milano et al.'s (2020) hypothesis that the phenomenon extends beyond mere crowding, that other issues contribute to its perception, and that there are empirical impacts that can be scientifically measured (Butler & Dodds, 2021).

These findings confirm both that overtourism is an evolution of older concepts related to sustainable tourism (Veríssimo et al., 2020) and that it also relates to socio-cultural and destination-specific structures (Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Milano et al., 2020, 2024).

In this study, we assessed overtourism solely from a residents' perspective (Veríssimo et al., 2020) and confirmed several concepts that had previously been conceptually linked to overtourism.

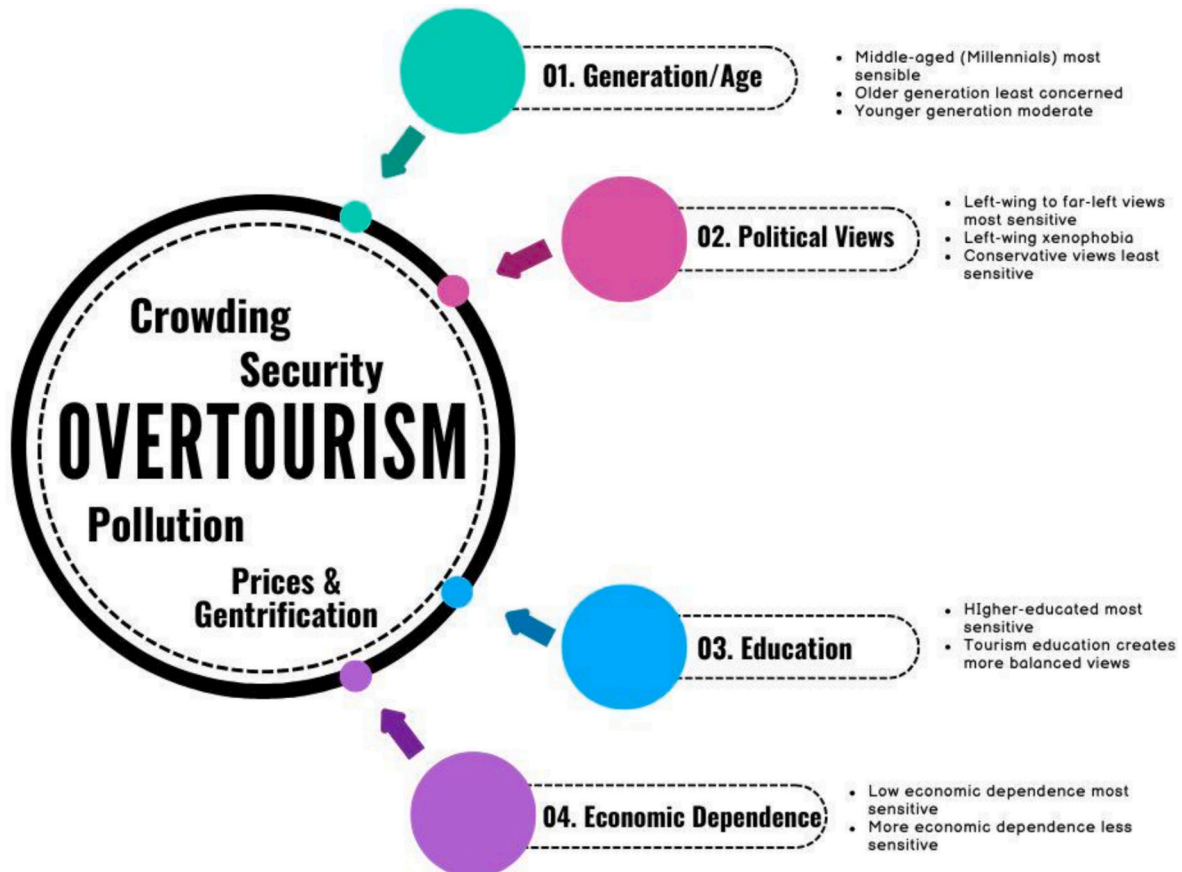


Fig. 1. Conceptualization of Overtourism from a Resident's Perspective.

Crowding has been defined as the most visible aspect of overtourism (Butler, 2018; Milano et al., 2014), and our respondents largely confirmed this. Security in tourism has been widely discussed (e.g., Hall, Timothy, & Duval, 2004; Mansfield & Pizam, 2006; Tarlow, 2014) and has recently also been related to the concept of overtourism (e.g., Daszko, 2022; Pechlaner, Innerhofer, & Erschbamer, 2019; Séraphin, 2020). However, this has largely been explored from a tourists' perspective. It is crucial to note that residents perceive a lack of safety induced by tourism development as an important indicator of overtourism.

