UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE ECONOMICHE ED AZIENDALI
"M. FANNO"

CORSO DI LAUREA MAGISTRALE IN
ACCOUNTING, FINANCE AND BUSINESS CONSULTING

TESI DI LAUREA

"MANAGING OVERTOURISM: FLOWS, PRESSURES, AND POLICY RESPONSES.
THE CASE OF VENICE AND THE ACCESS FEE"

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ANNO ACCADEMICO 2024 – 2025

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DIPARTIMENTO DI SCIENZE
ECONOMICHE E AZIENDALI "MARCO FANNO"

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND
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APPENDICE

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Abstract

Overtourism has emerged as a critical challenge for popular destinations, with Venice epitomizing the problem as enormous visitor volumes strain the city's social and environmental carrying capacity. In response, Venice has experimented with an access fee for day-trippers, a pioneering measure aimed at limiting crowds and raising funds for sustainable tourism management. This thesis examines tourists' willingness to pay the Venice access fee, focusing on how key perceptual factors influence acceptance of this policy. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), we assume that tourists' perceived usefulness of the fee, its perceived ease of use (the simplicity of understanding and paying it), perceived fairness (the equity and justification of the fee), perceived value (the value gained for the cost), and individuals' paying consciousness (sensitivity to spending) and attitude toward the fee, all collectively shape their willingness to pay. The research is grounded in both an exhaustive literature review and an empirical analysis. A survey of visitors to Venice was conducted, and the data (N = 207) were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SPSS and AMOS to test the hypothesized relationships. The SEM results reveal that tourists' acceptance of the fee is indeed a multi-factor decision. Notably, perceived fairness and usefulness emerged as especially strong predictors of willingness to pay, underscoring that tourists are more inclined to support the fee when they see it as just and beneficial. By critically assessing an innovative policy through a robust SEM approach, this thesis provides both theoretical contributions and practical insights. It highlights that achieving more sustainable tourism through visitor management tools requires not only implementing fees, but also ensuring that tourists perceive those measures as fair, easy, and valuable. In sum, the study offers an evidence-based, nuanced understanding of how tourists perceive the Venice access fee, guiding policymakers in Venice and beyond in designing fair and acceptable solutions to overtourism.

Introduction

Tourism has become a central pillar of the global economy, bringing jobs, investment, and cultural exchange to countless destinations. Yet, its rapid growth, fueled by affordable travel, digital platforms, and changing lifestyles, has also led to increasingly visible downsides. In many places, the high concentration of visitors has strained infrastructure, driven up housing costs, and eroded residents' quality of life. This phenomenon, widely known as overtourism, is now at the heart of policy debates across Europe and beyond (UNWTO, 2025; Capocchi et al., 2019).

Venice is one of the most striking examples. With its fragile physical setting and limited capacity, the city has long struggled under the weight of mass tourism. From depopulation and rising rents to the transformation of everyday spaces into tourist stages, the effects are visible and ongoing. UNESCO has repeatedly expressed alarm about the threats to Venice's cultural heritage, urging local authorities to take meaningful action (UNESCO, 2025). In response, the city has introduced a new policy: a daily access fee for short-term visitors, aimed at reducing pressure and generating resources for preservation.

This thesis explores how tourists perceive and respond to that policy. The main goal is to assess whether such a measure is not only technically functional, but also publicly acceptable. In other words: does it work in the eyes of those it targets? Are tourists willing to pay, and under what conditions? To answer these questions, the study examines both the broader context and the local dynamics. It reviews how cities across Europe have experimented with different tools, such as visitor caps, tourist taxes, cruise limits, and rental regulations, and what can be learned from those efforts (Peeters, 2018). It then focuses on the specific case of Venice, tracing the pressures that led to the access fee and the debate surrounding its implementation (Comune di Venezia, 2025).

At the core of the thesis is an empirical analysis based on a survey administered to possible visitors in Venice. Drawing on the Theory of Planned Behavior, the study identifies key variables, such as perceived usefulness, fairness, easy to use and attitude toward the fee, that influence tourists' willingness to pay (Ajzen, 1991). To analyze the complex interplay between these factors, the research relies on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a powerful statistical technique that makes it possible to test both direct and indirect relationships within a conceptual model. This method is essential not only for validating the structure of the visitors' responses, but also for uncovering how specific perceptions contribute to stronger or weaker support for the access fee.

Ultimately, this thesis seeks to contribute to a more balanced and sustainable approach to tourism governance, which takes into account not only the policies implemented, but also how they are perceived and experienced by those they affect. By combining a global overview of overtourism with a close examination of the local case of Venice, and by integrating policy analysis with behavioral data, the research offers a grounded and multidimensional perspective on how cities can regulate tourist flows without undermining their cultural identity or everyday livability.

Chapter 1 – From Growth to Overload: The Rise of Global Tourism and the Emergence of Overtourism.

1.1 The Evolution and Expansion of International Tourism

The tourism phenomenon can be described as a dynamic process, stemming from the human need of discovering new realities and visiting unknown places, associated with the circular movement of individuals from the permanent residence to a location of destination and back (Akda and Öter, 2011; Sofronov, 2018). The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as "*people who are travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited*" (WTO, 1995: p.1). Since 1939, for analytical purposes tourists have been categorized on the basis of their interests and preferences, taking into consideration different criteria, such as the initial and destination areas, the number of participants, season and time of travelling, means of transportation used, age and social status of travelers. On the basis of these criteria, different types of tourism have been distinguished, including leisure tourism, recreation and health care tourism, visitation tourism, transit tourism and work tourism (Tureac and Anca, 2008; Thommandru et al., 2023). From the end of the Second World War, the tourism industry has evolved consistently and progressively, becoming one of the fastest growing economic sectors globally as well as a socio-economic fact of critical importance (Peeters et al., 2018).

Starting from the 1950s, the combination of rapid economic development, growing middle classes and affordable travel and visa expenses, especially in light of the expansion of low-cost airlines, the rise of digital booking platforms, and the progressive simplification of cross-border travel regulations, has led to the expansion and diversification of tourism (UNWTO, 2020). Whereas 25 millions of international tourist arrivals were recorded in 1950, this figure spiked after the 1960s reaching 820 million in 2000 and surpassing 1.5 billion in 2019 (Akda and Öter, 2011; Herre and Samborska 2023). The Covid-19 pandemic and the consequent global lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus caused an unprecedented halt to this industry, which figured among the most harshly affected economic sectors. Indeed, 2020 represents the worst year ever witnessed, as the number of international tourist arrivals shrunk by over 70%, with slightly over 400 million visitors on record (UNWTO, 2024). Vaccines, cross-border coordination and safety protocols allowed recovery starting from the second semester of 2021. In 2023 1.3 billion international tourists were recorded and this trend continued in 2024, with 1.4 billion arrivals recorded globally and mirroring a comprehensive

99% recovery if comparing the data to 2019. To this regard, UN Tourism Secretary Zurab Pololikashvili stated that this tendency is expected to persist in 2025 with both mature and emerging destinations profiting from tourism growth (UNWTO, 2025). This evolution is clearly represented in *figure 1*.

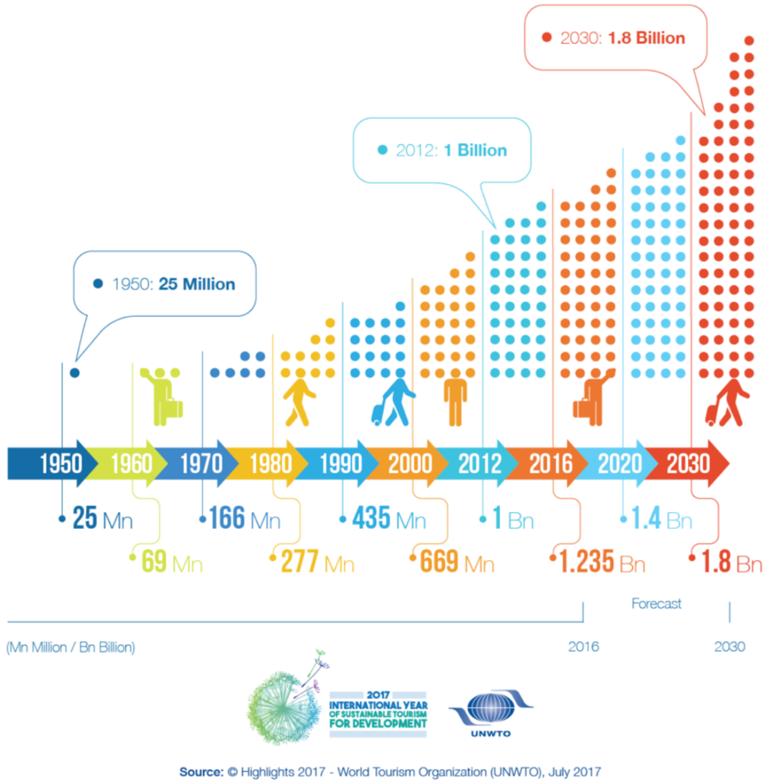


Figure 1: Evolution of Global Tourism.

Tourism expansion is not just reflected in the increasing number of tourists recorded but has had an evident direct and indirect impact on socioeconomic structures worldwide. According to the outlook published by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), the travel and tourism industry contributed 10.5% of the global economy in 2019 and to 10% in 2024, testifying a positive recovery of this industry from multiple perspectives. If considering tourism export revenues, which are determined by accounting for international tourism receipts (visitors' spendings at destinations) and passenger transport receipts (international transport services provided to visitors by local carriers), in 2019 and 2024 tourism respectively generated 10.3 and 10.9 trillion dollars. This positive tendency is forecasted to continue in the upcoming years, with projections of 10.3% of GDP share for year 2025 and 11.5% for year 2035 (UNWTO, 2025; WTTC, 2025).

From an economic perspective, tourism development allows diversification and presents opportunities for enterprises operating on all levels (Nyasha et al., 2021). Direct, indirect and induced effects can be distinguished when considering the economic impact of tourism. First, global tourism expenditures can represent a key revenue resource for countries, contributing to their economic development from multiple perspectives on the short, medium and long term. Moreover, tourism attractivity is directly linked with the income of foreign currencies and represents a key component for export diversification. Secondly, tourism growth positively impacts businesses that supply and support the tourism sector as a whole and has a multiplier effect as money income is likely to foster the creation of new economic activities. Thirdly, an increase in the number of tourists leading to greater expenditures can ultimately result in higher incomes for local employers, who will have more money for expenses such as groceries, clothes, rent and services. As a result, sectors not directly linked to the tourism industry will also benefit from its development and it acts as a stimulator of additional economic activities (Akda and Öter, 2011; Thommandru et al., 2023; UNWTO, 2024).

Analyses linked this industry's expansion with enhanced community pride and strengthened cultural identity, a better quality of life, enlarged employment opportunities, improved infrastructures, facilities and services and increased property and land value. The relevance of this topic has led to growing available literature which has evidenced a range of positive and negative consequences other than limitations to tourism development. However, there is general agreement that the increase of tourism offers a range of opportunities that if strategically capitalized can lead to improved socioeconomic conditions (Khan et al., 2020).

1.2 Tourism Growth: Positive and Negative Consequences

The expansion of the tourism industry represents the result of a combination of economic, technological, social and political changes, which have allowed this sector to become a global economic engine. Consequently, this resulted in multiple positive effects, notably in terms of GDP, employment and investments not merely within the tourism market. However, there is another side of coin, which growingly emerged and became preponderant over the last thirty years. Similarly to many other economic sectors, tourism growth foreshadowed a negative externality, leading to socioeconomic and environmental costs, which are being addressed by an expanding number of scholars and policymakers.

Global demographic development and globalization have undoubtedly accelerated tourism growth. Population growth, projected to reach about 10 billion people by the mid of the current century, and urbanization trends, with more than half living in urban areas, are both considered beneficial for the tourism industry (Bąk and Szczecińska, 2020; Ritchie et al., 2024; Dwyer, 2015; Mihajlovic and Krželj, 2021). Moreover, despite the persistence of great controversies, globalization is associated with a greater movement of ideas and individuals and the formation of a global civilization, fostering connection and interdependence on a global scale. By fostering interconnection, leading to higher incomes and thus more profitable work-leisure time management, generating opportunities and services, and enabling an innovative approach to business-related processes, globalization has structurally changed the approach to and within the tourism market. Today's younger generations can be considered the product of globalization, characterized by an innovative global outlook, and are the most active in the travel industry (Pindzo and Radulovic, 2017).

Enormous technological advancement and policy changes further contributed in this direction. Evolutions within the transportation industry has made mobility easier and more affordable, while the digital revolution has eased global interconnection. Over the last decades, modern aircrafts, cruise ships, high-speed trains and developed road systems have enabled people to move more rapidly while minimizing the risks associated with this activity (Khan et al., 2020). Starting at first in the late 1970s in the United States and between the 1980s and the 1990s in Europe and in the Pacific countries, a progressive removal of regulatory barriers was pushed by the aim of guaranteeing more convenient fares, greater competition and higher quality (Lohman and Duval, 2011; Sarilgan, 2016). The emergence of Low-Cost Carriers (LCCs) starting from the mid 1990s and growing exponentially in the following decade, has been transformative (Graham, 2000; Forsyth, 2003; Vera and Ivras, 2009).

Ultimately, a fundamental revolution within this sector is linked to digitalization. According to the Digital 2025 Global Overview Report, today about 70% of the global population has internet access (Kemp, 2025). Digital travel platforms and social media have led to behavioral transformations both within the demand and the offer within the tourism market and today they are considered a driving force for tourism attraction and for increasing the market share in the industry. Global distribution systems and online travel agencies revolutionized the market by optimizing travel and pricing strategies and facilitating customer experiences (Zequiri et al., 2025). Travelers have become much more interested in shorter but more frequent authentic local experiences, looking forward to integrating with locals during their stays in both urban and rural areas, and tend to autonomously book trips on the internet, bypassing any not strictly necessary cost (Debyser, 2019). AI-powered tourism platforms, enables the personalization of options for clients, which feel as if the travelling experience was specifically designed to fit their needs. Virtually viewing the experience before its concretization, while relying on rating systems, increases the chances of satisfaction and subsequent customer loyalty, representing a useful resource for both categories (Çinar, 2020; Zequiri et al., 2025).

Tourism emerges as a valuable driver of social and economic development (Bergström and Larsson, 2022). First, an expansion of the tourism industry positively impacts on a country's GDP, especially for developing countries, such as Kenya or the Maldives, which have included tourism as a key component of their medium-term and long-term national development plans (Bergström and Larsson, 2022). Second, tourism expansion is directly linked to the creation of new workplaces and jobs for people living in destination areas, within hotels, restaurants, transportation, retail and tourism-related businesses and industries, meaning that tourism can be considered a strategy for tackling youth underemployment issues (Baum & Hai, 2019). More broadly, there is an existing nexus between tourism growth and lower poverty and unemployment rates, higher wages and thus access to goods and services (Gómez López & Barrón Arreola, 2019). Third, despite infrastructure development, improvement and innovation might be primarily guided by the objective of enhancing tourism attractivity and expanding this industry, current residents and future generations figure among the benefitting categories. Enhanced quality of roads as well as health and education infrastructures figure as primary positive outcomes. In this regard, tourism growth enhances the well-being of communities residing in destination areas from multiple interconnected viewpoints, including economically, socially, and psychologically (Godovykh et al., 2025). Fourth, from a broader perspective, if considering that tourism expansion promotes economic diversification, lowering reliance on a single sector and increasing export revenues, it could be argued that it facilitates the pathway towards medium-term and long-term economic stability and strengthens a nation's economy multidimensionally (Jurowski, 2008). Finally, an increase in tourism flows can foster cultural enrichment and preservation. On the one hand, residents encounter the opportunity of engaging with different ideas and practices, while raising awareness on specific cultural practices characterizing a destination location. On the other hand, tourism revenues provide financial support to preserve tangible and intangible cultural heritage, including monuments and traditions (Malik et al., 2023; Godovykh et al., 2025).

However, there is another side of the coin. Rapid and uncontrolled tourism growth can represent a concrete source of pressure on destination location, especially if these coincide with developing contexts. To this regard, the issue is mainly related to difficulties in tourism management (Park & Stokowski, 2009). As the volume of tourist arrivals grows consistently, responses and policies are likely to be reactive rather than proactive, implying that strategic medium-term and long-term planning is not involved nor considered. Notably in areas where tourism booms translate in a valuable source of income and a means for tackling underdevelopment and high unemployment rates, governance institutions generally outline short-term coping plans. Despite these short-term market strategies seem to initially work well, these can ultimately lead to relevant issues in longer timeframe, with people bearing the burden of structural imbalances between spiking costs and limited benefits (Dioko, 2017). Key examples in this regard are the economic differences between urban developed areas and rural stagnated and poor areas in Turkey, after it became a popular destination for visitors, and the 79% decrease of the coral reef morphology in the Akumal Bay in Mexico over a three-year period, after it started attracting tourism. Both cases are valuable examples to acknowledge that without a solid managing institutional capacity an increase in tourism arrivals can become counter-productive, compromising the local social fabric or destroying key tourist attractions themselves. As local populations are on the forefront bearing the burden on the uncontrolled increase in visitor arrivals, this can ultimately lead to anti-tourism resentments, which are becoming increasingly felt in highly popular touristic locations such as Berlin, in Germany, and Barcelona, in Spain (Dioko, 2017).

This premise translates in the need of adopting a critical analytic lens when addressing tourism and its growth, which clearly is not only linked to positive outcomes. Aiming at unpacking the issues linked with sudden and mismanaged tourism growth, three main macro areas can be identified: the first is related to socio-cultural impacts, the second encompasses economic challenges, the third addresses environmental damage. Comprehensively these negatively affect the quality of life of local communities and populations.

To begin with, tourism patterns intersect local social fabrics, inevitably directly affecting host communities from multiple perspectives. Thus, tourism becomes a socio-cultural phenomenon which violently intersects local realities. Leading authors on the topic have associated negative impacts of tourism with inequalities in wealth and income of locals, a shortage in goods and services provision for natives, the rise in littering, violence and traffic congestions, and the spread of phenomena such as prostitution (Monterrubio et al., 2012; Mihalic, 2014; Zhao and Li, 2018; Zhuang et al., 2019). Moreover, intensifying tourism trends can adversely compromise religious and community values, food or drinking cultures, broadly affecting lifestyle trends and moralities (Amoiradis et al., 2021). This can ultimately result in “cultural clashes” between locals and foreigners. For instance, in Bangladesh tourism growth and the exposure to western lifestyles have led to a range of social issues. Among these crime rates, drinking and prostitution spiked and materialistic and greedy behaviors became more common. Notably in highly touristic regions, observing the luxurious lifestyles of tourists brought locals to make comparisons with their own possibilities, resulting in a deep sense of frustration and the expansion of black markets. Moreover, the increase in visitor numbers has led to landscape and heritage damage and noise pollution creating forms of resistance to tourists on a wider scale (Lincoln, 2013).

Secondly, the analysis of the impacts of tourism on economic development helps conceptualizing why the effects of this industry’s growth are not straightforward and thus must be addressed critically. Despite tourism growth is associated with an increase in a nation's economic wealth, this positive correlation might not be immediately felt by the local population. Poverty reduction and equal economic benefits cannot be identified as direct effects of this phenomenon's rise (Elgin & Elveren, 2024). For instance, despite there is no doubt that the tourism industry creates opportunities for both skilled and unskilled workers and its growth has allowed tackling unemployment issues, evidence from Peterborough (USA), Sierra Leone and South Africa, highlights that workplaces are seasonal, with salaries not allowing to bear for family responsibilities (Tullah & Jalloh, 2021). Thus, comprehensively tourism cannot be fully framed as valuable means for tackling unemployment. On a similar note, creating tourist-sized destinations can lead to a decline in traditional workplaces, especially within the primary sector, which can become a relevant issue especially in areas where human-land relationships are a cultural asset. These changes in dynamics are associated with the "enclavisation" of areas for tourists, which aims at fostering a destination's attractivity and maximize economic revenues but in turn leads to excluding locals from potential economic benefits (Frent, 2016). Other negative economic impacts include potential wealth leakages, notably when tourist infrastructures are owned by foreign companies located abroad from the destination areas, and as previously briefly mentioned, a spike in prices of goods and services, which can become unaffordable for locals, who might ultimately be forced to move due to inflation (Kumar et al., 2015). Finally, an excessive dependence on tourism sector enhances vulnerabilities and exposure to shocks (Frent, 2016). This became starkly clear on a global scale with the disastrous effects that followed the COVID-19 pandemic.

A third level of analysis that must be taken into consideration adopts an environmental perspective. Preserving the environment can become a challenging task as tourism trends increase and the number of annual visitors rise, leading to clashes between tourists and stakeholders in this industry on one side and locals on the other. Thus, tourism growth and the environment must be carefully balanced and managed and long-term sustainability must be addressed as a key element when planning this industry's growth. Pollution in its multiple forms, land degradations and resource over-consumption are among the most relevant issues linked to the environment. China, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Pakistan perfectly conceptualize the consequences of losing this fragile equilibrium, with the other side of the coin of high tourism attractiveness being the spike in water, air and noise pollution (Baloch et al., 2023). Transforming an area into a tourist destination leads to soil erosion and loss of flora and fauna, as the construction of infrastructures tends to negatively impact local habitats, enhance the exposure to landslides, reduce the capacity of soil absorption. In this regard, the promotion of sports tourism and event tourism have been analyzed in relation to their extensive impacts. The former represents a branch of this industry linked to creating, for instance, ski slopes and golf areas, while promoting infrastructure development for increasing the attractivity of an area and enlarge the range of services offered. Consequently, its growth is associated with permanent deforestation and biodiversity loss, leading to geological and ecological damages that must be addressed (Zhao, 2023). The latter is linked to promoting music festivals and theatre events to increase tourism attractivity, which besides creating business opportunities and increasing revenues, are likely to cause excessive pressure on local services, traffic congestions and overcrowding, increased criminality, high levels of noise and air pollution, littering, damages to the natural environment (Moiescu et al., 2019).

Intersecting these three aspects leads to recognizing the importance of including sustainability within growth strategies. Ecotourism encompasses a multi-faceted formula that allows to preserve the environment and the ecosystem, to promote bottom-up people-centered economic development measures aiming at eradicating poverty through economic diversification and to secure the preservation of traditions, by ensuring cross-cultural understanding (Patil & Pattanshetti, 2024). Thus, ecotourism can concretely represent a transformative mechanism for ensuring sustainable development. It embodies a conceptual framework for balancing tourism development and environmental preservation that has largely developed over the last three decades becoming increasingly relevant within international development agendas (Kryczka, 2019). This requires accurately balancing bottom-up and top-down initiatives, with the latter including systemic short-term, medium-term and long-term planning and functional policy frameworks. Mesomagoro in Ghana represents a valuable case study for analyzing the positive outcomes of acknowledging ecotourism as a development strategy. Defining operational strategies at a higher level and then decentralizing them vertically and implementing them horizontally under the supervision of specialized stakeholders can reduce the harmful impacts of uncontrolled tourism growth. On a similar note, the hybrid management formula underlying Richtersveld National Park in the Northern Cape, encompassing the employment of locals living within the park's premises which de facto embody park managers, resulted being extremely useful towards both ensuring a vital source of income for locals and promoting tourism growth in a sustainable way. In both cases strategic planning and meticulously considering local socioeconomic settings and needs emerge as pillars within sustainable development (Cossengue et al., 2025).

