

Sustainable and competitive nightlife district? – Management of overtourism in Budapest

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THE AIMS OF THE PAPER

The main objective of the paper is to answer a controversial question: How can a district that is inhabited by local residents, but is popular for tourists particularly during nightlife, be sustainable in a city? This question has become crucial in Budapest, where local residents are demonstrating over the impacts of party tourism. In this context, the study aims to find out creative product development ideas to deal with the mass tourism activities.

METHODOLOGY

Data collection took place in District VII and comprised two surveys: one in Hungarian conducted to local residents and Hungarian visitors; and one in English conducted to foreign tourists. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried out in Budapest to experts in the field of tourism working in different areas. The gathered data was analyzed through closed coding.

MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

In total, 574 questionnaires in Hungarian and 361 questionnaires in English were analyzed, together with 40 interviews. The findings show that tourists feel mainly attracted by the atmosphere and the ruin pubs of the night-time district. This phenomenon has led to huge concentrations of tourists and general concerns about cleanliness and safe. New product development integrating peripheral attractions to target specific segments of tourists is seen as a possible solution, as well as pricing strategies or the reduction of accommodation, transport and visitors' carrying capacity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper introduces definitions of the night-time economy and approaches to sustainable management of tourism in cities, as well as an analysis of the impacts of overtourism not only in District VII but in Budapest.

The study identifies methods of coping with negative impacts of tourism and offers solutions to the management of overtourism. Based on the results, concrete visitor management solutions can be created to support widening the area of the tourism flow in Budapest and offer authentic experiences outside the core tourism area.

Keywords: night-time economy, sustainable tourism management, overtourism, ruin bar district

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INTRODUCTION

The development of the night-time economy has brought a positive change in the competitiveness of many cities, especially in terms of income and tourism experience, but managing the potential impacts poses a number of challenges, as the welfare and well-being of the locals are among the most important goals of competitiveness. The purpose of this article is to show that an area can only be competitive if it can serve the well-being of both visitors and locals in the long run. On the other hand, the aim is to provide an overview of the solutions to the problem of the night-time economy and the phenomena called overtourism. All these issues were analyzed in Budapest's ruin pub quarter, which nowadays faces several conflicts due to the negative effects of the night-time economy and tourism. Budapest is among the popular cities facing dynamically growing tourism flow, mainly due to its new creative district called the ruin bar quarter, and this perspective is highly appreciated by every segment. In recent years, this process involving party tourism and mass tourism started causing overcrowding and unacceptable impacts of drunkenness and parties, which put several burdens to the local residents according to our research but also perceived as negative experience by the tourists. We focus first of all on the question of sustainability and overtourism in urban destinations, followed by the issues of a night-time economy, later the case study of Budapest is introduced as well as our researches and the results.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability of urban destinations and the phenomena of Overtourism

Urban destinations are complex entities with high and increasing population density and as being very sophisticated tourism products, cities attracts a dynamically growing number of tourists. In this context, though tourism on the one hand can serve the welfare of the local people, unmanaged tourism activity can decrease the wellbeing of the residents, which can have serious effect on the destination competitiveness (Dupeyras & Maccallum 2013).

Nonetheless, some European cities are facing some serious issues: overtourism and tourismphobia. The first term refers to the excessive tourism activity and its negative effects on the destination, while the second one represents the hostile reactions to this phenomenon among local residents

(Dredge 2017, Goodwin 2017). The quality of life of the locals and the damage of the well-being factors are at the heart of the movement which promotes the protection of the inhabitants of cities that are constantly flooded by tourists.

The European cities affected by the movement – Dubrovnik, Venice, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Berlin – soon became the focal point of the media and became the signature destinations of the tourismphobia. Milano *et al.* (2019), based on their research in Spain, point out that local residents typically have no problems with tourists, and usually enjoy a multicultural atmosphere to a certain level, but not the unplanned or less managed phenomena (e.g. overcrowding, noise, pollution). Similar results come from the research of Postma *et al.* (2017) by interviewing more than 2,600 metropolitan local residents in Copenhagen, Berlin, Munich, Amsterdam, Barcelona and Lisbon: the locals love the vibrant life brought to the cities by tourists, but only when it is followed by protecting cultural values and heritage. At the same time, urban tourism is struggling with some of the generally accepted problems that have made tourist activity massive. First of all, it is necessary to underline the decreasing travel costs, which are caused by low-cost flights and low-cost hotels (IPK International 2015).

How to manage Overtourism?

According to the research of IPK International (2018), which asked 29,000 travelers around the world, crowding is the major problem. In fact, nearly a quarter of respondents were in a crowded site in 2017 which impacted negatively on their experience. Therefore, overtourism disturbs not only the residents but the tourists as well.

