



“Unbalanced Tourism”

Final report of the T4T Horizontal Task-Force

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T4T Horizontal Task-Force

Unbalanced Tourism



T4T Report: Unbalanced Tourism in the EU

Executive Summary

The phenomenon of unbalanced tourism, characterized by the disproportionate distribution of tourist activity in specific geographic areas and/or seasons, has emerged as a critical challenge for the European Union. While tourism is a significant driver of economic development, job creation and weight in the European value chains (and complements domestic demand within the cultural and services sectors), its growth coupled with time and spatial concentration lead to detrimental social, economic, environmental, and communicative impacts, often termed "overtourism", while other regions and seasons face challenges of undertourism performance.

Familiar constraints around seasonality remain, such as school holidays. Climate change is already having an appreciable impact on sectoral resilience, destination and product development and travel patterns.

This report delves into the definitions and concepts surrounding this issue, analyses its multifaceted causes and impacts, outlines existing policy measures and good practices, identifies some EU policies and funding mechanisms, and proposes institutional actions enable and foster a more sustainable and equitable tourism landscape across the EU.

The overarching goal is to achieve a balance where tourism benefits local economies and communities, preserving the character and resources of destinations for future generations, while remaining competitive in the global context.



I – Introduction

Tourism is a powerful driver of economic and social progress, offering significant benefits to both emerging and developed countries. It creates jobs, strengthens economies, enhances infrastructure, and fosters the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Internally can also reduce poverty and inequality, particularly when local communities directly benefit. Externally rewards mutual curiosity about other people and culture, and shares European soft power around the world. Economically drives export revenue strengthening commercial balance with non-Eu countries.

However, poor destination's management can be lead to challenges, such as overcrowding, housing shortages, and strained natural and infrastructure resources. Identifying and addressing these impacts through sustainable practices and policy measures is essential to maximize the positive impact of tourism whilst minimising its negative consequences.

In this sense, targeted policies, well-regulated, multi-level policy and government policies and thoughtfully planned and managed tourism models hold the key to addressing many of the challenges raised by local communities.

1. Definitions and Concepts

Unbalanced Tourism is a structural concept, referring to the disproportionate distribution of tourism flows—whether spatial, temporal, or demographic — that leads to inefficiencies, inequalities, and sustainability risks.

A preliminary conclusion of the current process is that there's no consolidated definition of overtourism among the tourism ecosystem, including international organizations, European Institutions, national, regional, local authorities, and was popularized by the media.

Unbalanced tourism encapsulates several interconnected concepts that describe the detrimental effects on both, the destination/host communities and visitors of unmanaged and spatially and/or seasonality concentrated visitor flows. Consolidating these concepts requires recognizing their multi-dimensional nature and the interdependencies between them.

In this context, unbalanced tourism, while closely related with overtourism, is a broader and wider structural concept. It refers to the disproportionate distribution of tourism flows—whether spatial, temporal, or demographic—that leads to inefficiencies, inequalities, and sustainability risks.

In general, it takes into account communities' broader socio-economic interests and prospects, and their long term viability and appeal as places to live and work.

Key distinctions:



- Focus on distribution: Unbalanced tourism may occur even without overtourism if tourism is concentrated in specific zones or seasons while other areas and seasons remain underutilized and/or under visited regardless of their tourism potential.
- Planning-oriented: It is often used in policy and academic contexts to describe misalignment between tourism demand and destination capacity or strategy.
- Includes under-tourism: It encompasses both excess and deficiency, making it a more neutral and diagnostic term.

In short, overtourism is a symptom, often associated with a subjective diagnosis, while unbalanced tourism is a systemic condition.

What that is and how it can be achieved is our common concern.

➤ **Overtourism**

- Definition: when local people or tourists perceive a place as simply "over-visited," leading to a change in the destination's character and causing irritation and annoyance, primarily for residents. It manifests through symptoms like gentrification of urban centres, congestion in attraction areas, and overcrowding of popular seaside destinations and UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It is not solely about millions of visitors, as small, sensitive communities can experience overtourism with few tourists.

Overtourism was framed in a 2018 report by UN Tourism, the Centre of Expertise Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality (CELTH) of Breda University of Applied Sciences and the European Tourism Futures Institute (ETFI) of NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences.¹ as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experience in a negative way". The report further highlighted that terms such as 'overtourism' or 'tourismphobia' reflected the challenges of managing growing tourism flows into urban destinations and the impact of tourism on cities and its residents.²

- Consolidation Suggestion: Overtourism should be understood in the context of the definition of carrying capacity. As a perceptual and objective state where the negative impacts of tourism (social, environmental, economic) surpass the capacity and acceptance levels of the host community and the destination's resources. It is the core problem of unmanaged tourism, encompassing both "tourist overload" and "imbalances." Tourism carrying capacity was defined by UN Tourism as "the maximum number of people that may visit tourist destination at the same time, without causing destruction of the physical, economic and sociocultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality of visitors' satisfaction".
- Key characteristics:

¹ World Tourism Organization (UNWTO); Centre of Expertise Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality; NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences; and NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (eds., 2018), 'Overtourism'? – Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284419999>

² World Tourism Organization (UNWTO); Centre of Expertise Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality; NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences; and NHL Stenden University of Applied Sciences (eds., 2018), 'Overtourism'? – Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284419999>



- Perceptual and experiential: It is not only about numbers but about how tourism's impacts are felt by locals and tourists: tolerant/accepting/approving/supportive.
 - Media-driven: The term gained popularity post-2016, especially through platforms like Skift (which has since resiled from the term).
 - Symptomatic: Often identified through protests, infrastructure strain, and degradation of cultural/natural assets.
 - Reactive: Destinations often recognize overtourism only after negative impacts of unmanaged tourism become visible. Addressing overtourism therefore requires anticipatory governance supported by continuous monitoring systems that combine social, environmental, and economic indicators to detect early signs of imbalance before they become critical.
- **Tourist Overload**
- Definition: tourist overload directly refers to the excessive number of visitors that exceeds a threshold in a specific destination's physical, social, and environmental infrastructure. It is a key aspect of overtourism, indicating when the tourism carrying capacity (TCC) is exceeded, leading to congestion, queues, and strain on public services. In one sentence: they exceed its resilience to visitor activity.
 - Consolidation Suggestion: Tourist overload should be viewed as the physical manifestation of overtourism, specifically highlighting the pressure on infrastructure, services, and public spaces due to high visitor numbers. It's a quantitative measure of stress, directly linked to the TCC.
- **Imbalances**
- Definition: Tourism imbalances reflect the disproportionate distribution of tourist activity across a territory or a season. A key observation driving the EU's "Stratégie nationale de gestion des flux touristiques" is that 80% of tourist activity concentrates on merely 20% of the territory. This spatial and temporal concentration leads to negative impacts in popular areas while other regions remain underdeveloped.
 - Consolidation Suggestion: Imbalances represent the structural, seasonal and spatial dimension of unbalanced tourism, emphasizing the uneven distribution of visitor flows in space and time and their impacts. Addressing imbalances requires policies and strategies for geographical and seasonal redistribution of tourism and strengthening data interoperability to guide decision-making across governance levels.
- **Undertourism**
- Definition: refers to destinations that suffer from insufficient tourist visitation, which can lead to economic stagnation, underutilization of infrastructure, and missed opportunities for cultural exchange and development, usually due to ineffective branding, lack of visibility, or infrastructural limitations.
 - Consolidation: should be analysed through the alignment of the TCC and the lens of resident perceptions, showing both positive and negative impacts.



