



Policy responses to overtourism: Insights from Italy

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Abstract

Overtourism has emerged as one of the most debated challenges affecting major tourist destinations, with Italy frequently cited as a prominent case. This paper examines the policy responses to overtourism in Italy, focusing on how institutional arrangements, interest groups, and public discourse shape the management of tourism growth. Drawing on existing literature and emblematic cases—most notably Venice and Florence—the study argues that overtourism cannot be understood solely as the outcome of excessive visitor numbers. Instead, it results from long-term structural transformations, including demographic decline in historic centers, real estate dynamics, and policy choices that have reshaped urban economies around tourism. The paper analyzes the policy “toolbox” available to public authorities, ranging from regulatory measures to demarketing and nudging, and discusses the challenges of implementing them within complex systems of multi-level governance. Attention is given to conflicts among stakeholders and to the political incentives that often hinder effective intervention. The paper concludes by outlining different paths of evolution of the overtourism debate.

Key words

Overtourism, anti-tourism, tourism demarketing

Resumen

El exceso de turismo se ha convertido en uno de los retos más debatidos que afectan a los principales destinos turísticos, y a menudo se cita a Italia como un caso

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destacado. Este artículo examina las respuestas políticas al exceso de turismo en Italia, centrándose en cómo los acuerdos institucionales, los grupos de interés y el discurso público configuran la gestión del crecimiento turístico. Basándose en la bibliografía existente y en casos emblemáticos —sobre todo Venecia y Florencia—, el estudio sostiene que el exceso de turismo no puede entenderse únicamente como el resultado de un número excesivo de visitantes. Por el contrario, es el resultado de transformaciones estructurales a largo plazo, entre las que se incluyen el declive demográfico en los centros históricos, la dinámica inmobiliaria y las decisiones políticas que han reconfigurado las economías urbanas en torno al turismo. El artículo analiza el «conjunto de herramientas» políticas de que disponen las autoridades públicas, que abarca desde medidas reguladoras hasta estrategias de desmarketing y «nudging», y aborda los retos que plantea su aplicación en el marco de sistemas complejos de gobernanza multinivel. Se presta especial atención a los conflictos entre las partes interesadas y a los incentivos políticos que a menudo obstaculizan una intervención eficaz. El artículo concluye esbozando diferentes vías de evolución del debate sobre el «turismo excesivo».

Palabras clave

Turismo excesivo, antiturismo, despromoción turística

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1. Introduction

Italy, one of the world's most appealing tourist destinations, has also been a country most severely affected by the so-called overtourism. In this paper, following a very wide body of literature, overtourism is defined as a situation where tourism growth impacts negatively on a destination's actual or perceived quality for residents and/or for visitors (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 2018, Capocchi *et al.* 2019, Séraphin *et al.* 2020, Frey 2021, Honey and Frenkiel 2021, Magius Møgelhøi 2021, Back *et al.* 2025, Briguglio *et al.* 2026, Butler and Dodds 2026).

Venice, in particular, has become an international icon of the "tourism trap", as labeled in a Time magazine's cover in August 2018, serving as living evidence of all the risks involved in unmanaged tourist growth (Choi *et al.* 2025). Over recent decades, Venice has attracted considerable media and political attention, particularly in connection with the issue of cruise ships passing through the city (Schemmer 2022). Scholarly interest focused on the peculiarity of social phenomena, such as the effects of gentrification and the ambiguous role of new and wealthy residents (Minoia 2017) or the loss of authenticity and local identity (Ferri and Lusiani 2025, Lara-Hernandez 2026).

However, the case of Venice also illustrates the complexity of the phenomenon. Statistical evidence on residents' displacement depicts a city hollowed out by the expansion of tourism (Bertocchi and Visentin 2019). This phenomenon is the outcome of processes that are not necessarily sequential. Indeed, the population decline in Venice's historic center predates the exponential growth of tourism. It originates from strategic decisions that shifted the economic and social core of modern Venice toward mainland settlements. In other words, rather than a residential population "driven out" by tourism, Venice suggests a narrative of tourism filling the voids created by an urban development strategy unable to sustain a viable future for the historic city.

