

CAUSES OF OVERCOMING OVERTOURISM FAILURE IN CZECHIA

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Abstract

Overtourism is a phenomenon affecting destinations that are so popular that the sheer number of visitors to a destination causes problems. Several strategies have been used to mitigate the impact of overtourism, addressing both its manifestations and the root of the problem: too many tourists. However, when evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies, we find that while strategies that aim to mitigate the effects of overtourism tend to be successful, strategies that try to reverse the trend of increasing numbers of tourists tend to be unsuccessful. Therefore, the paper examines why this is the case and compares the experience abroad with the situation in Czechia.

The results show that one of the main reasons for the failure of the strategies is the different perceptions of the two main types of actors in the fight against overtourism: nature conservation authorities on the one hand and municipalities and destination agencies on the other. In some cases, the conflicting interests of these actors lead to inaction on overtourism, as one side usually blocks the other's solutions. It is only when the situation is genuinely untenable that they find agreement. However, the most effective approach is to take action on the stage to prevent the emergence of overtourism.

Key words: Sustainable tourism, attitude-behavior gap, development actors, fear of missing out (FOMO), tourism carrying capacity.

Introduction

The phenomenon of overtourism, defined as an excessive number of tourists in a destination that negatively impacts the environment, culture, and quality of life for locals (Koens, Postma & Papp, 2018), has become a pressing issue in many popular tourist destinations worldwide (Dodds & Butler, 2019). In response, various strategies have been implemented to mitigate the effects of overtourism. While these strategies have shown some success, efforts to reverse the trend of increasing tourist numbers have generally been less successful (Gowreesunkar & Seraphin, 2019).

Strategies to mitigate the adverse effects of overtourism, such as limiting the number of visitors or promoting responsible tourism practices, often fail due to complex and interrelated factors. These factors include inadequate planning and management, conflicting interests among stakeholders, lack of political will and resources, and the complexity of the tourism industry (Butler & Dodds, 2022). Many destinations need more data, expertise and help to develop and implement effective tourism management plans. This can result in a reactive approach to tourism, with destinations needing help to keep up with the rapid growth of tourist numbers and failing to anticipate and address the negative impacts of overtourism (Seraphin et al., 2019).

Another factor contributing to the failure of mitigation strategies is the conflicting interests among stakeholders. The tourism industry involves a range of actors, including government bodies, tourism operators, residents, and tourists. These actors often have competing interests and values, making it difficult to reach a consensus on managing and regulating tourism (Koh & Fakfare, 2020). For example, tourism operators may prioritize profit over sustainable tourism practices, while residents may prioritize their quality of life over the economic benefits of tourism (Boháč & Drápela 2022). Moreover, many destinations lack the necessary political support and financial resources to implement effective policies and regulations to manage tourism (Benner 2020).

Since choosing the right mitigation strategies is essential to destination management, this article analyzes the results of the strategies used in Czechia (outside of Prague) in recent years. Applications of different solutions to the problem of overtourism are presented at selected locations, and their effect is commented on. The article focuses on understanding the role of local stakeholders in preventing and overcoming overtourism.

Materials and Methods

To analyze how the selected destinations in the Czech Republic have implemented measures to mitigate the negative impacts of overtourism, it was first necessary to determine them. In total, 63 such sites were analyzed. Still, due to the limited scope of the paper, the results are presented here

only for three selected destinations, namely Adršpach, Hrubá Skála, and Bedřichov. In these destinations, interviews were conducted with key actors of local development (mayors, local entrepreneurs, nature conservation authorities, representatives of local destination agencies, etc.) and field observations of the current state of tourist infrastructure and its utilization during the primary summer tourist season. Subsequently, an evaluation of the presence of three factors that influence the presence of overtourism was carried out, namely fear-of-missing-out (FOMO), not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) effect, and (non-)cooperation between stakeholders. The resulting synthesis is then presented in the following chapter.

Results

The first destination analyzed is Adršpach, where overtourism was manifested by queues on hiking trails in the local rock town, traffic and congestion on access roads, and a lack of parking spaces. The municipality of Adršpach, which collects entrance and parking fees in the rock town, benefited from many visitors. Therefore, for a long time, it resisted any regulation of tourism, and the situation in the destination steadily worsened. However, the problem was relatively successfully resolved after local stakeholders (especially the municipality and nature conservation authorities) agreed and introduced a reservation system for rock town entry and parking spaces (see Figure 1). This measure regulates the number of incoming visitors to a tolerable limit and prevents overtourism at the destination.