- The concept is under-researched compared to overtourism and requires clearer theoretical framing.

- **Detourism**
 - Definition: can be conceptualized as a proactive and strategic approach to mitigate overtourism and rebalance tourism flows. It involves intentional efforts to reduce, redistribute, or shift tourist demand away from overcrowded areas or peak seasons. Strategies such as "spreading visitors around the city and beyond," "time-based rerouting," "regulation," "creating itineraries," "visitor segmentation," and "demarketing" are all elements of detourism. It aims to foster more sustainable and responsible tourism by influencing visitor behaviour and destination offerings.
 - Derived: Detourism concept has been also used an emerging concept in tourism studies that critiques mainstream tourism practices and proposes alternative ways of experiencing travel. It is often associated with: i) a philosophical and cultural inversion of traditional tourism; ii) a rejection of mass tourism and its commodified experiences; iii) an emphasis on slow, mindful, and creative travel, often aligned with degrowth and sustainability principles.
 - Consolidation Suggestion: Detourism could be positioned as last strategic phase of response to critical unbalanced tourism situation, encompassing all proactive measures aimed at mitigating overtourism and addressing imbalances. It is about actively managing threshold demand and supply to achieve sustainable visitor flows and enhance the overall quality of the tourist experience and resident life.

- **Capacity and Yield Optimisation**
 - Coupled with 'detourism' is the concept of 'capacity optimisation' which is applicable to individual attractions, sites and infrastructure networks, as well as more spatially. It is a response to 'under-utilisation'.
 - Improved facilities at a station might allow more passengers to be carried and reduce a sense of crowding and attract more passengers who would previously have been put off by crowding or lack of amenities.
 - Longer opening hours and improved flow management can transform how museums are visited, allowing an increase in numbers and in quality of visit.
 - Capacity and yield optimisation are standard concepts for the private sector but not always maximized adoption by the public sector – e.g. state-owned museums.
 - There need not be a conflict between economic players. More foot-fall, intelligently managed, will drive revenue which will pay for more staff, conservation, access arrangements and interpretation.

- **Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC)**
 - Definition: TCC is defined as the "maximum number of people who can visit a tourist destination at the same time, without causing the destruction of the physical, economic and socio-cultural environment and an unacceptable decrease in the quality



of visitor satisfaction".³ It is a multi-dimensional concept, encompassing physical, economic, perceptive, social, ecological, and political capacities.

- Consolidation Suggestion: TCC serves as the analytical foundation for understanding and quantifying the limits of a destination. It provides a concrete basis for identifying when overtourism occurs and for developing balancing strategies. Its multi-dimensional nature highlights the need for a holistic assessment.
- All together, unbalanced tourism, overtourism, and carrying capacity should be interpreted as complementary dimensions of the same management system. A robust set of indicators allows destinations to measure where they stand along this spectrum, guiding adaptive policies that reconcile economic vitality with environmental limits and community acceptance.

➤ **False Excursionism:**

- A concept introduced by Van der Borg (1991), referring to visitors who do not stay overnight in the destination but still consume its resources intensively. These visitors often bypass traditional accommodation statistics, making their impact harder to measure but no less significant.

➤ **Visitor-Friendliness:**

- Definition: A framework developed by Russo and Van der Borg (2002) to assess the quality of the urban tourism experience. It includes five dimensions: primary and secondary tourist products, destination image, external accessibility (how easy it is to reach the city), and internal accessibility (how easy it is to navigate within the city).

➤ **Tourism by consent**

- Definition: Tourism by consent refers to a model where tourism development and visitor flows occur with the explicit agreement and participation of local communities, ensuring that tourism aligns with their social, cultural, and environmental priorities.
- Based on five criteria: i) local residents have a voice in decisions about tourism projects, policies, and visitor management; ii) shared benefits; iii) transparency and dialogue; iv) respect for local identity; v) adaptive governance with transparent monitoring impacts and adjusting policies based on community feedback.

³ **World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).** (1981). *Technical Manual No. 2: Managing Tourism at World Heritage Sites – A Practical Manual for World Heritage Site Managers*. Madrid: UNWTO.



2. Causes and Impacts of Unbalanced Tourism

Unbalanced tourism arises from a complex interplay of structural, technological, economic, social, and communication factors that lead to an uneven distribution of tourism flows across space and time causing detrimental social, economic, environmental impacts. Unlike overtourism, which focuses on excessive visitor numbers in specific locations as per carrying capacity, unbalanced tourism encompasses both over-concentration and under-utilization, revealing systemic inefficiencies and missed opportunities in destination development.

Is also driven by a combination of factors, leading to significant social, economic, environmental, and communicative impacts. This is not solely the result of high visitor numbers—it is the outcome of structural mismatches between tourism flows and destination carrying capacity, planning, management and national/regional/local governance. Understanding its drivers requires a multidimensional lens that considers economic, technological, social, and policy-related factors.

2.1. Causes

Global tourism has surged to 1.5 billion arrivals in 2024, driven by economic growth, liberalized transport, and digital visibility. Demand remains highly seasonal and concentrated: 48% of EU arrivals occur June–September, and the top 10 destinations capture 40% of global flows. Connectivity gaps, cruise tourism, and the rise of short-term rentals amplify pressure on historic centres. Social media algorithms and platform-driven planning reinforce iconic hotspots, while policy and marketing often prioritize flagship destinations. Fragmented governance and focus on quantity over quality exacerbate territorial imbalances, highlighting the need for integrated, sustainable strategies and diversification of tourism flows.