Nevertheless, there remains the reality of a unique city being profoundly transformed, its fundamental character altered into something more akin to a theme park than to an authentic urban center (Settis 2014). To what extent Venice represents an extreme and possibly unique case or rather shows the final, nightmarish outcome of a trend that is bound to affect an increasing number of places? By now, the overtourism syndrome has affected many of Italy's major tourist destinations, including the central areas of Rome and Milan. Nonetheless the phenomenon appears to have reached especially alarming levels in a relatively limited number of specific areas, that are both iconic and highly accessible, such as the historic center of Florence or the coastal area near the city of La Spezia ("Cinque Terre") (Spinelli and Zanini 2025). An interesting case is Naples, where overtourism is increasingly debated as the city is emerging from decades of negative reputation into a culturally and economically dynamic reality and tourism growth is at the same time engine and consequence of its urban renaissance (Trunfio *et al.* 2025). In a number of other cases overtourism is still more potential rather than actual, and yet a threat that must be increasingly considered in urban development (Zilli and Modaffari 2021).

In this paper we provide an overall assessment of Italian policies concerning overtourism within a tourism management conceptual framework. However, because of the nature of the problems involved, the analysis requires to look carefully at the interactions with institutions and actors in the society through a political economy lens.

Special attention is paid to the multilevel dimension of these interactions and to the context-specific conditions shaping both the challenges and the subsequent policies.

The paper is based on an extensive experience “on the field” and pays attention to the most recent evolution of the practice. This explains why scientific literature has been supplemented by additional sources of information and relevant “grey literature”.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the challenges inherent to designing overtourism policies; Section 3 analyzes the dominant discourses emerging within the public sphere; Section 4 evaluates contemporary policy instruments and regulatory interventions; Section 5 examines the tensions within multi-level governance; and Section 6 concludes with an assessment of current trends and future trajectories.

2. Overtourism in Italy: The policy challenges

In the Italian context, policies addressing overtourism face challenges similar to those observed in other European countries (Butler and Dodds 2022). Overtourism constitutes an extremely complex issue, characterized by a variety of dimensions and significant local variations. Simple, one-size-fits-all solutions are either unpracticable or ineffective. It is also essential to consider how rapid was the pace of tourism growth and of the diffusion of innovative business models, such as the low-cost approach in transportation, short-term rentals in hospitality or global platform services in intermediation. Unsurprisingly, policy learning constantly lagged behind the fast evolution of the industry and of the market. The delay manifests both in the identification and interpretation of the phenomenon and in the design of appropriate policy tools, often resulting in improvised adaptations of policy approaches that are rooted in very different socio-economic frameworks.

A further challenge stems from the technical difficulty of quantifying excessive tourism through objective and unambiguous data. In recent years, various attempts have been made to identify composite indicators and dashboards to measure tourist density and signal overtourism situations (McKinsey & Co. and World Travel & Tourism Council 2017, De Marchi *et al.* 2022, ISTAT 2022). However, these measures remain primarily monitoring tools with limited prescriptive value and significant methodological limitations (Burlando *et al.* 2025).

The increasingly frequent reference in public debate to the “carrying capacity” of a tourist destination has triggered also in Italy a very large number of measurement exercises, based on case studies (Liberatore *et al.* 2018, 2023, Garau *et al.* 2022, Spinelli and Zanini 2025). However, the complexity of the concept complicates its operationalization. Carrying capacity encompasses several different and only partially overlapping dimensions: physical, economic, perceptual, social, ecological and political (Getz 1983, Yusoh *et al.* 2021, Kennel 2024, Augusto Da Costa *et al.* 2025). Its assessment needs to consider not only the kind of destination (e.g. urban vs. natural) (Pulido-Fernández *et al.* 2025), but also the specific conditions of the visited sites. By incorporating also a visitor’s perspective (Bang and Jang 2025), carrying capacity should also refer to the specific types of tourism and tourist experiences which take place in those sites. Objective assessment is made even more difficult by the fact that congestion phenomena, even in massively touristified cities like Venice or Florence, are highly

localized in specific areas of the city, namely those characterized by the presence of iconic attractors, that are must-see sites particularly for first-time visitors (Popp 2012, Baldin *et al.* 2025).

Consequently, the defining factor becomes the perception of a situation of excessive tourism (Papadopoulou *et al.* 2023): “overtourism exists when residents can’t take it anymore” (Maggi 2025). Although critical situations arise in a variety of destinations, in Italy, like elsewhere in Europe, the issue of excessive tourism emerges with particular significance in urban contexts. In these settings, the presence of the tourist as a temporary citizen generates inherently conflictual interactions between outsiders and insiders over the occupation of spaces, often high symbolic ones, that are co-consumed by tourists and residents. This occupation of space implies not only a physical but also a cultural touristification of places. It is within these urban contexts that the deviant behavior of tourists enters into direct conflict with the behavioral models of residents (Jafari 1987).