Pollution has mostly been discussed in relation to overtourism from an environmental sustainability perspective (e.g., Damjanović, 2021; Taiminen, 2018), but our study shows that residents also experience noise and visual pollution in forming their perception of overtourism. Finally, price increases and gentrification are frequently covered by traditional media as one of the most visible impacts of overtourism in various destinations (e.g., Nadeau, 2024; Vianello, 2024), a concern also confirmed by our data.

In terms of socio-cultural and structural dynamics underlying overtourism (Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Milano et al., 2020, 2024), our study identified several factors that, in the case of Barcelona, shape residents' perceptions of overtourism. These factors are (1) generation/age, (2) political views, (3) education, and (4) economic dependence.

Millennials were found to be the most critical regarding overtourism, due to their increased awareness of negative impacts, support for more radical political parties, living/working in the city center, housing needs, and safety concerns. Conversely, the older generation was the least susceptible, likely due to their financial stability, political conservatism, and greater ability to avoid negative impacts by relocating or traveling elsewhere.

Interestingly, the youngest generation, although critical, held the most moderate view. This was attributed to their adaptation to a touristy Barcelona, limited ability to compare the city with its past, moderate political views, and perception of tourism as an opportunity due to their frequent studies in tourism-related fields. Age and generational characteristics were thus strongly correlated with other factors such as political views, education, and economic dependence, which warrant further discussion.

Political views have been identified as a catalyst for attitudes toward tourism in past studies (Webster & Ivanov, 2016) and are influenced by both current and historical factors (e.g., Wassler et al., 2018, 2019). Specifically, in Barcelona, Hughes (2018) noted that tourismophobia was spurred by affiliates of left-wing national parties with anti-neoliberal ideologies. In our study, far-left political beliefs were also correlated with an increased perception of overtourism. BBC News (Peter, 2017) similarly reported that far-left political ideologists have driven tourist protests in the Basque Country, stating, "We are anti-capitalist; we want to destroy the system, and the tourist industry is part of that system." This political affiliation was particularly prevalent among the millennial clusters with the highest perception of overtourism in Barcelona.

Education was related to overtourism perception in two ways. The most highly educated cluster was also the most susceptible to overtourism. Our data suggest that this is likely due to greater awareness of ongoing issues and the negative impacts of tourism. Conversely, tourism-related jobs tend to be largely low-skilled (Di Liberto, 2013; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2008), and higher education is not necessarily required. This was confirmed by our data, which show that this group has the lowest economic dependence on the tourism sector.

Interestingly, respondents noted that younger people may have a more rational view of overtourism because they frequently study tourism or hospitality in higher education. This aligns with Jafari's (1990, 2001, 2007) "knowledge-based platform" of tourism, where scientific perspectives overcome the limitations and simplifications of tourism knowledge through education.

Economic dependence on tourism was also found to significantly

influence residents' attitudes, consistent with previous studies (Qin et al., 2021; Williams & Lawson, 2001). In Barcelona, the oldest generation was the most economically dependent (presumably through property rental), while the youngest generation worked in service-related tourism jobs. The least economically dependent group held the most negative views of overtourism, as they experienced tourism primarily as an external force with negative impacts. Income, however, was not found to be significant, as the negative effects of tourism appear to be felt similarly across income levels.

Finally, it is noteworthy that area of residency was not found to be related to the perception of overtourism. Although there might be an intuitive relationship, area of residency has sometimes been found to influence residents' perceptions of tourism negatively (Harrill & Potts, 2003), positively (Belisle & Hoy, 1980), or not at all (Wassler et al., 2018). This was also true for overtourism in Barcelona. Our findings suggest that this is largely due to residents needing to move around the city for work and leisure, making them equally impacted by overtourism regardless of where they live.

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the growing body of research on overtourism by empirically assessing the phenomenon from a residents' perspective. By identifying crowding, lack of security, pollution, and price increases/gentrification as key factors shaping residents' perceptions, our findings confirm and expand upon Milano et al.'s (2020) hypothesis that overtourism extends beyond mere congestion and involves broader socio-economic and environmental concerns. This supports the argument that overtourism is an evolution of earlier sustainable tourism concepts (Verissimo et al., 2020) while also being deeply embedded in socio-cultural and destination-specific structures (Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Milano et al., 2020, 2024).