- **Continuous Growth of Global Tourism:** with a global economic growth, international tourist arrivals have seen exceptional development to reach 1.5 billion in 2024 as compared to 222 million fifty years ago, with forecasts predicting continued growth. This overall increase in demand puts pressure, in particular on popular destinations.
- **High Seasonality:** According to UN Tourism, in EU destinations the period June to September concentrated in 2024 nearly 48% of all international tourist arrivals in the EU. This share has improved slightly from an estimated 51% in 2000.
- **Concentration of Demand in a number of destinations:** According to UN Tourism the top 10 most visited destinations in the world concentrated in 2024 40% of all 1,5 billion international tourist arrivals.
- **Transport and Connectivity Asymmetries:** the liberalization of air travel and the rise of low-cost carriers, along with the emergence of the high-speed rail networks, have democratized access to tourism, enabling short city breaks and weekend trips across



Europe⁴. This has led to a concentration of tourism in iconic destinations, often without proportional investment in infrastructure or dispersion strategies, facilitate city-tripping and allow people to visit heritage cities from further away, increasing visitor numbers. Conversely, destinations with limited connectivity or infrastructure remain under-visited, regardless of their potential. This accessibility gap is a key structural cause of unbalanced tourism.

- Growth of Cruise Tourism: Large cruise ships bring significant numbers of visitors, especially day-trippers (excursionists), who contribute marginally to the local economy but heavily impact infrastructure during peak hours and in a concentrated period of time and space.
- Rise of the Sharing Economy: platforms that easily intermediates short term accommodation significantly increase lodging supply, particularly in historic centres, contributing to "touristification trend" and increasing visitor numbers outside traditional monitoring⁵. Moreover, the data generated by these platforms often lacks granularity, making it difficult to monitor and manage flows in underdeveloped areas.
- Digital Visibility and Social Media Amplification: one of the most influential drivers of unbalanced tourism is the role of digital platforms and social media in shaping destination visibility. Algorithms on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube tend to amplify content related to already popular destinations, reinforcing their dominance in the tourist imagination. This creates a feedback loop where iconic sites receive disproportionate attention, while nearby or lesser-known destinations remain invisible, despite having comparable cultural or natural assets. The result is a digital concentration of interest that translates into physical concentration of visitors, often without corresponding management strategies⁶. This digital concentration creates a feedback loop: destinations that are already popular become even more visible, while others—despite having cultural or natural assets—remain digitally invisible and under-visited. The algorithm favours engagement, not balance.

On other hand, from perspective of organised travel, one of the opportunities is work out how to attract people to less-famous-but-good, and push back against the social media narrative domination.

- Platform-Driven Travel Behaviour: Travel planning increasingly relies on user-generated content and peer recommendations. Platforms such as TripAdvisor, Google Maps, and Airbnb prioritize destinations with high engagement, reviews, and search volume. This algorithmic bias contributes to the marginalization of emerging or peripheral destinations, exacerbating territorial imbalances.
- Policy and Marketing Focus on Flagship Destinations: national and regional tourism strategies often prioritize flagship destinations for international promotion, investment, and infrastructure development. While this boosts competitiveness, it also concentrates

⁴ Eg: Venice saw a quadrupling of arrivals over 25 years, largely due to increased accessibility and affordability of travel. However, the city's fragile ecosystem and limited spatial capacity were not scaled accordingly.

⁵Eg: Venice, the proliferation of non-hotel accommodations has made it harder to track and manage visitor numbers, especially day-trippers and "false excursionists."

⁶The Tre Cime di Lavaredo site in the Dolomites experienced peak densities of 75 people per hectare, driven by social media exposure and lack of flow regulation.



tourism flows and neglects the development of alternative areas. The lack of coordinated territorial planning leads to saturation in some zones and stagnation in others.

- Destinations that lack integrated tourism strategies or fail to coordinate across local/municipal and regional levels. This leads to fragmented responses and missed opportunities for sustainable development.
- Focus on Quantity over Quality: tourism development policies and business models have historically focused on boosting social and economic development through increasing visitor numbers rather than raising the quality or sustainability of the tourism experience or profiling segments aligned with the destination sustainability and equity aims. The challenge in here is how to increase spend/minimise economic leakage, without becoming elitist and democratic.
- Concentration on Limited Areas: a large percentage of tourism activity (supply) is concentrated in a small percentage of territory, leading to intense pressure on specific sites. This has been more visible in peak seasons and specific zone (historical centres)⁷.
- External Shocks and Flow redistribution: geopolitical events, pandemics, and extreme weather disruptions can abruptly redirect tourism flows. Destinations unprepared for sudden influxes may experience temporary overflow of demand, while others suffer from under-tourism under such shocks. These shocks reveal the fragility of tourism distribution systems and the need for adaptive planning, management and crisis preparedness.

2.2. Impacts

Unbalanced tourism creates territorial, social, and environmental disparities, amplified by fragmented data and lack of harmonized indicators. Saturated destinations face gentrification, rising costs, cultural erosion, and strain on public services, while under-visited areas miss development opportunities. Economic impacts include over-reliance on tourism, uneven benefits, and leakage through global platforms. Environmental pressures—biodiversity loss, pollution, and resource depletion—combine with communication biases that reinforce overtourism. Social tensions and anti-tourism sentiments grow as resident well-being and authenticity decline. Addressing these challenges requires integrated planning, robust monitoring, and strategies that balance visitor flows, protect ecosystems, and sustain local communities.

The impacts of unbalanced tourism can only be properly understood and addressed when supported by robust data and comparable indicators. Measuring it requires harmonized methodologies that capture territorial, temporal, and social dimensions of tourism activity. The

⁷ Lyon and Turin have been struggling with uneven distribution of visitors, with central districts overloaded while peripheral areas remain underdeveloped.



absence of shared statistical frameworks across countries and regions leads to fragmented knowledge, limiting the ability to anticipate risks or design coordinated responses.

Nevertheless, some impacts of national/regional/local unbalanced tourism can be observed from different angles:

