

## Overtourism and Tourismphobia at a Russian resort

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### Abstract

The paper investigates the existence of overtourism and tourismphobia in Sochi, a leading Russian resort destination, through a sample of 2,390 residents. The analysis of respondents' attitudes towards tourism reveals that there are no severe problems of overtourism or tourismphobia. Currently, a large number of tourists in the destination are not causing any negative feedback from the majority of residents. At the same time, although conflict situations rarely occurred, they hint at some tension between residents and guests of the city.

**Keywords:** overtourism; tourismphobia; tourism impact; quality of life; residents-tourists conflicts; Russian resort; Sochi

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## Introduction

Tourism had been growing steadily until the end of 2019. According to UNWTO (2020), international tourist arrivals worldwide rose 4% in 2019 to reach 1.5 billion. An increase in tourist flow is also observed in Russia – the number of nights spent in hotels in 2017 increased by 1.5 times compared to 2012 (Strategy of development of tourism in Russia, 2019). However, the impact of tourism on host destinations can also be negative, especially if there is a significant increase in the number of tourists. In recent years, the topic of “tourist expansion” in the world tourism centres has attracted increased attention of researchers due to the growing protests of the residents of Valencia, Barcelona, Palma de Mallorca, Venice, Dubrovnik, and other cities (Egresi, 2018; Martins, 2018). Overtourism has attracted the attention of researchers (Milano, 2017; Postma & Schmuecker, 2017; Avond, *et al.*, 2019; Capocchi, *et al.*, 2019; Namberger, *et al.*, 2019; Seraphin and Ivanov, 2019; Seraphin, *et al.*, 2020 and many others), which analysed various aspects of this phenomenon such as its causes, conditions, the capacity of destinations, impact on the quality of resident’s life, and the attitude of locals towards tourists and others. Overtourism became the cause of actions such as clashes, conflicts between locals and tourists visiting destinations, and protests of residents against tourists. Extreme hostility to tourists in a destination, publicly manifested in various forms, including in the form of verbal and/or physical violence, was called “tourismphobia” (Chigarev, 2019).

While the problems of overtourism have been reported in many mature tourist destinations, it is not clear how severe they are at Russian resorts. A survey was conducted in Sochi, the “southern capital of Russia”. With a population of over 520 thousand people, it provides recreational services to a great number of Russian and foreign tourists: in 2019, the city was visited by 6.5 million people, including 3.5 million during the three summer months (Batalova, 2020). This means that Sochi, as a classic mature tourist destination, is exposed to the impact of a significant number of tourists during high season.

This article aims to determine the existence of overtourism and tourismphobia at the leading Russian resort destination, the resort city of Sochi.

## Methodology

Primary data were collected in 2019 from city residents living in all four districts of Sochi with the help of students from Sochi State University. The questionnaire was distributed among 10,000 potential respondents and the feedback from 2,390 of them was received, presenting a 23.9% response rate. The questionnaire consisted of four sections. The first section combined 17 questions about the residents’ perception of the impact of the increase in the number of tourists on various aspects of city life, using the five-point Likert scale based on the works of Vetitnev & Bobina (2015) and Gonzalez *et al.* (2018). The second section contained questions assessing respondents’ satisfaction with the quality of their life in the city adapted from Jeon *et al.* (2016). The third section included questions about the presence and frequency of conflicts with visitors and the relationship of conflicts with the sphere of interaction between residents and tourists (work, life). The last section collected data about the socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics of the respondents. The data analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 21.

## Results

Table 1 presents the results of the residents’ evaluation of various factors of tourism impact on the Sochi destination. Respondents generally agreed with the many positive effects of increasing tourist numbers in the host destination. At the same time, they were afraid of some negative consequences of the overdevelopment of tourism on their lives in the region. Respondents’ differed in their attitudes towards tourism based on their socio-demographic characteristics (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Residents' perceptions towards the impacts of tourism growth

Impact items	Mean	Std. Deviation	ANOVA test					
			Gender	Age	Place of Birth	Involvement in tourism	Social group	Education
Increased benefits for the city's economy	4.56	0.817	5.157*	1.123	15.008***	10.059**	9.488***	4.368
Higher levels of local services	3.85	1.188	2.969	1.174	1.719	19.696***	0.641	1.437
Traffic jams during the peak season	4.08	1.174	0.005	12.744***	0.941	1.904	6.502***	0.933
Increased employment opportunities	3.70	1.301	2.564	8.812***	12.147**	44.823***	1.737	0.679
Overcrowding at local facilities during the season	4.07	1.134	2.729	13.133***	0.801	0.499	3.428**	0.963
Attracting more cultural events to the resort	4.21	1.060	6.002*	9.186***	23.246***	13.870***	2.931*	0.885
Better understanding of different people and cultures	3.74	1.181	1.099	4.373**	19.015***	9.312**	2.145	1.265
Higher price levels in Sochi	4.22	0.977	23.515***	3.407**	0.791	0.000	7.717***	0.352
Improved public facilities for sports and leisure for residents	3.73	1.243	15.509***	1.809	11.977**	15.058***	8.914***	0.284
Increased income of residents	3.93	1.160	1.980	0.993	25.365***	49.206***	23.731***	0.578
Increased litter in the streets and the beaches	4.10	1.046	0.690	2.459*	0.475	2.982	5.429***	0.367
Higher levels of crime in Sochi	3.49	1.224	3.094	7.154***	11.081**	18.766***	9.928***	4.392*
Damage to the natural environment	3.71	1.132	0.192	0.466	2.696	9.217**	5.652***	0.881
Negative impact on the architecture of the resort	3.55	1.256	0.014	2.266*	8.034**	4.047*	11.465***	0.629
Disruption of residents' peace and tranquillity	2.78	1.351	14.417***	5.061***	17.544***	11.573**	8.088***	13.988***
Increased number of quality goods and services	3.67	1.179	0.875	0.774	8.596**	18.683***	5.407***	3.390*
Higher risk of infectious diseases	3.97	1.148	0.451	1.479	8.972**	4.208*	8.450***	7.726***