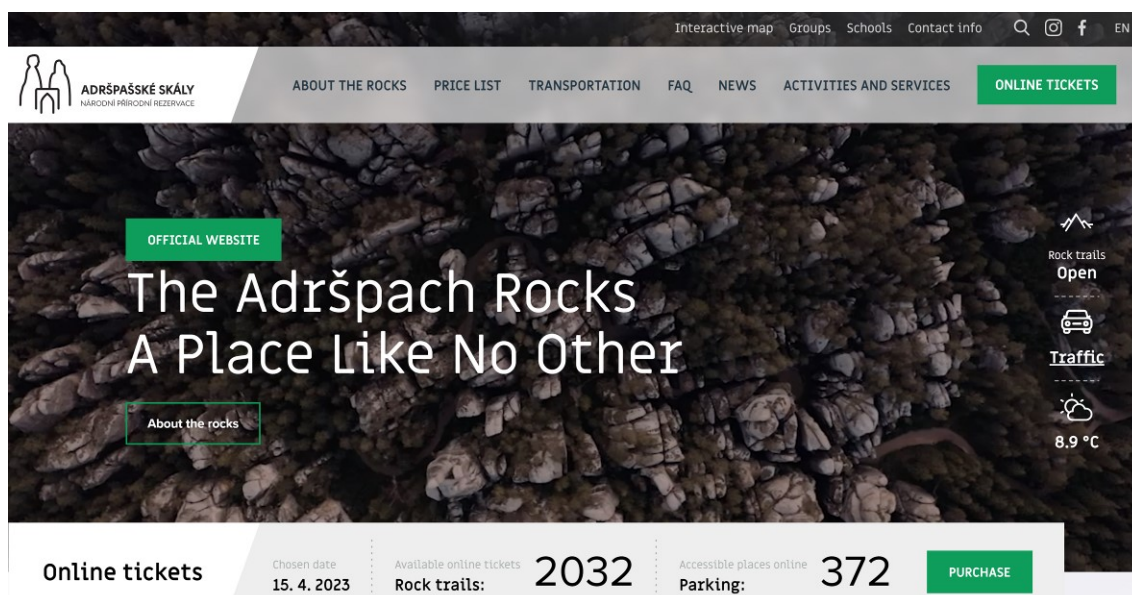


Fig. 1: The Adršpach Rocks website with a booking system for tickets and parking spaces. Source: <https://www.adrspasskeskaly.cz/>

The second destination analyzed is Hrubá Skála. It is a very similar locality to Adršpach; the main tourist attraction is the rock town. Overtourism is manifested here mainly by traffic problems associated with a lack of parking spaces. Due to the lack of parking capacity, traffic jams occur on the access roads, and various local businesses entice visitors to park in these jams on their property. However, this sometimes arouses resentment among the residents who have tourists park near their houses. In this destination, however, there has been no agreement on a solution to this problem among local actors, with each pushing for a different solution, which is why the overtourism situation continues.

Another destination studied was Bedřichov in the Jizera Mountains, a popular destination, especially in winter, when cross-country skiers leave for trips to the surrounding area. Problems with overtourism are manifested on access roads and parking, even though the municipality of Bedřichov has several large parking lots built on its territory, and the street navigation system shows their current occupancy. Unfortunately, this destination is a victim of the inactivity of the surrounding municipalities in the region. It is one of the few places where comfortable and spacious parking lots can be found in the Jizera Mountains. That is why an unbearably large number of visitors are heading here, which the municipality's territory cannot absorb. The construction of tourist parking lots in other places in the region is prevented either by the lack of interest of the surrounding municipalities or by nature conservation authorities, who are afraid of the influx of tourists to the core areas of the mountains.

As can be seen from the previous description of the selected destinations, although each has a slightly different character, the reasons for the emergence of overtourism in them are pretty similar: the attractive natural environment gradually attracted large numbers of visitors, which began to cause the collapse of the transport and tourist infrastructure during the high season. All three destinations did not address this situation proactively but let it escalate to overtourism before reacting. After that, however, their approach differs.