2.2.1 – General policy impacts

- **Territorial Inequality and Missed Development Opportunities:** unbalanced tourism leads to stark disparities in economic benefits across regions. While some destinations experience high tourism demand and saturation effects, others fail to attract sufficient visitors to sustain and develop local businesses or justify infrastructure investments. This uneven development undermines cohesion and resilience at the territorial level. This is particularly true for urban vs rural areas. These disparities are often amplified by the lack of disaggregated and comparable statistical data at regional and local levels.
- **Social Fragmentation and Perception Gaps:** in areas with high demand, residents may experience displacement, rising costs, and loss of community identity, forgetting the economic and social value of tourism. On the other hand, in under-visited areas, communities may feel excluded from the tourism economy, leading to frustration and disengagement. These contrasting experiences create perception gaps that complicate national tourism narratives and policy alignment.
Social tensions narrative around tourism are rarely quantified in official statistics. Resident satisfaction, perceived quality of life, and social carrying capacity are not consistently measured, resulting in a data gap between how tourism is experienced and how it is governed. Integrating social perception indicators into national and regional monitoring systems would allow for evidence-based dialogue between residents, authorities, and industry.
- **Environmental/Cultural Pressure and Neglect:** popular destinations face environmental degradation and cultural impacts due to overuse, while less-visited areas may lack the resources or incentives to preserve their natural and cultural heritage. This duality results in both ecological strain and missed conservation opportunities. Environmental impacts of tourism remain under-measured and difficult to compare due to heterogeneous data collection practices.
- **Communication Imbalance and Visibility Bias:** the dominance of certain destinations in media and digital discourse perpetuates a communicative imbalance. This not only affects visitor behaviour but also influences funding and investment decisions, policy priorities, and stakeholder engagement. Destinations that are less visible struggle to attract investment and recognition, reinforcing the cycle of under-tourism.
- **Strategic Misalignment and Planning Challenges:** unbalanced tourism, in some cases, is a consequence of lack of strategic planning, as data and policy tools are often calibrated for high-traffic areas. This leads to underinvestment in measuring, monitoring and capacity-building for emerging destinations, and reactive rather than proactive management in saturated zones.
- **Stigmatisation:** being known as a ‘tourism destination’ is not necessarily a plus nowadays. This term may unconsciously inhibit development of other activity, and/or



build resentment that other activity is not given the support it needs to develop and thrive.

2.2.2 – Tourism Ecosystem Impacts

- Social Impacts
 - Gentrification and Displacement: can lead to the "touristification" of historic city centres, pushing out other economic activities and social functions to peripheries. Increased property prices and rental costs force local residents to move out, changing the community's character and leading to depopulation.
 - Resident Annoyance and Anti-Tourism Sentiments: Overcrowding, traffic issues, noise pollution, and the feeling of being excluded from daily life spaces can lead to negative perceptions of tourists and the industry, sometimes resulting in anti-tourism feelings, movements and social unrest, namely within the context of allocation of scarce resources (e.g. who gets the water, hotel swimming pool or local residents' gardens - or swimming pools?)
 - Loss of Authenticity and Cultural Identity: The character of a destination can change, losing its authenticity for residents and tourists, eroding local traditions.
 - Deterioration of Visitor Experience: Congestion, long queues, and difficulties in accessing sites can diminish the quality of the visitor experience.
 - Strain on Public Services: Increased demand on transportation, waste management, and other public facilities can lead to system overload.
- Economic Impacts
 - Economic Monoculture and Over-reliance: Destinations can become overly dependent on tourism, displacing other economic activities and creating a vulnerable economy.
 - Increased Cost of Living: Tourism demand can inflate prices for goods and services, affecting local residents.
 - Net Loss in Saturation Stages: While initial tourism growth can be profitable, the "saturation stage" can lead to a net loss for the local community as negative externalities outweigh benefits, with destination "deterioration in value".
 - Uneven Economic Benefits: Economic benefits might not be widely distributed, leading to resentment if residents do not perceive personal economic benefits from tourism.
 - Economic leakage arising from online marketplace consequent to platform sales driving non-EU commission revenues: while this the OTAs are obliged to comply with EU Digital Single market legislation the main players in this context are non-EU.
- Environmental Impacts
 - Threats to Biodiversity and Natural Sites: Excessive visitor numbers and inappropriate behaviour can directly damage fragile ecosystems and natural heritage, including mountains, beaches, and protected areas.



- Pollution: Increased traffic (own, rented, shared or individual transports platforms) leads to air pollution, while high visitor density contributes to noise pollution, particularly in residential areas.
- Waste Management Issues: Overload on waste treatment systems due to higher waste generation from tourists.
- Resource Depletion: Increased consumption of local resources such as water and energy can strain limited supplies.
- Communication Impacts
 - Amplification of Overtourism through Social Media: User-generated content and social media can inadvertently promote already crowded sites, attracting even more visitors and exacerbating overtourism.
 - Challenges in Influencing Behaviour: Communicating responsible visitor's practices and redirecting visitors effectively requires sophisticated, targeted strategies that counteract the natural pull of popular sites, transports, and local infrastructures.



3. Known Policy Measures

Managing unbalanced tourism requires integrated, multi-dimensional strategies. Key measures include spatial and temporal redistribution through alternative itineraries, dynamic pricing, and off-peak incentives; mobility solutions like improved public transport, buffer terminals, and smart parking; and visitor engagement via real-time digital tools, responsible tourism campaigns, and demarketing of saturated sites. Community involvement ensures legitimacy and fosters co-created experiences, while data-driven governance—through observatories, telecom analytics, and early warning systems—supports proactive management. Regulation and quotas remain last-resort options, applied transparently and aligned with EU law. Success depends on collaboration, robust indicators, and harmonized monitoring frameworks.

A range of policy measures has been identified and implemented to manage unbalanced tourism, often requiring multi-dimensional and integrated approaches.

- **Spatial and Temporal Redistribution:**
 - **Spreading Visitors:** Encouraging tourists to visit less-known areas or to explore destinations beyond the main attractions. Redistribution strategies are most effective when guided by comparable indicators of tourism density and intensity at local level. This should be developed with a close collaboration with the travel trade to encourage both spatial and temporal distribution, creating an attractive products packages.
 - **Time-Based Rerouting:** Promoting (based on incentivisation and availability) visits during off-peak hours or seasons to distribute demand more evenly. Measuring seasonality through standardised indicators — such as gini index — helps destinations design evidence-based incentives for off-peak travel and evaluate the effectiveness of temporal redistribution campaigns over time
 - **Alternative Itineraries and Attractions:** Creating and marketing new tourist products or routes to diversify offerings and diffuse crowds, resulting in diversification of tourism products and experiences. These actions should be linked to data monitoring frameworks capable of tracking visitor flows and behavioural change, using interoperable mobility and tourism datasets
 - **Tourists/Visitors cards with incentives, dynamic pricing, and targeted marketing.**
 - **Smart management of short accommodation, based on quality data.**
- **Mobility and Infrastructure Management:**
 - **Improved Public Transport:** Enhancing public transport networks and intramodality to reduce private vehicle use and manage traffic.
 - **Parking Management:** Developing intelligent parking solutions and systems that monitor availability to reduce congestion and encourage alternative transport.
 - **Buffer Terminals:** Establishing peripheral terminals to intercept visitors before they reach sensitive city centres, especially for day-trippers and cruise tourists.