Using the tools of visitor management (e.g. motivating pre-and post-season trips, increasing the price level, developing new attractions far from the most popular attractions), mass arrivals can be spread over time and space. One important tool for reducing concentration can be cooperation with surrounding, lesser-known settlements or districts, which may also provide an opportunity for cultural travelers seeking authenticity to benefit from personal experience (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] and European Commission [ETC] 2005).

The UNWTO suggests the following steps to reduce the negative impacts of tourism and avoid overtourism:

- “1. Promote the dispersal of visitors within the city and beyond
 2. Promote time-based dispersal of visitors
 3. Stimulate new visitor itineraries and attractions
 4. Review and adapt regulation
 5. Enhance visitors’ segmentation
 6. Ensure local communities benefit from tourism
 7. Create city experiences that benefit both residents and visitors
 8. Improve city infrastructure and facilities
 9. Communicate with and engage local stakeholders
 10. Communicate with and engage visitors
 11. Set monitoring and response measures.”
- (UNWTO 2018, 10-11)

Copenhagen goes beyond, and state that they put an end to tourism as it was known before and considering tourists and locals as one, by involving tourists in the lives of locals, particularly those tourists who want to appreciate and value local values, relying on product pillars such as design and architecture, gastronomy, sustainable approach, kingdom fairy tale, tolerance and variety (Wonderful Copenhagen 2017).

Night-Time Economy

Night-time economy comprises all the activities in a given area in the evening and are connected with entertainment or shopping (Shaw 2010). In the case of cities, the night-time economy can create a particular problem. Indeed, the competitiveness of the city increases as a result of the increment of economic revenues, while at the same time can seriously decrease the quality of life of local residents. Due to the appearance of unintended or unmanaged effects, some popular, typically creative quarters can become easily so-called no-go zones (where the locals are reluctant to enter) (Roberts 2006). The areas affected by the night-time economy are typically not only party quarters, but also residential areas, which have changed during spontaneous, unplanned processes. Similar processes started in British university cities: the number of nightlife venues increased, and tens of thousands between the ages of 18 and 24-years-old were on the streets of downtown at night on weekends. All this has led to a process in which certain parts of the city, streets became no-go zones where the use of alcohol, drugs and anti-social behavior, police interventions became general. In the case of Berlin, the increasingly popular night-time economy

causes significant conflicts in the otherwise developing downtown areas due to the excessive alcohol consumption, noise and further negative impacts (Füller *et al.* 2018).

The issue of night-time economy management is particularly sensitive, as the local authorities are only partially able to remedy the negative effects. The reason for this is that there is a great dilemma in maintaining the profitability of services in the night time quarters while dealing with the negative externalities of nightlife (Roberts & Gornostaeva 2007). Good practices can be seen in the United Kingdom, where cities can apply for the so-called purple flag nightlife label, which can be won through individual initiatives. Cities can reach the label by solutions protecting the peace of the locals: beyond government measures (such as police presence, street cleaning, street traffic management) many bottom-up residential initiatives help. Among these, civilian patrols and safe haven initiatives should be highlighted. Street haven or angel programs were initiated by the British Halifax Church in 2005 to establish a civilian patrol service. Volunteer patrols served on Fridays and Saturdays, to avoid violent behavior in the city center, providing protection (water and sugar replacement) to the unprotected drunk people. The initiative has been adapted to over 100 British cities and some Australian settlements (CNI Network 2018). Calafat *et al.* (2010) highlights the voluntary initiatives of service providers, for example, to conduct trainings where employees can gain new experience in the area of responsible service (protection of excessively drunk people) and conflict management. In addition, Shaw (2014) draws attention to a local organization, which typically involves artists, alternative entertainment in the form of cultural programs, concerts, workshops, and debates that can be connected to nightlife.

Case of Budapest

The ruin bar quarter is located in the city center of Budapest, in the VII district called Inner-Erzsébetváros. The district is part of the historical center of Budapest, and known as the Jewish Quarter as well, with significant values from Jewish cultural history. Csanádi *et al.* (2006) point out that this is still an important element of the area’s identity. After the World War, the renovation of the district was delayed and negative social processes (aging, outmigration) started. The economic recession of the 90’s deprived the district as well as the problematic privatization of the apartments (Csanádi *et*