Clearly this concern over defining sustainable tourism management strategies became progressively more relevant as issues related to uncontrolled rise in the number of international visitors grew. Especially as this tendency foreshadows an industry pursuing growth and promotion instead of regulation and preservation (Kryczka, 2019). More prominently, this attentive framework was applied as "overtourism" started becoming a felt global challenge.

1.3 Defining Overtourism: the Rise of a Counter-Tendency

The concept of "overtourism" was first coined in 2012, when it was used on social media to refer to a context characterized by the rapid and unsustainable growth of tourists. During the following years consensus rapidly grew around the perception of tourism growth as controversial. In 2013 the issue was addressed during the 7th International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations and in 2016 Rafat Ali, the founder of the online tourist platform Skift, contributed to rising awareness over the negative impact of mismanaged or poorly managed tourism growth. Shortly after, probably due to the enhanced consciousness, this phenomenon exploded and not only 2017 has been labeled as the "year of overtourism", but "overtourism" also became the word of the year and included in the Collins English Dictionary as an antonym for sustainable development. This evolution was followed by several implications, including a radical change in the perception of the industry's expansion, the expansion of academic literature contributions unpacking overtourism and its related issues, the spread of feelings of "tourist-phobia" throughout different contexts and a rising consciousness of the devastating effects of "antropopressure". Especially, as the issue started becoming concrete, this evolution translated into a growing number of publications in grey literature, especially promoted by governments that had to find suitable but immediate solutions for tackling growing dissatisfaction and Non-Governmental Organizations acting as spokesmen for the environment and subaltern social groups (Kryczka, 2019).

In 2018, the Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies working within the European Parliament, undertook the complex challenge of providing a definition that could comprehensively project the web of phenomena liked to what had been broadly defined "overtourism". The outcome proposed by the TRAN Committee was simplistic and generalist albeit incredibly effective towards the objective projecting the magnitude of this phenomenon: "*Overtourism describes the situation in which the impact of tourism, at certain times and in certain locations, exceeds physical, ecological, social, economic, psychological, and/or political capacity thresholds*" (Peeters et al., 2018, p. 22).

This macro-definition embodies an umbrella under which policymakers can move towards outlining concrete and effective strategies. However, this concept id multifaceted and still lacks standardization (Capocchi et al., 2019). Thus, it requires conducting an analysis on the micro-level focusing on the capacity of a location from each of the mentioned perspectives. To begin with, the ecological-environmental capacity is the level beyond which tourism development would irreversibly compromise the environment. Second, the physical-facility capacity is the level of tourism pressure beyond which facilities would be saturated or overused. Third, the social-perceptual capacity can be understood as the level of tolerance of locals towards mass tourism, which might have severe implications on environment, disrupts local culture and not seldom radically diminishes the quality of life for locals. Fourth, economic carrying capacity is the ability of absorbing tourist functions without additional ecological, social, cultural or local costs. Fifth, the psychological capacity represents an individual's ability of coping with overcrowding and the level beyond which an individual no longer feels comfortable due to an overwhelming presence of tourists, negative attitudes, traffic congestions and unbearable pollution (Peeters et al., 2018). Only if considered comprehensively, these categories reveal that uncontrolled and rapid tourism growth not counterbalanced by adequate planning and management can become a serious issue intersecting numerous spheres, foreshadowing further problems and complex dynamics ultimately resulting in anti-tourism resentment. Moreover, there are no one-sized solutions for tackling the adverse consequences of this phenomenon. Thus, for policies and institutional measures to be effective, these must both be designed ad hoc in light of a specific context and provide inclusive solutions which are not limited to top top-down strategies (Koens et al., 2018).

Throughout this chapter it was possible to understand that the boom experienced by the tourism industry is the result of multiple intersecting factors, whereas growing issues related to the climate crisis and the negative socioeconomic impacts of mass tourism highlighted the importance of implementing measures for tackling overtourism. Although it only gained popularity in recent times, the effects of excessive tourism pressure have been the object of an open debate over the last 40 years. To this regard, starting from the 1960s, and more prominently in the following decades, authors and analysts have been rising concerns over how increasing tourism concertation was becoming an issue for local socioeconomic and physical environments and creating growing stress on residents. For instance, already in 1979, Rosenow and Pulsipher introduced the concept of "visitor overkill" to conceptualize the effect of this phenomenon (Capocchi et al., 2019).

To fully comprehend the magnitude of overtourism it must be accurately distinguished from concepts such as "mass tourism" and "overcrowding". Respectively, the former refers to a large number of people visiting the same destination at the same time and the latter underlies the relationship between the number of people and physical space. Moreover, a widespread misconception that overtourism represents an issue related to cities, whereas islands and rural areas are potentially less equipped to confront a growing number of tourists and thus more exposed to negative fallouts. Taking all these specifications into consideration and recalling the definition above outlined, the novelty embodied by the concept of overtourism lies in its ambition of considering the existing nexus between a spike in pressure brought by a growing number of visitors and local capacity (Capocchi et al., 2019). By intersecting these two aspects it presents an innovative image of the effects of the tourist industry's expansion, which is associated with the risk of disruption from multiple perspectives. Thus, the debate has shifted towards balancing the rights of tourists to travel and the rights of locals to live in a healthy and peaceful environment (Veríssimo et al., 2020). Consequently, a feature that further enhances the relevance of this phenomenon is related to its global projection, which makes it an issue of global relevance. To give proof of what just stated, New York City, London, Amsterdam, Dubrovnik, Reykjavik, Paris, Rome, the Seychelles, Santorini, the Koh Phi Phi Islands of Thailand and the Palawan archipelagic province of the Philippines all have to deal with the negative externalities of an industry that can be extremely beneficial as well as devastating for local ecosystems and socioeconomic structures (Capocchi et al., 2019).

Chapter 2 – Overtourism: Policy and Economic Management

2.1 Economic and Accounting Perspective

From an economic viewpoint, overtourism involves trade-offs between revenue generation and external costs. Positive impacts include job creation, for example in hotels, restaurants and guiding, foreign exchange earnings, and tax receipts. For instance, a study found that tourism taxes in European cities can raise significant income, and Barcelona aims to use its extra tax revenue to fund roads and public transit, and global reports estimate that tourism contributed around 10% of global GDP pre-pandemic (Ann Hughes, 2024; Peeters, 2018). However, the economic benefits of tourism are often undermined by negative side effects, such as the high costs of overcrowding, which require increased spending on public safety, sanitation, and infrastructure, rising prices in the housing market and everyday goods, and imbalances in the local economy, where labor shifts away from essential or skilled sectors toward low-wage tourism services (Frent, 2016). In Barcelona the growth of holiday rentals has been linked to a housing crisis and rising rents (Mas de Xaxàs, 2024). Overtourism also generates "hidden" costs like environmental degradation, including erosion, pollution, and damage to natural and cultural sites, which often require costly interventions by public authorities or local businesses to repair and manage. Tourism taxes are an example of what economists call Pigovian taxes. This means they are designed to make visitors pay for the hidden or indirect costs their presence imposes on the destination, such as pressure on public infrastructure, increased waste, environmental damage, or reduced quality of life for residents (Pigou, 2017). In other words, these taxes aim to correct a market imbalance by ensuring that tourists contribute to the costs they help create, rather than leaving local governments and communities to cover the expenses.

Research shows that these taxes generally have a limited effect on overall tourist numbers, especially when the amounts are modest. In many European cities, tourist taxes range from just €1 to €7 per night, roughly 1 to 3 percent of the average hotel room price. Because this cost is relatively low compared to the total expense of a trip, it does not significantly deter visitors (Group Nao, 2020). In fact, many destinations have continued to experience rising tourist arrivals even after implementing such taxes. Barcelona, for example, increased its tourist tax while maintaining high levels of tourism, showing that these fiscal tools can raise revenue without undermining the sector's attractiveness (García-López et al., 2021).

From an accounting perspective, many experts advocate for the development of "destination accounts" or sustainability dashboards to track the true balance between the benefits and costs of tourism. These tools are designed to go beyond basic metrics like visitor numbers or hotel occupancy rates. Instead, they provide a more holistic view of tourism's financial, social, and environmental footprint within a destination (UNWTO, 2005; OECD, 2022). A comprehensive destination account would monitor both inflows, such as revenue from tourist taxes, entry fees, and local business growth, and outflows, including public spending on infrastructure maintenance, waste management, policing, and health services strained by high visitor volumes. In addition, it would integrate indicators on environmental quality (such as air and water pollution, carbon emissions, and land degradation) and social well-being (including housing affordability, access to public services, and resident satisfaction) (UNWTO, 2021); Eurostat, 2024). These accounting systems are essential for evidence-based tourism policy. They help local authorities evaluate whether tourism is delivering net positive outcomes or generating long-term burdens for the community. For example, a destination account could reveal whether rising tourist taxes are actually covering the full cost of increased service demands, or whether local residents are effectively subsidizing tourism through higher rents or reduced public space access (Christie et al., 2021).

Despite their value, such tools remain underutilized. A 2018 study commissioned by the European Parliament found that few destinations in the EU systematically measure the effectiveness of their tourism controls or track broader ecological and social impacts (Peeters, 2018). Similarly, the OECD notes that most local tourism strategies still prioritize short-term visitor growth over long-term sustainability due to the lack of integrated monitoring frameworks (OECD, 2022). Even in cities facing extreme overtourism, policy tends to be reactive and fragmented, rather than guided by ongoing performance data (Peeters et al., 2018). As the pressure to manage tourism sustainably increases, institutions like Eurostat and UNWTO have begun promoting common frameworks for tourism statistics that include environmental and social dimensions. In 2024, Eurostat launched a collaboration with booking platforms to share anonymized data on regional overnight stays, helping governments monitor tourism at a granular level (Eurostat, 2024). However, building full destination accounts requires not just better data but also political will, cross-agency coordination, and long-term investment in administrative capacity.

Measuring the full costs of overtourism is especially difficult when it comes to intangible effects, such as cultural erosion, social tensions, or psychological stress among residents. These impacts do not show up in traditional financial data, yet they are often among the most strongly felt. For example, in cities like Venice and Barcelona, residents report feeling displaced from their neighborhoods, disturbed by noise and overcrowding, or pushed out of the housing market by tourism-related gentrification (Peeters et al., 2018; Trancoso González, 2018). These social burdens are difficult to quantify but are critical to understanding tourism's broader footprint. Despite these challenges, there is a growing international movement toward more transparent, evidence-based tourism policy. Recent industry reports have identified a shift toward "regenerative" tourism which is an approach that not only minimizes harm but actively restores the places and communities affected by tourism. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, more than 60 global destinations now earmark tourism taxes specifically for regenerative uses, including environmental restoration, infrastructure upgrades, and even direct compensation for local residents impacted by noise, pollution, or crowding (WTTC, 2022). Public opinion strongly supports this direction. An OECD (2020) report found that local support for tourism taxes increases significantly when revenues are used for public services, housing, or environmental protection. For example, the Balearic Islands' Sustainable Tourism Tax has gained legitimacy due to its transparent allocation to green and social projects (OECD, 2020; Balears Sostenible, 2024).

Ultimately, managing overtourism is about finding a workable balance: maximizing economic benefits without undermining social cohesion or environmental health. Well-designed policy tools, such as taxes and entrance fees, can help capture tourism value and redirect it toward sustainability goals. But these instruments cannot solve the problem alone. Without addressing deeper structural drivers like low-cost air travel, aggressive marketing, and under-regulated housing platforms, fiscal tools may simply shift rather than reduce visitor pressure (Balmer, 2024b; Peeters, 2018).

Overly restrictive measures can also backfire. Policies that severely limit tourism may preserve cultural sites but at the cost of lost income for local workers and businesses. For instance, banning large cruise ships can help protect fragile urban centers, but may reduce earnings for port services, guides, and transport operators (ICOMOS, 2023; Wizenberg, 2023). For this reason, most economists and policy experts recommend integrated strategies. These combine several tools, such as zoning regulations, seasonal quotas, differentiated pricing, and real-time monitoring systems, to manage tourism flows while preserving economic viability. When combined with strong community engagement and ongoing data analysis, such mixed approaches are more likely to deliver sustainable, long-term outcomes for both visitors and host communities (GSTC, 2025; Peeters et al., 2018).

To sum up, overtourism presents multifaceted policy challenges that cut across governance scales. Local authorities have become laboratories for innovation, while national and international bodies set broader guidelines and coordinate research.

2.2 Management Tools and Governance Responses for Tackling Tourism Growth

Central to this discussion is the role of policy planning and multi-level governance in steering tourism towards sustainability. Across the world, national and local authorities, often in collaboration with residents, businesses, and international organizations, are developing tools to balance visitor demand with the well-being of host communities. Destinations are increasingly adopting management policies to address overtourism at different levels, combining regulatory, fiscal, and planning approaches. These include planning controls and zoning restrictions, quotas and time-slot entry systems, and limits on cruise traffic or short-term rentals. At the same time, economic instruments such as tourist taxes, access fees, and differentiated pricing strategies are being used to influence visitor behavior, generate revenue for conservation, and support infrastructure maintenance. Such measures aim both to internalize the external costs of tourism and to align visitor numbers with the destination's carrying capacity and residents' quality of life. At the international level, organizations like UNESCO and UNWTO promote sustainable tourism principles and advocate the use of carrying-capacity assessments, while regional bodies, such as the European Parliament, have commissioned studies and policy frameworks to guide destination management (Peeters et al., 2018). A key insight emerging from these experiences is that no single formula can be universally applied; rather, effective governance depends on tailoring strategies to the unique social, economic, and environmental conditions of each place.

2.2.1 Visitor Caps and Timed Entry

Many heritage sites and natural parks around the world have begun implementing strict visitor caps and timed-entry systems as a way to manage the negative effects of overcrowding. These measures are designed not only to preserve the physical integrity of the sites but also to enhance the overall visitor experience by preventing excessive congestion during peak hours (UNESCO, 2021).

One of the most notable examples of this approach is Machu Picchu in Peru, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of the most visited archaeological destinations in the world. To protect the site's delicate ecosystem and archaeological structures, authorities introduced daily visitor limits, and assigned entry time slots. According to UNESCO, as of 2020, the official carrying capacity of Machu Picchu was set at 2,244 visitors per day. However, in early 2024, the Peruvian government decided to raise this cap to 4,500 entries per day, an increase from a previous operational threshold of 3,800 (Elliott, 2024). The decision was driven by the desire to support economic recovery following the pandemic, particularly in regions dependent on tourism. In addition to limiting numbers, visitors must now follow designated circuits and, in many cases, join small guided tours. These rules are intended to reduce crowding on the narrow paths that wind through the site, prevent environmental degradation, and ensure better control of tourist behavior. While these efforts have been praised by conservationists, they have also sparked resistance (Peru Explorer, 2025). The introduction of a centralized online ticketing platform in 2024, for instance, led to protests by local tourism operators who felt excluded from the planning process and concerned about the loss of income.

A similar approach has been adopted in Italy's Cinque Terre National Park, a coastal area famous for its scenic hiking trails and picturesque villages. To manage the growing number of hikers on one of its most popular footpaths, the park authority introduced entrance fee going from €7,50 to €15. (Balmer, 2024). This measure is meant both to limit the volume of visitors during high season and to generate revenue for trail maintenance and conservation work. Like in Peru, the implementation of such fees has received mixed reactions: while some welcome the improved management, others have raised concerns about accessibility and local economic impacts.

Overall, visitor caps and timed entry systems are becoming essential tools for balancing preservation with access. They allow site managers to regulate the flow of tourists in real time, avoid overcrowding during critical periods, and allocate resources more effectively (Larson & Poudyal, 2012). However, the success of these measures often depends on how they are communicated and implemented, as well as the degree to which local communities are involved in the process.

2.2.2 Tourist Taxes and Fees

Fiscal instruments have become a central strategy for managing overtourism, particularly in popular European destinations. One of the most common approaches has been the introduction or increase of tourism taxes, especially between 2019 and 2025. These taxes are generally applied to overnight stays or short-term visits and serve a dual purpose: they generate revenue that can be reinvested in infrastructure and services, and they discourage forms of tourism considered unsustainable or disruptive to local communities (Peeters, 2018).

In Barcelona, the nightly tourist tax was raised in April 2024 from €3.25 to €4.00, and in 2025, depending on the type of accommodation, it can reach up to €11 per night. City officials stated that the extra revenue, expected to grow from €95 to €115 million annually, would fund cleaning services, public transport, and urban maintenance. The goal is to shift from mass tourism toward a more sustainable, higher-value model. Similarly, the Balearic Islands apply a

Sustainable Tourism Tax of €1 to €4 per night, with the income supporting environmental protection and infrastructure (Ann Hughes, 2024). Capri, facing overcrowding from day-trippers, raised its ferry entry fee to €5 during peak months to help manage visitor flows and generate funds for basic services (Balmer, 2024).

These taxes have shown limited impact on overall demand, but they do provide essential funding. Studies and surveys indicate that residents and tourists are more likely to support such charges when the revenue is transparently used for local benefit, such as heritage preservation or environmental projects (Group Nao, 2020). Venice also introduced a day-visitor access fee of €5 in 2024, collecting over €2.4 million in its first year (Giuffrida, 2025). This and other measures adopted in the city will be examined more closely in the next chapters.

2.2.3 Cruise Ship Limits

Restrictions on cruise ship traffic have become an important tool for managing overtourism, particularly in cities where large vessels release thousands of tourists into small, historic urban areas within a matter of hours. These sudden influxes often overwhelm local infrastructure, crowd public spaces, and strain the experience for both residents and visitors. To respond to this challenge, several destinations have adopted regulations that limit either the size of cruise ships or the number of daily arrivals (León Himelfarb, 2025). In Venice, for example, ships exceeding 25,000 gross tons are no longer permitted to pass through the Giudecca Canal. Instead, these larger vessels are rerouted to the industrial port of Marghera, outside the city's historic center (Ann Hughes, 2025). This shift encourages smaller-scale alternatives, such as visits via private yachts or the city's public waterbus system. Dubrovnik has also taken steps to manage cruise traffic by imposing a strict cap: no more than two cruise ships may dock in the city per day (Tesija, 2023). Amsterdam, facing similar pressures, has announced its intention to phase out large cruise ships altogether by the year 2035 (Hineman, 2025). Meanwhile, in Palma de Mallorca, authorities have opted for a balanced approach, allowing a maximum of three cruise ships per day, only one of which may carry more than 5,000 passengers (Rodolfo, 2021).

These measures aim to spread tourist arrivals over time and limit peak congestion. By reducing the number of cruise passengers entering all at once, cities are better able to preserve public spaces, protect cultural sites, and offer a higher quality experience to both visitors and residents (Peeters, 2018). However, these policies can come with economic trade-offs. Local businesses may see a short-term decline in revenue as the volume of cruise-based spending drops. Nevertheless, many local governments argue that the long-term benefits such as reduced overcrowding, improved livability, and the protection of heritage sites, outweigh the immediate economic losses (Frost, 2023).

2.2.4 Short-Term Rental Regulations

The explosion of online rentals such as Airbnb, Booking, etc. has intensified housing shortages and problems in many cities. Several governments have cracked down on holiday lets by imposing licensing requirements or tight limits. Amsterdam is a leading example: it now requires all hosts to obtain permits and register each stay (Jacobs, 2025). The maximum annual nights for renting a whole home were cut from 60 to 30 in 2019, and a further reduction to 15 nights per year in the central districts (Centrum and De Pijp) is planned from April 2026. Any violation can lead to fines or license revocation. Barcelona has pursued similar steps: its mayor announced a phased ban on tourist apartment rentals by 2028, aiming to protect the housing stock. Other popular cities, including Paris and Lisbon, have introduced caps or strict licensing as well (Mas de Xaxàs, 2024). These policies can shrink the supply of tourist accommodation, raising rents and redirecting demand toward hotels or longer-stay rentals. The changes often meet strong industry and platform resistance: even Airbnb argues short-term rentals constitute only a small share of stays in central Amsterdam, but resident groups generally applaud the measures for easing crowding and tenant displacement. In many cases, policy-makers accompany rental limits with "tourist behavior" laws (noise bans, group-size restrictions, banned party tours, etc.) to address overtourism nuisances at their root (Jacobs, 2025).

2.2.5 Other Local Measures

Cities also use zoning and crowd management: Barcelona in recent years restricted guided tour routes, imposed noise limits and one-way systems in sensitive areas (Ann Hughes, 2024). Amsterdam has implemented similar strategies by banning large tourist buses from the city center and launching awareness campaigns to redirect visitors away from saturated zones such as the Red-Light District. The well-known "Stay Away" campaign, introduced in 2023, specifically targeted disruptive party tourism (Cipolla, 2023). World Heritage sites may implement special plans: UNESCO led public-use plans now exist for places like Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat, etc., prescribing visitor flows and community involvement. At the global level, policy frameworks such as the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the UNESCO World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme call for tourism to align with environmental limits and local equity. The European Parliament has also stressed the need to move beyond volume-based growth models, recommending indicators that reflect fair wages, resident satisfaction, and sustainability over raw arrival numbers (Peeters, 2018).

In conclusion, managing overtourism requires more than a list of taxes or restrictions. It calls for careful balance between economic interests, environmental limits, and the quality of life of residents. The examples discussed show that tools such as visitor caps, fees, and rental or cruise limits can help reduce pressure, but they do not solve the deeper causes of overtourism or the issue on the medium and long term. These policies mostly are reactive in fact, they manage the visible effects of overcrowding but do not question the constant push for growth that creates the problem in the first place (Peeters et al., 2018). Their real effectiveness often depends on how they are designed and, above all, on how fairly and transparently they are implemented. Experience from cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam, shows that public trust is essential. If residents, who are exposed in first person, feel excluded or believe that tourism policies mainly serve commercial interests, even well-intentioned measures can fail. On the other hand, when people see that the rules are fair and that revenues are reinvested locally, acceptance and cooperation increase. This highlights that managing tourism is not only about limiting numbers but also about deciding what kind of tourism a city wants to promote and what values should guide it.

In the long run, destinations will need to move from simply controlling overcrowding to rethinking how tourism fits within their social and environmental capacities. Sustainable tourism cannot mean "more growth with fewer problems", but a different model of development that prioritizes balance, fairness, and respect for the places and people involved.

2.3 Policy Responses in Practice: A Cross-Destination Overview

Barcelona

Barcelona has become a key example of a city struggling with and responding to overtourism. With over 32 million annual visitors in a city of 1.6 million residents, tourism has brought both major economic benefits and serious social costs. The sector contributes around €12.75 billion per year and supports approximately 150,000 jobs, but also generates an estimated €50 million in additional public expenses related to security, cleaning, and transport (Mas de Xaxàs, 2024; Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2020).

In recent years, the city has begun shifting its tourism model toward sustainability and resident well-being. A central measure has been the steady increase in the tourist tax. In 2024, the nightly surcharge was raised to €4.00, and to €11 in 2025, with further hikes planned. This revenue is directed toward improving mobility, restoring public spaces, and supporting housing access (Ann Hughes, 2024). Barcelona has also tightened control over tourist accommodation. New hotel developments have been banned in saturated districts since 2017, and the city plans to eliminate all short-term tourist apartment licenses by 2028. Officials argue that platforms like Airbnb have worsened housing shortages and driven up rent, especially in central neighborhoods (García-López et al., 2021; elPeriódico, 2025). Additional policies include limits on cruise ship arrivals, restrictions on large guided tours, and crowd management in iconic sites such as Park Güell (Congostrina, 2024). The city's tourism plan now prioritizes longer-stay, higher-spending visitors over mass tourism. Local authorities have openly stated that Barcelona no longer seeks to grow tourism at all costs, but instead aims to ensure it aligns with local needs and urban balance (Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2020).