Notes: 1. Coding: 1-completely unacceptable, 5-completely acceptable; 2. Levels of significance: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Based on the fact that overtourism causes negative attitudes toward tourists among some residents, an indicator of which is conflict, the presence and frequency of conflicts between locals and visitors were studied. It turned out that more than half of the respondents (55.44 %) never conflicted with tourists, 39.33 % - experienced conflicts rarely, and only 5.23 % reported they were often in conflict with tourists. Socio-demographic and behavioural characteristics of residents affected the frequency of their conflicts with guests (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Frequency of conflicts and socio-demographic characteristics of residents

Characteristics	Frequency of conflicts (%)			Chi-square
	Never	Rarely	Quite often	
<b>Gender</b>				25.326***
male	49.6	43.0	7.4	
female	58.7	37.3	4.0	
<b>Age</b>				28.173**
16-19	52.1	42.0	5.9	
20-29	49.5	43.1	7.4	
30-39	60.8	35.9	3.3	
40-49	57.3	38.9	3.8	
50-59	57.3	38.2	4.4	
60 and over	58.9	35.0	6.1	
<b>Place of Birth</b>				28.731***
natives	50.0	43.1	6.8	
newcomers	60.2	36.0	3.8	
<b>Involvement in Tourism</b>				19.970***
yes	49.3	44.5	6.2	
no	58.8	36.5	4.7	
<b>Social group</b>				96.043***
SG1	35.4	39.4	25.3	
SG2	50.3	43.1	6.6	
SG3	57.1	39.4	3.6	
SG4	58.0	37.6	4.4	
SG5	55.5	40.6	3.9	

Notes: 1. Social group stratification by Strategic Research Centre of Rosgosstrakh, 2012; 2. Levels of significance: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01

The relationships between the frequency of conflicts and some dependent variables were examined using ANOVA-test (Table 3).

### Discussion and Conclusion

In recent years, Russian media have repeatedly reported about the negative consequences of an excessive number of tourists at the main Russian resort, the city of Sochi (dirty beaches, traffic jams, litter on the streets, etc.) and dissatisfaction with the residents (Chigarev, 2019). However, there are practically no studies on these problems. The survey results show that the majority of Sochi residents demonstrate a positive attitude towards tourist arrivals: negative answers occurred only in 4.27% of cases, which is significantly less than in other mature tourist destinations, where even the manifestation of tourismphobia was observed (Martin *et al.*, 2018). The residents' perceptions of the impact of overtourism were shaped by several socio-demographic and behavioural factors: age, profession, social status, length of residency, affiliation with tourism, which also corresponds to data from other countries (e.g. Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Lee *et al.*, 2012).

**Table 3.** Frequency of conflicts, the attitude towards tourism and the quality of resident life

The dependent variables	Frequency of conflicts			F-test
	Never	Rarely	Quite often	
<i>Overall the positive impact of tourism outweighs the negative effects</i>				
Mean	3.76	3.58	3.29	15.005***
Std deviation	1.11	1.07	1.22	
<i>How pleased are you with the arrival of tourists in Sochi?</i>				
Mean	4.12	3.85	3.33	47.886***
Std deviation	0.93	1.03	1.26	
<i>The life quality assessment</i>				
Mean	3.92	3.71	3.11	80.438***
Std deviation	0.73	0.71	0.98	
<i>The willingness to learn a foreign language</i>				
Mean	3.61	3.52	2.91	15.211***
Std deviation	1.35	1.32	1.55	

Note: ANOVA-test; Levels of significance: \*\*\* p<0.001

As a result of this study, it was revealed that most respondents have never had conflicts with tourists. Moreover, the higher the level of the residents' life quality was, the fewer conflicts arose between them and tourists. This data about resident-tourist conflicts, first obtained at Russian resorts, has shown that the current number of tourists is not excessive for the Sochi resort and does not form a mass negative feedback from residents. At the same time, conflict situations, although not frequent, indicate some tension between residents and guests of the city. Indigenous people were more likely to conflict with visitors than non-natives. The residents connected with tourism reported fewer conflicts with visitors than other residents, which indirectly match the results of Andereck *et al.* (2005). Most conflicts occurred outside the professional sphere – they took place in everyday life rather than in the workplace. This data can be useful for destination management organization to assess the impact of tourism on the lives of respondents when planning the activities of tourism.

Some limitations of this study may be identified. It would be interesting to extend this research to other large resorts of Russia, where some problems of overtourism are observed. The present study analysed the conflicts between residents and tourists only, while it is important to know the occurrence of conflicts among tourists, as well as the causes and forms of conflicts. Given the negative impacts that these problems have on tourists, it is also necessary to study this issue from the perspective of tourists. Information on social networks can be useful in the context of the problems of overtourism and tourismphobia.

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