Tab. 1: Comparison of the analyzed destinations in the presence of critical factors influencing overtourism

	Adršpach	Hrubá Skála	Bedřichov
fear-of-missing-out	yes	yes	no
not-in-my-backyard effect	no	yes	no
cooperation between stakeholders	yes	no	yes in destination /no in region
mitigation strategy successful	yes	no	no

Table 1 provides an overview of the three main factors influencing the emergence of overtourism. The first is fear-of-missing-out (FOMO), i.e., the feeling that if I am in a given region, I will miss out on something important by not visiting the destination. This psychological phenomenon is typical for tourist highlights (i.e., also for Adršpach and Hrubá Skála) but not for starting points to them (e.g., Bedřichov). The second factor is the not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) effect, which applies mainly to large public infrastructure projects, but in recent decades also to tourism infrastructure. Although almost everyone likes to travel and have comfort in their travels, if, for example, a tourist parking lot were to be built next to their house, they would try to block this project. Of the sites analyzed, this is happening in Hrubá Skála. The third factor is the cooperation between stakeholders, which has already been described above in the text.

Discussion and Conclusion

When analyzing the success of destinations in overcoming overtourism, smart technology-based solutions such as online booking systems have proven to work relatively well. These are some of the few possible solutions that can reduce the number of arrivals and thus regulate the number of visitors. Studies from abroad confirm their success (e.g., Fontanari & Traskevich, 2023).

However, in rural areas with valuable natural environments, in addition to congestion of local transport and tourism infrastructure, a significant negative impact of overtourism is damage to nature, such as damage to sandstone cliffs or disruption of valuable ecosystems (Drápela, 2021). In such cases, the interests of nature conservation must also be considered. Still, these may conflict with the interests of municipalities and tourism entrepreneurs who would welcome tourism growth in the destination. These contradictions may then be why no measures are ultimately implemented, as in the case of Hrubá Skála. However, these contradictions are not always between the nature conservation authorities and the entities benefiting from tourism; in the case of Bedřichov, it is instead the municipalities in the surrounding area that are worsening the situation in Bedřichov by their persistent resistance to strengthening the tourist infrastructure on their territory, as it is almost the only way for visitors to get to this part of the Jizera Mountains.

This short article does not aim to provide a comprehensive explanation of the reasons leading to overtourism in the Czech Republic. After all, there are already several other studies on this topic - the author can recommend Drápela et al. (2021), which discusses this issue in more detail. However, the purpose of this text was to point out a factor that significantly influences the success of the application of measures aimed at overcoming overtourism in a destination, namely the (non-)cooperation of local stakeholders.

Rural overtourism is mainly caused by exceeding the carrying capacity of a destination, which is a problem that can be addressed. However, if local stakeholders disagree on a standard course of action, the situation is blocked for a long time, and the problem of overtourism is continuously worsening.

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Souhrn

Overturismus je fenomén postihující destinace, které jsou natolik oblíbené, že pouhý počet návštěvníků v destinaci způsobuje problémy. Pro zmírnění dopadů overturismu se využívá několik druhů strategií, které se zaměřují jak na jeho projevy, tak i na samotné jádro problému: příliš vysoký počet turistů. Při evaluaci efektivity těchto strategií však zjišťujeme, že zatímco strategie cílící na zmírnění projevů overturismu bývají úspěšné, tak strategie, které se snaží změnit trend rostoucího počtu turistů, naopak neúspěšné. Článek se proto zabývá důvody, proč tomu tak je, a porovnává zkušenosti ze zahraničí se situací v Česku.

Z výsledků plyne, že jedním z hlavních důvodů neúspěšnosti strategií je odlišné pojetí boje s overturismem u dvou hlavních druhů aktérů: orgánů ochrany přírody na jedné straně a obcí a destinačních agentur na straně druhé. Protichůdné zájmy těchto aktérů v některých případech vedou k neaktivitě v oblasti overturismu, neboť jedna strana obvykle blokuje řešení strany druhé. Shodu pak nalézají až případy, kdy je situace opravdu neúnosná. Přitom nejefektivnějším přístupem je konat už ve fázi prevence vzniku overturismu.

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