Still, public tension remains. Grassroots groups have protested mega-events and the commercialization of public spaces, demanding stronger protections for residents. Mayor Collboni has defended higher tourist taxes and stricter rules as necessary to protect livability and ensure that tourism revenues benefit the wider community (Ann Hughes, 2024).

Amsterdam

Amsterdam has become one of Europe's frontrunners in confronting the pressures of overtourism through targeted and enforceable policy measures. With over 20 million visitors annually in a city of fewer than one million residents, the local government has shifted from promotion to regulation, aiming to safeguard urban livability while maintaining the city's cultural and economic vitality (McNamee, 2025). A core policy concerns short-term rentals. Since 2019, Amsterdam has capped holiday rentals to a maximum of 30 nights per year for entire homes. In 2025, the city council proposed cutting this limit to just 15 nights annually in the most affected districts, such as Centrum and De Pijp (Jacobs, 2025). Amsterdam has also moved to reduce disruptive tourism behavior, especially in the central Red Light District. In 2023, it launched the "Stay Away" campaign, targeting rowdy party tourists through geotargeted ads that discourage stag parties and antisocial behavior (Holligan, 2023).

Additionally, the city plans to ban large sea cruise ships by 2035, citing pollution, crowding, and quality-of-life concerns. The terminal near the central station will be relocated, with future efforts focusing on smaller, low-impact river cruises (Hineman, 2025).

Dubrovnik

Dubrovnik, the historic coastal city in Croatia, is also considered one of the most emblematic examples of the pressures caused by overtourism, particularly due to the arrival of large cruise ships. By 2018, the sheer volume of cruise passengers was placing enormous strain on the city's UNESCO-listed Old Town. In response, local authorities introduced a policy limiting the number of cruise ships allowed to dock each day to just two, with a combined maximum of 8,000 passengers (Ann Hughes, 2025). To further reduce congestion, the schedule of arrivals was carefully staggered, ensuring that the two ships never docked at the same time, but rather at least eight hours apart. These measures significantly reduced the overwhelming crowds in the city's narrow streets and historic squares, improving the overall experience for both tourists and residents. However, local leaders have remained firm in their stance, resisting pressure to ease these restrictions for short-term economic gain (Müncheberg, 2024). Alongside the cruise limits, the city has also explored additional strategies, such as restricting the entry of large tourist buses into the old quarter and introducing a moderate tourist tax. In the following years, Dubrovnik's cruise policy evolved further, with the municipality considering seasonal caps on the total number of cruise passenger disembarkations (Tesija, 2023). In some cases, there were even discussions about discouraging or limiting visitors who only come ashore for a few hours without contributing significantly to the local economy.

The experience of Dubrovnik demonstrates how relatively simple regulations can have a meaningful impact on managing tourism in small, high-pressure destinations. It also highlights the importance of shifting the focus from mass arrivals to more balanced tourism, which encourages overnight stays, distributes economic benefits more evenly, and reduces pressure on key heritage zones (Tara, 2024).

Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu, one of Peru's most iconic landmarks and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has long been regarded as a model for regulated tourism in fragile cultural landscapes (UNESCO, 2021). To manage the growing number of visitors and protect the site's cultural and ecological integrity, the Peruvian government introduced several control measures starting in 2019. These included mandatory time-slot tickets, fixed one-way walking circuits, and the requirement that many tourists be accompanied by licensed guides (Garay, 2024). These rules were designed to distribute visitor flows throughout the day, reduce congestion on the narrow stone paths, and prevent degradation of the ancient ruins.

According to UNESCO documentation, by 2020 the official daily entry limit had been set at around 2,200 visitors to safeguard the site's Outstanding Universal Value. However, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and in an effort to revive the tourism sector, the Peruvian government raised the daily cap in early 2024 to 4,500, an increase from the previous operational threshold of more than 2000 (Elliott, 2024). Revenue from ticket sales plays a crucial role in funding site maintenance, infrastructure upgrades, and broader conservation programs. At the same time, these systems have not been without controversy. The 2024 rollout of a centralized electronic ticketing platform led to protests from tourism workers and local stakeholders who felt excluded from the planning process (Edenedo, 2023). The case of Machu

Picchu shows that while strong visitor management policies are essential to protect heritage sites, their success also depends on transparent governance and community involvement.

Capri

Another example of city that has become a symbol of the challenges faced by small destinations under the weight of mass tourism is the island of Capri. During the summer of 2023, the island saw an average of 16,000 tourist arrivals per day which is well above its permanent population of approximately 6,800 (Balmer, 2024). The vast majority of visitors arrive on ferries from Naples or Sorrento, often staying for just a few hours, which creates intense pressure on local infrastructure and services. In an attempt to reduce the burden during peak periods, the local administration decided to double the ferry landing fee in 2024, raising it from €2.50 to €5 for day-trippers. The hope was to encourage tourists to visit during less crowded seasons or to stay longer and contribute more substantially to the local economy (Capri Press, 2024). However, many experts and residents remain skeptical that such a modest increase will deter the influx, particularly given the influence of social media in popularizing Capri as a must-see destination. Beyond overcrowding, the island is also grappling with the consequences of unregulated short-term rentals. The number of Airbnb listings has surged from just over 100 in 2016 to more than 500 by 2024, placing additional strain on housing availability for residents (Cozzolino, 2024). Local officials acknowledge that the rental market has become disorganized and largely unmonitored, complicating efforts to manage tourism sustainably. While the mayor has voiced support for promoting winter tourism as a way to redistribute visitor numbers more evenly, many locals argue that the island's challenges stem from broader national issues, including housing policy and unchecked tourism promotion, which cannot be solved by entry fees alone (Balmer, 2024).

Beyond these specific examples, many other destinations have adopted comparable strategies to manage the pressures of overtourism. On the Greek islands of Santorini and Mykonos, authorities have introduced a cruise disembarkation fee of up to 20 euros per visitor, aiming to reduce congestion and support local infrastructure during peak seasons (Reuters, 2024; Michael Cappetta, 2022). Spain's Balearic Islands have taken a more systemic approach by implementing a regional Sustainable Tourism Tax, which ranges from one to four euros per night and funds a dedicated development and conservation program. Revenues are directed toward projects such as environmental restoration, heritage preservation, and social housing (Flach, 2025).

At the national level, Italian lawmakers are actively debating new fiscal measures affecting tourism. A high-profile example is the 2026 draft budget proposal, which aims to overhaul the tax regime for short-term rentals. Under current rules, individual landlords can benefit from a reduced 21% flat tax (*cedolare secca*) on income from one property, while any additional short-term rentals are taxed at 26%. The proposed reform would abolish this two-tier system and apply a uniform 26% tax to all short-term rental income, regardless of the number of properties owned. The only exception would be for landlords who rent a single property without using intermediaries or online platforms, in which case the 21% rate would still apply, though this scenario is rare in practice (Giacalone, 2025). The proposal, which has sparked internal criticism within the governing coalition, would significantly affect private hosts as well as platforms such as Airbnb and Booking.com. In parallel, national tourism authorities have expressed interest in adopting broader visitor levies to manage overcrowding in high-pressure destinations, although concrete national legislation on tourist taxes is still under discussion (Armellini & Fonte, 2025).

Meanwhile, the European Union has encouraged member states to strengthen local data collection on tourism flows. Eurostat has partnered with major booking platforms to provide detailed, anonymized data on regional overnight stays, offering policymakers better tools to anticipate and respond to tourism pressures (European Commission, 2024). Outside of Europe, countries such as Bhutan and New Zealand have adopted more comprehensive fiscal measures. Bhutan charges international tourists a high daily fee to preserve cultural heritage and limit volume, while New Zealand recently raised its International Visitor Levy to fund conservation and infrastructure projects in high-impact areas (Srivastava, 2023; Ministry of Business, 2024).

Overall, the different cases reviewed, from Barcelona and Amsterdam to Dubrovnik, Machu Picchu, and Capri, show that cities and heritage sites are gradually shifting from promoting growth to trying to control it making it sustainable. This marks a radical change in how tourism is understood: no longer as an unlimited engine of economic expansion, but as an activity that must respect social and environmental limits (Peeters, 2018). Yet, many of these measures remain reactive, designed to contain problems that have already emerged rather than to prevent them. Policies such as higher tourist taxes, entry limits, and rental restrictions can reduce pressure, but they do not always change the deeper logic of continuous expansion that drives overtourism.

What truly distinguishes successful destinations is not only the type of measure adopted but how it is governed. Where decisions are transparent, revenues are reinvested locally, and communities are involved, results tend to be more positive and lasting. Conversely, where tourism management is top-down or profit-driven, local resistance often grows, as seen in cities like Barcelona or Venice. In this sense, the main challenge is political rather than technical:

balancing the interests of residents, visitors, and the tourism industry within a shared framework of accountability and fairness (Mas de Xaxàs, 2024).

From a broader perspective, a common trend can be observed: many destinations are shifting away from a "mass tourism" mindset toward a "sustainable tourism" model. This new approach focuses less on the number of arrivals and more on the quality of experiences, cultural respect, and fair economic returns for local communities (Mas de Xaxàs, 2024). Achieving this transformation, however, requires consistent political will and long-term planning. Strong data systems, community participation, and transparent governance remain essential to ensure sustainability to become more than a slogan. As global travelling continues to grow, the challenge is not only to manage overtourism more efficiently, but to redefine tourism itself, as a tool for regeneration and shared prosperity rather than a race for endless expansion.

Chapter 3 – The Case of Venice: A Fragile City Under Pressure

3.1 Venice as a Symbol of Global Overtourism

Venice is one of the most famous and iconic cities in the world, known everywhere for its cultural, artistic, and environmental richness (Drigo et al., 2024). Its uniqueness lies in its physical structure: the city is not built on solid land, but rather on 118 small islands in a shallow lagoon along the Adriatic coast (Italia.it, 2022). These islands are connected by over 400 bridges and interwoven with about 160 canals, forming a dense, navigable network that replaces streets with waterways (Treccani, 2024). This unusual urban fabric is the product of centuries of adaptation to the lagoon's unstable terrain. As early as the 5th century AD, people escaping invasions settled in the marshes and built the city by driving thousands of wooden poles into the seabed to make it stable enough for construction (Cosgrove & Foot, 2025).

This hybrid condition between land and water makes Venice ecologically fragile. Scientific research shows that both the city and its lagoon are highly vulnerable to environmental stress and sea-level rise (Antonioli et al., 2021). The lagoon itself represents a semi-natural habitat shaped by human activity over time, including the construction of fishing villages, religious complexes, and artisan centers like Murano and Burano. These elements contribute to Venice's recognition not only as a cultural marvel but also as a dynamic socio-natural system (Cavallo et al., 2021). Its unique morphology has influenced the development of civic, commercial, and artistic life for over a millennium. Between the 12th and 15th centuries, Venice grew into a powerful maritime republic and a key commercial node between Europe and the East (Venezia, 2025). Today, traces of this history can still be seen in Venice's palaces, churches, and public spaces, all shaped by its role in trade, diplomacy, and culture. From the Gothic grandeur of the Doge's Palace to the Byzantine domes of St. Mark's Basilica and the engineering feats of the Rialto Bridge, Venice is considered an open-air museum. Even the smallest churches and squares house masterpieces by Titian, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Giorgione. This heritage, however, is not frozen in time: Venice continues to evolve under modern pressures. Increasingly, the symbolic image of the city is overshadowed by overtourism, with more than 25 million visitors annually and over 70% staying only a few hours (Boston Consulting Group, 2025).

Mass tourism has transformed the city's urban and social structure. The resident population has declined dramatically, down 48% since 1977, while the number of souvenir shops and tourist rentals has skyrocketed. The pressure on infrastructure is relentless: around 100,000 boats navigate the canals each day, and emissions from tourism-related transport are projected to rise by 25% by 2030. Waste collection systems, overloaded by disposable plastic use, operate continuously but struggle to contain the impact. At the same time, traditional crafts are disappearing and the housing market is increasingly dominated by short-term rentals (Venezia Today, 2025).

This degradation is not only physical or demographic but also psychological. According to studies based on mobile phone data, the city's daily population regularly exceeds 175,000 people, far more than the 50,000 residents. Every weekend, up to 96,000 tourists may enter the historic center, contributing to what researchers describe as a centrifugal effect: for every 1,000 tourists, 140 residents leave temporarily or permanently (Mastrolonardo, 2024). Venice, once a vibrant city with a balance between local life and tourism, has increasingly become a place of symbolic consumption. The qualities that make Venice exceptional are now under pressure from the tourism they attract, putting its fragile balance in danger.

3.2 Local Responses and the Role of UNESCO

In 1987, Venice and its entire lagoon were officially added to the UNESCO World Heritage list, making it the fourth Italian city, after Brescia, Rome and Florence, to receive this prestigious recognition (UNESCO, 2025). What makes this inscription particularly special is that it includes not only the city itself, but the entire surrounding lagoon ecosystem, which extends over more than 70,000 hectares.

UNESCO's recognition is not only a celebration of the past, but also an appeal to protect the future of the city. Venice is facing serious threats: the increase in mass tourism, the loss of local population and, the increasing frequency of high tides and floods risk damaging the very qualities that make Venice so special. These pressures risk undermining the attributes that justify the city's World Heritage status. In response, Venice has developed a formal Management Plan which focuses on sustainable tourism, the preservation of traditional practices and, a careful balance between conservation and modern needs. (Xu et al., 2021). The Venice Management Plan, most recently revised in 2019, identifies mass tourism as a "macro-emergency" and proposes a wide array of policy responses: monitoring systems, entry regulations, housing protections, and limits on commercial conversions. The plan is integrated with broader city-level initiatives like the Venice Sustainability Pact and coordinated with national strategies. In particular, the city implemented of the MoSE barrier system against flooding, the re-routing of cruise ships, and the recentenlty introduced of a tourist access fee. Many of these measures have been directly prompted by repeated UNESCO warnings, particularly the 2021 recommendation that Venice could be added to the List of World Heritage in Danger if urgent actions were not taken (Lavenir et al., 2025).

Notably, this pressure catalyzed a national decision banning cruise ships over 25,000 gross tons from entering the Giudecca Canal and San Marco basin, both heritage areas under threat. These vessels, while representing a small share of maritime traffic, were perceived as emblems of unsustainable tourism with minimal economic returns (Bollettino Avvisatore Marittimo, 2024). Ships were rerouted to temporary ports like Chioggia and Monfalcone, reinforcing a broader policy shift toward preservation over volume. This measure was reported in the Bollettino Avvisatore Marittimo, the official bulletin of the Italian maritime authority. As an authoritative government publication, the Bollettino serves as a key source for legal, logistical, and operational updates regarding maritime navigation and port infrastructure, making it a reliable reference for maritime policy enforcement.

Another key initiative is the introduction of a tourist Access Fee in 2024, aimed at managing the high influx of day-trippers while generating funds for heritage conservation. Scholars have argued that such mechanisms are not only economically justified but also ethically grounded as a means to protect shared global public goods (Xu et al., 2021; Žuvela et al., 2023). It builds on the idea that heritage sites belong to everyone and should be protected through shared efforts and contributions across countries.

Recent academic literature confirms that UNESCO status increasingly acts as a governance tool that helps cities adopt more robust sustainability frameworks (Van der Zee et al., 2024). In Amsterdam, for instance, the designation of its historic canal ring as a World Heritage Site led to the establishment of strict buffer zones and policies that regulate commercial development (Brinkhuijsen & Pourbahador, 2023). Bordeaux, similarly, has imposed strict regulations on short-term rentals and converted UNESCO requirements into enforceable urban rules (Izogo et al., 2020). These comparative cases demonstrate that World Heritage status, when paired with active governance, can empower cities to resist extractive tourism and restore urban balance. However, implementation challenges persist. UNESCO has repeatedly called for a dedicated management authority for Venice, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and broader local engagement. As Baldin et al. (2024) warn, the transformation from symbolic to effective regulation remains incomplete without clear institutional leadership (Baldin et al., 2024).

In this context, the measures introduced in Venice, such as the cruise ship rerouting, housing regulations, and the MOSE flood barrier system, reflect a broader governance shift aimed at reconciling tourism with long-term urban sustainability. UNESCO's involvement has evolved into an active driver of change, pushing the city to adopt stronger and more coordinated responses. In the next chapter, we will focus on one of the most recent and emblematic tools introduced within this framework: the Access Fee. This measure represents a new phase in the city's efforts to meet UNESCO's sustainability standards and address the pressures of mass tourism more decisively.

3.3 Demographic Decline and Resident Displacement in Venice

The progressive transformation of residential areas into tourist areas is a process called "touristification" in the literature (Baldin et al., 2024). The term *touristification* began to appear in academic literature in the 1980s and indicates the process by which a place progressively adapts to the needs and interests of tourism, often at the expense of the local community. This entails, for example, the replacement of services intended for residents by commercial activities aimed at tourists, the increase in real estate prices and the erosion of the cultural identity of the place. Originally, the term was used in a neutral way to describe how an area becomes a tourist destination, highlighting both positive effects (such as economic development) and negative effects (such as pollution or overcrowding). However, in recent years the meaning has evolved, assuming a predominantly negative connotation. Today *touristification* is often used to describe phenomena in which tourism ends up "taking over" the territory (García Hernández & De la Calle-Vaquero, 2023).

One of the main factors behind the continuous departure of residents from Venice's historic center is the growing pressure on the local housing market. In recent years, a large part of the residential supply has been converted into tourist accommodation, especially through online platforms such as Airbnb. This process has made it much harder for residents to find affordable long-term housing and has encouraged property owners to rent to visitors instead, as short stays are far more profitable (Franco & Santos, 2021; Wachsmuth & Weisler, 2018). Studies in several European cities show that the expansion of short-term rentals usually reduces the number of homes available for permanent residents and contributes to higher rents (Horn & Merante, 2017; Duso et al., 2024).

In Venice, the same trend is clearly visible. According to recent data, rents increased by 16% between December 2023 and December 2024, reaching an average of €21 per m^2, the third-highest level in Italy after Milan and Florence (Baldin et al., 2024). The Idealista report for June 2025 confirms this rise: in the area of Venice and Giudecca the average price reached €21.3 per m^2 (+6.3% in one year), while districts such as San Marco and Cannaregio recorded even stronger growth (Idealista, 2025). Idealista is one of the largest and most recognized real-estate platforms in Southern Europe, active in Italy, Spain, and Portugal. Its housing market data are frequently used by public institutions, financial newspapers and, by international analysts as a reliable indicator of residential price trends (Idealista, 2020). Because listings and transactions are updated daily and verified by local agencies, Idealista provides one of the most accurate pictures of short-term rent fluctuations in Italian cities, including Venice.

These figures show that the housing problem is not temporary but structural. The transformation of ordinary apartments into tourist rentals has reduced long-term supply and increased competition for the remaining homes, pushing many residents to move to the mainland. This situation also changes the social character of Venice. The growing dominance of the tourist economy creates areas where local shops and services disappear, replaced by short-term rentals and souvenir stores. Such dynamics lead to the loss of social diversity and weaken community life (Peeters, 2018; Baldin et al., 2024). In this sense, the rise of Airbnb and similar platforms is not only an economic issue but a challenge to the liveability of the historic center. If the city wants to maintain a stable resident population, stronger regulation of short-term rentals and housing protections are urgently needed.

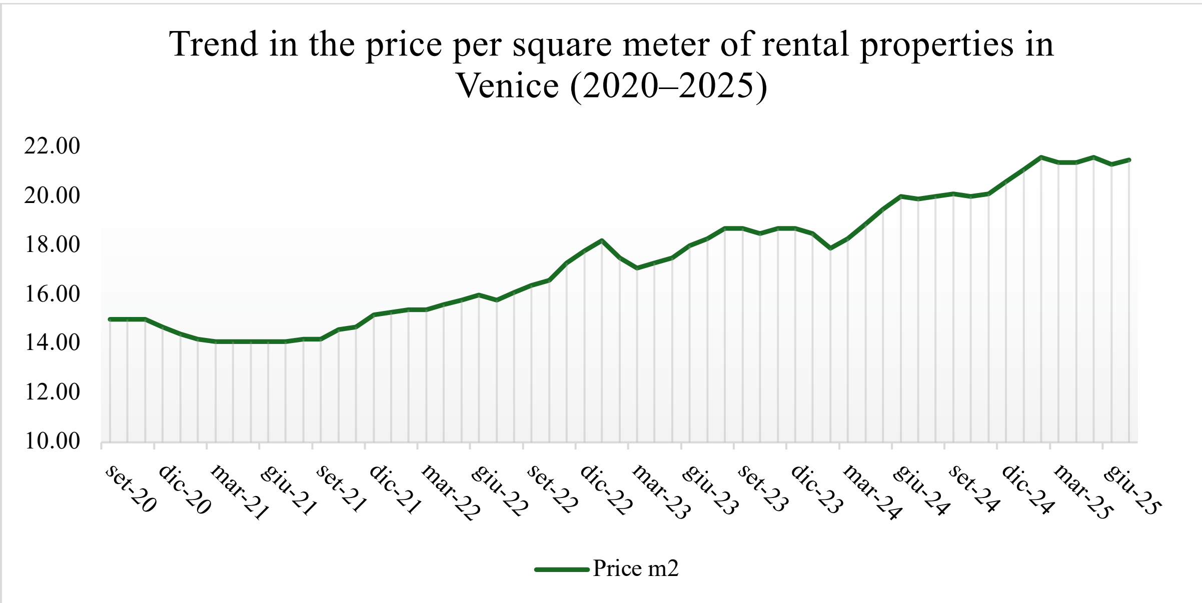


Figure 2: Trend in the price per meter of rental properties in Venice (2020 - 2025) (Source: Idealista, 2025)

To this criticality it is added also the increase of the cost of the properties for sale, that represents an ulterior obstacle for those who intend to settle in the city. According to recent data, updated in June 2025, the average price required for the purchase of a house in the area of Venice and Giudecca reached 5,002 €/m 2, with an increase of +4.0% year-on-year. Although in past years the sales values have suffered a slight decline, the most recent trend points to a steady recovery (Idealista, 2025).