Overtourism feeds off anti-tourist feelings in “wounded destinations” (Gorji and Seyfi 2026). A significant growth of anti-tourism (or “tourismophobia”) reflects the diffusion of residents’ irritation, annoyance and eventually antagonism (Pavlić and Portolan 2015), especially in the major hotspots of Italian tourism, like Venice and Florence. However, notwithstanding its relevance and visibility, anti-tourism does not seem to take on the characteristics of radical politicization that have been identified in other European contexts (Milano *et al.* 2019, Novy and Colomb 2019).

In fact, the conflict is not just between residents and tourists, insiders and outsiders. Overtourism is a source of social conflict also within the local community between concerned residents and the large number of people who are employed in or otherwise connected to tourist businesses (Del Chiappa *et al.* 2021). In a city like Florence, where the touristified UNESCO area is surrounded by a heavily industrialized metropolitan area, a potential conflict emerges around policy priorities between social groups depending on different economic sectors. With regard to short-term rentals, another deep divide takes place between hoteliers and property owners. Large sections of the urban middle-class households have invested heavily in an expanding market opportunity, whose rewards are unmatched in the present economic situation, while hospitality entrepreneurs see their business threatened by unfair competition.

Divides also concern the city and its peripheries, including more remote, inner areas. The emphasis on regulating short-term rentals originate in cities and in their problems, based on their visibility and on the economic and political power they represent. The latter complain that regulations are designed to deal with urban issues, but they may hinder development in areas where traditional hospitality is weak or non-existent.

Thus, it is not easy to establish a coherent general framework for local tourism policies. The same political bodies, responding to conflicting constituencies, voice their concern about excessive tourism, while at the same time they praise the latest growth figures of tourist presence in their territories and engage substantial resources in infrastructures that are clearly aimed at increasing accessibility (e.g. airports). Promotion, especially when based on social media, becomes a double-edge sword. The role of influencers provides a good example: they may sustain the visibility of local destinations and even be instrumental to the opening of a museum to wider and younger audiences (like in the

case of the visit of a famous influencer, Chiara Ferragni, to the Uffizi Museum), but, if uncontrolled, they can suddenly provoke dramatically intense congestion (like in the 2025 assault by more than two hundred buses of the Roccaraso ski resort, following a TikTok's "invitation").

3. Discourses in the public sphere

Italy provides numerous examples showing the nature of overtourism as a discursive formation, filled with rhetoric, extreme metaphors and self-evident truths (O'Regan *et al.* 2022, O'Regan 2023). The role of media is especially noticeable. Some media outlets (a prime example being the Florentine edition of *Corriere della Sera*) express an editorial line that places tourism at the center of the problems afflicting or potentially afflicting the city of Florence. They constantly present scary, war-like images of an invaded city that is consumed by a relentless siege, where barricaded residents face hordes of tourists that are easily satisfied by low-quality services. Apartment buildings are hollowed out, leaving only a few isolated and frightened inhabitants. In streets and squares traditional businesses are replaced by a noisy and vulgar "food factory". And the media are ready to pick up on the exasperated voices of those who are "fed up" and wish that tourists would finally "go back home."

The pervasiveness of the overtourism discourses in Italy can hardly be underestimated. The perception of tourism as being "too much" has increasingly become a kind of implicit, undisputed assumption on the public space (Giuzio 2023, 2024). Criticism of the impact of tourism has produced several thoughtful, in-depth and evidence-based contributions (D'Eramo 2021, 2022, Nadotti 2025) and has also fed radical visions of a humanistic approach to tourism, advocating its degrowth (Amore and Adie 2020, Della Lucia and Giudici 2020). To some authors, scholars and opinion leaders the battle against overtourism provides a politically promising arena in which to imagine a "different societal model", possibly as a "new normal" outcome of the pandemic times (Celata and Romano 2022, Gainsforth 2023, Coconi *et al.* 2024). A brilliant and bitter depiction of contemporary tourism in Italy was even turned into an acclaimed novel by the Dutch writer, Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer (2018).

The denunciation of the ills of overtourism lends itself also to instrumental use by politicians and local stakeholders. It often serves as an alibi for minor and major dysfunctions—for example, in public services, from transportation to energy supplies, from traffic management to emergency rooms. Thus, there are "too many tourists in our hospitals", according to a member of the Regional Government of Tuscany, and a mayor facing a major electric blackout is tempted to consider as a solution to make the tourists pay "a ticket, like in Venice". Even as scabies cases appear on the rise in Italy and this is associated with travel and stays in crowded facilities, overtourism is readily quoted as the obvious cause.

