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## Porto Under Pressure: Spatial and Temporal Insights of the Accelerated Growth of Tourism

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### Purpose

In 2022, the capacity of tourist accommodation in the municipality of Porto, Portugal, corresponded to 5.7% of the national total, 31.9% of the total for the northern region and 60.9% of the Porto Metropolitan Area (Pordata, 2024). The growth rate of tourist activity, which has been above the national and regional average, is reflected in the 61.8% increase in the number of beds and the 46% increase in the number of overnight stays (Pordata, 2024a) between 2016 and 2022. These significant increases in tourist accommodation and overnight stays have led to an accelerated growth of tourism supply and demand in Porto, significantly impacting this destination. Combined with the concentration of tourist accommodation in the historic centre, we can identify areas in the destination with high tourist pressure. This research aims to critically analyse the evolution of tourist activity, i.e., the location of tourist accommodations and visitors' intensity areas, in Porto since 2000. The study period was chosen because of the existence of georeferenced data on the places visited by tourists and on the tourist accommodations. It was also during this period that tourism in the city grew most rapidly and intensely. This longitudinal study is crucial to understanding and addressing some of the main tourism sociocultural impacts in areas with high pressure and overcrowding. A set of measures that could be adopted to manage tourist flows more sustainably will be presented.

### Theoretical framework

For operationalization purposes, the Mihalic (2020, n.p.) definition of over-tourism - “the acceleration and growth of tourism supply and demand, the use of tourism destinations' natural ecological goods, the destruction of their cultural attractions and negative impacts on their social and economic environments”, is adopted. Overcrowding is associated with negative experiences emerging from the presence of too many tourists at certain places and times (European Parliament, 2018). Both concepts are linked to the complex idea of destination carrying capacity, i.e., “the maximum number of visitors that can be accommodated by a given destination under

conditions of maximum stress, and in economic terms as the maximum number of visitors that can be accommodated at a constant quality of their experience” (Canestrelli & Costa, 1991). The research framework of the TOURWISE project, based on incentive strategies, will also be presented and discussed.

### **Methodology**

Data collection will focus on secondary sources, namely tourism statistics, according to the most relevant over-tourism indicators, suggested by the European Parliament (2018); Open Georeferenced Data from *Turismo de Portugal* on tourist establishments (TE) and local accommodation (LA); and georeferenced photographs uploaded by tourists in the Flickr social network. The data collected was processed and analysed using GIS (Geographic Information System) software. Thematic cartography was created on the distribution of accommodation and visitors from a longitudinal perspective.

### **Findings**

The analyses provided a detailed understanding of the evolution of the uneven geographical distribution of tourist activity in Porto. Tourism density and intensity allow us to conclude that more detailed indicators are needed to better manage high-pressure areas at the urban scale. The main tourism accommodation and visitor hotspots were identified through a longitudinal perspective.

### **Research, practical & social implications**

This research offers a detailed analysis of the tourist dynamics of the city of Porto and contributes to the development of new methods for measuring and monitoring tourist flows in urban areas based on GIS. It also makes some proposals to improve the quality of life of residents and the visiting experiences of the tourists, based on the Tourwise Project, a research project financially supported by CITUR.

### **Originality**

The use of GIS to analyse the spatial and temporal distribution of tourist accommodation and visitors in Porto is an innovative approach that provides a solid basis for political decision-making. The integration of georeferenced data from *Turismo de Portugal* and photographs from the Flickr social network also offers a unique perspective on the behaviour of tourists and the occupation of urban spaces. By examining the evolution of tourism since 2000, this study provides a crucial longitudinal perspective for identifying significant trends and changes that can inform future tourism management policies.

### **Keywords**

Over-tourism, Overcrowding, Carrying Capacity, Tourwise Project, Flickr.

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