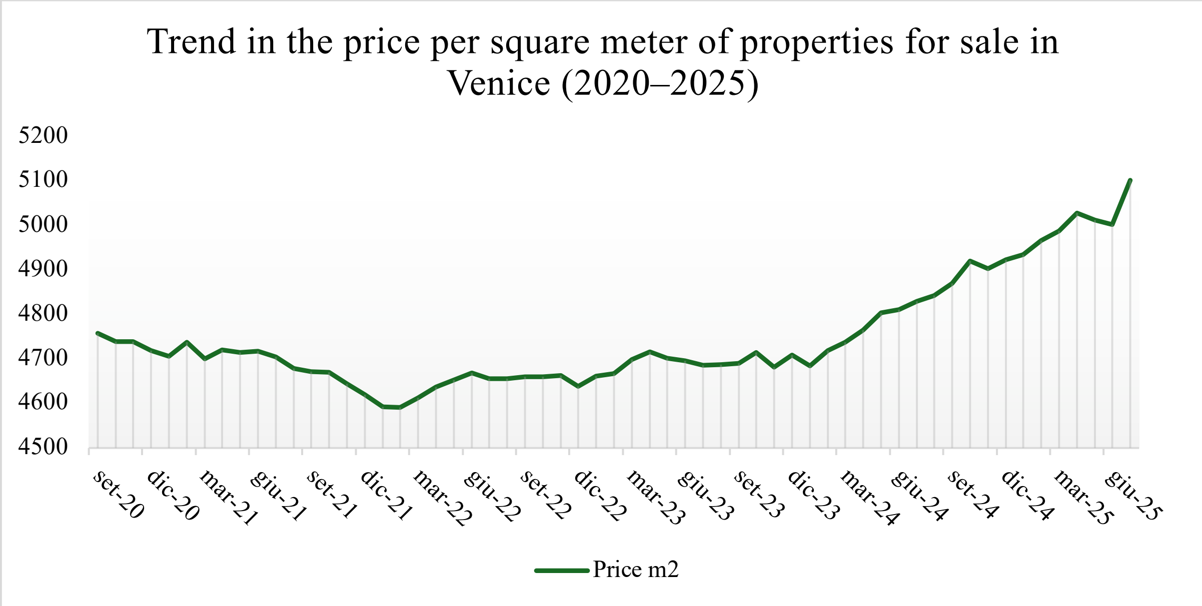


Figure 3 - Trend in the price per meter of properties for sale in Venice (2020 - 2025) (Source: Idealista, 2025)

With average wages lower than the regional average, many residents choose to relocate to more accessible areas, such as Mestre or the Venetian mainland, where the Nomisma Observatory has already detected an increase in demand for rent. The Nomisma Observatory, established in Bologna in 1981, is one of Italy's leading economic research centers and regularly publishes data and forecasts on national real estate and housing trends. Its reports are widely used by banks, policymakers, and real-estate professionals as a reliable indicator of market dynamics (Nomisma, 2025). The combined increase in tourist rentals and sales values, together with the lack of effective policies for regulating the housing market, is contributing significantly to the phenomenon of the de-residenzializzazione of the historic center (Venezia Today, 2025). Another reason that pushes residents to leave the historic center of Venice is related to psychological and social inconveniences caused by the constant presence of large tourist flows. The daily influx of thousands of visitors makes life more and more difficult for the inhabitants, worsening the quality of their urban experience. Streets and public spaces are often crowded, some common areas are made inaccessible, and many local services disappear, leaving room for activities designed only for tourists. All this causes a strong sense of exclusion among residents (Baldin et al., 2024).

Similar dynamics have been observed in other historic European cities. In Barcelona's Gothic Quarter, long-term residents have been pushed out due to the rapid spread of short-term tourist rentals and the transformation of essential services into souvenir shops and fast-food chains. This has led to what some scholars define as a "collective displacement," where people leave not only because of rising rents, but because they no longer recognize their neighborhoods (Gant, 2016). In Amsterdam, residents of the central Jordaan district have expressed a growing sense of alienation as public spaces are increasingly occupied by visitors, and the housing stock is converted into vacation rentals (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017). In Lisbon, historic districts such as Alfama and Bairro Alto have seen a sharp decline in residential population as Airbnb listings multiplied and everyday life was replaced by short-term consumption (Sequera & Nofre, 2020). These cases suggest that Venice's trajectory is part of a wider pattern in Europe's tourist cities. But what makes the situation particularly critical is the fragility of Venice's infrastructure and social structure. Unlike larger metropolises, Venice has limited space, high environmental vulnerability, and a smaller resident base, making its social balance even more fragile. Without stronger urban protections and clearer limits on the expansion of tourism, Venice, like other cities, risks turning into a tourist set: preserved for appearances, but no longer functioning as a genuine urban community.

As a demonstration of this growing discomfort, in recent years have also been born protest movements such as "No Grandi Navi", which represent the voice of those who do not recognize themselves in a city increasingly oriented to tourism. If these tensions are not addressed with appropriate policies, they risk further damaging the social cohesion and sustainability of the future of Venice (Baldin et al., 2024).

An additional reason that contributes to the depopulation of Venice is linked to the progressive erosion of the cultural and social link between residents and the city. In recent years, many Venetian traditions have been progressively transformed into tourist products, reducing the active participation of the local population. An emblematic example of this phenomenon is the Venice Carnival. The first document attesting to its holding dates back to 1094, while in 1296 the Senate of the Republic officially recognized it as a celebration day (Città di Venezia, 2019). In the past, this celebration had a strong symbolic and collective value for citizens, but today the Carnival has become a commercial event, organized mainly to attract tourists, with shows and programs designed more for the outside public than for the Venetian community.

In 2023, the Carnival attracted about 5 million visitors, of which only some actually stayed in the city. This trend was also confirmed in 2024, with data showing a strong impact on the tourist real estate market during the event period. According to the findings of The Data Appeal Company, in the period of Carnival 2024 the average rates of housing have increased by 40% compared to 2023, and up to +57% compared to the average of the first months of the year (from 9 January to 9 April). In particular, short-term rentals recorded the sharpest increase, with an average increase of +47% (Rocca, 2025).

Despite these economic results, many inhabitants' express dissatisfaction and detachment towards the event. Residents increasingly feel like passive spectators, rather than active participants in what was once their own celebration. The loss of participation, combined with the side effects linked to overtourism and rising cost of living, contributes to the feeling that the city no longer belongs to its residents, therefore reinforcing the desire to abandon it and look elsewhere for a more balanced and livable context.

3.3.1 Local Demographic Decline in Venice in Numbers

To fully understand the seriousness of Venice's depopulation, it is useful to look at how the resident population has changed over time through official data. According to the surveys of the Statistical Office of the Municipality of Venice, between 1871 and 2024 the population living in the historic center has decreased significantly. At the end of the nineteenth century, the city had about 130,000 inhabitants, while in 2024 the number fell to less than 50,000, recording an overall decrease of 62.74%.

It should be noted, however, that this decline has not followed a constant path. The resident population grew steadily until the early 1950s, peaking at 174,808 inhabitants in 1951. Since then, the city has entered an extended phase of demographic erosion, with an average annual loss of 1.18% (Ufficio Statistica Città di Venezia, 2025). These figures are not merely historical curiosities, they reveal a long-term structural imbalance between tourism and residential life. The real concern is not just how many people have left, but what this steady outflow signals: the gradual loss of Venice's capacity to function as a living city.

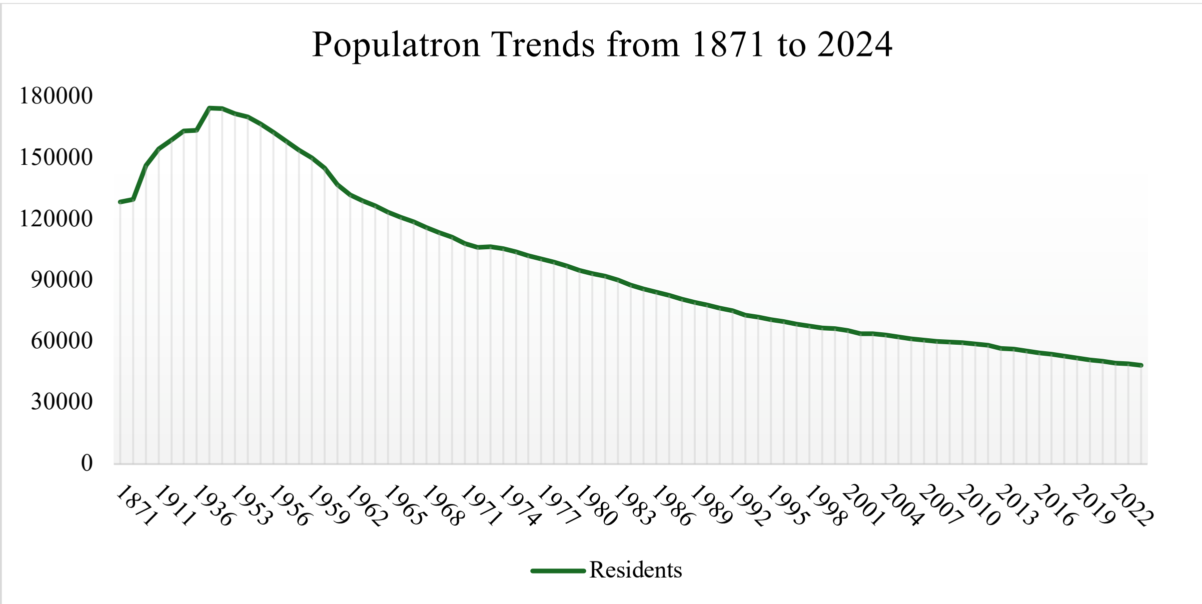


Figure 4 - Population Trends from 1871 to 2024 (Source: Comune di Venezia, 2025)

Academic research confirms that when historic centers lose their resident base, the consequences go beyond cultural identity: they affect urban resilience, economic diversity, and long-term sustainability (Russo & Scarnato, 2018; Colomb & Novy, 2017). Cities like Venice risk becoming "tourism bubbles," where the built heritage remains intact but everyday life slowly disappears. Researchers argue that this transformation produces not only physical crowding but also social alienation, leading to a form of "symbolic abandonment" by those who no longer feel they belong (Seraphin et al., 2018).

In this light, the demographic data should be read as a warning. Without decisive policies to restore housing affordability, protect local economies, and re-balance the tourism-resident equation, Venice may soon cross a threshold beyond which demographic recovery becomes nearly impossible. The result would be a city admired by millions but inhabited by few: a paradoxical outcome for a place recognized as a World Heritage Site precisely because of the interaction between its people, its environment, and its history.

3.4 Changing Tourist Behaviors: From Hotels to Short-Term Rentals (2005–2024)

Using official tourism statistics (2005–2024), it can be analyed how tourists' lodging choices in Venice's historic center have changed over time, comparing hotel and non-hotel accommodations. By focusing on arrivals and overnight stays in this area, we directly measure shifts in accommodation patterns that are tied to overtourism and the rise of short-term rentals. The analysis presented in this section is based on official statistics published by the Regional Statistical System of the Municipality of Venice, in cooperation with ISTAT and the Veneto Region's Statistics Office (Sistema Statistico Regionale, 2024). These are official sources that guarantee high standards of reliability and quality, offering detailed information on tourist flows, their territorial distribution and accommodation preferences. This subchapter focuses only on the historic center of Venice, which is the area most impacted by overtourism. The two indicators used in the analysis, arrivals (number of tourists spending at least one night) and overnight stays (total nights spent by tourists), allow us to assess both the volume and duration of tourism flows.

By comparing the distribution of these indicators between hotel and non-hotel accommodations over time, the goal is to understand whether and how visitor preferences have shifted. This approach makes it possible to link observed patterns to broader urban effects, such as the expansion of short-term rentals, the growing role of digital platforms like Airbnb, and their impact on housing availability, social cohesion, and local regulation.

The analysis of data on tourist arrivals in the historic center of the city during the period under examination highlights a constantly growing trend, with some significant variations due to exceptional events such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Total arrivals rose from around 1.9 million in 2005 to almost 3.9 million in 2024, while overnight stays increased from around 4.9 million to over 9.4 million over the same period.

The only major interruption came in 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic caused a sharp drop in tourism. Visitor numbers quickly recovered, surpassing pre-pandemic levels by 2023 – 2024.

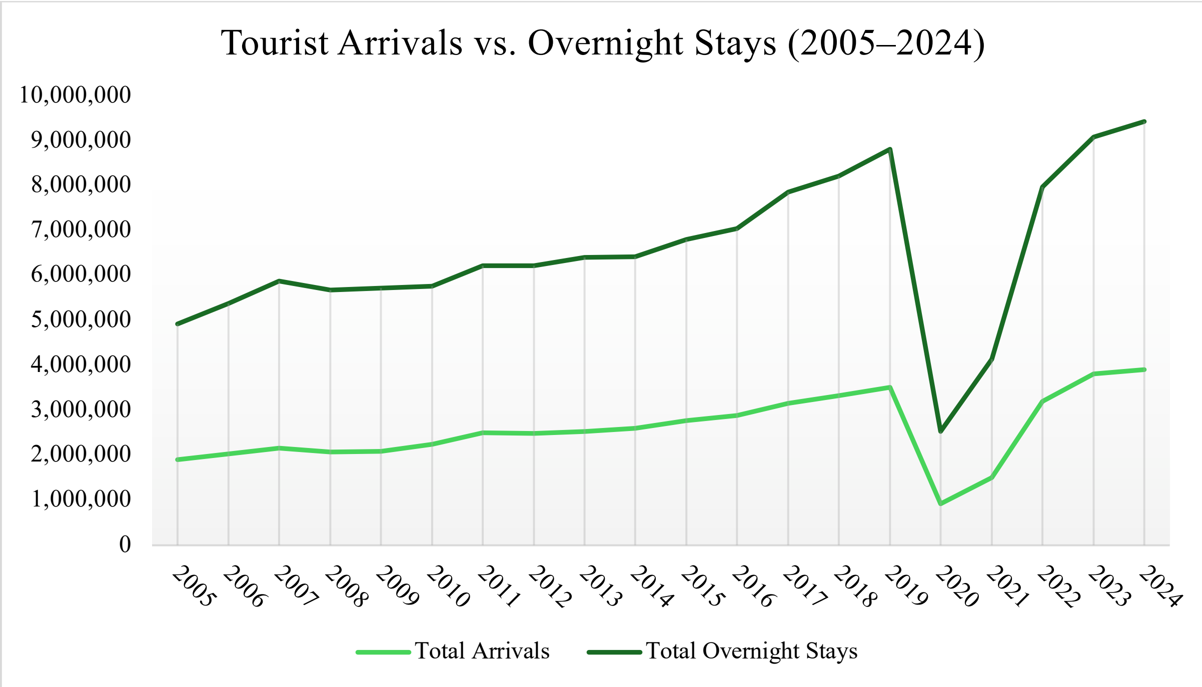


Figure 5 - Tourist Arrivals vs. Overnight Stays (2005 - 2024) (Source: Sistema Statistico Regionale, 2025)

Another noteworthy trend is the gradual decline in the average length of stay, which has dropped from 2.59 nights per tourist in 2005 to 2.41 in 2024. This slight but steady decline points to the rise of "hit-and-run" tourism, characterized by a growing number of visitors who remain in the city for increasingly shorter durations. From the perspective of overtourism, this shift is particularly significant: a higher volume of short stays intensifies the daily strain on the city's infrastructure and livability, without generating proportional economic or social returns.

Analysis of tourist arrivals in Venice's historic center

The analysis of tourist arrivals in Venice's historic center between 2005 and 2024 reveals a profound shift in visitor preferences. In 2005, 84% of arrivals stayed in hotels and only 16% in non-hotel options. By 2024, that share had changed dramatically: 45% of tourists chose non-hotel accommodations like private rentals, B&Bs, and guesthouses. This represents a substantial rebalancing, reflecting the growing appeal of more flexible, often affordable options, usually facilitated thanks to digital platforms such as Airbnb.

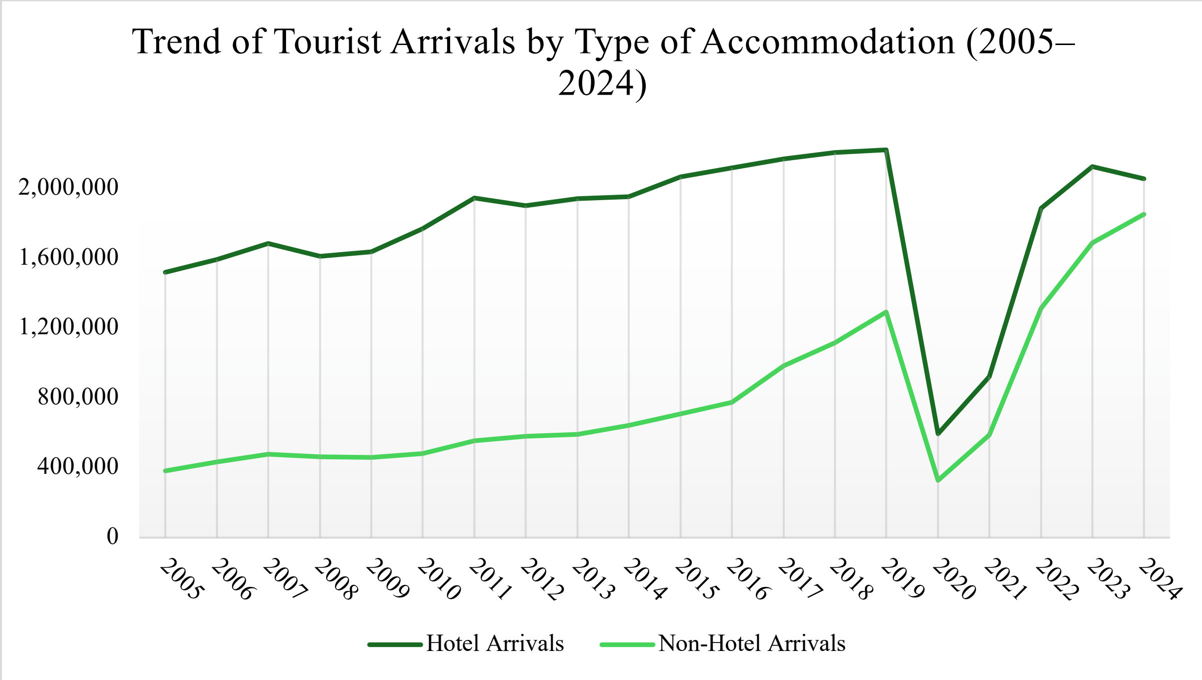


Figure 6 - Trend of Tourist Arribals by Type of Accomodation (Source: Sistema Statistico Regionale, 2025)

In absolute terms, non-hotel arrivals rose from around 381,000 to over 1.85 million, with private rentals leading the growth. Meanwhile, traditional hotels showed slower progress or decline. Lower-end hotels lost guests, one- and two-star properties dropped from over 300,000 arrivals to under 192,000, while five-star hotels doubled their figures over the same period. The hotel sector peaked in 2019 with 2.2 million arrivals but has since then seen a gradual drop, ending at just over 2 million in 2024. This suggests that while luxury hospitality remains strong, the overall balance in Venice's accommodation model is shifting toward more decentralized, often less regulated forms of tourism.

Analysis of tourist overnight stays in Venice's historic center

The trend in overnight stays mirrors the shift seen in arrivals. In 2005, hotels accounted for over 77% of stays, but by 2024 that share had dropped to 48%. For the first time, non-hotel accommodations overtook traditional hotels, reaching nearly 4.9 million overnight stays compared to 4.55 million in hotels.

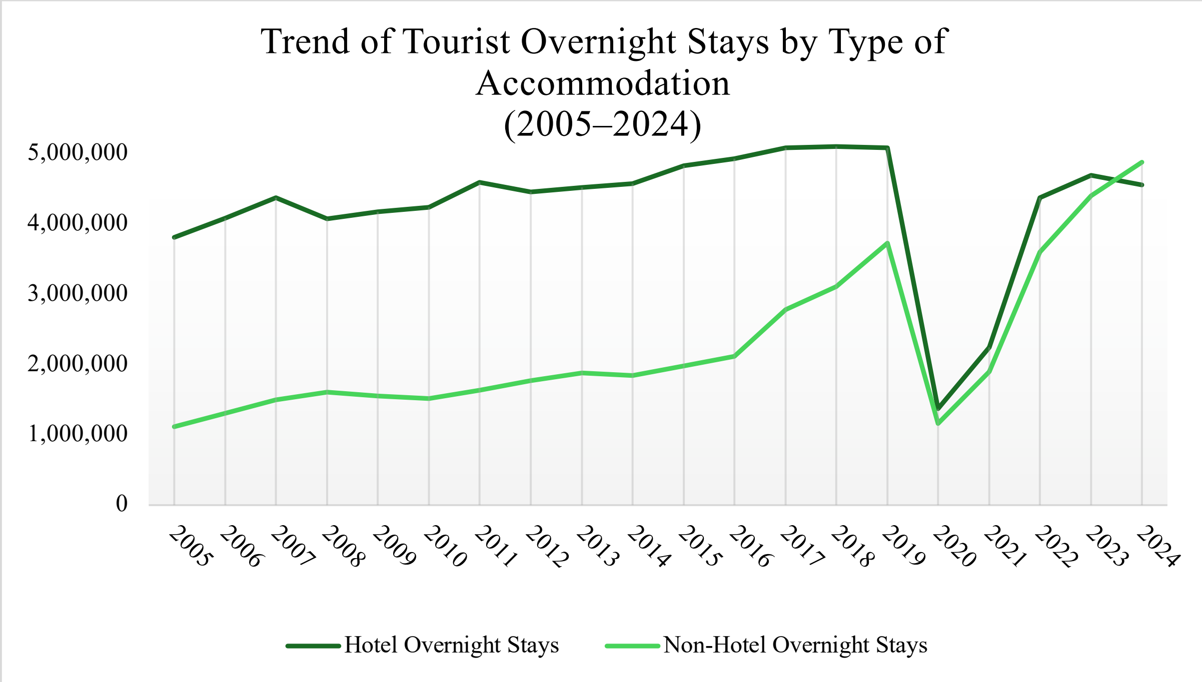


Figure 7 - Trend of Tourist Overnight Staysby Type of Accomodation (Source: Sistema Statistico Regionale, 2025)

Most of this growth came from private rentals, which rose from around 737,000 nights in 2005 to over 4.27 million in 2024. B&Bs also passed 120,000 nights annually, while other options like hostels and farmhouses continued to grow steadily. Hotels, on the other hand, peaked in 2018 with more than 5.1 million overnight stays. Since then, numbers have declined, confirming that the traditional hotel model is slowly losing its dominant role in the city's hospitality sector.

Taken together, the data on arrivals and overnight stays paint a clear picture of a city undergoing a deep transformation in its hospitality landscape.

The parallel evolution these two indicators confirms a structural change in the geography of Venice. The traditional hotel system, while remaining relevant, has gradually lost ground to the non-hotel segment, which today represents an essential, and often dominant, component of city's tourism ecosystem. This transformation is not merely numerical, but also spatial and social. Non-hotel housing, being widespread in the residential areas, generates greater pressure on neighborhoods, contributing to phenomena such as gentrification, rising rental prices and residential displacement. At the same time, the growing reliance on digital platforms makes it more difficult to regulate and monitor tourism flows.

To support the trends observed in Venice, studies conducted in other tourism-driven economies reveal comparable dynamics in the rise of short-term rental platforms. In Japan, for example, the number of foreign visitors reached a record 31.88 million in 2019, generating around $46.1 billion USD in tourist spending (Japan External Trade Organization, 2020). Within this growing sector, Airbnb played a central role, hosting around 7 million guests in

Japan that same year, supported by over 50,000 active listings (Airbnb, 2019). Initially encouraged by the government as part of Prime Minister Abe's structural reforms (Fors et al., 2021), Airbnb saw rapid growth between 2014 and 2015, expanding from 5,000 to 21,000 listings (Jacoby et al., 2020). However, regulation caught up in 2018 with the implementation of the Private Lodging Business Act, causing listings to drop dramatically from 62,000 to just 13,800 in June (Nikkei Asia, 2018). Despite fears of disruption, the study shows that Airbnb had no statistically significant negative impact on overall hotel occupancy rates in Japan, except for certain segments like ryokans and guesthouses, which showed only marginal effects (Nakamura et al., 2024). Interestingly, the research concludes that rather than replacing traditional hotels, Airbnb can complement them by addressing accommodation shortages and meeting diverse tourist demands, especially in anticipation of Japan's tourism goals of 30 million visitors annually by 2030 (Kim & Kim, 2021; Marukawa, 2019). These findings suggest that excessive regulation may hinder both innovation and tourism potential, and that coexistence, not competition, should guide future policy.