The most prominent debate focuses on the impact on the real estate market and the negative effect on the availability of rental housing for the middle class and specific categories, such as out-of-town students and workers. Only recently academic research has started to provide robust data and assessments on the nature and impacts of this phenomenon. The most important project on this issue was realized by the Turin Polytechnic and the results were presented in May 2026. An ad hoc database covering

sixteen urban contexts provides a systematic and comparative mapping of the Airbnb presence. By coordinating research teams from leading Italian universities, each dedicated to a specific city, for the first time, a range of diverse urban settings were analyzed using the same methodological approach (<https://full.polito.it/en/research/airmap/>). While the link between the scarcity of affordable housing and the spread of the short-term rental market is indisputable, blaming Airbnb exonerates one from posing other, more uncomfortable questions. These include inquiries into the very high share of unused public and private real estate assets, or the delays—if not the outright absence—of policies for the development of social housing and university residences.

4. The toolbox

4.1. Regulation

The primary response thus far—the most visible and supposedly most politically rewarding—has been that of *regulation*. This has concerned primarily short-term rentals (Bei and Celata 2023), often inspired by the comparison of the Italian permissiveness with restrictive interventions enacted or announced elsewhere, notably in New York or Barcelona. Undoubtedly, there is evidence, at least from the case of Florence, that “targeted, tourism-centered regulations” have an effect on tourism intensity, although this is supposed to happen only to the extent that monitoring supports “adaptive governance”: “tourism regulation should be conceived by policymakers as an iterative process that can be adjusted as conditions evolve, rather than as a fixed, one-time policy response” (Miccini *et al.* 2026).

Tourism regulation needs to be fully contextualized in more complex processes of societal dynamics (Nieuwland *et al.* 2025). The Italian experience of recent years confirms that the available regulatory toolkit may easily collide with legal principles such as the protection of private property. Regulations are therefore made ineffective, at least temporarily, by time-demanding legal controversies as they significantly postpone implementation.

Regulations may end up triggering undesirable and possibly unforeseen effects. E.g., in the case of Florence, owners of properties that are not currently rented out on a short-term basis engaged in “preventive registration”, to ensure that they are not prevented from doing so in the near future. Furthermore, the regulation focusing on the “UNESCO area” cause a rapid rise of short-term rentals in the unregulated vicinity, that is often efficiently connected by public transportation, if not at walking distance from the city’s hotspots.

4.2. Regulating tourists’ behavior

A second area of intervention has focused on the regulation of visitor behavior. The benchmark experience has been that of Venice, with a program tagged as *#enjoyrespectVenezia*² and subsequently imitated by other cities like Florence. This approach utilizes a mix of promotion of responsible behavior, prohibitions of

² Città di Venezia (<https://www.comune.venezia.it/en/content/enjoyrespectvenezia>).

unacceptable conduct, and useful information for compliance. Tourists are encouraged to “discover the hidden treasures of Venice in the least visited places”, “explore the islands in the lagoon”, “taste the local products”, “visit the artisans’ workshops”, choosing only original products, “book tours with qualified tourist guides”. They are warned to “walk on the right, do not stand at any time on bridges, do not even lead bikes by hand” and that “steps of churches, bridges, wells, monuments and banks of streams, canals etc. are not picnic areas”. Explicit prohibitions concern standing in St. Mark’s Square “at any time in order to consume food or drink”, “to camp, walk about in swimwear, dive and swim”, to “litter, vandalize with graffiti, or padlocks”, to “give food to the pigeons”. Maps of public gardens (where picnics are allowed) and of public toilets are provided.

In order to enforce bans several cities have introduced pecuniary sanctions and/or the application of the so-called “urban DASPO”. DASPO stands for *Divieto di Accedere alle manifestazioni SPortive* (Prohibition of Access to Sports Events) and is an administrative measure, issued by the local police department, that was introduced in the late 1980s to ban violent individuals from stadiums and surrounding areas. Similarly, misbehaving tourists may be ordered to leave a certain area or city for a predetermined amount of time (e.g., 48 hours). These are all measures whose deterrent effect is accompanied by an equally—and perhaps even more—significant reassuring effect that their announcement should have on resident citizens.