- Devise smart rules for coach access if capacity is at a premium but access practical (e.g. permit door-to-door access if vehicle carries visitors with luggage, and require visitors walk to hub to board vehicle for day excursion).
- Visitor Information and Engagement:
 - Digital Response Systems: Utilizing smart technologies, apps, and real-time data to inform visitors about crowded areas and suggest alternatives. Data-sharing between public authorities and private platforms and telecoms would enable real-time monitoring of visitor concentration, and should be supported by standard definitions and metrics.
 - Responsible Tourism Campaigns: Sensitizing tourists to sustainable behaviours and the impacts of overpressure regions through communication campaigns with the travel industry and collaborations with influencers. Impact evaluation of these campaigns should be data-driven, using pre- and post-campaign indicators such as visitor dispersion, satisfaction, and resident perception collected through official observatories. The resulting datasets should be shared with tourism businesses to enhance joint learning and coordination.
 - Demarketing: Strategically reducing or shifting the marketing focus from over-visited hotspots and help businesses to sell alternatives, along with raising consumer awareness.
- Community Involvement and Empowerment:
 - Partners in Governance - community involvement in planning and decision-making enhances legitimacy and effectiveness. Participatory models like living labs, citizen forums, and neighbourhood councils allow for shared responsibility.
 - Integrating Local Expectations: Developing policies that explicitly consider and incorporate the needs and perceptions of local populations, fostering pride and hospitality.
 - Public-private collaboration with the travel trade, including international operators.
 - Co-creators of Tourism Experiences - when engaged meaningfully, communities can co-design tourism products, such as local tours, cultural events⁸, and gastronomy experiences. This fosters economic inclusion and social cohesion.
 - Support for Non-Tourism Activities: Subsidizing housing or fostering alternative economic activities to prevent economic monoculture and gentrification.
- Data and Monitoring:
 - Tourism Observatories: Developing systems to collect, analyse, and disseminate tourism data, including visitor flows, impacts, and resident perceptions, often using big data and real-time information.
 - TCC Calculation Models: Applying quantitative models, including fuzzy linear programming, to determine sustainable visitor limits for destinations.

⁸ In **Turin**, the revitalization of cultural assets like the Mole Antonelliana involved local stakeholders in programming and promotion.



- Using Telcom data⁹, GPS, and social media analytics to track and manage visitor behaviour and congestion.
- Early Warning System – residents are often the first to experience the negative impacts of tourism—noise, overcrowding, rising rents, and loss of public space. Their feedback can serve as a real-time diagnostic tool for policymakers¹⁰.
- Implementation of cross-EU registration systems for short term accommodations with a unique ID number for listings.
- Regulation and Quotas: as last resource, the definition of quotas and/or reservation systems to limit visitor numbers and short accommodation availability in sensitive sites or during peak times, based on quality and transparent data information and in line with the EU legislation.

⁹ Eg: in the Dolomites, Vodafone data was used to classify visitors, measure density, and inform infrastructure planning, enabling responsive management and predictive planning.

¹⁰ Eg: surveys in Salzburg and Bruges revealed growing dissatisfaction among locals, prompting authorities to reconsider tourism strategies.



4. Existing Good Practices in Diverse Destination's Types

Effective strategies to manage unbalanced tourism are being implemented across various destinations, showcasing the adaptability of these measures.

4.1 Destinations cases studies

Case Studies of EU-Funded Projects Addressing Unbalanced Tourism

- Case Study 1: Vienna (Austria) - Vienna faced overtourism in its historic centre. Through EU-funded workshops and GIS-based mapping, the city developed early-warning indicators and spatial redistribution strategies to guide tourists to lesser-known areas.
- Case Study 2: Florence (Italy)- Florence used EU support to promote longer stays and off-centre attractions, reducing pressure on iconic sites. The strategy included digital tools and local partnerships to enhance visitor experience and spread demand.
- Case Study 3: Dubrovnik (Croatia) - Dubrovnik implemented visitor caps and smart ticketing systems with EU funding, improving crowd control and preserving heritage. The city also invested in seasonal diversification and community engagement.
- Case Study 4: Canary Islands (Spain) - EU funds supported the development of alternative tourism models (e.g., rural and cultural tourism) to reduce dependency on mass beach tourism. The project included training for SMEs and digital marketing campaigns.

Urban Destination

- **Dubrovnik:** Implemented a digital response system combining "Du Visitors" (real-time visitor counting via cameras) and "DuCard" (mobile app for discounts and alternative suggestions). When thresholds (e.g., 4,000 people in the Old Town) are reached, the system sends notifications to DuCard users to visit less-crowded areas like nearby beaches or islands. The city also uses the "Dubrovnik Eye" web platform for citizen feedback on tourism-related issues and promotes agrotourism via "Rural Dubrovnik-Neretva" to spread visitors.
- **Venice:** Explores a multi-faceted approach, including a reservation system for visitors, creating a "buffer of terminals" around the historical center to manage incoming flows, and using real-time data (security cameras, mobile phone data) for internal flow management. "Detourism" campaigns promote alternative routes. The city has considered subsidizing non-tourism activities and housing to counter gentrification and regulating cruise tourism.
- **French Cities (AMI "Gestion des flux touristiques" Laureates): Various projects address flows management:**
 - **Iles du Ponant:** Organizing concerted management of visitor flows across 15 islands, including training for local officials on legal tools to regulate fluxes and launching a sustainable tourism awareness campaign.



- **Grand Site des Falaises d'Étretat Côte d'Albâtre:** Developing a visitor observatory and a flux management plan, with a focus on reviewing mobility plans and promoting intermodality and diffusing visitors beyond the main cliffs.

Natural Heritage Sites

- **Dolomites UNESCO World Heritage Site (Italy):** Utilizes big data from telco companies to monitor tourist movement, quantify daily visitors (including day-trippers often missed by official statistics), and analyse their behaviour in natural areas. This data helps identify congestion points and informs strategies like redesigning mobility systems, adding traffic circles, and implementing underground parking with real-time availability information to encourage public transport and walking.
- **Etablissement Public de Parc National des Calanques (France):** Project focuses on understanding visitor flows and publics to better welcome and manage frequentation within the National Park.
- **Gorges de l'Ardèche Tourisme (France):** Fostering synergies among stakeholders to diffuse fluxes spatially and temporally, including the implementation of "Canoë Malin," a predictive tool to inform visitors about optimal times to avoid peak crowds on rivers, with plans for similar tools for hiking trails.