3.5 The Rise of Hit-and-Run Tourism: Shorter Stays and Lower Spending

While earlier we examined where tourists choose to stay, here we focus on how long they stay, how much they spend, and how they behave during their visit. By combining official statistics with insights from academic research, we explore the rise of short-stay, low-spend tourism, sometimes described as "hit-and-run", and how it affects the city's economy, residents, and cultural life.

Studies show that Venice has increasingly attracted low-cost and short-stay tourism, fueled by budget airlines, cruise ships, and day-trippers (Seraphin et al., 2018). Many of these visitors spend just a few hours in the city, focusing on the most iconic and symbolic locations while consuming low-cost goods and avoiding deeper engagement with local culture or businesses. This "hit-and-run" behavior leads to reduced per capita tourist spending and limits the economic benefits traditionally associated with longer, higher-quality stays (Vagena, 2021). Cruise passengers are a prime example of this trend, typically spending only a few hours in the city, adding to congestion while contributing minimally to the local economy. As a result, spending patterns have shifted towards quick services, like souvenir shops and global chains, at the expense of local artisans and restaurants. This evolution has made Venice's tourism model increasingly unsustainable, both economically and socially (Trancoso González, 2018).

Additional research further supports this transformation. Venice already in 1996, had one of the highest tourism intensities in Europe, with 89 tourists per resident, well above cities like Salzburg (36) (Van Der Borg et al., 1996). More recent analyses show that the spread of platforms like Airbnb has intensified this issue by increasing bed capacity without matching infrastructure development. These platforms attract more fragmented, lower-spending, and short-staying visitors, putting added stress on residential neighborhoods and distorting the tourism economy (Peeters, 2018).

This transformation becomes even more evident during major cultural events such as Carnival and the Venice Biennale, which attract large waves of visitors concentrated over weekends or short holiday windows. These events contribute to temporal overcrowding, with visitors often participating in what has been described as symbolic and experiential consumption: a form of tourism focused more on "being there" and capturing the moment than on deep cultural engagement or meaningful interaction with the local economy (Baldin et al., 2024). This behavioral change not only reduces per capita expenditure, but also alters the temporal and spatial distribution of tourist pressure throughout the city.

Baldin et al. also introduces the concept of temporary crowding-out, whereby residents actively leave the city during major tourist events due to discomfort or loss of access to public spaces (Baldin et al., 2024). A notable example is the Festa del Redentore, a traditionally local event that has gained international attention and is now subject to a reservation system for residents as well. While the system aims to regulate tourist flows, it also risks eroding the traditional and communal nature of such events.

Some high-profile events have begun to experiment with solutions such as extended durations, campaigns promoting slow tourism, aiming to reduce pressure and spread arrivals more evenly. Overall, this evolving tourism profile, characterized by short stays, minimal economic contribution and participation in mass events during peak hours, amplifies the challenges of overtourism and highlights the urgency of reorienting Venice's tourism model towards longer visits, more significant and economically beneficial.

Chapter 4 – Regulating Tourism in Venice: The Access Fee as a Policy Tool

Building on growing concerns about the unsustainable dynamics of tourism in Venice, particularly when not properly managed on daily basis, the access fee has emerged as one of the most ambitious regulatory responses adopted by the city. This chapter explores the measure in depth, tracing its evolution from initial political debate to formal implementation. More than just an administrative measure, the Access Fee reflects a broader shift in how tourism is understood, not only as an economic resource, but as a complex phenomenon that requires careful regulation, equity, and long-term planning. The chapter places the fee within a wider transition in policy, one that increasingly favors fiscal and regulatory instruments over traditional promotional or infrastructural approaches to tourism management.

4.1 From Proposal to Policy: The Political and Legal Origins

The introduction of the Venice access fee is the result of a long regulatory and political process, developed over the years in response to the growing pressures exerted by mass tourism on the lagoon city. The first institutional turning point came in 2019, when the City of Venice, on the initiative of Mayor Luigi Brugnaro and Tourism Councilor Simone Venturini, officially proposed the introduction of a fee for day visitors, especially so-called “hit and run” tourists. The legal framework was established by the 2019 Budget Law (art. 1, paragraph 1129), which expressly attributed to the Municipality the power to introduce an access contribution for the historic center and the smaller islands of the lagoon, with the possibility of extending it to all types of transport. Just few days later, with Resolution No. 11 of 26 February 2019, the City Council approved the first Regulation governing the implementation of the measure, which was then published on 28 February (Comune di Venezia, 2019). This initiative represented a turning point in the governance of tourism in Venice, marking the beginning of a more active regulation of day-trip flows, also through the strategic use of resources to cover the extraordinary costs linked to the urban management of a city as fragile as it is complex. As highlighted by the Journal of Tax Law (2024), the Venetian case stands out on both the national and international stage for at least three distinctive elements (Giorgi, 2024):

- The breadth of its scope, as it applies to the entire historic center of a major art city.
- The exceptional regulatory basis, designed specifically for Venice, which allows the contribution to be applied regardless of the means of transport used.

- The political and institutional context in which it was developed, shaped also by strong international pressure from UNESCO, which at the time was already questioning the status of Venice as a World Heritage Site.

As already mentioned, the adoption of the Access Contribution by the Municipality of Venice cannot be fully understood without considering the growing institutional and international pressures that, over more than a decade, made regulatory intervention on tourist flows increasingly unavoidable. Since 2014, UNESCO has repeatedly expressed concerns over the fragile balance between the city's outstanding universal value and the environmental, demographic, and tourism-related transformations threatening its integrity (UNESCO, 2014; ILGAZZETTINO.it, 2014). Already at the time, the organization stressed the need to contain the impact of mass tourism, building developments, and environmental degradation, urging the Italian authorities to develop a sustainable management plan (ILGAZZETTINO, 2014).

In 2016, during the session of the World Heritage Committee in Istanbul, UNESCO escalated its warnings by threatening, for the first time, to place Venice in the list of World Heritage in Danger if no concrete measures were taken by February 2017. The recommendations included limiting the large daily flows, regulating maritime traffic, and adopting effective tools to counter depopulation and urban decline (Fullin, 2016). In 2019, these concerns were renewed during the Committee's 43rd session in Baku, where it was confirmed that the actions taken up to remained inadequate. By this point, international solicitations had made regulatory action unavoidable, which resulted in the approval of the first Regulation on the Access Contribution later that same year (UNESCO, 2019). A decisive moment occurred in July 2023, when the UNESCO World Heritage Center formally recommended the inclusion of Venice on the List of World Heritage in Danger, highlighting the inadequacy of the policies adopted to deal with the threats related to climate change, depopulation and above all, mass tourism. Uncontrolled access to the city, the deterioration of the urban fabric, and the lack of effective coordination between local and national authorities were indicated as critical issues (OnuItalia, 2023). The reaction of the Municipality was swift: just days before the decisive UNESCO session scheduled for September 2023 in Riyadh, the City Council definitively approved the new Regulation on the Access Contribution, presenting it as an emblematic measure of response to international concerns. On 14 September 2023, partly thanks to the official recognition of the measure's entry into force, the Committee decided not to include Venice on the List of World Heritage in Danger, while underlining that further progress and ongoing monitoring would be necessary (Ufficio Stampa e Comunicazione MiC, 2023).

In addition to pressure from international bodies, it is important to remember the role of civic mobilization and media campaigns which, over time, have denounced the loss of urban livability, the increase in hit-and-run tourism, and the deterioration of the city's social fabric (Mantengoli, 2023). Associations of residents, scholars, and journalists have consistently raised the urgent action to restore a sustainable balance between tourism and quality of life. Within this framework, the Access Contribution emerges as a response, albeit a contested one, to the growing demand to reclaim the right to a liveable and sustainable city.

Despite the approval of the Municipal Regulation in 2019, the actual implementation of the Access Contribution followed a long and detailed process, characterized by numerous postponements, revisions and experimental phases. The delays can be attributed both to the operational complexity of the measure, which required the creation of a digital reservation and control system tailored to a uniquely insular city like Venice, and to extraordinary external circumstances, first and foremost the COVID-19 pandemic.

Between 2020 and 2023, the implementation of the measure was suspended indefinitely. Initially, the public health emergency made any form of active tourism management unfeasible. Even after restrictions were lifted, technical difficulties persisted: a functional digital booking platform was still missing, and no operational model had yet been defined that could effectively balance enforcement, mobility regulations, and protection of individual rights. During this period, the measure remained a political priority, but only on paper (Giuffrida, 2024). During the Carnival 2024 period, the municipal administration publicly relaunched its intentions to pilot the system through an experimental phase, scheduled for spring. The timing was particularly symbolic: the massive return of post-pandemic tourism once again brought out tensions between residents and visitors, further intensified by media pressure and the tangible risk of Venice being added to UNESCO's List of World Heritage Sites in Danger (Povoledo, 2024).

The pilot officially began on 25 April 2024, with 29 chargeable days spread between April and July. The €5 fee applied to day tourists over the age of 14 who were not residents in the Veneto region. This marked a historic precedent: for the first time, a major European city introduced a formal urban entry fee. The trial was designed to collect data, test the functionality of booking and payment systems, and observe the concrete impact on tourist flows (Giuffrida, 2024). The economic results of the pilot phase exceeded the expectations, with around €2 million collected in the first 17 days. However, in terms of managing tourist flows, the impact was limited. The main contributing factors included the high number of exemptions, only partial enforcement of checks, and the absence of caps on daily entries. Despite these limitations, public acceptance of the measure was unexpectedly positive, with many visitors proudly displaying the QR code. Protests by residents were limited and primarily focused on freedom of movement concerns (Fullin, 2024).

Building on the experience gained, the municipal administration announced a significant extension of the measure for 2025: 54 chargeable days, between April and July, with a base fee of €5 and a surcharge of €10 for reservations made fewer than four days in advance. The list of previous exemptions was confirmed and maintained. At the same time, the City launched a more stringent regulatory effort targeting of tourist accommodations, introducing new requirements and limits for short-term rentals, with the aim of addressing broader concerns related to sustainability of the tourism system (Mantengoli, 2024). On April 18, 2025, the second phase was launched in a more complex and closely monitored form. The digital infrastructure was enhanced, the numbers of chargeable days were doubled, and checks at the main access points were intensified. In this phase, the informational and cultural dimensions of the Access Contribution were also reinforced: the measure was conceived not solely as an economic deterrent, but as part of a broader strategy aimed at raising awareness of the value and fragility of Venice's heritage. The stated objective was to promote a form of "quality tourism" that is more conscious and respectful. Nevertheless, tensions with residents persisted, and public debate continued regarding the actual effectiveness of the instrument (Giuffrida, 2025).

4.2 A Regulatory Innovation: Objectives and Challenges of the Access Fee

Since its inception, the access fee has been presented as an innovative policy tool designed to tackle the challenges related to excessive daily tourism in Venice, with particular reference to the so-called "hit and run" visitors, who crowd the city without staying overnight or making a significant contribution to the local economy (Comune di Venezia, 2019). Its overall aim is to manage tourist flows in a more sustainable way, reducing the pressure on the urban environment and enhancing the quality of life of residents.

The stated objectives can be grouped into several key areas. First, the Municipality seeks to contain daily visitor flows during peak periods by introducing an economic disincentive which, although modest in amount, can contribute to discouraging high-intensity, short-stay tourism (Comune di Venezia, 2019; Povoledo, 2024). Secondly, the measure is intended to finance the city's extraordinary management costs, including street cleaning, the maintenance of banks, bridges and public buildings, waste collection and the reinforcement of control and security services (Comune di Venezia, 2019; visitvenezia.eu, 2019). A further objective is to promote more sustainable and responsible tourism, by encouraging visits on less crowded days and discouraging superficial, concentrated use of the city's most iconic sites (Povoledo, 2024; Giuffrida, 2024).

As already mentioned in the previous sections, the measure also responds to UNESCO's repeated warnings and recommendations, which have pointed to the risk of Venice being placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger if structural and effective flow management measures were not implemented. In this regard, the Access Contribution is part of a broader policy framework aimed at safeguarding the city's tangible and intangible heritage, ensuring that its employment remains compatible with the preservation of its integrity (Giuffrida, 2024; Povoledo, 2024). In addition to the sustainability and heritage protection dimension, the planned management of access enables the Municipality the improve service planning, drawing on the forecasting of daily flows and the use of digital monitoring tools (Povoledo, 2024). In this way, the fee is conceived not only as a means of financing, but also as a genuine governance instrument, capable of rebalancing the relationship between the city and its visitors.

As regards the use of revenues, the municipal administration has specified that the resources deriving from the Access Contribution will be entirely allocated to interventions concerning the maintenance and management of the city, with particular attention to the needs arising from its exceptional physical and environmental fragility (Comune di Venezia, 2019). These funds will directed to both ordinary and extraordinary maintenance, from the restoration of stone paving and bridges to the consolidation of embankments, as well as to support essential public services, including waste collection and disposal, extraordinary cleaning of streets and squares, and the strengthening of safety and control measures during periods of peak attendance (visitvenezia.eu, 2019).

In addition, the Municipality has indicated that, net of management costs, part of the revenue will be used for initiatives directly benefiting residents and local economic activities, starting with the maintenance of the reduced waste tax (TARI) rate. For 2025, at least €1.5 million of the proceeds have been allocated to lowering this tariff, providing tangible relief to households and businesses. A further portion of the revenue will also be allocated to the conservation of Venice's artistic and architectural heritage, supporting the restoration of monuments, churches and historic buildings, as well as the protection of the lagoon environment (visitvenezia.eu, 2019). In line with the overall philosophy of the measure, these revenues may also finance projects and initiatives aimed at promoting tourism sustainability, encouraging a more balanced and respectful model of the city use. The goal is to ensure that the contribution generates a positive and tangible impact, turning what might be perceived as a simple cost for visitors into a concrete tool for safeguarding and enhancing the city, to the benefit of both residents and future tourists (visitvenezia.eu, 2019).

4.3 Technical Design and Implementation (Pilot 2024 – Official 2025)

Following the experimental debut in the spring of 2024, the Access Contribution entered a second, broader and more structured phase in 2025. While the core principles of the measure, applying a daily fee to day visitors as an instrument to regulate access to Venice's historic center, remained unchanged, significant adjustments and several technical and operational aspects were revised. These changes concerned the duration of application, the fee structure, the reservation and control system, and the sanctions regime.

4.3.1 Scope of Application

In both years, the contribution was applied as an alternative to the tourist tax and was due from any person entering the historic center, with the exception of those falling within the statutory categories of exclusion or exemption.

- 2024: The pilot covered only the period between 25 April and 14 July, for a total of 29 non-consecutive days, in the 8:30–16:00 time slot. It did not apply to the minor islands of the lagoon (including Lido, Pellestrina, Murano, Burano, Torcello, Sant'Erasmo, Mazzorbo, Vignole, etc.) nor to those individuals merely transiting through Piazzale Roma, Tronchetto or Stazione Marittima without entering the historic center (Comune di Venezia, 2023).
- 2025: The application period was extended to 54 non-consecutive days, between 18 April and 27 July, distributed across weekends and peak periods. The exclusions for the minor islands were confirmed, and an additional exemption was introduced for the area facing the Gran Turismo boats near Riva degli Schiavoni (Venezia Unica, 2025).

4.3.2 Fee Structure

- 2024: A flat fee of 5€ per day applied to all visitors, without any reductions or surcharges, and without the introduction of daily capacity thresholds (Comune di Venezia, 2023).
- 2025: A two-tier pricing system was introduced to encourage early booking: 5 € for reservations made at least four days before the visit, 10 € for later bookings. The amount remains unique per person and per day, with no reductions (Comune di Venezia, 2025a).

4.3.3 Categories of exclusion and exemption

The structure of exclusions (no payment obligation and booking requirement) and exemptions (no payment but mandatory booking) remained broadly similar, although 2025 regulations presented a more consolidated list.

- Exclusions (both years): Residents in the Municipality of Venice; property owners and their households (in compliance with IMU); students and workers with stable workplace in the historic center, whether resident or commuting (Comune di Venezia, 2023).
- Exemptions (both years): overnight guests in accommodation within the municipality, temporary residents, Veneto residents, children under 14, people with certified disabilities and their carers, individuals with medical needs, visitors of hospital patients, participants in recognized sporting events, spouses and relatives of residents up to the third degree (Comune di Venezia, 2025a). It should be noted, however, that in 2024 Veneto residents and students were also required to obtain the QR code to validate their exemption, while in 2025 this obligation was removed.

4.3.4 Booking and Control System

- 2024: Visitors had to pre-book via dedicated online platform to obtain a QR code certifying either payment or exemption status. Controls were carried out at the main access points, though checks remained partial and enforcement limited (Comune di Venezia, 2023).
- 2025: The digital system, managed by Venis S.p.A., was enhanced into a multi-channel, multilingual platform (cda.ve.it), with cleaner instructions and categorization. The QR code system was confirmed, and monitoring at access points was strengthened to ensure compliance (Comune di Venezia, 2025a).

4.3.5 Sanctions and Visitor-Generated Revenues

- 2024: Administrative fines ranged from €50 to €300, plus €10 contribution, with the possibility of criminal prosecution for false declarations. During the 29 days of application, approximately 485,000 visitors were recorded, generation revenues of €2.4 million.
- 2025: The range of administrative fines was reduced to €25–150, plus €10 contribution, while retaining the possibility of criminal prosecution for false declarations. Over the 54 days of application, more than 720,000 visitors were recorded, producing revenues of €5.4 million, almost double the 2024 figure. In this period, around 2,500 fines were issued to individuals entering the city without a valid access ticket (Gazzetta Express, 2025).

4.4 Public Debate and Emerging Criticisms

Alongside its technical development, the Access Contribution also became the subject of intense public debate. From the earliest days of application, the measure drew contrasting reactions, highlighting differing perceptions of its aims, design, and potential impact.
From the very first days of the experimental phase, the Access Contribution sparked widespread public debate, drawing protests, media attention, and a clear polarization between supporters and opponents. While the municipal administration presented the measure as a pioneering and concrete tool for the management of tourist flows, even claiming a “first international” one in this regulation, several citizens’, groups, associations and observers immediately questioned its scope, design and actual ability to achieve the declared objectives.

One of the most recurrent objections concerns the wide range of the exemptions provided by the regulation. Critics argued that the design of the measure allowed a significant portion of visitors to avoid payment, thereby limiting its effectiveness in alleviating congestion on peak days. According to this view, the narrow segment of visitors actually subject to the fee meant that the Access Contribution was likely to have only a marginal impact on overall tourist flows (Giorgi, 2024). This perception was further reinforced by the fee level established for the 2024 trial phase (a flat €5) which many considered far too low to act as an effective deterrent. Given the typical costs of transport, dining, and leisure in Venice, opponents maintained that such a modest surcharge was unlikely to persuade visitors to alter or postpone their plans (Mantengoli, 2024).

The management of controls has also been the subject of controversy. No sanctions were recorded in the 29 days of application in 2024, a fact that has fueled doubts about the actual ability of the system to enforce the rules. Some observers have hypothesized that, even in the presence of irregular access, staff preferred to avoid interventions so as not to expose themselves to possible legal disputes. This aspect contributed to strengthening the perception that the provision was applied in a mild way, compromising its deterrent function. The protests organized during the first days of experimentation also made visible a symbolic discomfort. Local movements and associations have accused the administration of wanting to transform Venice into a sort of paid “Disneyland”, with opening hours and tickets, reducing the city to a theme park and distorting its urban character. Some residents expressed the feeling of feeling like they were “guests in their own home” and announced plans not to show documents in the case of a check. The demonstrations, which sometimes led to clashes with the police, highlighted a rift between the municipal administration and some of the citizens, who see the contribution as a more symbolic than structural measure (Studio, 2024).

A further element of friction is represented by the alleged inconsistency of some political choices. Various associations have pointed out how, in parallel with the introduction of the access ticket, the Municipality has expressed its intention to encourage the return of large ships to the lagoon and to create new tourist access hubs, measures which risk increasing the overall number of visitors. At the same time, the lack of concrete interventions on issues such as housing availability, services for residents and economic diversification with respect to the tourist monoculture was criticized.

Overall, the debate that emerged during 2024 highlights a significant distance between the declared objectives and the perceptions of a part of the population. For the administration, experimentation represents a historic and perfectible step towards a new form of flow management; for detractors, however, it is a weak intervention, not very incisive and without a strategic design capable of addressing the root causes of overtourism in Venice.

4.5 Reactions and First Results

The transition from the pilot phase in 2024 to the extended application in 2025 has produced provisional data that allow for an early assessment of the measure's performance.
As previously mentioned, the pilot phase of the Access Contribution took place in 2024 over 29 non-consecutive days, between 25 April and 14 July, and produced results that exceeded the municipal administration's initial forecasts. During this period, a total of 485,062 paid access tickets were issued, generating certified revenues of 2,425,310 euros. The peak was on 26 April, with approximately 23,600 transactions, while the lowest figure occurred on 7 July, with 10,488 payments. The daily average of tickets purchased reached 16,726, well above preliminary estimates, which had projected total revenues of no more than €700,000 for the entire trial period. Despite this stronger-than-expected economic performance, no penalties were issued in 2024 for irregular access, a circumstance that attracted widespread criticism and raised doubts about the system's actual capacity to enforce compliance (Comune di Venezia, 2025b).

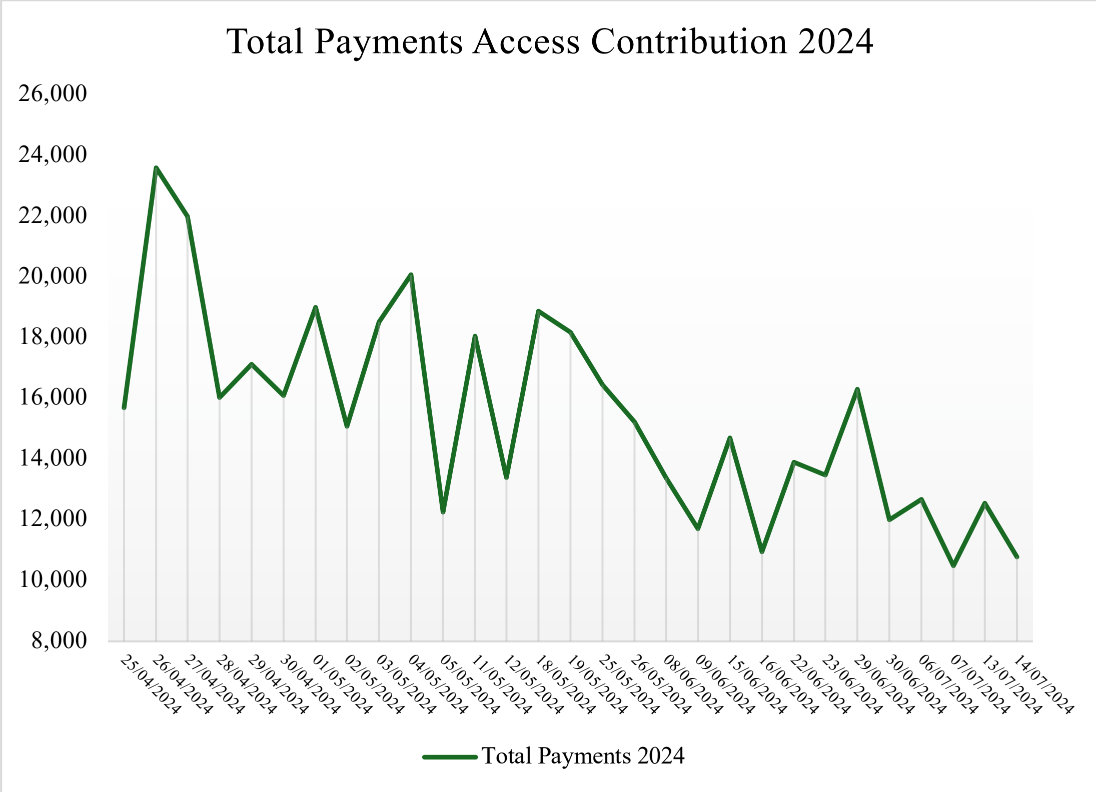


Figure 8 - Total Payment Access Contribution 2024 (Source: Comune di Venezia, 2024 and own reinterpretation)

In 2025, with the measure becoming fully operational, the period of application period was extended to 54 non-consecutive days, between 18 April and 27 July. Over this time, a total of 723,497 payment vouchers were issued, an increase of approximately 49 per cent over the previous year, resulting in total collection of €5,421,425, almost double those recorded during the experimental phase. Of these, 704,467 payment vouchers (97.4% of the total) were purchased through the official electronic platform, corresponding to 260,494 individual orders, while the remaining 19,030 were sold through external agreements. The price breakdown shows that 51% of the access tickets were sold at the reduced price of €5, while the remaining 49% at the full price of €10. In terms of payment channels, purchases through the official cda.ve.it website prevailed (65%), followed by physical ticket offices of Vela (22.5%) and other online portals (6%).

