Voices of protest and the right to the city in the context of overtourism: reflections from the historic city of Chania, Crete (Greece)

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📅 Published online: 01 Jul 2025.

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Voices of protest and the right to the city in the context of overtourism: reflections from the historic city of Chania, Crete (Greece)

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After the years of the 'Great Recession' of 2008, tourism growth has become a lever for economic recovery in many southern European cities, followed by rapid urban transformations. Based on multimodal ethnographic research in historic neighbourhoods of the city of Chania (Crete, Greece), this article offers an in-depth examination of the transformation of the economic and social fabric of a city threatened by the ongoing tourism growth, promoted by both neoliberal strategies and state policies. Drawing on Lefebvre's ideas on the right to the city, this article contributes to the conceptual debates on tourism monoculture, touristification and place alienation and attempts to initiate a debate on political struggles against overtourism in small historic Mediterranean cities, which are often missing in urban tourism studies. The study reveals a diverse repertoire of protests: resilient

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narratives that address the deterioration of quality of life, the housing crisis and residential displacement; retrospective voices that look back nostalgically at the past community and express feelings of depression; and, above all, radical actors, usually excluded from the mainstream discourse on tourism, who invoke the right to the city to support the pursuit of a just city through discursive protest and activist practices.

Introduction

The urban economy in the post-industrial cities of southern Europe is driven by a consumption-led growth model characterised by intensification of tourism and leisure development. Overtourism occurs when destinations exceed the threshold of sustainability in terms of social, environmental, phycological and economic capacities, followed by strong negative feelings of host communities and visitors. The challenge of overtourism has attracted considerable attention in academic literature and the media, while international institutions such as the World Tourism Organisation and the European Parliament have sought possible policy responses (UNWTO 2018).

The recent wave of overtourism in Southern European destinations is related to the utilisation of tourism and leisure as important economic recovery strategies to overcome the negative effects of the Great Recession (Sequera and Nofre 2018). This process has been favoured by the development of an Airbnb economy and a hyper-flexible property and rental market focused on short-term rentals (STRs), which improves market efficiency for property owners and makes them increasingly attractive to both local and global investors (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021). In addition, new technologies and innovative business models such as online booking sites, short-term rental platform, package holidays, low-cost airlines and cruise tourism have accelerated tourism growth (Nilsson 2020).

Just as tourism growth accelerates neoliberal urbanism, it also opens up space for social concerns and social movement resistance in many southern European cities (e.g. Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021; Fernandes and Batel 2023; Hughes 2018; Milano, Novelli, and Russo 2024). The protest against overtourism is the epicentre of our ethnographic research in Chania, a small, historic coastal city with a rich cultural and archaeological heritage, whose identity and urban fabric are threatened by the pressure of tourism. Chania is a popular tourist destination on Crete, the largest island in Greece and the so-called flagship of Greek tourism. It is also among the few cities in Greece where the problem of overtourism has engaged the local population and led to protests and social movement campaigns attracting the attention of the local and national press.

In Chania, the visual signs of overtourism are omnipresent: Billboards advertising renovated buildings for rent to tourists, advertisements for selling products for tourists and cruises to nearby 'exotic' beaches, crowded and noisy bars and tavernas around the harbour, which resembles a bustling

tourist park in summer. At the same time, the dissatisfaction of many locals and social movements is evident in everyday discussions and is inscribed in the cityscape through graffiti protesting tourism growth and its impacts in the urban fabric.

This paper aims to contribute to emerging debates in urban studies on overtourism in Southern Europe by offering fresh empirical insights from the perspective of a country and a city where the issue of overtourism has not yet been sufficiently researched. Using a novel multimodal approach that draws on a variety of sources, the study examines overtourism from the perspective of a bottom-up counter-discourse that challenges the prevailing euphoric narrative of tourism growth as a means to economic development and prosperity. The study uses an analytical framework inspired by Lefebvre's discourse on the right to the city and recent debates on overtourism in urban tourism studies to better understand the concerns of residents and social movements about the erosion of the quality of community life and the transformation of the urban fabric. It offers new conceptual insights on overtourism and touristification in small coastal Mediterranean cities that raise issues of power, social injustice, alienation and the citizens' rights to urban communities.