Emerging / Underdeveloped Destinations

- **Scheldeland Region (Flanders, Belgium):** In areas with low-to-modest tourism, the focus is on understanding resident attitudes and support for tourism development. Studies using simplified Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) found that psychological, social, and political empowerment are stronger drivers for tourism support than purely economic benefits. This indicates that involving locals as "stewards and local ambassadors" and improving quality of life contributes to sustainable development even before major economic gains are realized.
- **Valley of Arts Festival (Művészetek Völgye) – Measures to Manage Seasonal Overtourism – The Valley of Arts Festival is Hungary's largest multi-arts festival, held annually in late July across several small villages in the Káli Basin—primarily Kapolcs, Taliándörögd, and Vigántpetend.** During the 10-day event, these normally quiet rural communities experience a significant, yet short-term, surge in visitor numbers. This results in *temporary overtourism* concentrated around the main festival venues, while the rest of the year remains calm and community-oriented. The entire festival area can only be accessed with a valid ticket or pass. Temporary parking zones are established on the outskirts of the villages, with shuttle buses transporting visitors to and between main venues. This system efficiently reduces congestion within village streets, though coordination challenges remain during peak arrival times. Entry to the festival area requires a day pass or full festival pass, and most programs are scheduled at specific times. This structure naturally regulates visitor flow and prevents overcrowding at individual venues. The festival encourages walking between nearby villages, and the event area is largely pedestrian-friendly. However, dedicated cycling routes and



improved pedestrian pathways between settlements could further enhance visitor management and safety. Sustainability and respect for local communities are key elements of festival communication. Visitors receive ongoing information about environmental protection, noise reduction, waste management, and supporting local artisans and producers. Smaller off-season cultural initiatives (e.g., *MiniVölgy* or winter art weekends) attract visitors at other times of the year. This helps distribute tourism more evenly and supports local economies beyond the main summer season.

Case Studies of engaging with local communities

- **Flanders** has surveyed residents' attitudes toward tourism since 2017 in Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, Leuven, and Mechelen. The latest results show that 69% of residents support tourism, proving the value of transparency and dialogue.
- **Catalonia** is establishing a new tourism strategy public–private–residents partnership that ensures community voices directly shape solutions to tourism challenges. Catalonia aims to accelerate the transition from volume to value in this new tourism model.
- **Multi-stakeholder collaboration in destinations:** Effective partnerships between governments, civil society, academia, and the tourism sector are key to sustainable destination management. A leading example is the [TUI Rhodes Co-Lab](#), which is piloting sustainable solutions on the island, including the adoption of e-bikes by tour guides, reforestation projects with fire-resistant trees, a “field-to-fork” programme to integrate local agriculture into the tourism supply chain, and a new biogas plant to convert organic waste into energy. The Co-Lab has also partnered with local schools.

4.2 Sectorial case studies

Professionals/business case studies

- **Offering a more diverse range of experiences promoting alternative attractions:** For example, Lisbon promotes alternative city tours, such as street art tours or food tours in emerging neighbourhoods like Alfama and Marvila. Additionally, they encourage experiences like surfing lessons on the Lisbon coast and fado music performances in local taverns, offering tourists a wider range of activities tied to Lisbon's cultural heritage. These strategies help distribute visitors more evenly across the city, and they provide a richer, more local experience for tourists. Tourism companies can also contribute by promoting and encouraging visitors to engage in specific interests like culinary tours, wildlife experiences, or active outdoor adventures, which can divert traffic from heavily visited tourist sites (e.g. [TUI collection experiences](#)), further benefiting local communities whilst enriching travellers' experience through the discovery of “hidden gems”. Other best practices bringing together various stakeholders in destinations include the [Colourful Cultures programme](#) of the TUI Care Foundation, which empowers artists and artisans to gain access to new income opportunities and promote their cultural heritage through new tourism offers. In addition, the [TUI Field to Fork](#) projects,



for example in Greece, Cyprus and Portugal, offer training programmes to local farmers on regenerative agriculture, establish important links to the local tourism ecosystem and create new experiences for tourists, such as wine tastings and organised tours in the surrounding agricultural areas.

- **ETOA** has launched a new event www.etoa.org/SHOP promoting shoulder and off-peak travel. Its marketing campaign will raise awareness of off-season appeal, and the not-so-famous-but-good, and awareness of strong demand if the product is there (see previous comment about whether hotels are open). As such, it is an opportunity for both destinations/supply chain and operators.
- **Actions by Tourism Professionals** - also the professionals have been developing actions in this context that could bring value-added to this challenge.
The European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations launched a large survey between August and September 2025 on the topic of Unbalanced Tourism. Received 896 replies, which makes a strong sample of perceptions and critical suggestions of this professional level.
- While Travel Agents and Operators have projects like Intrepid, with the “Not Hot list” where spotlights 10 lesser-known places works on the side of undertourism dimension., **easyJet Holidays** is promoting the “Different holiday destinations”, where the OTA offers solutions on less pressured regions.

International organizations initiative

- **Tourism for Rural Development Programme by UN Tourism and Best Tourism Villages Initiative¹¹**: The programme aims to make tourism a driver in reducing regional inequalities and promote territorial cohesion while addressing challenges such as depopulation. The Best Tourism Villages seeks to advance the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding rural villages along with their associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities (agriculture, forestry, livestock and/or fisheries), including their gastronomy.

Final Note:

Due to the potential oversize of this document, some best practices identified by the T4T Task-Force “Unbalanced Tourism” experts are available in the Annex 1 of this report.



5. EU Policies and Funding

The EU prioritizes sustainable tourism through initiatives like the Agenda 2030, Transition Pathway, and tools such as the Tourism Dashboard, promoting harmonized data for evidence-based policy. France's national strategy addresses flow concentration via awareness campaigns, observatories, and funding for territorial projects (AMI), supporting redistribution and capacity-building. EU-funded programs—SmartCulTour, D3HUB, DEPLOYTOUR—advance data-driven governance and interoperability through the Common European Tourism Data Space. Despite progress, challenges persist: limited regional granularity, funding gaps, and abandoned measures. Coordinated standards, robust monitoring, and integrated governance remain essential to balance tourism flows and foster sustainable, inclusive growth.

The European Union recognizes the importance of sustainable tourism in the last years. Efforts such as the EU Agenda 2030 for Tourism, the Transition Pathway for Tourism and some tools like the EU Tourism Dashboard, illustrate the EU's shift toward indicator-based policymaking. They promote the use of harmonised frameworks and interoperable data systems to support evidence-based decisions at all territorial levels. These initiatives set the foundation for several strategies and projects by EU funded mechanisms to address unbalanced tourism.