4.3. Demarketing

International observers have also paid close attention to measures that can be interpreted within a “demarketing” framework. Demarketing is a term used to describe a change-managing marketing strategy when the objective is to decrease the consumption of a product, for business reasons but also when certain products or services are believed to be harmful to consumers or to the society as a whole. This concept maintains that the marketer’s task is to shape demand to conform with long-term objectives rather than blindly focusing on short-term increases in sales. Thus, demarketing may lower expected sales *ex ante* but improve reputation and quality image *ex post* (Cullwick 1975, Zhang and Miklós-Thal 2011, Lawrence and Mekoth 2023).

Demarketing principles may be applied to destination management (Medway *et al.* 2010, Hall and Wood 2021) for many purposes like repositioning a destination or a specific attraction on a different market segment or reducing seasonality, but this market-conforming approach seems especially appropriate to deal with overtouristified places. A demarketing toolbox includes communicative tools (like a decrease in the intensity of promotional activities concerning the destination or the sharing of information concerning peak times and days) and access restrictions, that can be implemented mostly for buildings or closed areas. A good example is provided by the limits introduced in February 2026 to the access of the Trevi Fountain basin in Rome (establishing a maximum of 400 people at any one time between 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.).

This approach has been implemented also on beaches with a fragile ecosystem and excessive demand, often in combination with access tickets and compulsory digital reservation. In Sardinia the scenic beaches of La Pelosa in the municipality of Stintino can now be accessed only by 1500 persons per day (1000 being available for reservation

only in the last 48 hours). Similar systems are now in place for several beaches on that island.

On the Alps, especially on the Dolomites area, heavy tourist pressure is particularly evident during the summer, when the large influx of visitors leads to congestion on the trails, long queues at the lifts, and increasing pressure on local infrastructure. The aim of limiting the number of visitors at peak times has been realized through access control devices, such as turnstiles and monitored gates. The management of flows has also focused on limiting access to private cars, regulating parking by compulsory reservation, and imposing the use of public transportation and soft mobility solutions.

The focus on traffic limitations is central also in the case of the Amalfi Coast, where a quota system was established in high season for both tourist buses and cars, while expanding maritime transport. In addition, a system of alternate license plates and a local restricted traffic zone have been established. The alternate license plate system has also been extended to non-resident chauffeur and taxi vehicles that do not transport tourists staying in the municipalities of the Amalfi Coast.

The demarketing toolbox includes also the use of pricing mechanisms, based on the expectation of a reduction of demand following an increase in prices. The decision by the Municipality of Venice to impose an entry fee on arriving tourists (but with no quotas of visitors) has received significant coverage in the international media. This initiative followed the controversial and ultimately unsuccessful experience of the turnstiles in 2018, which—failing to effectively limit the number of people in the city—appeared to be an unnecessary vexation, even for resident citizens.

On 29 “red” days of 2024, between April 25 and July 14, entry to the city of Venice from 8.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. was subject to payment of a 5€ access fee, unless the visitor belonged to one of the categories that entitle to exemption: residents of the Municipality of Venice; individuals born in the Municipality of Venice; minors under the age of 14; holders of the European Disability Card and their accompanying caregivers; workers, students, and second-home owners. Tourists staying overnight in Venice were also exempt from paying the ticket, as already subject to a tourist tax, but they had to be registered on the city’s portal. An average of more than 15 thousand payers per day yielded revenues of some €2.4 million euros.

In 2025, the trial was for an increased total of 54 days, with the cost of the entry ticket raised at 10€, but the cost was reduced to €5 with advance booking. A total of 723,5 thousand entry vouchers were issued. The overall revenue amounted to 5,4 million €. Tax evasion remained relatively modest. This approach has been confirmed for 2026, with a further increase in the number of days (from 54 to 60) but maintaining the same amounts for the ticket.

No evidence has emerged so far that the introduction of the entry ticket contributed to significantly reduce tourist flows and not even to a redistribution of flows by rescheduling the visit to the “free” days. This is far from surprising. The economic rationale of the measure is weak, as it fails to recognize the absolute price inelasticity of demand, when this concerns an iconic destination like Venice. Furthermore, tourists are already subject to high (and often speculative) prices during their whole stay in Venice

for most goods and services consumed, including public transportation (a 75-minute ticket costs 9.50 €).