al. 2006). The turn took place in 2004, when the first ruin pubs were established. Csizmady and Olt (2014) defines three waves of the development of the ruin pubs. During the first wave, semi-official bars were set up in ruined buildings with unique design, defined by Lugosi *et al.* (2010) as guerrilla restaurants. During the second wave (2005-2009), the municipality wanted to stop the spontaneous process of opening bars and allowed settling bars with cultural functions. By that time, apparently a creative milieu started to emerge, due to the ruin pubs providing a special atmosphere, home for sub-cultures and the creative quarter of Budapest was born (Egedy & Smith 2016). In the third wave, bars with higher prices and standards were opened, so the semi-amateur ruin bars serving alternative cultural programs were thrust into the background and disappeared. In the quarter, hospitality and tourism have become increasingly important in recent years: franchise bars have been opened, which have little relation to the original ruin pub philosophy and strengthen the nature of the night-life alcohol-centered quarter in the area. All this is confirmed by several studies (Smith *et al.* 2018, Kelemen-Erdős - Mitev 2017) that the quarter is increasingly becoming the place of party tourism and bachelor and hen party, supported Airbnb and hostel offerings. It should be noted, that beside tourists, Hungarian visitors are also an important target group.

The negative effects of nightlife mean an unbearable burden for the residents living there. Even if the quarter's population is undergoing a slow transformation and the sparkling life attracts younger generation moving to the area. According to the latest available statistical analyzes, the increase in the proportion of people of active age has increased (Integrált Településfejlesztési Stratégia [ITS] 2015). After 2010, the self-organization of the local people can be realized, particularly due to the dramatic increase of the negative impacts, which could not be handled by the municipality. Thanks to active appearances of the NGO's, the local government has suggested a few solutions and called for a referendum on closing bars at midnight. The result of the referendum was invalid, as well as taken steps seemed to be ineffective, so the active residents in the district seek for further solution (Turizmusonline 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The main research questions were connected to the negative impacts and their management possibilities as follows: 1. How the impacts of tourism affect the residents and the tourists in the ruin bar district?; 2. Can we talk about overtourism?; 3. How product development can extend the tourism activity so as to give a solution for the problem? In order to analyze these issues, a two-folded research have been made.

First of all, a quantitative research was made in 2017 by the authors. The main objective was to get a picture about the perceptions of the key stakeholders, residents, local visitors and tourists. The dimensions analyzed were based on validated scales from earlier researches (Roberts 2006, Pradel-Miquel 2017). Two questionnaires were designed: one in Hungarian language for local residents of District VII as well as Hungarian visitors from outside the District (mainly from Budapest), and another in English language for foreign tourists. In total, 574 questionnaires were received in Hungarian (283 local residents and 291 visitors to the District) and 361 valid questionnaires from tourists. There was a particular aim to make quota sampling based on the age-groups of the different segments, though there were several constraints because of the night-time survey, so the young people are overrepresented in the sample. In this article we particularly focus on analyzing the perceptions of the different stakeholders and the management options.

Secondly, in 2019 product development ideas were looked for, so as to extend the mass tourism activities in time and space. To reach this goal, 40 interviews were conducted in Budapest to experts in the field of tourism from different areas: travel agents, tour operators, themed tour guides, independent tour guides, museum tour guides, employees and tour guides from tourist transportation companies (cruise ships, sightseeing buses and airport shuttles), employees from tourist information centers. The interviews were semi-structured, varied from 20-30 minutes, and were analyzed through closed coding. Participants were asked about the possible actions to reduce the concentration of tourism, as well as the activities or programs that could be offered outside the core districts, the specific segments to target and the best strategies to make them attractive.

RESULTS

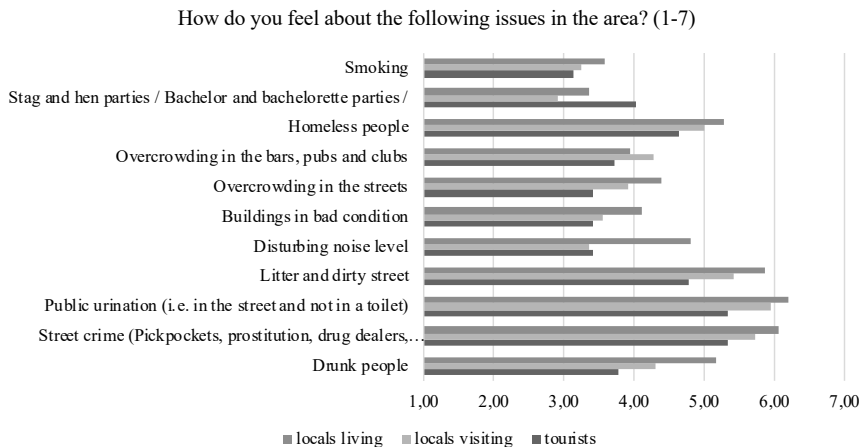
Regarding the sample of the quantitative research, 35.5% of respondents in the local population are 18-29 years old; 18.6% are 30-39 years old; 30.5% are over 60 years old, which partially reflects only the current age distribution of the quarter. On the one hand, partial up-to-date information is available, on the other hand, representative sampling was hindered by time and material constraints. Based on our earlier observations, targeted segment under the age of 40 mainly comprises tourists and local visitors (among the local visitors 61.9% of respondents were 18-29 years old, 35.5% 30-39 years old, 2.3% over 60 years old. While 55.6% of tourists responded 18-29 years; 22.5% 30-39 years old; 2.2% over 60 years old). In terms of education, 83% of tourists, 56% of those living there, and 63% of local visitors had higher education.