- Plan Destination France (November 2021): This national plan for tourism reconquest and transformation includes the measure "Développer une offre d'ingénierie touristique territoriale" (Develop an offer of territorial tourism engineering), which serves as the framework for initiatives like the AMI "Gestion des flux touristiques".
- Stratégie nationale de gestion des flux touristiques (National Tourist Flow Management Strategy, June 2023):
 - Context and Objective: Launched in response to the concentration of 80% of tourism activity in 20% of the territory, aiming to provide territories with keys and tools to build a sustainable flow management strategy, balancing economic development with site preservation.
 - Key Axes: The strategy is articulated around four axes:
 1. Diffusing a common understanding: Creation of "France Tourisme Durable" (a digital platform for resources and good practices) and publication of a "Vademecum sur la gestion des flux touristiques" (practical guide for territories).
 2. Sensitizing actors and users: National communication campaigns (e.g., with Jamy Gourmaud and Evan Adelinet, which achieved 2.4 million views) and engagement with influencers to promote responsible behavior and balanced flows. Efforts also focus on supporting the attractiveness of jobs related to sustainable tourism and integrating local populations' expectations into tourism policies.



3. Measuring tourist flows and impacts: Initiatives include creating a national observatory for major tourist sites (though facing data and budgetary obstacles) and measuring the acceptability of tourist flows among local populations through surveys.
 4. Accompanying territories in flow management: This includes the Appel à Manifestation d'Intérêt (AMI) "Gestion des flux touristiques" and the development of online training modules for tourism actors.
- Appel à Manifestation d'Intérêt (AMI) "Gestion des flux touristiques":
 - Purpose: Launched on October 5, 2023, by Atout France, this call for expressions of interest aims to support or foster projects in tourist flow management by financially assisting needs in engineering (e.g., measurement, strategy definition, skill development, communication).
 - Selection and Funding: A selection committee retained 25 highly structuring projects across metropolitan and overseas regions, eligible for subsidies up to €200,000 and 18 months of support. The total amount granted was €2,142,091, with individual grants ranging from €30,000 to €180,000.
 - Phases of Support: The accompaniment includes four cumulative or disjointed phases: (1) assisting in flow measurement and impact analysis; (2) defining an action plan for flow management strategy; (3) training key actors; (4) elaborating a communication plan.
 - Challenges and Limitations of Existing EU Tools:
 - Despite ongoing efforts, current European tools such as the Virtual Tourism Observatory (VTO) remain limited in regional granularity, integration of private and real-time data sources, and interoperability with local systems. This gap highlights the need for a coordinated mechanism that connects destinations, data providers, and statistical institutions through shared standards and governance principles. It lacks sufficient regional-level data tailored to specific destination features, active involvement of public and private tourism organizations, and full exploitation of Web 2.0 data.
 - Funding Gaps: Some measures, like helping territories acquire measurement tools, have not received sufficient financial backing (e.g., from Banque des Territoires). Others, like creating a national observatory, face budgetary constraints and data collection difficulties.
 - Abandoned Measures: Certain planned initiatives, such as establishing an "ambassador network" and creating a national communication kit, have been abandoned due to operational, budgetary, or practical constraints.
 - Horizon 2020 and Research Initiatives: Projects like "SmartCulTour" have received EU funding (e.g., Horizon 2020) to conduct research on sustainable tourism, including resident support for tourism development.
 - The D3HUB project supports Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) in adopting data-driven and sustainable practices, enhancing local insights and decision-making.



- The DMO Project Management initiative fosters professionalisation and capacity-building among tourism managers, promoting strategic planning and stakeholder engagement. These projects collectively contribute to a smarter, greener, and more inclusive tourism ecosystem across Europe.
- DEPLOYTOUR, funded under the Digital Europe Programme, is developing the Common European Tourism Data Space, creating a trusted environment for secure and interoperable data exchange between public authorities, DMOs, and SMEs. While D3HUB provides the methodologies and indicator frameworks that make data comparable, DEPLOYTOUR builds the infrastructure and governance layer that allows this data to circulate with confidence. Together, they form the foundation of a coherent European system where tourism data flows across territories with shared standards, fostering comparability, innovation, and trust.



6. Institutional Recommendations

Addressing unbalanced tourism in the EU requires a coordinated institutional framework linking data, governance, and investment. A proposed EU roadmap by 2030 should guide multi-level cooperation, harmonized indicators, and stakeholder engagement to balance overtourism and undertourism. Key priorities include standardized data systems, advanced observatories, and longitudinal surveys to measure flows and social acceptability. Public-private-community partnerships, skill development, and adaptive management approaches are essential for resilience. Flexible policies, diversification incentives, and cruise flow regulation complement these efforts. Coherence between promotion and redistribution strategies, supported by interoperable data platforms, will ensure sustainable, inclusive tourism across Europe.

Addressing unbalanced tourism in the EU requires a strong institutional framework that links data, governance, and coordinated investment. Fragmented actions at national and regional levels are not sufficient to rebalance tourism flows or to make progress toward the sustainability and cohesion objectives of the European Union. A joint approach — rooted in common methodologies, multi-level cooperation, and shared evidence — is essential to move from isolated initiatives to a coherent European framework for balanced tourism development.

To effectively address unbalanced tourism in the EU, a robust institutional and governance framework is required, characterized by strong coordination, multi-stakeholder engagement, and data-driven decision-making.

General scope

It is proposed that the EU develops a comprehensive roadmap on Unbalanced Tourism by 2030. This roadmap should be dedicated to supporting national, regional, and local public authorities, as well as destinations, associations, businesses, local communities, and tourism workers. The roadmap would outline strategic actions to address unbalanced tourism, within an equilibrium between overtourism and undertourism, foster territorial development and cohesion and promote sustainable tourism practices.

It should include guidelines for data collection and analysis, stakeholder engagement, funding mechanisms, and policy coordination, ensuring that tourism remains a driver of inclusive growth and cultural preservation across the EU

The use of European large survey tools, like Eurobarometer, should be used as a measurement of the feeling of the European citizens regarding tourism, its impacts and best measures to manage them in this context.

This roadmap should also ensure coherence between promotion and redistribution strategies. Also, and taking into account the present report content, the EU should also create a database of the good practices and policy measures, including the national, regional and local players, probably with the EU Stakeholder's Platform.