The analysis of the daily days shows that in 2025 the highest peak was recorded on Friday 2 May, with 24,951 payment vouchers issued, while the lowest was on Friday 4 July, with only 8,689 payments. The daily average stood at 13,046, lower than in 2024 which stood at 16,726. This decrease is partly attributable to the expansion of the application period, which spreads visitor arrivals over a greater number of days, thereby reducing concentrated peaks (Comune di Venezia, 2025c). It should be also noted that the 2025 figures are not fully comparable with those of 2024, since in the latter year residents of Veneto and students were also required to apply for the QR code, an obligation that was subsequently removed in 2025.

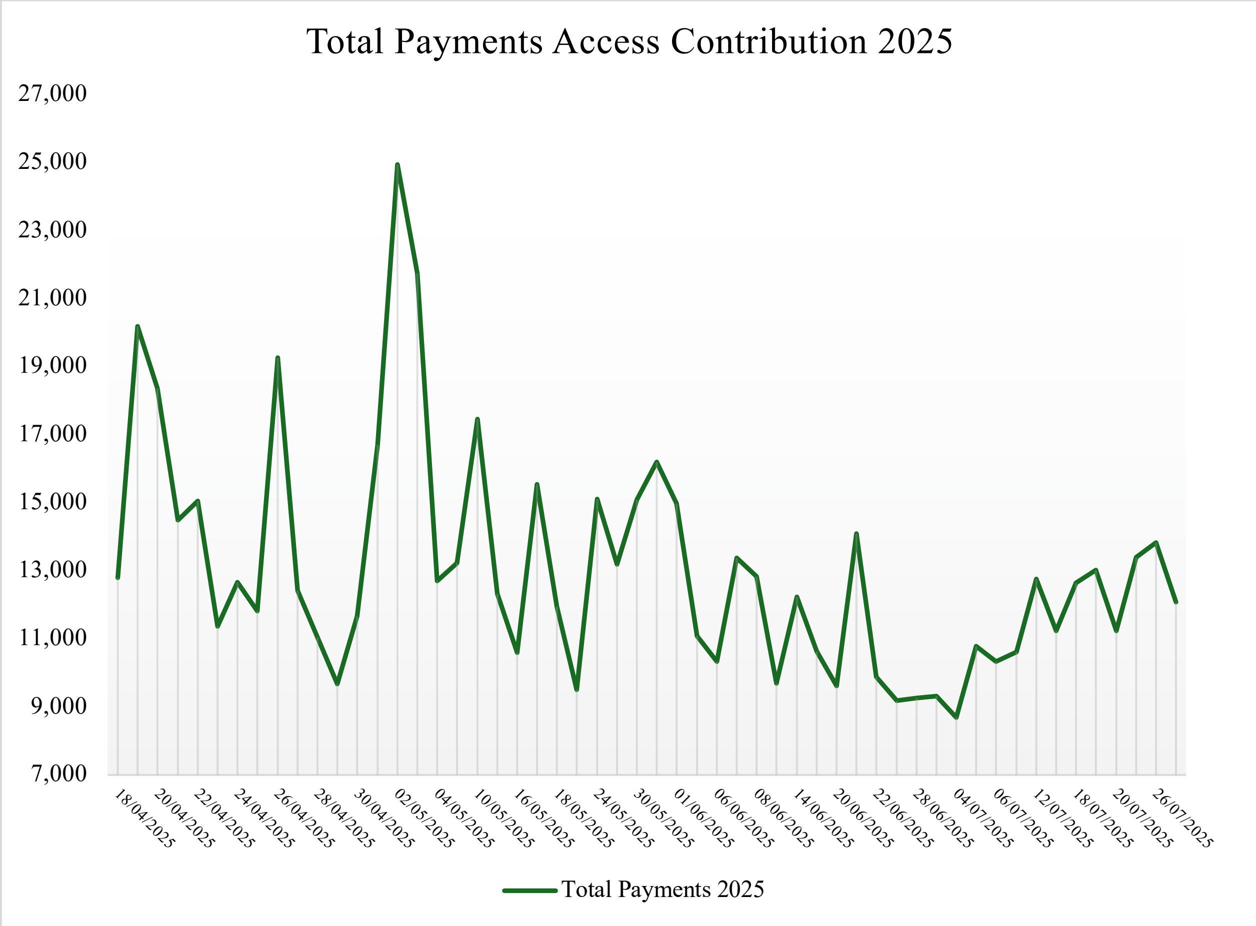


Figure 9 - Total Payment Access Contribution 2025 (Source: Comune di Venezia, 2025 and own reinterpretation)

Regarding enforcement, approximately 2,500 penalties were imposed in 2025 for entering without a valid access title, compared to the complete absence of fines in the previous year. This figure indicated a strengthening of control activity, although without doubts persist about the overall effectiveness of the verification system. As for exemptions, in both years the most numerous category was that of guests of accommodation facilities, with a daily average of 36,639 in 2025 and 48,210 in 2024, followed by commuter workers, non-resident property owners, relatives of residents and invited guests. As already mentioned above, differences in regulatory requirements between the two years limit the comparability of these figures.

Overall, the 2025 data indicate a substantial increase in both the number of paying visitors and total revenue, together with an improvement in control activities. Nevertheless, the decline in the daily average of payers and the continued presence of a large exempt population suggest that the ability of the measure to substantially reduce crowding on peak days remains limited. In this context, the political and technical debate continues to question the need for further adjustments, whether in terms of scope, tariff levels, or the adoption of complementary policies, that can address more structurally the root causes of overtourism in Venice (Comune di Venezia, 2025c).

Chapter 5 – Research Framework and Methodological Approach

The empirical part of this thesis focuses on understanding the factors that influence visitors' Willingness To Pay (WTP). WTP is the outcome variable in this context and is defined as the maximum amount that an individual is willing to pay for a particular good or service, beyond which they would decline the transaction (Stobierski, 2020). WTP, in the context of Venice, refers to the amount of money that tourists are willing to pay as access fee to the historic center of the city. This decision is not only shaped by their economic aspect, but also takes into consideration their opinion about the measure's necessity, fairness, and value (Sánchez-García et al., 2021). As emphasized in the economic literature, WTP varies significantly among individuals in fact it is not a static or uniform amount but rather a subjective construct. These differences are influenced by both extrinsic factors, such as age, income level and education, and intrinsic factors, including attitudes towards sustainability, place attachment or sensitivity to environmental concerns (Stobierski, 2020).

Previous research studies have looked at willingness to pay from a variety of perspectives, each highlighting distinct factors that influence people's payment intentions. Studies in the transportation sector have focused on how behavioral and attitudinal constructs influence willingness to pay for policies aimed at reducing air pollution from transportation (Sánchez-García et al., 2021). In the context of natural resource management, research has concentrated on price fairness and user fee policies as key indicators of visitors' willingness to pay for access to public goods like national forests (Chung et al., 2011). Finally, research on bike-sharing systems has shown that perceived value, trust, and individual payment consciousness are important factors in determining willingness to pay for innovative transport services within the mobility and sharing economy (Song et al., 2022).

Even though these contributions have improved our understanding of WTP in various fields, they also highlight some significant research gaps. First of all, most of the research conducted to date has been done in service-related contexts, whereas cultural tourism, and especially urban destinations dealing with overtourism, has received little attention (Ezeh & Dube, 2024). Moreover, there is a geographical gap: despite Venice's widespread popularity as an example of overtourism, the majority of empirical work comes from Asia or sub-Saharan Africa, with little evidence from Europe (Rubbi, 2024). Lastly, the Venice Access Fee itself is a novel policy tool that was just recently implemented and has not yet been empirically evaluated for social acceptability (Abuamoud, 2025). For these reasons, this study focuses on the case of Venice and investigates how tourists evaluate and accept the newly introduced access fee. It adopts a quantitative methodology that combines survey-based data collection with

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to explore both direct and indirect effects among key psychological and contextual variables. The choice of SEM allows for a more nuanced understanding of how constructs like perceived fairness, usefulness, and personal payment consciousness interact with perceived value and attitudes to shape payment intentions (Ma et al., 2020; Wu & Kim, 2019). In doing so, the thesis contributes to the literature by extending behavioral models, such as the Theory of Planned Behavior, to the underexplored domain of cultural tourism pricing (Choi & Johnson, 2019; López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2012). On a practical level, the results offer useful insights for policymakers, helping them understand what influences tourists' acceptance and how to design and communicate such measures. More broadly, the findings may be helpful for other destinations facing similar challenges, where managing visitor flows in a fair and sustainable way is becoming increasingly urgent (Seraphin et al., 2018; Peeters, 2018).

5.1 Theoretical framework and hypothesis development

The conceptual model created and developed in this thesis is based on existing research on willingness to pay, extending it by including a broader set of determinant factors. This integrated framework provides a structured basis for understanding how multiple factors interact to influence payment intentions (Sánchez-García et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2011). Building on this foundation, the conceptual model is further supported by the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which provides a solid framework for understanding the mechanisms through which the selected variables may affect willingness to pay. This theory has been widely used to explain pro-environmental behaviors and willingness to pay in tourism and environmental contexts (Nguyen et al., 2016; Choi & Johnson, 2019; Fu et al., 2019). Within this framework, attitudes represent a core determinant of behavioral intentions: individuals who hold favorable evaluations of a measure are more likely to perceive it as valuable and to comply with related financial requirements (Taufique & Vaithianathan, 2018; Ru et al., 2019; Pleeging et al., 2021). In this thesis, Theory of Planned Behavior provides the rationale for including attitude both as a direct determinant of willingness to pay and as an indirect driver through perceived value, supporting the expectation that visitors' pro-sustainability orientations will translate into stronger and greater acceptance of the access fee.

The model is not intended to be exhaustive of all the possible determinants of the willingness to pay, rather, it reflects a carefully considered selection based on prior studies and the context of Venice (Song et al., 2022; Wu & Huang, 2020; Kim et al., 2009; Shirai, 2015). It must be noted that some variables included have already been directly linked to willingness to pay, while others have not been tested before in this relationship. The inclusion of the latter set of factors is motivated by their relevance to the context, allowing this study to test novel and untested relationships as well as to expand on previously established findings.

5.1.1 Hypothesis between variables

The first four dimensions were chosen because they capture different but complementary aspects that visitors are likely to consider when assessing the access fee: perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use which refers to the simplicity of the procedure, perceived price fairness, and individual paying consciousness including the personal willingness to contribute. Together, these variables provide a coherent framework for understanding how visitors form value perceptions, which in turn influence their willingness to pay.

Perceived Usefulness and Perceived Value

Perceived usefulness refers to the extent to which individuals believe that paying the fee contributes to significant outcomes or improvements (Venkatesh et al., 2012). In the context of Venice, usefulness is often associated with the ability of the measure to manage excessive visitor flows, protect the historic environment, and improve the visitor experience. The logic is simple: the more visitors perceive that their payment leads to tangible benefits, the greater the value they attribute to the measure. Research has shown that perceived usefulness increases satisfaction and reinforces positive attitudes toward public policies and services (Kuo & Yen, 2009; Peng et al., 2019). In this way, visitors who recognize the practical contribution of the fee are more likely to evaluate it positively, which in turn increases their perceived value of the measure.

Perceived Easy – to – use and Perceived Value

A complementary factor is perceived ease of use, which captures the degree to which individuals consider the payment and access system to be simple and clear. Prior research highlights that when procedures are user-friendly, transparent, and accessible, individuals find it easier to comply and report higher levels of satisfaction (Yin et al., 2019). In the case of Venice, the design of the digital platform for booking and payment, the clarity of exemptions, and the efficiency of controls are all factors that influence the ease of use perceived by visitors. If the process is considered simple and straightforward, the measure is more easily associated with value, strengthening positive evaluations and reducing resistance (Kim et al., 2009).

Perceived Price Fairness and Perceived Value

A third determinant is perceived price fairness, which refers to the subjective assessment of whether the price paid is reasonable in relation to the benefits obtained (Li, 2018; Ma et al., 2020). The perception of fairness is fundamental to shaping perceived value. When individuals consider a price as reasonable and consistent with their expectations, they are more likely to accept the measure and evaluate it positively (Bento et al., 2017; Hamenda, 2018). For many visitors, the €5 to €10 contribution can be considered small compared to the overall cost of a trip to Venice, which includes transport, meals, tours, and museums. When framed as a fair and equitable tool, the access fee is more likely to be considered legitimate, thereby increasing its perceived value and acceptance (Konuk, 2019). On the contrary, if visitors consider the price excessive or disproportionate, the perceived value decreases, regardless of the declared objectives of the measure (Maxwell, 2007).

Individual Paying Consciousness and Perceived Value

Finally, individual paying consciousness reflects a visitor's general willingness to contribute financially for services or goods considered important or beneficial (Shirai, 2015; Rihn et al., 2018). This variable captures the psychological dimension of responsibility and willingness to contribute to collective goods, even when personal benefits are indirect. Previous research has demonstrated that individuals with greater pay consciousness are less likely to free-ride and more likely to support collective initiatives, particularly in the areas of environmental protection and cultural heritage (Baumol, 2004; Berger, 2018). In this specific case, visitors who recognize the symbolic and environmental importance of safeguarding the city are more likely to attribute greater value to the fee, thus justifying their willingness to contribute.

Taken together, these four factors represent distinct but complementary drivers of perceived value, shaping how visitors evaluate the access fee. Each of these variables highlights a different but interconnected aspect, ranging from perceived utility and easy to use, to judgements of fairness and personal willingness to contribute, ultimately strengthening the overall perception of value. Consequently, this thesis proposes the following hypotheses:

H1. Perceived usefulness has a positive effect on perceived value.

H2. Perceived ease of use has a positive effect on perceived value.

H3. Perceived price fairness has a positive effect on perceived value.

H4. Individual paying consciousness has a positive effect on perceived value.

Perceived Value and Willingness to Pay

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the positive role of perceived value in shaping individuals' willingness to pay for public services and policies. Perceived value can be understood as the overall assessment of benefits in relation to the sacrifices involved, balancing what individuals earn with what they must give up (Zhong & Zhang, 2013; Zhao & Zhou, 2017). Studies conducted in different contexts, from payments via mobile devices to transport services, highlight that when individuals perceive higher value, they express greater satisfaction and a greater intention to comply with fees or charges (Yang et al., 2011; Ye et al., 2014; Lai & Chen, 2011; Wang et al., 2018).

In particular, Ma et al. and Wu and Kim showed that perceived value directly increases users' willingness to pay, as it reflects the emotional and cognitive trade-off between perceived benefits and monetary costs (Ma et al., 2018; Wu & Kim, 2019). In the tourism and mobility sectors, similar conclusions have been reached: when the perceived value of a service or measure is high, users are more likely to accept it and even to develop positive behavioral intentions regarding its continued use (Chen et al., 2021). Evidence from studies conducted in China further suggests that individual psychological value assessment strongly influence willingness to pay, confirming the robustness of this relationship across different cultural and institutional contexts (Wei et al., 2018; Wu & Huang, 2020).

Similar findings have been reported in other countries. In Palestine, a study on the water service sector showed that when customers perceived improvements in reliability, maintenance, and quality, they were more willing to pay to sustain and improve the services (Murrar et al., 2025). This implies that the relationship between perceived value and willingness to pay holds also for services in basic public utilities. Similarly in Saudi Arabia, restaurant customers who perceived added value from social media marketing efforts were willing to pay premium prices, confirming that the same mechanism holds true across various industries and cultural contexts (Bushara et al., 2023).

Applied to the specific case of Venice, this suggests that visitors' willingness to pay the access fee is closely linked and largely depends on the value they attribute to it, for instance, whether they consider it a fair way to reduce overcrowding, improve the quality of the visit, or contribute, at least symbolically, to the preservation of the city's fragile heritage. What matters here is not the actual allocation of the revenues, but how visitors interpret, assess and evaluate the potential benefits of the measure. The stronger the perceived value associated with the measure, the higher the willingness of visitors to contribute financially (Zhong & Zhang, 2013). Accordingly, this thesis proposes the following hypothesis:

H5. Perceived value positively influences willingness to pay.

Attitude and Willingness to Pay

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), previously introduced, attitudes represent a key psychological determinant of individuals' behavioral intentions. Visitors are more likely to support a measure and convert this attitude into a real willingness to pay when they have a positive opinion of it (Nguyen et al., 2016; Choi & Johnson, 2019; Fu et al., 2019).

Previous studies have demonstrated that people who have positive attitudes toward the environment are more likely to participate in pro-sustainability activities, such as acceptingPouta & Rekola, 2010or conservation purposes (Pouta & Rekola, 2019; López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2012; Li, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). In this sense, willingness to pay is not driven solely by economic evaluation but also by the ethical perception that paying has positive consequences, such as preserving cultural heritage, reducing environmental pressure, or demonstrating responsible behavior (Judge et al., 2019). Visitors with favourable attitudes are more likely to assess the access fee positively and accept its cost when they believe it aligns with their values and public interest, as suggested by the TPB, even in the absence of detailed knowledge about how revenues are used (Lindsey et al., 2001).
Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed in this thesis:

H6. Attitude has a positive effect on willingness to pay.

Attitude and Perceived Value

Concerning the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitudes influence not only intentions directly but also the way people cognitively evaluate a measure before deciding to support it (López-Mosquera García, 2016; Li, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). People are more likely to interpret a policy or service favorably and see greater benefits than possible drawbacks when they have positive attitudes toward it. According to this mechanism, attitudes not only directly affect intentions but also reinforce perceived value as an intermediate evaluation (Choi & Johnson, 2019; Gkargkavouzi et al., 2019).

This relationship takes on special significance in the context of Venice. Visitors who hold a favorable attitude toward the access fee, seeing it not solely as a financial burden but as an appropriate and reasonable measure to manage visitor flows and support the city, are more likely to evaluate the measure positively. Because the contribution is presented as both a financial expense and a way to help preserve a delicate cultural and environmental heritage, such attitudes have the potential to strengthen views of value (De Dominicis et al., 2017). In this way, favorable opinions toward the fee could increase its perceived fairness and strengthen tourists' willingness to accept and internalize its rationale.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7. Attitude significantly positively influences Perceived Value.

Attitude, Perceived Value, and Willingness to Pay

In addition to its direct influence, attitude is expected to exert an indirect effect on willingness to pay through perceived value. According to earlier studies, individuals who hold a positive attitude toward a policy are more likely to evaluate it as useful and beneficial, thereby increasing its perceived value (Dodds et al., 1991; Zeithaml, 1988). According to the Theory of Planned Behavior framework, attitudes shape individuals' cognitive evaluations, which in turn influence behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991). In this context, a favorable attitude toward the access fee is likely to enhance the perceived value of the measure, and this higher perceived value subsequently increases the individual's willingness to pay (López-Mosquera & Sánchez, 2012). This suggests that perceived value acts as a bridge between attitude and WTP: when perceived value is taken into account, the influence of attitude on willingness to pay becomes stronger. Therefore, attitude not only has a direct effect on WTP but also works indirectly through perceived value, amplifying its impact on the outcome variable (Wu & Kim, 2019; Chen et al., 2021).

This indicates that visitors who have a positive opinion of Venice's access fee are more likely to consider it valuable and advantageous. Its perceived value is strengthened by this positive evaluation, which raises their willingness to pay.

Hence, the following hypothesis has been formulated to test this indirect effect:

H8. Perceived value mediates the relationship between Attitude and Willingness to Pay.

Building on the hypotheses outlined above, the research model is summarized in the theoretical framework illustrated in *Figure 10.*

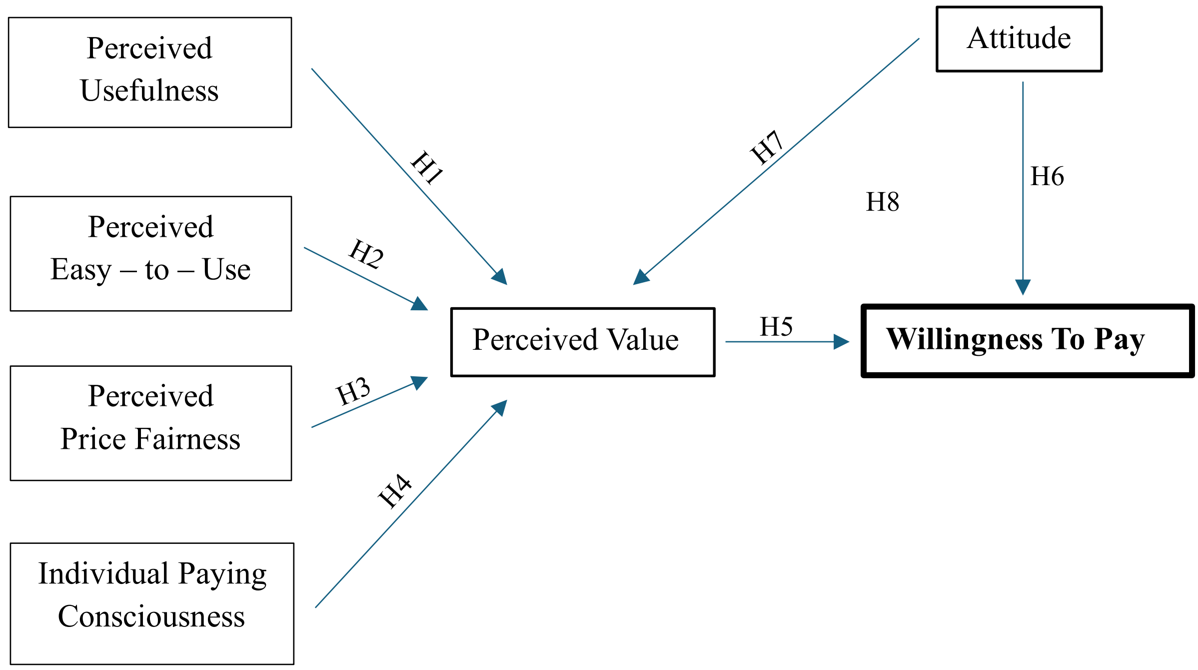


Figure 10: Hypothetical conceptual model. (Source: own elaboration)

5.2 Items and Latent Variables

In this section, we present the questionnaire items corresponding to each latent construct identified in the study. Each construct represents an underlying concept related to visitors' acceptance of Venice's access fee, which cannot be measured directly. Therefore, each latent variable is assessed through multiple observed indicators in the survey. Below, each construct is briefly defined in the context of the Venice access fee, and the specific survey items used to measure it are listed.