It has become evident that the atmosphere of the ruin pub quarter is especially important for both, tourists and local visitors, and the least important for the inhabitants. For specific activities, the following can be said:

- Local residents mostly visit cafes and restaurants (18.9% of the answers) and cultural - theater, cinema (14.6%),
- Local visitors choose bars and pubs (18.9%), then ruins pubs (15.8%), and street food venues (13.42%),
- Tourists are extremely attracted by the atmosphere (22.2 %) and ruin pubs (16.3%), but they also visit other type of pubs/bars (15.2%) and restaurants and cafes (12.7%) as well. However, neither the concerts nor the other cultural sites are attractive for tourists, despite the fact that cultural and heritage sites is the most important motivation for visiting Budapest (18.2% of the answers).

The issue of public safety and cleanliness is rather problematic for all the segments, but noticeably much more disturbing among the locals, reaching or exceeding the very harmful level (average of 6 on a 1-7 Likert scale). As expected, for local residents disturbing noise level is much more upsetting than for local visitors or tourists. Interestingly, the stag and hen parties disturb mainly the tourists, even much more than the local residents. Local visitors seem to be the most resistant but the issue of cleanliness and security is also very problematic for them. (see Figure 1.)

Figure 1. The perception of impacts



Source: own construction

Better street lighting, more public toilets and police presence are claimed for every segment, but cleanliness is obviously at the focus of people living there. Closing bars at midnight is one of the least attractive and interestingly more acceptable solution for tourists.

According to the qualitative research, the majority of respondents agree on the existence of overtourism, but not in the entire city. Actually, this phenomenon seems to be closely related to two factors, space and time: "There are periods and places when there is a big amount of tourists" (Kodolányi János Főiskola). In fact, some point out that only the most popular districts of the city (V and VII) face this problem: "I think yes, especially in the party area" (tour guide), "It happens mostly in the city centre, in the 7th district, perhaps in the Buda Castle district" (employee of Hop on hop off City Sightseeing Budapest). Others are even more specific and indicate that overtourism occurs at particular attractions of the city: "Yes, especially around Mátyás temple, it is difficult to get through Tárnok street because of tourists. It is almost impossible to stop there and talk about the buildings because this area is too crowded and noisy" (Titkok és rejtélyek idegenvezetés), "Near the Parliament, near the Buda Castle, the Fisherman's Bastion and at the Heroes' Square. These places are always crowded no matter what kind of weather is" (employee of Hop on hop off City Sightseeing Budapest). Furthermore, for others the concentration of tourists is seasonal: "The phenomenon is already present in Budapest, mainly in the summer and around Christmas" (independent Tour guide); and at certain hours of the day: "For example at the party district at summer nights, evenings, or the Fishermen's Bastion or Matthias Church at the middle of the day" (Licensed driver-guide, Rinett Guide).

The rest of respondents consider as premature the idea of overtourism happening in Budapest. However, they see this phenomenon very likely to happen in the nearest future, particularly in the case of night-time economy: "The phenomenon is not yet significant in Budapest. But we can see the early signs of it in the popular districts (e.g. V., VI., VII.) among the young tourists. The baths and the museums are often saturated in these areas, and there is a lot of noise and waste on the streets" (Tour guide of the Hospital in the Rock Nuclear Bunker Museum).

The increasing amount of cruise-ships and buses, low prices, attractions concentrated in one place and quality of tourists seem to be the main triggers. This situation has led to a generalized discomfort in both, inhabitants and tourists; decreasing quality of experience; difficult accessibility; traffic

jams; tourist sites becoming unpleasant or unattractive: "There are too many sightseeing buses and other tourist buses disturbs the local people and ruins their life. These buses have bad effect on the traffic and more and more people complain" (Tour guide in Budapest), "I think yes especially in the party area. The tourist might get transformed picture of Budapest and not the real experience. They might not enjoy the services" (Tour guide).