In the meanwhile, in Venice the primary objective was presented in 2024 as the “defense” and “livability” of the city. In 2025 it was stated in more pragmatic terms:

The objective remains twofold: to ensure equity between overnight guests and day-trippers, and to utilize the collected resources—net of administrative costs—for interventions benefiting the citizenry, beginning with the maintenance of reductions on the TARI (waste tax). In fact, after deducting service management expenses, at least 1.5 million euros were allocated to lowering waste collection bills.³

The amount of the entry ticket is clearly unlikely to have an effect on the quantity of demand. Would a higher price be more effective? But would it be acceptable? would it not be a blow to the right to visit to Venice as “world heritage” through a choice for exclusion rather than inclusion, based on income? The issue has in fact been raised in relation to the Cinque Terre area, where the combined effect of the increase in prices in local services and of the increase of the price of the Card to visit the Park area and use the train affects small family groups on traditional weekend excursions much more than the large crowds of cruise passengers arriving from nearby ports.

4.4. Technologies for “smart destinations”

High expectations have also been placed on the use of new technologies, through the application of smart city solutions to tourist destinations. “Smart destinations” are therefore characterized by digital platforms connecting stakeholders. Real time information is made available, in different ways and formats, to destination managers, businesses, residents, as well as tourists (Buhalis and Amaranggana 2015, Pasquinelli and Trunfio 2020, 2023).

For a decade several Italian destinations have also tested mobile analytics in cooperation with providers. Furthermore, the most important Italian museum, the Uffizi Galleries in Florence, has experimented sophisticated algorithms, overcoming the mere echelon approach to optimize flows of visitors, taking into account weather conditions, time of the day, number of group members etc.

The ultimate expression of the technology option is provided by “smart control rooms”, like the ones set up in Venice in 2022 and in Florence in 2023, based on cellphone monitoring, a huge number of surveillance cameras and real-time information. These are technologies that dramatically increase the quantity, quality, and timeliness of the information available for monitoring flows and identifying bottlenecks and problems. As such, however, they serve to streamline flows, but not to reduce them.

4.5. Nudging

A final set of tools belongs to the nudging approach, i.e. they try to influence the visitors’ behavior in a predictable way, by engaging their cognitive processes without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives (Thaler and Sunstein 2021, del Soldato and Ceschin 2025). In dealing with overtourism, an important option

³ See Città di Venezia: *Contributo di accesso: i numeri del 2025* (<https://live.comune.venezia.it/it/2025/07/contributo-di-accesso-i-numeri-del-2025>)

may be the nudging of tourist flows towards alternative places and attractions, mitigating the tourist specialization of historic centers (Carta 2018). The nudging option is consistent also with the assumption that an increasing share of demand will be made by “travelers”, an ideal type significantly distinguished from traditional (mass) tourists and characterized by active engagement, co-creating attitudes, experiential learning, interest in “living like a local”, sensitivity to current developments etc. (Pasquinelli 2017).

Operationalizing this difference would require designing a new generation of experiences. Marketing would not be enough without consistent thinking on products. Several cases seem to be driving in that direction: slow tourism experiences; learning programs on local traditions, culture, history, cooking and gastronomy etc.; urban trekking activities; urban-rural paths; etc.

The role of communication is also crucial. Recently, several attempts have been made to respond to the search for less crowded, hidden, unexpected destinations. These are managed by platforms (e.g. Trivago), promotional agencies and consultants (e.g. visititaly.eu), apps (e.g. Unexpected Italy), gaming apps (e.g. FirenzeGame Next) and several social networks’ accounts by “local guides” (especially on Instagram and Facebook).

Nudging may also occur by limiting or hiding information that would lead to inappropriate behavior. A good example is provided by the agreement between Florence Municipality and the “Get Your Guide” platform on hiding the numerous offers of “drunken tours” (pub crawls).

5. Multi-level governance to the test of overtourism

In Italy, the division of legislative powers concerning tourism is established by Article 117 of the Constitution. Following the 2001 reform, tourism no longer appears among the matters of exclusive or concurrent State jurisdiction and it is currently considered a matter of exclusive legislative authority of the Regions.

However, the State is not excluded from this domain. Primarily, it maintains functions of guidance and coordination, although its role must be justified, proportionate, and implemented in agreement with the Regions. Furthermore, the State retains exclusive competence over matters that directly and significantly impact tourism. These include the protection of cultural heritage, the environment, urban planning, competition, taxation, labor rights, and the regulation of tourism professions. Additionally, the State manages a highly relevant share of subsidies for tourism enterprises, alongside functions related to the promotion of the Italian tourism offer abroad (Decaro and Piccirilli 2017, Santagata 2025).