5.2.1 Perceived Usefulness

Perceived Usefulness refers to the degree to which individuals believe that the introduction of the Venice access fee will be beneficial and effective in achieving its intended goals (Venkatesh et al., 2012). A high perceived usefulness means respondents see the fee as a valuable and worthwhile measure for Venice. This observed variable is composed of three items:

- *I believe the Venice Access Fee can help improve the management of tourist flows.*
- *I consider the Venice Access Fee to be useful.*
- *I think it is necessary to implement an Access Fee to protect the city of Venice.*

5.2.2 Perceived Ease of Use

Perceived Ease of Use reflects how simple people expect the process of paying the access fee to be. In the Venice access fee context, a construct of high perceived ease of use indicates that individuals feel the ticketing/payment system will be user-friendly and not burdensome (Yin et al., 2019). This construct was measured through the following items:

- *It is easy for me to understand how the Venice Access Fee works.*
- *It does not take much effort to learn how to pay the Venice Access Fee.*
- *The payment process for the Venice Access Fee is simple to complete.*

5.2.3 Perceived Price Fairness

Perceived Price Fairness denotes the extent to which the cost of the Venice access fee is seen as fair, reasonable, and justified by respondents (Li, 2018). The survey captured this perception with statements including:

- *I think that the Venice Access Fee is appropriate.*
- *The Venice Access Fee is fair because it excludes certain categories such as Veneto region residents, commuters, workers, and people with disabilities.*
- *The Venice Access Fee is a fair way to collect revenue from those who benefit the most from visiting Venice.*
- *I believe the Venice Access Fee is fair.*

5.2.4 Individual Paying Consciousness

Individual Paying Consciousness describes a person's intrinsic willingness to pay for public goods or services they find valuable, rather than expecting free access or focusing solely on cost-saving (Shirai, 2015). We measured this latent variable using the following items:

- *I believe that paying a fee can contribute to a better quality of service for visitors in Venice.*
- *I think it is cost-effective to pay for services or policies that help preserve the city of Venice.*
- *I am willing to pay for measures I consider valuable for the protection and sustainability of Venice.*

5.2.5 Perceived Value

Perceived Value refers to the visitor's overall assessment of the worth of paying the access fee in exchange for the benefits of visiting Venice (Zhong & Zhang, 2013). In the context of the access fee, perceived value was captured by survey items including:

- *Compared with the amount of money paid, it is worthwhile to pay the Venice Access Fee.*
- *Compared with the effort it takes to plan a visit, it is worthwhile to pay the Venice Access Fee.*
- *Compared with the time involved in the payment process, it is worthwhile to pay the Venice Access Fee.*
- *In general, paying the Venice Access Fee is valuable.*

5.2.6 Attitude

Attitude toward the access fee represents the individual's overall evaluative judgment of the fee policy, ranging from positive to negative (Nguyen et al., 2016). This construct summarizes how favorably or unfavorably a person feels about the introduction of the Venice tourist access charge. This observed construct is measured using five items:

- *I think the idea of paying to reduce overtourism in Venice is brilliant.*
- *I think that paying to protect the city of Venice is very useful.*
- *I believe that paying to manage visitor flows in Venice is a very intelligent idea.*
- *I think that paying to preserve Venice is a responsible choice.*
- *I believe that paying to safeguard Venice is an ecological and sustainable action.*

5.2.7 Willingness to Pay

Willingness to Pay is the output variable of this study and refers to the extent to which individuals are prepared to pay the access fee to visit Venice, essentially reflecting their intention to comply with the fee (Chen et al., 2021). The willingness to pay consists of four items:

- *I would be willing to pay the entrance fee.*
- *I would be comfortable paying the entrance fee.*

- *I would have no problem paying the entrance fee.*
- *I would be happy to pay the entrance fee.*

All the above items were organized into thematic sections in the questionnaire, and each item was rated by respondents on a seven-point Likert agreement scale. Specifically, for every statement related to a latent construct, participants indicated their level of agreement from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). This 7-point Likert scale format allowed participants to express varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with each statement, providing a nuanced measure of each underlying construct.

5.3 Questionnaire Design and Analysis

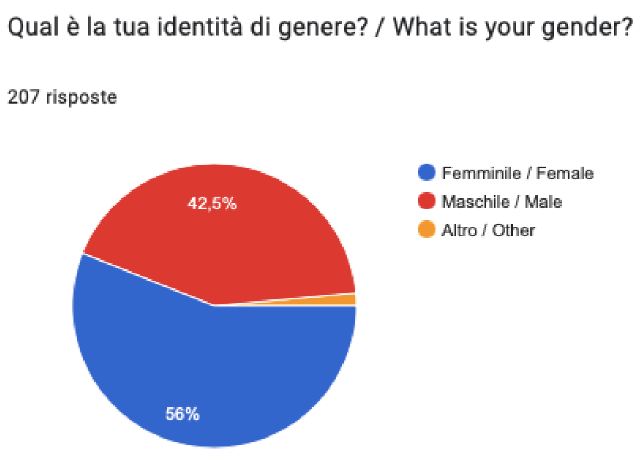
The questionnaire was carefully designed to capture the above latent constructs and relevant background information from respondents. It was structured in multiple sections:

- First part: encompasses the control variables that allow classifying respondents on the basis of gender, age, level of education and, nationality;
- Second part: contains a fact-finding part to find out if they had ever been to Venice, and if so, if they had paid the fee;
- Third part: contains the questions related to the various items creating the variables (showed in subchapter 5.3).

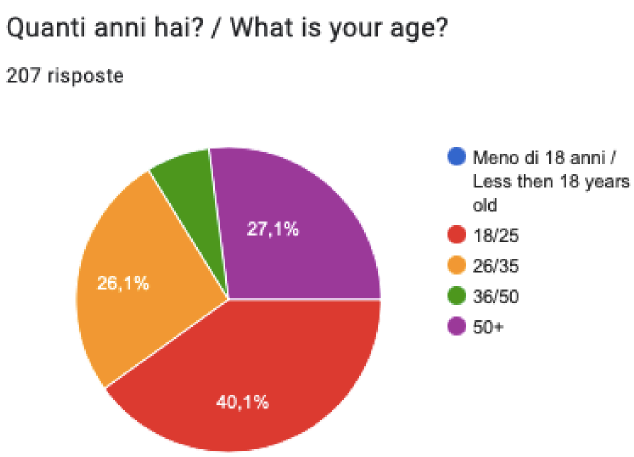
The survey included both closed-ended items, using Likert scales for the latent variables, and a few categorical or open-ended questions for demographics or additional comments. The questionnaire was administered to the target population of respondents who have experience with or interest in the tourism context under study. Data collection took place over a time span between 14 September 2025 and 6 October 2025, using WhatsApp and Instagram as modes of distribution. The questionnaire was administered to potential tourists, including individuals who had already visited Venice and those who might visit in the future. In total, 207 completed responses were obtained and used for analysis.

5.3.1 Descriptive Statistics

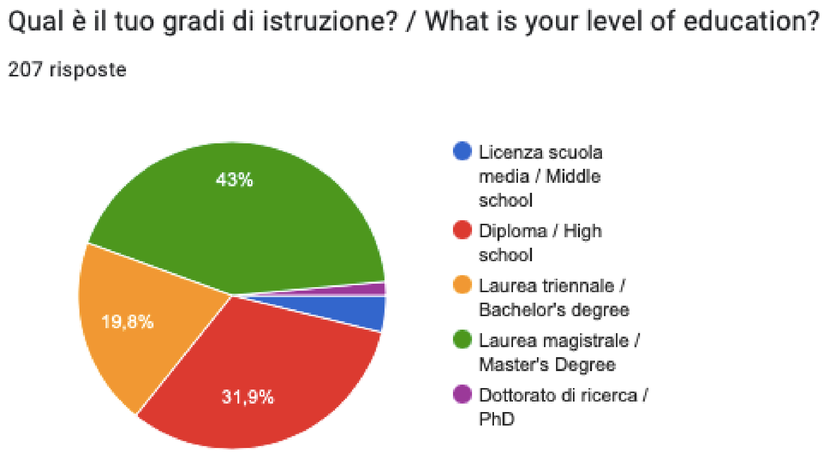
To provide context for the analysis, this section presents the first and the second part of the survey. These descriptive statistics offer an overview of the sample's composition.



In terms of gender, the sample has slightly more female respondents than male. Specifically, 116 respondents are female (approximately 56%), while 88 are male (about 43%). A very small minority of respondents (3 individuals, ~1%) identified as "Other" for gender. This indicates that women make up the majority of the sample.



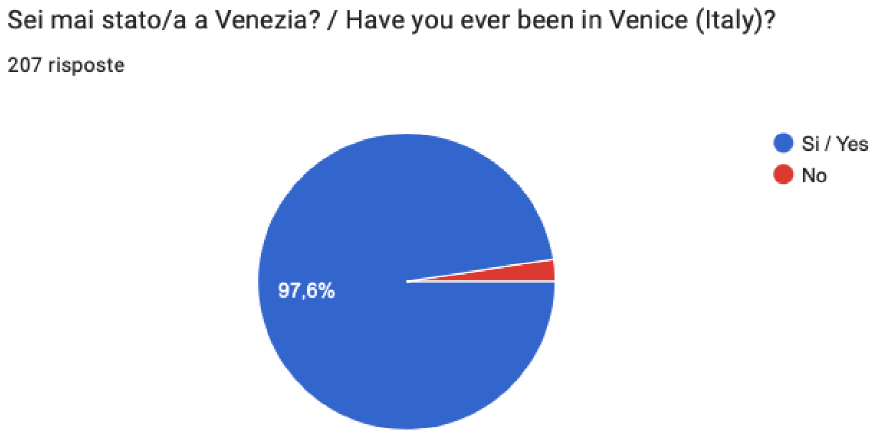
With respect to age, the respondents' ages range from teenagers to over 50 years. The largest age group is 18–25 years, comprising 83 participants (40% of the sample). Those aged 50 years and above form the second-largest group with 56 respondents (27%), closely followed by the 26–35 year-old group at 54 respondents (26%). Respondents between 36 and 50 years old constitute the smallest group, with 14 individuals (7%). This distribution shows a high representation of younger adults and older adults, with comparatively fewer middle-aged participants.



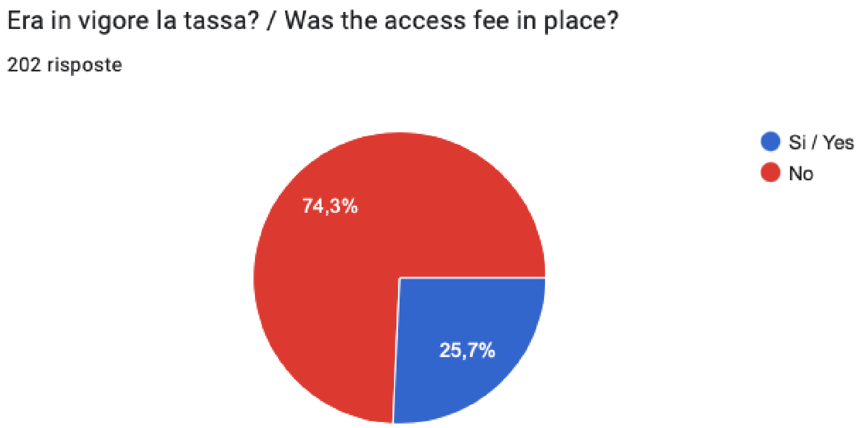
Regarding educational attainment, the respondents are generally well-educated. Master's degree holders represent the largest segment of the sample, with 89 respondents (43%). The next most common qualification is a high school diploma, held by 66 respondents (32%). Additionally, 41 respondents (20%) have a bachelor's degree, 8 respondents (4%) reported a middle school education as their highest level, and 3 respondents (1%) hold a PhD. Overall, roughly 64% of the sample has at least a bachelor's degree. This indicates a relatively high level of education among the survey participants.

In terms of nationality, the sample is largely Italian. Out of 207 respondents, 204 (98.6%) are Italian citizens. The remaining three participants are foreign nationals (2 Romanian and 1 Belarusian in total, about 1.4% of the sample). This highlights that the survey's respondents are almost exclusively from Italy, with only a very small fraction from other national backgrounds.

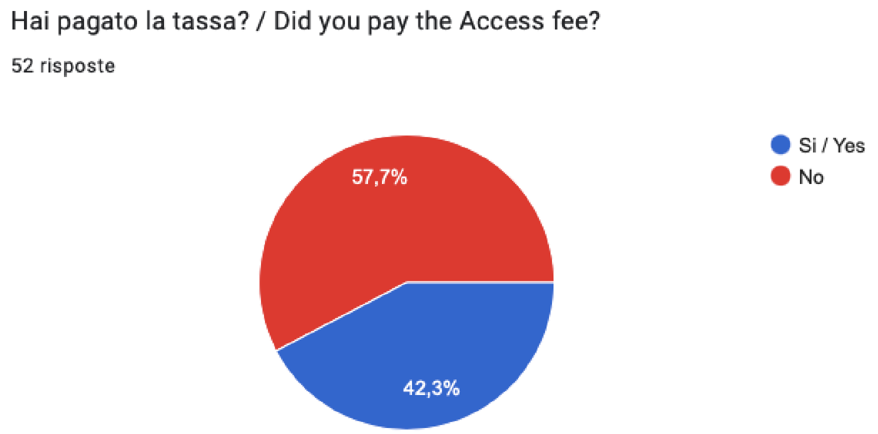
In addition to demographics, four filter questions were asked in sequence to capture prior experience with Venice and contact with the access fee. Only those who answered "yes" to one question were shown the next. Percentages below refer to each question's own respondents.



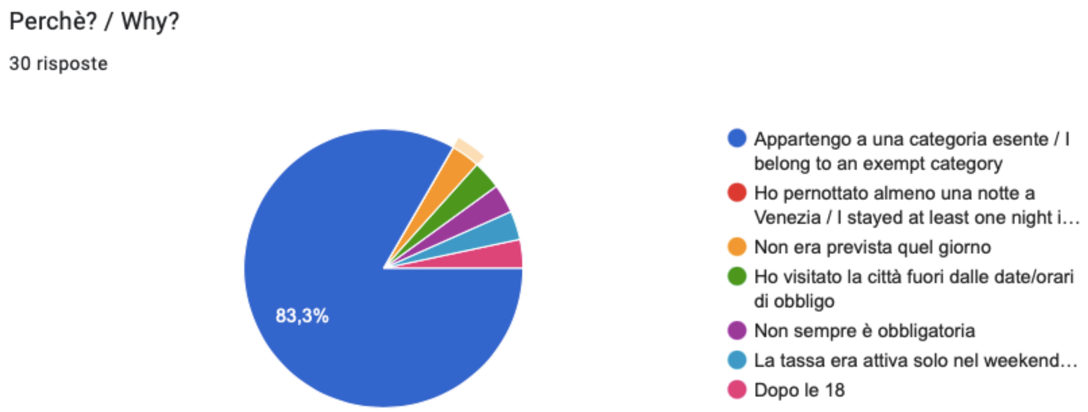
Most respondents had already visited Venice. 202 out of 207 answered Yes (97.6%), and only 5 answered No (2.4%). This is useful because most opinions in the survey are based on real visits, not on assumptions.



Among those who had been to Venice, only a minority found the access fee in force during their visit: 52 said Yes (25.7%), while 150 said No (74.3%). This makes sense given the limited activation periods. Exposure therefore depends on when people travelled. The lower exposure also explains why the next question has a smaller base.



Of the 52 who encountered the fee, 22 reported that they paid (42.3%) and 30 reported they did not (57.7%). This split suggests that better information such as clear instructions, or reminders before arrival, could help move some non-payers into the payer group when the fee is active.



Non-payment was mainly due to eligibility and timing, not refusal. Among the 30 non-payers, 25 belonged to an exempt category; 2 arrived after 18:00 (outside the obligation window); 2 noted the fee was not always mandatory; and 1 visited mid-week, when activation was limited to weekends. In other words, most non-payment aligns with how the policy is designed to work.

5.4 Reliability Statistics

The next step is to assess the internal consistency of each set of items. In other words, how reliably they measure their latent construct. For this purpose, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each multi-item scale (PU, PETU, PPF, IPC, PV, AT, and WTP). Cronbach's alpha (α) provides an estimate of scale reliability based on the inter-correlations among the items: values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. A commonly accepted rule of thumb is that 0.60 > α ≥ 0.70 denotes an acceptable level of reliability for exploratory research, 0.70 > α ≥ 0.80 is considered good, 0.80 > α ≥ 0.90 is considered very good and, α ≥ 0.90 is considered excellent.

All of the constructs in this study demonstrated high internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values ranged from approximately 0.83 to 0.93 across the scales, comfortably exceeding the minimum threshold:

Perceived Usefulness (PU):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,871	,873	3

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha for Perceived Usefulness. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

This 3-item scale achieved α = 0.873. This suggests that respondents answered the PU1, PU2, and PU3 items very consistently. An alpha in the high 0.8s is considered very good, indicating robust reliability.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PU1	4,80	1,557	204
PU2	4,89	1,485	204
PU3	4,82	1,676	204

Table 2: Mean Scores of PU Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

The three PU items show mean scores in the mid-to-high range of the 7-point Likert scale, indicating a general tendency toward agreement.

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	4,838	4,804	4,892	,088	1,018
Inter-Item Correlations	,696	,679	,720	,041	1,061

Table 3: Summary Statistics for PU. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

The average of the items is therefore close to five, the high reliability of the scale makes us assume that those who found the measure useful on one aspect tended to similarly rate it useful on other aspects.

Perceived Easy to Use (PETU):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,867	,870	3

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha for Perceived Easy to Use. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

With these 3 items, PETU had α = 0.87, similar to the previous variable. This indicates strong internal consistency.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PETU1	5,13	1,526	204
PETU2	5,19	1,355	204
PETU3	5,06	1,323	204

Table 5: Mean Scores of PETU Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	5,124	5,059	5,186	,127	1,025
Inter-Item Correlations	,690	,577	,747	,170	1,294

Table 6: Summary Statistics for PETU. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Item means (5.06–5.19) fall in the mid–high range of the 7-point Likert scale, suggesting respondents generally agree that the payment process is easy to understand and complete.

Perceived Price Fairness (PPF):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,875	,874	4

Table 7: Cronbach's Alpha for Perceived Price Fairness. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

This 4-item scale showed α = 0.874. This high value means that respondents' views on fairness were very coherent across the different fairness-related questions. The items all correlate well with the overall fairness score, reinforcing that PPF is a reliable composite measure.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PPF1	4,74	1,724	204
PPF2	5,83	1,513	204
PPF3	4,92	1,700	204
PPF4	4,91	1,783	204

Table 8: Mean Scores of PPF Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	5,099	4,740	5,828	1,088	1,230
Inter-Item Correlations	,635	,558	,752	,194	1,347

Table 9: Summary Statistics for PPF. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

All 4 the items are around mid–high Likert values with moderate association among them, suggesting a coherent and reasonably consistent measure of perceived price fairness.

Individual Paying Consciousness (IPC):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,832	,834	3

Table 10: Cronbach's Alpha for Individual Paying Consciousness. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

The 3-item IPC scale had the lowest alpha of the set, $\alpha = 0.834$. Despite being the lowest among all the items analyzed, an alpha in the low 0.8s is still well above acceptable levels. This indicates good reliability.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
IPC1	4,95	1,656	204
IPC2	5,18	1,531	204
IPC3	5,17	1,599	204

Table 11: Mean Scores of IPC Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	5,098	4,946	5,176	,230	1,047
Inter-Item Correlations	,625	,482	,799	,317	1,658

Table 12: Summary Statistics for IPC. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Overall, the IPC items fall in the mid–high range of the Likert scale, with moderate inter-item association, indicating a coherent and reasonably consistent measure of Individual Paying Consciousness.

Perceived Value (PV):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,914	,915	4

Table 13: Cronbach's Alpha for Perceived Value. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

The 4-item PV scale achieved α = 0,915, which is an excellent level of reliability. A Cronbach's alpha above 0.90 indicates very little random error in the scale.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
PV1	4,98	1,653	204
PV2	5,03	1,582	204
PV3	5,00	1,546	204
PV4	4,92	1,749	204

Table 14: Mean Scores of PV Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

This small spread among the variables shows that respondents judged the value of the measure in much the same way across all statements, rather than reacting to one specific wording. In other words, their view of value was steady and consistent across the scale.

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	4,980	4,922	5,029	,108	1,022
Inter-Item Correlations	,730	,634	,886	,252	1,397

Table 15: Summary Statistics for PV. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Attitude (AT):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,928	,928	5

Table 16: Cronbach's Alpha for Attitude. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

With 5 items, the attitude scale had the highest reliability, α = 0.928. This result suggests that the respondents answered very consistently across the items, showing a strong alignment in how they evaluated the measure. The high internal consistency means that the items are working well together and are effectively capturing the same underlying concept.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
AT1	4,36	1,720	204
AT2	5,08	1,659	204
AT3	4,66	1,803	204
AT4	5,24	1,561	204
AT5	4,89	1,793	204

Table 17: Mean Scores of AT Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	4,843	4,358	5,235	,877	1,201
Inter-Item Correlations	,722	,576	,815	,239	1,415

Table 18: Summary Statistics for AT. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

Willingness to Pay (WTP):

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,859	,861	4

Table 19: Cronbach's Alpha for Willingness to Pay. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

The 4-item willingness to pay scale yielded α = 0.861. This is a solid reliability score, indicating that the various questions about willingness to pay consistently reflect an underlying propensity to contribute financially. The alpha in the mid-0.8s means the WTP construct is measured with confidence.

Item Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
WTP1	5,11	1,798	204
WTP2	5,58	1,424	204
WTP3	5,33	1,662	204
WTP4	4,41	2,117	204

Table 20: Mean Scores of WTP Items. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

It's worth noting that one item (WTP4) had a slightly different mean response as mentioned earlier; reliability analysis shows that if that item were removed, the alpha would increase slightly (to about 0.88 – 0.89).

Summary Item Statistics

	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Range	Maximum/Minimum
Item Means	5,108	4,412	5,578	1,167	1,264
Inter-Item Correlations	,608	,432	,788	,356	1,823

Table 21: Summary Statistics for WTP. (Source: own elaboration using SPSS)

The results of the reliability analysis indicate that the measurement tools used in the questionnaire were consistent and well-structured. Each set of items showed good internal alignment, suggesting that respondents interpreted the statements in a similar and coherent way. These findings confirm the quality of the constructs and offer reassurance about the stability of the collected data. With this in place, the next step is to examine how the variables interact with one another, beginning with the analysis of their correlations.

5.5 Correlation and Mediation Analysis

Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed between all pairs of composite variables (PU, PETU, PPF, IPC, PV, AT, and WTP) to examine the direction and strength of their associations. The resulting correlation matrix is presented in *table 22*. These correlations offer initial insights into which factors tend to vary together and provide evidence for or against the hypothesized relationships in the study.