In this context, they suggest a wide range of actions to tackle this phenomenon in the short, medium run:

- Attract people to the peripheral districts of Budapest through the creation of programs and themed tours, the improvement of infrastructure (build hotels outside the city center) and the promotion within specific segments.
- Set admission fees for some attractions or higher prices for low-cost airlines/ accommodation.
- Impose restrictions in the amount of: tourists visiting attractions, sightseeing buses, cruise-ships, low-cost flights.
- Extend opening hours in attractions.
- Attract tourists in the off season.
- Attract a better quality of visitors, mainly through advertisement.

One of the main issues, the integration of the peripheral districts, was in the focus. Participants were questioned on the type of programs out of the city center that could be of interest, on how to make them more attractive and for which segment. The key seems to be the accessibility, in terms of infrastructure (transportation services), competitive prices (cheaper), marketing strategies (advertising, social media, good reviews) and integration to popular programs (offered by travel agencies). As a tour guide summarizes: "to be easily accessible, to be well maintained, to have a decent website which includes opening hours and other important information" (Tour operator at Qalandar Élménytúrák Utazásszervező Kft. travel agency). They also mention the importance of creating different (unknown, hidden places) and interactive (experiencing, doing) programs, based on history, nature, culture and adventure.

- Thematic tours: like tours to industrial areas or showing the real life of the suburb as well as folk art tours, or ethnic cultural tours.
- Tours to the satellite towns of Budapest: excursions to Gödöllő, Szentendre, Danube – bend, Óbuda island.

- Gastro tours: tasting tour to the wine destination of Etyek, or champagne of Törley.
- Nature tours: activities in the Buda-hills, tour with chairlift to János hill, Ördögrom or Rám-szakadék, Normafa, Elisabeth Lookout Tower.
- Attractions out of the city center: Aquincum, Tropicarium, Heroes' Square, Aquaworld (Resort Budapest).

This product development ideas could help to scatter the crowd outside the city center, but the main question is whether the tourists would appreciate these types of programs aiming to support the experiential travel and the feeling of the localhood. The interviewees stated that these programs could be interesting for both, Hungarians and foreigners. Mainly for the younger generation, who are mobile enough. However, the targeting is not easy and should be cautious as there is a huge number of tourists who come to Budapest for the first time and want to visit the must-see places. But there could be other segments, those who either have been in Budapest before or plan a long stay in the city, that could be involved in these experiences: "Experienced tourists are usually looking for special destinations, or tourists who had been in Budapest before, and at that time saw all the must-see attractions" (Tour guide from the visitor center of Zwack museum).

Among the most recommended communication channels are the internet (social media, influencers) and travel agencies. They also consider that online short films could be very effective tools to promote the programs. Traditional media (brochures, magazines, Ads) are also suggested as well as word-of-mouth within locals.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although there are robust classical and accepted models of carrying capacity and change management in destinations based on which the current situation in Europe could have been easily forecasted, the old phenomena in new terms is called overtourism or tourismphobia, which hit the industry in several countries in 2017. This anti-tourism wave throughout Europe shows that there are huge gaps between the concept of sustainable tourism and the way in which stakeholders understand sustainability and particularly how they can manage the strong flow and impacts of tourism. The experts and researchers express the need for tailor-made, new

solutions applied in destinations involving a close relationship with the local residents.

Our research showed that tourists feel mainly attracted by the atmosphere along with the ruin pubs of the night-time district, despite the fact of having the cultural and heritage attractions as one of the main motivating factors for visiting Budapest. In contrast, local visitors and local residents appreciate the food and drink alternatives as well as the cultural venues.

In case of Budapest, many feel that there are too many tourists in the party district, but surprisingly few have had bad experiences with tourists. However, the crowd and anti-social behavior cause several burdens on the local residents. According to the surveys both, tourists and local residents, showed the same concerns about the district: cleanliness and safe. In this context, some suggested actions related to the first issue are: more frequent cleaning of public spaces, disposal of more waste bins and increase in the number of public toilets. In general terms they felt safe in Budapest and in this particular district, even after 18h00, but the majority would welcome more police presence and better street lighting.

According to the experts' interviews, the huge concentrations of tourists in the most popular attractions at specific periods of time lead to believe that overtourism hit Budapest. New product development integrating peripheral attraction or programs for experiencing the real Budapest or the so called localhood could be one of the solutions. Some others recommend the pricing strategy as a way to also improve the quality of tourists. For others the limitation of accommodation, transport and visitors' capacity could be an alternative.

However, the targeting needs more attention as these types of programs seem to be interesting for some niche segment, particularly experienced traveler returning to Budapest, but further surveys are needed to identify the needs of the visitors.

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