The evolution in the allocation of powers has been reflected in the organization of the structures responsible for national policy and in the singular history of the shifting of tourism competencies among various government branches. Since 1959 the General Directorate of Tourism had been a division of the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, but in 1993 an abrogation referendum led to the abolition of the Ministry. This choice was intended to allow the Regions to autonomously and, ideally, more effectively manage funding, subsidies, hotel licenses, contributions, and tourism

promotion in alignment with the diverse needs of geographical areas. Nonetheless tourism functions survived at national level as part of broader ministerial portfolios until a new Ministry of Tourism was eventually re-established in 2021 and endowed with its own portfolio.

The rebirth of the Ministry of Tourism coincides, in effect, with the emergence of a growing sensitivity—also by businesses—to the need for homogeneous standards of quality and competitiveness, and for overcoming the diseconomies caused by the fragmentation of policies among Regions. This issue has been raised particularly with regard to promotional activities. The co-presence of diverse marketing strategies and communication practices has been accused of generating not only a dispersion of resources but also a poorly coordinated image of the Italy brand abroad (Priante 2025). The process of re-nationalizing tourism policies has further accelerated during the last decade due to the demand for interventions in response of the pandemic (with the subsequent commitment to implement the National Recovery and Resilience Plan) (Musselli 2022).

The central government's assumption of a leading responsibility regarding overtourism has a twofold justification. On one hand, it aims at preventing local and regional responses from creating further heterogeneity in rules and interventions, which could have unpredictable distorting effects on the sector's development. On the other hand, the Ministry, also due to the political profiles of its leadership, increasingly assumed a proactive role of protecting the industry with a policy that would respond to overtourism problems without penalizing growth dynamics and exacerbating conflicts among stakeholders.

The primary national intervention was thus the introduction of the CIN (*Codice Identificativo Nazionale* or National Identification Code), a sort of digital license for all properties intended for short-term rentals, tourist leases, and hospitality structures in Italy. Obtaining and displaying this code (both on the building's exterior and in platform listings) is now mandatory. Having become fully binding as of January 1, 2025, the CIN aimed to replace the previous regional codes that had been introduced or were in the process of implementation.

In parallel, the current Minister of Tourism has placed significant emphasis on a strategic vision that pairs the management of overtourism with actions targeted at what is provocatively defined as “undertourism”. The underlying idea is that Italian tourism is characterized by a pathological concentration of tourist flows. Official data suggest that 75% of tourist arrivals are concentrated in 4% of the national territory (The European House Ambrosetti—TEHA—2024). The objective, therefore, becomes shifting visitors toward the remaining 96%, composed of inland areas, small villages, and minor islands. This would also allow for a greater capacity to intercept de-seasonalized demand, in addition to alleviating the influx toward the most congested destinations. At the same time, the emphasis should shift toward a higher quality (rather than quantity) of tourist flows, measured by the visitor's spending capacity.

It remains, of course, to be evaluated to what extent the actions undertaken by the Ministry are effective and consistent with these objectives, but one cannot underestimate the contradiction between problems that are context-specific and inherently “local” and national policies that are based on some nation-wide generalization of their characters.

This was made clear when overtourism became a matter of jurisdiction conflict between the national government and some regional governments. Overtourism was a major issue in the design of the new Consolidated Law (*Testo Unico*) on Tourism that was approved by the Tuscany Regional Council in December 2024. The approval was secured only after a long and arduous process of consultation and mediation.

The primary focus of attention was the regulation of short-term rentals. The law granted high-tourism-density municipalities the authority to adopt regulations aimed at limiting short-term rentals for tourism purposes within specific zones or homogeneous urban areas, in addition to establishing quality and safety standards for properties. Following a bipartisan amendment, the rhetoric of the original draft was tempered, several constraints were eased, and a moratorium (ranging from a minimum of three to a maximum of five years) was introduced for existing activities. It is therefore evident that the actual impact of this reform would be significantly deferred over time.

In March 2025, the Government challenged the law before the Constitutional Court, contending that such restrictions violated the freedom of enterprise, property rights, and the State's exclusive jurisdiction over civil law and competition. The Government contested the regional requirement mandating that extra-hotel activities be managed as professional business enterprises above a certain threshold, deeming it excessively restrictive. In December 2025, the Constitutional Court, through ruling 186/2025, dismissed the Government's appeal, acknowledging the power of Regions and Municipalities to regulate the phenomenon in order to safeguard the social function of property and the residential integrity of historic centers. This ruling established a significant precedent, prompting other regions to consider similar legislation to limit short-term rentals.