The coefficient can take values between −1, where the correlation is perfectly negative, and +1, where the correlation is perfectly positive. Coefficient values are found in-between these two extremes and if the value in 0, it means that the variables are not correlated (Cohen et al., 2009):

Correlation Matrix

	PU	PETU	PPF	IPC	PV	AT	WTP
PU	1						
PETU	,221**	1					
PPF	,756***	,220**	1				
IPC	,597***	,244***	,682***	1			
PV	,678***	,307***	,720***	,657***	1		

AT	,720***	,191**	,684***	,617***	,637***	1	
WTP	,539***	,324***	,631***	,581***	,692***	,607***	1

**: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

Table 22: Correlation Matrix. (Source: own elaboration)

Several important patterns emerge from the correlation analysis:

All correlations are positive. This means that people who gave higher scores to one aspect of the access fee also tended to give higher scores to other aspects. In other words, those who saw the measure in a positive light tended to view it positively across the board. This general pattern suggests that respondents had a consistent attitude toward the fee.

Strength of Associations: The magnitude of the correlations ranges from moderate to strong. The correlations range from moderate to strong, with coefficients spanning approximately from r = 0.19 to r = 0.76. The strongest relationship is between Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Price Fairness (PPF), where r = 0.756. This suggests that people who see the measure as useful also tend to view it as fair. In contrast, the weakest correlation is found between Attitude (AT) and Perceived Ease of Use (PETU), with r = 0.191. This indicates that general support for the measure is only weakly connected to whether the payment system is perceived as easy or not.

Willingness to Pay (WTP) correlations: Focusing on the outcome variable, WTP shows significant positive correlations with all the constructs. The strongest predictors of WTP in the correlation matrix are Perceived Value (r = 0.692) and Perceived Price Fairness (r = 0.631), suggesting that those who perceive the fee as fair and reasonable are more likely to express willingness to pay. Attitude (AT) toward the measure also shows a strong correlation with WTP (r = 0.607), indicating that general support for the policy tends to translate into actual payment intentions. This outcome is consistent with theoretical models like the Theory of Planned Behavior which was previously introduced in the chapter.

Perceived Usefulness (PU) has a considerable correlation with WTP (r = 0.539). This indicates that when people believe the fee might help reduce overtourism, they are more inclined to accept and pay it. Similarly, Individual Paying Consciousness (IPC) correlates with WTP at r = 0.582, showing a meaningful relationship with the output variable, highlighting the role of internal norms and personal responsibility in shaping payment behavior.

Finally, while Perceived Ease of Use (PETU) has the weakest correlation with WTP (r = 0.324), the relationship remains significant. This suggests that ease and clarity in the payment process do influence willingness to pay, but less so than perceptions of value, fairness, or personal conviction.

Potential Mediation Effects: The correlation matrix also points to a potential mediation involving Attitude (AT). In particular, Attitude may act as a bridge between Perceived Value (PV) and Willingness to Pay (WTP). This means that the effect of perceived value on willingness to pay could be explained, at least in part, by the attitude respondents develop toward the access fee. In other words, individuals who see high value in the measure tend to form a more favorable attitude toward it, which in turn increases their willingness to pay. The conditions for testing this kind of mediation are all met: PV is strongly correlated with AT ($r = 0.637$), PV with WTP ($r = 0.692$), and AT with WTP ($r = 0.607$). This pattern supports the hypothesis of a mediation, where Attitude transmits part of the effect of Perceived Value on WTP.

5.6 Methodology

This section outlines the analytical approach used to examine tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) for the Venice access fee. The study's hypothetical model was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), enabling simultaneous examination of multiple relationships between latent constructs (Datacamp, 2024). Furthermore, SEM is capable of evaluating both direct and indirect effects, making it well-suited to examine the mediating role of constructs like perceived value and attitude within the WTP framework (IntellectusConsulting, 2025). The model distinguishes between variables that directly influence WTP and those that exert an indirect effect through mediating constructs. For instance, attitudinal dimensions such as perceived usefulness or fairness influence perceived value, which in turn affects the respondent's willingness to pay.

The research process was carried out in multiple steps. First, using IBM SPSS, we evaluated each construct's internal consistency: all multi-item scales achieved Cronbach's alpha values above the recommended 0.70 threshold, indicating acceptable reliability (Bohari et al., 2022). This suggests that the survey items for each construct were internally consistent. Any items that would lower a scale's reliability were scrutinized and, if necessary, removed or refined before proceeding. After that reliable measures were established, we applied AMOS (v.26) to estimate the structural model. In AMOS, a path diagram was specified according to the theoretical framework which was specified through a path diagram that linked the constructs hypothesized in Chapter 5.2. Consequently, the analysis focused on standardized regression weights and their significance levels, which were considered sufficient for evaluating the strength and direction of the hypothesized relationships.

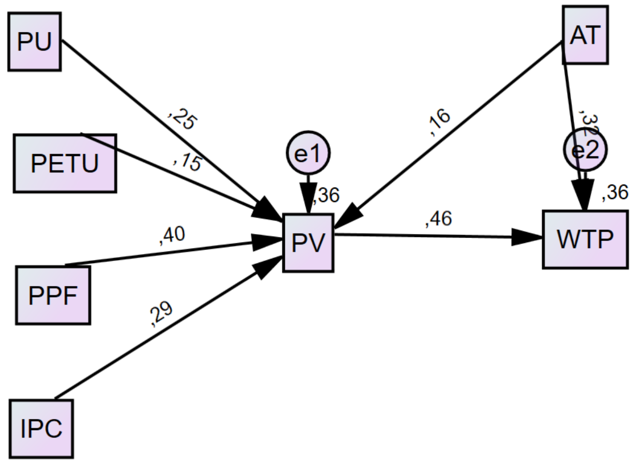


Figure 11: Conceptual model. (Source: own elaboration using AMOS v.26)

The structural model defined in AMOS offers a visual and analytical representation of the hypothesized relationships tested in this study. Through the path diagram, it becomes immediately clear how each latent construct contributes, either directly or indirectly, to shaping tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) for the Venice access fee. The structure of the model also reflects its layered logic: while constructs like PPF and PU do not directly influence WTP, they exert a significant indirect effect by shaping how valuable the fee is perceived to be. The following section presents the specific standardized regression weights obtained, offering quantitative insight into the strength and direction of each path hypothesized in the model.

5.6.1 Analysis of Standardized Regression Weights

The structural model estimates revealed several statistically significant relationships among the latent constructs. Standardized regression weights, which range from -1 to +1, indicate the strength and direction of influence each independent variable exerts on its dependent variable.

			Estimate	**P – value**
PV	←	PU	0.254	***
PV	←	PETU	--	--
PV	←	PPF	0.398	***
PV	←	IPC	0.292	***
PV	←	AT	--	--
WTP	←	PV	0.458	***
WTP	←	AT	0.324	***

Table 23: Standardized Regression Weights. (Source: own elaboration using AMOS v.26)

As expected, Perceived Value (PV) was influenced by multiple factors. The strongest predictor was Perceived Price Fairness (PPF) ($\beta = 0.302$), indicating that individuals who view the fee as fair are more likely to see value in the measure. Individual Paying Consciousness (IPC) also showed a strong effect ($\beta = 0.228$), suggesting that those with a higher predisposition to contribute to public causes perceive greater value in the access fee. Perceived Usefulness (PU) contributed significantly ($\beta = 0.205$), meaning that the more visitors see the measure as beneficial, the more they recognize its value.

When looking at Willingness To Pay (WTP), Perceived Value emerged as the most influential factor ($\beta = 0.539$), confirming the central role of perceived benefits in shaping payment intentions. Attitude also significantly predicted WTP ($\beta = 0.268$), suggesting that visitors' general support for the policy translates into a higher willingness to pay.

Overall, the results validate the proposed conceptual model, with all hypothesized paths showing positive and statistically significant effects. These findings support the theoretical assumptions underlying the model and demonstrate that visitors' evaluations of fairness, usefulness, and simplicity, together with their attitudes and values, all contribute meaningfully to shaping their willingness to support the access policy financially.

5.7 Discussion and implications

The results of the SEM analysis provide valuable insight into the mechanisms shaping tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) for Venice's access fee. All hypothesized relationships in the model were found to be statistically significant and in the expected direction, confirming the validity of the conceptual framework developed in the previous chapters. More specifically, the analysis revealed that tourists' perception of value (PV) plays a central mediating role: it is significantly influenced by four antecedents (Perceived Usefulness, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Price Fairness, and Individual Paying Consciousness), and in turn directly predicts WTP. This structure confirms that perceived value acts as a crucial interpretative filter through which individuals evaluate the legitimacy and acceptability of the access fee (Zhong & Zhang, 2013; Chen et al., 2021).

Among the antecedents of PV, the most influential variable was Perceived Price Fairness (PPF), with a standardized regression weight of 0.398. This finding aligns with the literature on behavioral pricing and tourism taxation, where perceived fairness is one of the main factors influencing acceptance of user fees (Konuk, 2019; Li, 2018). When tourists judge the fee to be fair in light of the experience and public benefits it generates, they are more inclined to see it as justified, thus increasing its perceived value. Closely following, Individual Paying Consciousness (IPC) showed a solid effect (0.292), underlining the importance of individual psychological predispositions. Those who tend to support collective initiatives or who have internalized the idea of contributing financially to the preservation of common goods were more likely to attribute value to the measure. This supports earlier work emphasizing the role of pro-social and civic motivations in predicting WTP in environmental and heritage contexts (Berger, 2018; Rihn et al., 2018).

Perceived Usefulness (PU) also had a relevant impact (0.254), suggesting that tourists who see the access fee as an effective tool to manage overtourism and protect the city's heritage are more likely to value and support it. This confirms the findings of Venkatesh et al. (2012), who highlighted the centrality of perceived performance and outcome effectiveness in technology and policy acceptance (Venkatesh et al., 2012). Finally, Perceived Ease of Use (PETU) contributes with a smaller weight. This suggests that while usability and accessibility of the payment system are important, they play a somewhat secondary role compared to fairness and moral predisposition. However, a simple and transparent system can still help reduce resistance and make the process more acceptable (Yin et al., 2019).

When examining the direct predictors of WTP, Perceived Value stood out as the strongest factor, with a standardized regression weight of 0.458. This confirms the idea that individuals are more likely to pay when they perceive a good balance between what they give, the cost, and what they get, the benefits, whether tangible (e.g., reduced crowds) or symbolic (e.g., contributing to conservation). In line with previous research, this reinforces the notion that WTP for cultural and environmental measures is largely value-driven (Wu & Kim, 2019; Ma et al., 2018).

Attitude (AT) also emerged as a significant direct predictor of WTP (0.324), reinforcing the theoretical assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991). A favorable evaluation of the measure leads to a greater willingness to support it financially. The strong performance of the attitudinal component offers empirical support for TPB's robustness in the context of tourist behavior. It confirms that individual attitudes, shaped by perceived outcomes and values, are central to predicting behavioral intention, particularly when moral or civic considerations are involved (Nguyen et al., 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, the results contribute to the growing literature applying the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in the context of sustainable tourism and pricing measures (Song et al., 2022). The model confirms the essential role of attitudes in shaping intention, a central role of TPB, while also integrating constructs that enrich its explanatory power. In particular, the inclusion of Perceived Value as a mediating construct suggests a useful extension of the TPB framework, showing how value-based judgments interact with attitudinal to influence behavioral intentions (Ru et al., 2019). Furthermore, the study underscores that behavioral models like TPB can be adapted to policy tools such as tourism access fees, providing useful insights for understanding and guiding public compliance with environmental and heritage conservation strategies (López-Mosquera García, 2016).

Beyond theoretical implications, the findings carry several practical and policy insights. First, the high influence of attitudes indicates that public perception of the fee's fairness and utility will make or break its success. Venice's authorities should therefore invest in informational campaigns that clearly explain how the revenue from the access fee will be used to benefit the city's heritage and manage crowds. Transparency about the allocation of the funds for conservation, maintenance of infrastructure, or crowd mitigation could increase positive attitudes. If tourists believe their money contributes to tangible improvements, they might be more likely to pay. This ties to the concept of social acceptance of tourism taxes: Rubbi (2024) notes that evaluating tourists' WTP helps assess an entry fee's acceptability and effectiveness in managing visitor flows (Rubbi, 2024).

A second, more specific implication relates to how the fee is communicated, not just in terms of transparency, but in how it is framed. While the previous point focused on showing where the money goes, here the emphasis is on presenting the fee in a way that feels positive and collaborative. Since most tourists in our sample expressed a willingness to pay, the city could describe the fee not as a tax, but as a contribution or gesture of support to help preserve Venice. Research on contingent valuation shows that people are more open to paying when they feel it's part of a shared responsibility and not just an imposed cost (Ajzen et al, 1996; Byrnes et al., 1999). Framing the payment this way could create a sense of involvement and make tourists feel they are helping protect something valuable. If this message is supported by visible results, it could further strengthen people's acceptance and willingness to contribute (Abuamoud, 2025).

In summary, the discussion highlights that tourists' willingness to pay is multi-faceted. It is driven mainly by personal attitudes, which can be influenced by effective communication of the fee's benefits, supported by practical ability, which can be ensured by thoughtful policy design, and less so by social norms indicating individual decision-making dominates this context. These findings provide evidence-based guidance: to maximize compliance and revenue, policymakers should focus on increasing the perceived value of the fee to visitors. This includes clearly linking the fee to visible improvements, keeping the process visitor-friendly, and maintaining a fair price point. It is encouraging that a large proportion of tourists are willing to pay, a sign that the public recognizes the pressures Venice faces and is open to contributing to solutions.

Managing overtourism requires careful calibration of policies and understanding tourist psychology is a key piece of that puzzle. The implications of this research reach beyond Venice but should be applied with contextual sensitivity. Cities considering similar entrance fees or tourist levies should evaluate how their unique characteristics including geographical, administrative, or socio-cultural ones, affect implementation feasibility. While our findings offer a useful reference, they should not be interpreted as universally applicable. Instead, they can serve as a conceptual starting point for other destinations, provided that policy makers carefully adapt the design and communication of access fees to their own logistical constraints, cultural expectations, local realities and infrastructure, and visitor profiles. Ultimately, the goal is a more sustainable tourism model where visitors actively participate in the preservation of the very sites they enjoy.

5.8 Final Remarks

5.8.1 Limitations

Notwithstanding the contributions, this research has several limitations that must be acknowledged:

Limited Foreign Representation

In our sample, only 3 out of 207 respondents were foreign (non-Italian) tourists, so the perspectives of international visitors are largely missing. This lack of national diversity is a notable limitation because tourists from different countries or cultural backgrounds may have different views on paying an access fee. Prior research suggests that willingness to pay tourism fees can vary by country of origin (Göktaş & Çetin, 2023). Without a sufficient number of foreign respondents, we could not determine if such cross-cultural variations apply in the Venice context.

Hypothetical Bias (Intent vs. Action)

At the time of data collection, Venice's day-trip access fee had only been implemented for two years (Hughes, 2024). While respondents were aware of the policy, and some may have experienced it on those peak days, their stated willingness to pay might still differ from their actual behavior when faced with a real payment requirement. In survey scenarios, people often express intentions that don't fully translate into actions thus, our results capture visitors' stated acceptance in principle, more than a guaranteed prediction of compliance once the fee is permanently and universally enforced. This intent-behavior gap means there is a risk of hypothetical bias in our findings.

Limited Scope of Factors

Our structural model did not include many other variables that might influence willingness to pay. We did not measure, for example, personal moral norms, such as a sense of ethical duty to contribute, or trust in authorities to use the revenue well. Moreover, certain visitor characteristics like income level or awareness of Venice's environmental issues were outside the scope of our questionnaire. Omitting these factors means we might be missing some important predictors of willingness to pay that other studies have found relevant (Göktaş & Çetin, 2023). In other words, tourists' payment decisions are complex and could be affected by additional psychological or situational variables beyond those analyzed here.

Context-Specific External Validity

The unique context of Venice limits the direct applicability of our findings to other destinations. Venice is an unusual case: an island city with a world-renowned heritage site, and this likely influenced both visitors' willingness to pay and the feasibility of enforcing the fee. Tourists might be more willing to pay an entry charge for a famously fragile, iconic place like Venice, whereas in a less iconic city a similar fee could meet greater resistance. Likewise, Venice's insular geography, with only a few main entry points by bridge, train station, or port, makes it comparatively easier to monitor and enforce the payment. In fact, the city can set up designated checkpoints and require proof of payment (via QR codes) as visitors enter the limited access points (Hughes, 2024). In a larger, non-insular city with numerous entry routes and no natural control points, implementing and checking a day-tripper fee would be far more challenging, which could undermine compliance. Therefore, caution is warranted in generalizing our results or this fee model to other cities. What works for Venice in terms of visitor attitudes and enforcement practicality may not work elsewhere due to different geographic, logistical, and cultural conditions.

5.8.2 Main Findings

This study investigated tourists' willingness to pay for Venice's access fee through a Structural Equation Modeling approach, generating useful yet contextually bounded insights. The findings indicate that most respondents expressed some degree of willingness to contribute financially to access the city, revealing a broadly favorable attitude towards the policy. However, this apparent acceptance should be interpreted with caution. The positive results reflect visitors' perceptions under hypothetical conditions and in a highly specific context: Venice, a globally recognized and symbolically fragile destination where paying an entry fee may be seen as a moral rather than economic gesture. In this sense, the findings might reveal as much about how people want to appear when surveyed about protecting a world heritage city as about how they would actually behave when faced with a real payment obligation. The SEM analysis confirmed that attitude towards the fee was the strongest predictor of willingness to pay, emphasizing the central role of perceived fairness and usefulness (Rubbi, 2024). Yet, while this supports the theoretical assumptions of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), it also exposes its limits. The model captures rational and attitudinal factors, but it simplifies the emotional, cultural, and even political dimensions of how people react to new forms of regulation. Paying to enter a city like Venice is not a neutral economic act, instead it touches on deeper ideas of entitlement, responsibility, and access to culture. The apparent consistency between positive attitudes and willingness to pay therefore reflects a narrow slice of a more complex psychological and social reality.

The study's limitations reinforce this need for critical reflection. The lack of foreign respondents restricts the interpretive power of the results and prevents meaningful cross-cultural comparison. Visitors from different countries may not share the same ethical or emotional connection to Venice, nor the same perception of fairness when asked to pay for access (Göktaş & Çetin, 2023). Expanding future samples to include a more balanced international representation would help assess whether willingness to pay is driven by global awareness of overtourism or by local and cultural identification with the city. Moreover, because the data was collected during the early stages of the fee's implementation and through self-reported surveys, respondents' answers reflect intentions rather than actual behavior. In such contexts, people often overstate their willingness to pay to appear responsible or supportive. Future research could therefore adopt longitudinal or experimental designs to observe real payment behavior once the fee is fully operational, comparing what visitors say they would do with what they truly do in practice.

Conceptually, the model already captures several key psychological dimensions, such as perceived value, fairness, usefulness, and overall attitude toward the policy. However, future research could expand this framework by exploring deeper ethical or emotional aspects, for instance tourists' sense of moral responsibility, environmental concern, or trust in local authorities. Including these elements could enrich the understanding of how visitors connect their personal values with an economic imposition. It would also be interesting to extend the study beyond Venice to see whether the positive attitude observed here reflects a broader awareness of sustainability issues or is instead linked to Venice's unique cultural prestige and visibility as a fragile, world-famous destination.

In sum, while this research confirms that the access fee enjoys a certain degree of legitimacy among visitors, it also reveals how fragile and context-dependent legitimacy may be. The results should therefore be read not as an endorsement of pricing policies per se, but as evidence of the conditions under which they might be accepted: when they are transparent, equitable, and clearly linked to tangible public benefits. Future studies that overcome these methodological and conceptual limitations could help move the debate from short-term acceptance to long-term transformation, clarifying whether monetary contributions can genuinely foster more sustainable tourism, or merely repackage mass tourism under a greener label. Venice ultimately represents both a testing ground and a reminder of the tensions between heritage preservation and a global tourism economy that continues to prioritize expansion and entertainment over sustainability.

Conclusions

This thesis investigated tourists' willingness to pay (WTP) for Venice's newly introduced access fee, aiming to understand whether such a measure can be socially accepted and used as a viable governance tool to manage overtourism. The empirical results, developed through a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach, validated the proposed conceptual model and revealed several key findings with both theoretical and policy implications.

The strongest and most consistent predictor of WTP was tourists' perceived value of the measure, which emerged as the central mediating variable. This perceived value was significantly influenced by four antecedents: perceived price fairness, individual paying consciousness, perceived usefulness, and perceived ease of use. Among these, perceived price fairness played the most decisive role, suggesting that when tourists judge the fee as fair and justifiable, they are more likely to perceive it positively and be willing to pay it (Konuk, 2019). Individual paying consciousness also had a strong impact, highlighting the role of internalized civic values and moral responsibility. Tourists who feel a sense of collective duty were more supportive of the measure, reinforcing the importance of social and ethical motivations in tourism governance (Berger, 2018). Perceived usefulness was another relevant factor: respondents who viewed the fee as a practical tool to manage overtourism and protect Venice's fragile heritage were more inclined to support it financially. Meanwhile, perceived ease of use showed a smaller but still significant effect, indicating that operational simplicity and transparency can help increase acceptance, though they are secondary compared to fairness and moral predispositions. Another important finding is the direct role of attitudes. The model confirmed that a favorable attitude towards the policy significantly predicted WTP, underlining the need for public engagement and awareness. This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes the role of attitudes in shaping behavioral intention. Attitudes are shaped by perceived outcomes, and in this case, beliefs about fairness, usefulness, and social responsibility played a key role in fostering support.

Despite these encouraging findings, the study is not without limitations. First, the sample was overwhelmingly composed of Italian tourists, with only 3 out of 207 respondents being foreigners. This limits the external validity of the findings and does not allow for cross-cultural comparisons, which are highly relevant when discussing globally diverse tourist flows (Göktaş & Çetin, 2023). Second, the responses reflect a hypothetical scenario: although the fee was implemented during specific peak days, many respondents may not have directly experienced it. As such, their stated willingness to pay might differ from actual behavior in a real-world, consistent implementation context. This gap between intention and behavior is well-documented and remains a source of uncertainty (Hughes, 2024).

Moreover, the structural model did not include other potentially influential variables, such as personal income, trust in local authorities, or environmental awareness. These factors could further enrich the understanding of what drives or limits WTP and should be integrated into future research. Finally, the unique context of Venice, an iconic, fragile, and globally recognized destination, makes it difficult to generalize findings to other cities or regions. What works in Venice may not be easily replicable elsewhere.

Nonetheless, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers. It shows that tourists are not categorically opposed to paying for access when the fee is perceived as fair, purposeful, and efficiently administered. This underscores the importance of transparent communication, careful design, and respect for public perceptions in policy implementation. Future strategies could benefit from participatory processes that involve both visitors and local communities, strengthening the legitimacy and effectiveness of tourism governance.

In conclusion, this thesis demonstrates that a well-designed and properly communicated access fee can be a legitimate policy tool to manage overtourism, provided it aligns with tourists' values and expectations. The findings support the broader shift towards more sustainable tourism models, where economic measures are complemented by ethical considerations and stakeholder engagement. While limitations exist, this work contributes to the ongoing debate on balancing tourism growth with social and environmental responsibility and opens new avenues for research into behavioral drivers of sustainable travel decisions.

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