This study advances overtourism research by empirically applying and extending Milano et al.'s (2018, 2020) theoretical backdrops, which positions overtourism as a multidimensional, socio-politically constructed phenomenon involving not just visitor overcrowding but also socio-economic inequalities, gentrification, and resident protests. Unlike traditional carrying capacity models focused on quantitative thresholds (e.g., visitor-to-space ratios), our resident-centered cluster analysis in Barcelona reveals four perception-based segments shaped by demographic (age, education), ideological, and economic dependency factors. This confirms Milano et al.'s emphasis on structural drivers, evident in key concerns like price increases/gentrification, insecurity, pollution, and crowding, while extending the framework by quantifying how generational divides and political ideologies (e.g., left-leaning views correlating with anti-tourism stances) fuel resident segmentation and protests, as seen in recent Barcelona mobilizations (Earnshaw, 2024).

Our study contributes to the ongoing debate on defining and conceptualizing overtourism, a contested issue in the academic literature (Butler & Dodds, 2021; Dodds & Butler, 2019a; Gretzel, 2019; Koens et al., 2018; Mihalič, 2020). Recent resident-led protests, including mass demonstrations in the Canary Islands (Euronews, 2024) and anti-tourism actions in Rome and Barcelona (Earnshaw, 2024; Vianello, 2024), highlight its continued relevance. Political responses, such as increased tourist taxes in Spain (Liroso, 2024) and new regulations in Venice and Florence (Nadeau, 2024; Robertson, 2024), emphasise the need for a resident-centered perspective. However, some leaders downplay the issue, framing it as localized congestion rather than systemic overtourism (Krinis, 2024).

A key contribution of our study is identifying socio-cultural and demographic factors, generation, age, political views, education, and economic dependence, that shape residents' perceptions of overtourism in Barcelona. These generational differences reflect the complex interplay between ideology, education, and economic reliance on tourism, aligning with previous research (Dodds & Butler, 2019a; Wassler et al., 2018; Webster & Ivanov, 2016).

By integrating these findings with broader discussions on economic dependency, structural inequalities, and political ideologies (Milano

et al., 2024), our study extends previous work on resident-led protests (Milano et al., 2020). We show how social class, political affiliation, and education shape these movements, reinforcing that addressing overtourism requires more than destination management, it demands a deeper understanding of socio-cultural and economic dynamics (Dodds & Butler, 2019a, 2019b; Milano et al., 2024).

Our findings also extend existing debates by distinguishing overtourism from the long-standing concept of carrying capacity. Whereas carrying capacity approaches have traditionally framed tourism impacts in terms of quantitative thresholds, our resident-centered analysis shows that overtourism is perceived less as a matter of absolute numbers and more as a socially and politically constructed phenomenon. Residents associate overtourism with issues such as housing affordability, gentrification, insecurity, and environmental degradation, which cannot be captured solely through visitor-to-space ratios. This suggests that overtourism is not reducible to an ecological or infrastructural limit but is shaped by economic dependency, generational differences, and political ideology.

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, tourism planners, and local governments seeking to mitigate the negative effects of overtourism in Barcelona and similar destinations. The study highlights the need for more nuanced, resident-focused tourism management strategies that go beyond traditional crowd control measures. Given that overtourism perceptions are influenced by factors such as political ideology, education, and economic dependence, strategies must consider these socio-cultural dimensions rather than solely focusing on tourist volume reductions.

The findings underscore that resident perceptions are more than an expression of local sentiment: they are a barometer of policy legitimacy and a determinant of whether governance structures can achieve sustainable outcomes. A failure to engage with these perceptions risks creating tensions that destabilize tourism development and weaken the destination's resilience. By contrast, policies that recognize residents as active stakeholders foster greater legitimacy, strengthen governance, and contribute to sustainable destination management. In this sense, resident perspectives are not peripheral to tourism studies but central to both theoretical debates and practical strategies for long-term viability.

Our findings also resonate with broader international patterns observed in historic urban destinations beyond Spain. In Venice, mass tourism and cruise-ship visitation have placed severe pressure on infrastructure and resident life, prompting experiments with visitor-fee schemes and capacity management. Similarly, Florence faces tensions over short-term rentals, the commercialisation of public space, and residential displacement, echoing conflicts reported in Spanish heritage cities. Comparable dynamics appear in Asian urban destinations such as Bangkok and Singapore, where governance frameworks seek to balance tourism growth with heritage preservation and socio-spatial equity, underscoring that the trade-offs between resident well-being, heritage, and tourism development are not unique to Spain but characteristic of post-industrial heritage cities worldwide.

One key implication is the importance of addressing price increases and gentrification, which were found to be among the primary concerns of residents. Policies that regulate short-term rentals, curb real estate speculation, and promote affordable housing could help alleviate these concerns. Furthermore, safety issues linked to overtourism suggest that stronger measures should be implemented to manage crime, anti-social behavior, and overcrowding in public spaces.