6. Looking forward

The framework outlined must confront the continued and rapid evolution of overtourism, which necessitates sustained attention to several of its critical dimensions. The remarkable post-pandemic resilience of tourism demonstrates that the growth of this market and its associated industry is not destined to halt or undergo significant slowdowns, except as a result of exogenous shocks related to the international geopolitical situation and the escalation of conflicts. In a scenario of continued market growth, it is unlikely that the de-growth option will become more than a rhetorical reference.

The overtourism debate may evolve in different directions. International literature, especially across human geography, sociology, and urban planning, suggests an increasingly close connection between the issues of overtourism and trends in urban transformation, such as (tourist) gentrification, financialization and socio-spatial displacement. Tourism should therefore not be treated as an industry per se, but as providing a "heuristic device" to interpret urban dynamics and to detect the role of contemporary capitalism and class conflict (Gotham 2026). Overtourism issues are just "the tip of the iceberg, that hides different manifestations of inequalities and asymmetrical power relations, very often affecting the most vulnerable in a community. (...) The risk is that the only proposed solution will be to reduce flows, which could lead to the elitization of consumption" (Milano *et al.* 2024).

Simultaneously, current practices seem to point toward less radical outcomes, in which the possibility of truly sustainable tourism (and tourism growth) is reaffirmed. This may depend on how much the issues raised in recent years will be mitigated in the near future. This could be achieved because of the impact of new and future regulations, as well as of a more balanced distribution of investments within both the real estate and productive investment markets and of changes in tourists' preferences.

Furthermore, anti-tourism rhetoric is beginning to encounter significant reappraisals. In some relevant cases mayors have publicly rejected dramatized and often caricatured representations of the effects of overtourism. In summer 2024 the mayor of Bologna harshly replied to an article published by *The New York Times* and describing the city as a "tourist hell" and a "mortadella eating factory" (Sala 2024). He defined the article as "outrageous" and "insulting". One year before, in summer 2023, *Le Monde* had depicted Naples as a city scared of becoming a second Barcelona: "In the Spanish Quarter, a working-class enclave near the city's port, bed and breakfast signs are popping up where prostitution, smuggling, and various forms of trafficking once reigned supreme just a few years ago" (Kaval 2023). The Mayor of Naples, while recognizing the challenges to maintain local identity and to manage the growth of tourism, defined the claim that it was better when there were prostitutes and smugglers in an area than now that there are commercial activities as unacceptable and part of an outdated "oleography" about the city.

The Italian tourism industry has progressively metabolized most of the issues raised by the debate on overtourism. The attention to these issues has been operationalized in several aspects of destination management, e.g. by redefining attributes of destination brands (Pasquinelli *et al.* 2021, 2022). This is also reflected in the publication of works, often originating from the world of practice and consulting, which articulate the role of tourism in ways that are once again consistent with a sustainable and even "regenerative" socioeconomic development of communities (De Felice and Guiggiani 2025, Verri and Colombo 2025). An updated lexicon includes expressions and concepts that have already been discussed in the literature (Hristov 2015, Kim *et al.* 2022, Li and Liu 2022) and operationalized in some foreign cases (like Vienna), such as that of the "visitor economy", overturning the "tourism economy" approach (where communities do what is needed to attract tourism) and shifting the attention to what visitors can do for the well-being of the community (Ceschin 2024). In this way, also a vision of tourism governance is proposed that rejects both an unconditional logic of profit and a technocratic vision of public intervention. From this perspective, destination management increasingly takes on a political dimension, with a strong emphasis on the participatory aspect of decision-making and implementation processes, as shown in some celebrated cases of the Province of Trento (Bazzanella *et al.* 2020) and by the engagement of the city of Bologna in the so-called "DMOcracy" approach.

Within this revised mood, policies are converging toward a more pragmatic approach, especially with regard to the short-term rentals issue, that could characterize the years ahead. During 2025, in Venice (where national law has authorized municipal regulations since 2022) it was proposed that short term rentals are limited a maximum of 120 days per year unless the owner adheres to a "pact" that requires participants to check in in person, be available 24 hours a day, and educate guests on waste management. In Naples

the focus is on the implementation of urban planning regulations through a more active control activity, while avoiding more controversial decisions. In Florence a “rulebook” has been issued to ensure sustainable tourism, confirming the regulation of short-term rentals, but also providing new guidelines on a variety of aspects of the city’s livability and decorum and, inspired by the Copenhagen “Copenpay” experience (Vegas-Macias *et al.* 2026), engaging in the promotion of responsible tourist behavior through rewards rather than through prohibitions.

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