The article is divided into two main parts. The first part contains critical theoretical reflections on the debates about touristification, overtourism, urban commons and place alienation, and pays particular attention to the discourse against overtourism in the context of Lefebvre's ideas on the right to the city. The second, empirical part is based on a multimodal ethnography of historical neighbourhoods in Chania that employs interviews, graffiti, social media and press sources to uncover both the context of the development of overtourism in Chania and the repertory of the voices of protest against overtourism. The article ends with a conceptual discussion of urban transformation and the touristification of the urban fabric in southern European cities. It highlights the different narratives that either call for the resilience of their communities through supportive state and municipal policies or challenge the discourse of tourism growth and defend, through street activism, the right of citizens to control community life and the urban and natural commons.

Overtourism and touristification in southern European cities

The intensification of tourism has changed the social and cultural fabric of contemporary city. The term touristification was coined to describe the multi-layered process of transforming the urban environment into a space for tourist consumption (Salerno 2022). It goes hand in hand with the transformation of the traditional retail landscape of city centres into disneyfied commercial tourism spaces, the development of transnational and local real estate markets and venture investment funds, the cross-class displacement (Sequera and Nofre 2018) or, in other cases, the displacement of low-income households and the appropriation of public space (Jover and Díaz-Parra 2022).

Overtourism is another way to conceptualise the intensification of tourism in and around tourist cities in the context of unregulated capital accumulation and growth strategies associated with selling cities as tourism commodities

(Milano, Novelli, and Cheer 2019). According to Jover and Díaz-Parra (2022), touristification refers to the consequences of tourism growth in urban environments, while overtourism focuses on the strong negative impact on the perceived quality of life by citizens and/or visitors (UNWTO 2018) and is related to the 'sheer pressure of economy overreliance on local resources extraction', which manifests in a variety of disruptions to the social ecosystem, and the consequences this has 'for places, communities, labour regimes, discourses and policy frames' (Milano, Novelli, and Russo 2024, 1315).

Overtourism is not just a matter of oversaturation of destinations, but a more serious situation involving a spatially uneven distribution of tourism. In certain urban areas 'urban marketing, heritage restoration and private investment converge' to accommodate most of the city's tourism infrastructure, and possibly the intensification of tourist flows leads to an expansion of touristification to surrounding areas that were previously mainly residential (Jover and Díaz-Parra 2022, 13). Moreover, overtourism occurs in the context of a restructured urban economy based on tourism monoculture, in which the majority of economic activities are 'directly or indirectly related to tourism, in line with public policies that focus on attracting capital and visitors', potentially dismantling other sectors (Jover and Díaz-Parra 2022, 14). The model of tourism monoculture is largely based on the convergence of a complex web of interests between the tourism sector and the construction industry (Conti and Perelli 2011). This fragile model favours 'a significant reduction in the housing stock, which increasingly provides space for the tourism market', driving up the cost of living and leading to the displacement of the most vulnerable residents and the gradual transformation of residential neighbourhoods into tourist areas (Basso and Fregolent 2021, 157).

Residents' negative feelings towards overtourism are triggered when destinations breach the threshold of what communities can tolerate and the limit of their capacities 'to adapt and respond to the changing social and environmental conditions' (Cheer, Milano, and Novelli 2019, 561). They feel that the quality of life in the area has deteriorated in an unacceptable way (Goodwin 2017) and are forced to change their lifestyle and the realisation of their optimal well-being, which affects their right to determine the conditions of daily life (Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021; Milano, Novelli, and Cheer 2019).