Specifically:

- Strengthen Multi-Level Governance and Coordination:
 - National-Local Dialogue: Foster stronger dialogue and structured information exchange between national and territorial levels to mobilize public action levers.
 - Metropolitan-Level Management: Promote the management of supra-local tourism interests (e.g., transport, infrastructure, overall management) at the metropolitan or regional level, rather than solely at the municipal level, to ensure more coherent strategies.
- Enhance Data Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination:
 - Media narratives often rely on untrustworthy or commercial information, creating bias in the understanding of tourism's real magnitude and impacts. Building a culture of open, verified, and comparable tourism statistics is essential to support informed public debate and counteract misinformation.
 - Economic over-dependence is difficult to monitor where tourism satellite accounts are incomplete or outdated. Extending the coverage and frequency of TSA data at regional and local levels would make it possible to quantify the vulnerability of destinations to external shocks and to track the diversification of their economic base.
 - Social acceptability around tourism is rarely quantified in official statistics. Resident satisfaction, perceived quality of life, and social carrying capacity are not consistently measured, resulting in a data gap between how tourism is experienced and how it is governed.
 - Common Data Frameworks for Destinations: Move beyond isolated observatories toward a common European system where destinations measure tourism pressures, flows, and impacts under shared standards. The future Competence Centre and the Tourism Data Space should ensure that local data — including telecom, mobility, and social media sources — are interoperable, trusted, and comparable across regions.
 - In this context, EUROSTAT should develop the selection of the indicators statistics in order to be possible to define thresholds (e.g. the TCC) and defining clear protocols on how to intervene when these thresholds are reached.
 - Advanced Tourism Observatories: Move beyond mere reorganization of official statistics. Develop observatories (e.g., ShapeTourism model) that integrate official data with big data sources (telco data, social media, user-generated content) to provide real-time, fine-grained, and multi-dimensional insights into visitor flows, impacts, and resident perceptions at regional and local levels.
 - Standardized Indicators: Develop and consistently apply standardized indicators for defining TCC and measuring tourism across destinations, allowing for benchmarking and early warning systems.
 - Longitudinal Data on Resident Attitudes: Implement consistent, longitudinal surveys to objectively measure resident attitudes, separating perceptions from actual impacts, especially in early development stages in line with the



recommendations included in the Statistical Framework for the Measurement of the Sustainability of Tourism (SF-MST)¹². Special attention should be delivered to the incumbent population (next generations), who may resist change necessary for successful adaptation.

- Promote Public-Private-Community-Academic Partnerships:
 - Co-Designed Tourism Strategies: Actively involve public authorities, private tourism operators, academic institutions, and local communities in the co-design and implementation of tourism development and management strategies. This ensures that strategies are relevant, receive local buy-in, and leverage diverse expertise and data.
 - Knowledge Networks: Establish and fund robust knowledge networks between research institutions, universities, and public/private monitoring units to facilitate continuous learning, research, and knowledge transfer in tourism management.
- Invest in Human Capital and Skill Development:
 - Training for Professionals: Provide continuous education and training opportunities for tourism entrepreneurs, public and private managers, and front-line staff in sustainable tourism management, digital tools, and visitor engagement. This includes skills in data analysis, community engagement, and crisis management for overtourism.
 - Local Ambassadors: Foster local pride and empower residents to act as ambassadors for sustainable tourism, promoting respectful interactions and local culture.
- Adopt Adaptive Management Approaches:
 - Planning failures often stem from the absence of consistent measurement frameworks. Without harmonized indicators, destinations rely on non-comparable metrics or commercial datasets, leading to fragmented governance. Aligning local monitoring tools with European methodologies—such as the EU Tourism Dashboard or the OECD indicator frameworks—would foster coherent evaluation of progress towards sustainability and resilience objectives
 - Flexible Policy Responses: Implement policies that can adapt to evolving tourism trends and impacts, moving beyond rigid quotas to dynamic, real-time management solutions informed by data.
 - Diversification Incentives: Provide incentives and support for destinations to diversify their tourism offerings, develop alternative itineraries, and engage in strategies to spread visitors and reduce pressure on hotspots.
- Distribution of Cruise Arrivals for local Revenue Maximization: Cruise travellers spend an average of €700 per passenger in port cities over the course of a typical seven-day cruise, but excessive arrivals at once can cause overcrowding in destinations. By implementing clear planning and regulations from local authorities, congestion can be avoided.

¹² <https://www.untourism.int/tourism-statistics/statistical-framework-for-measuring-the-sustainability-of-tourism>



Distributing cruise arrivals over the day or week not only creates a more pleasant environment for locals and tourists but also maximizes revenue opportunities for local traders and entrepreneurs.



7. Conclusion

Unbalanced tourism poses a significant risk to the long-term sustainability and attractiveness of European destinations, impacting local communities, economies, and environments. The concentration of visitors in a limited number of destinations while others remain underdeveloped highlights a fundamental structural disequilibrium that requires urgent and concerted action. Concepts like overtourism, tourist overload, imbalances, and detourism provide a comprehensive vocabulary to understand and address this multifaceted challenge, in order to the Tourism ecosystem has the same grammar.

It is therefore essential to move from fragmented analysis toward a coordinated European approach grounded in shared data and evidence.

The analysis of causes of such unbalance points to global tourism growth, the rise of the sharing economy and low-cost travel, and a historical emphasis on quantity over quality as key drivers. The resulting impacts range from gentrification and social friction to environmental degradation and economic monoculture. However, the EU and its Member-States have begun to implement a variety of policy measures to address these challenges, from regulations and quotas to digital management systems and community engagement initiatives. On other hand, destinations often collect data in isolation, using incompatible indicators that limit benchmarking and informed policy design. The European framework must therefore focus on harmonising the measurement of tourism flows, pressures, and social acceptance through common indicators aligned with official statistical systems.

Good practices presented illustrate that innovative, data-driven, and community-centric approaches can effectively mitigate overtourism and redistribute visitor flows, tackling unbalanced tourism.

At the same time, business and local communities have also been active, providing new and more sustainable services with special care for the social dimension and local communities. The “return” of the organized tourism has been pointed as part of the solution.

Moving forward, institutional efforts must focus on strengthening multi-level governance, enhancing data collection, monitoring and analysis through advanced tourism observatories, fostering robust public-private-community academic partnerships, and investing in human capital. An adaptive planning and management approach, leveraging technology and empowering local stakeholders, is crucial for fostering a tourism sector that is not only economically viable but also socially equitable and environmentally sustainable. By proactively embracing balanced tourism strategies and well-adjusted local (economic or social) activity, and learning from both challenges and successes, the EU can ensure that its rich cultural and natural heritage remains accessible and enjoyable for both residents and visitors, now and in the future.



But for this, efforts should be deployed to streamline similar ongoing projects. Progress will not come from multiplying short-term projects, but from aligning and scaling existing initiatives under a single strategic vision, in a broader European strategy with a common ground and coherence.

Therefore, the work of this T4T Task-Force, including the present report, is just a first step of a designing a positive European action plan to provide tools and resources to the tourism ecosystem (where includes public and private players) in order to provide a better balanced framework to the sector and bringing back the positive image of Tourism to the Europeans, as a provider of wealth, jobs, innovation, regional development and social cement between the European peoples.

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Brussels, 2025-10-31