Noise and visual pollution were also identified as significant contributors to residents' perceptions of overtourism. This suggests that urban planning measures, such as stricter noise regulations, improved waste management, and designated tourism zones, could help maintain a better balance between tourism and residential life. Additionally, the study found that younger residents, despite growing up in a heavily touristed Barcelona, still exhibit moderate concerns about overtourism. This presents an opportunity for educational initiatives that foster a more sustainable tourism mindset, ensuring that future generations

engage with tourism in ways that benefit both the local community and visitors.

Finally, given that political ideology plays a role in shaping perceptions of overtourism, tourism governance should engage with diverse stakeholder groups, including resident associations, tourism businesses, and policymakers across the political spectrum. Participatory planning and transparent communication with residents can help build trust and ensure that tourism management policies align with the needs of local communities.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, while the study provides a comprehensive analysis of overtourism from a residents' perspective, it does not account for the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as business owners, policymakers, and tourists themselves. Future research could adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to provide a more holistic understanding of overtourism dynamics.

Second, the study focuses exclusively on Barcelona. The findings may not be directly transferable to other destinations with different economic models, cultural contexts, or levels of tourism development. Comparative studies across different cities and regions could offer a broader understanding of how overtourism is perceived and managed in varying contexts.

Third, the quantitative research uses a non-probabilistic sampling procedure based on an online panel which might affect the quality of the data. Nevertheless, recent research has recognized the value and relevance of online panels for industry and academic research (Ferecatu, De Bruyn, & Mukherjee, 2024). Besides, the online panel used follows the ISO 26362:2009 standards, ensuring response quality and reliability of the data, and quotas were established a priori to obtain a sample representative of the target population in terms of age, gender, and district of residence.

Fourth, the original mixed methods approach by Wassler et al. (2019) offers a tripartite method, where also resident voices are investigated through qualitative interviews. The absence of resident qualitative voices is a limitation of this study and a their inclusion is a suggestion for future research.

The quantitative stage used a non-probabilistic online panel, which may introduce sampling biases such as self-selection and underrepresentation of digitally less-accessible groups (e.g., older or peripheral residents), despite quotas for age, gender, and district. Social desirability bias could also affect responses to sensitive overtourism topics. Qualitative interviews relied on a small purposeful sample of eight experts, potentially limiting perspective diversity. Future research should employ probability sampling and mixed-mode surveys for greater generalizability.

Additionally, while the study identifies key demographic and socio-cultural factors influencing overtourism perceptions, it does not explore the deeper psychological mechanisms behind these perceptions. Future research could integrate psychological and behavioral theories to better understand why certain groups are more critical of tourism and how these attitudes translate into social movements or policy preferences.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Philipp Wassler: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Ángel Herrero-Crespo:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Josep Rialp-Criado:** Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors used ChatGPT in order to correct spelling and grammar issues. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take

(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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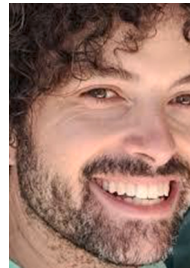
Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2026.101495>.

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Philipp Wassler (PhD at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University) is Assistant Professor at the University of Bergamo (Italy). As a passionate traveller, his primary research interest is in tourism management with a particular focus on sociological perspectives. He has also worked on other tourism-related subjects, among which marketing and sustainable development. His research has been published in international impact journals such as *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* and *Current Issues in Tourism*.



Ángel Herrero-Crespo is Full Professor of Marketing at the University of Cantabria. His main areas of work are marketing, consumer behavior and new technologies adoption. His research has led to the publication of more than 50 scientific papers in renowned journals such as *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *Tourism Management*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, *International Journal of Advertising*, *Computers Human Behavior*, *International Marketing Review* and *Journal of Business Ethics*. He is author of 10 chapters published in collective books.



Josep Rialp-Criado is full professor in the Department of Business at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His research interests are focused on the international marketing, firm internationalization processes and marketing metrics. He is author and co-author of different articles published in national and international journals such as *International Business Review*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Global Information Management*, *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, *International Journal of Technology Management*, *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, *Journal of Small Business Management*, *European Management Journal*, *Journal of International Marketing*, *Journal of World Business*, among others; as well as book chapters. He received his PhD from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in 1997. He was visiting professor in University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (1999), Brunel University (2013), McEwan University (2024) and has participated in several financed research projects. Currently, he is one of the principal researchers in a competitive project granted by the Spanish Ministry of Economics and Competitiveness.