In studies on urban tourism, excessive tourism is often associated with processes of capital accumulation, including the financialisation of the housing market, rising property and rental prices, over-reliance on increasing foreign investment, and the exploitation and precarisation of labour (Milano, Novelli, and Russo 2024). Overtourism can lead to the displacement of local service providers and community exchange networks as well as the privatisation of public space. The rise of the Airbnb economy in tourist cities plays an important role in creating investment opportunities that facilitate the arrival of global real estate capital in certain neighbourhoods (Cocola-Gant and Gago 2021). It accelerates changes in the urban fabric, especially in working-class neighbourhoods that are transformed into places of tourist consumption, entertainment and leisure (Sequera and Nofre 2018). This process often leads to the loss of housing units for long-term residents, which is converted into gentrified housing for short-term rentals (Colomb and Novy 2017; Salerno 2022).

Right to the city, place alienation and urban commons

Lefebvre's theory of the alienation of everyday life is crucial for understanding the effects of overtourism and the transformation of urban space for the profitability of capital (1991a, 2005). Lefebvre has shown that alienation arises not only in the workplace, but also in the sphere of everyday life through the expansion of economic growth and state control in people's living spaces. These processes alienate people from their creative ability to produce representational spaces and to control community life and their relationship with nature (Lefebvre 1991a).

Scholars have linked the narrative of the right to the city (Lefebvre 1968) with the right to a non-alienated urban life and the sense of belonging to a particular community (Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021). Residents have the right to co-create and maintain their community and to derive the socio-economic, cultural and psychological benefits from community life (Hubbard and Lees 2018). In the context of overtourism, it becomes increasingly difficult to 'develop a sense of community and create meaning when public space and the built environment are constantly commodified for profit' as people's attachment to their place is disrupted, leading to a sense of subjective alienation from their neighbourhood (Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021, 171). In these circumstances, citizens' emotional and material ties to the communities to which they feel they belong and around which their daily lives revolve are disrupted. This leads to a sense of loss of control over the place and community, which now belong to others (visitors, investors, markets), and, in some cases, to feelings of deprivation, anger and frustration (Cocola-Gant 2023; Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021).

Lefebvre has discussed the relationship between tourism development and the accumulation of capital in Mediterranean cities, claiming that the lack of industrialisation in southern European regions is substituted by the development of a non-productive circuit of capital accumulation in which 'tourism and leisure become the major areas of investment and profitability' (Lefebvre 1991b, 353), leading to a kind of urban neo-colonisation (Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021, 161). In popular destinations, the tourism industry 'treats daily life as the colonialists once treated the colonised territories', transforming the urban economy and everyday life and imposing the predominance of exchange value over use value (Kipfer and Goonewardena 2013, 89). Entire ways of life are disrupted when tourism growth displaces small shops, local service providers, retail activities or informal economies and the space is increasingly colonised by consumer and leisure activities for mass tourism.

In the tourist city, heritage sites are appropriated by tourism and leisure businesses for consumption and profitability. The process of touristification is accelerated by the neoliberal policy of 'heritagisation' of the city, which favours the creation of spaces to be seen rather than inhabited (Alonso González 2015) and the objectification of urban areas into aesthetic commodities (Salerno 2022).

While the narrative of cultural heritage helps to build and legitimise the 'neoliberal marketisation and private appropriation of historic centres', it also provides space for social preservationists and social movements to defend the city's cultural heritage as an urban common and thus resist neoliberal appropriation (Franquesa 2013, 346). In this sense, everyday life harbours the potential for the exercise of the right to the city by opening a window onto a

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process of dis-alienation of the everyday in the struggles for the (re)appropriation of neighbourhoods as urban commons 'through autogestion or self-management, prioritising use value over exchange value' (Eidelman and Safransky 2021, 797).

Scholars have highlighted how social movements resisting the commodification of urban commons can use legal tools to encourage residents to assert their right to community in the fight against dispossession (Hubbard and Lees 2018, 20) and resist the state and market-driven dynamics of value extraction from popular neighbourhoods (Pecile 2022). In touristified neighbourhoods, an insistence on the right of residents to remain and on their belonging to a neighbourhood has emerged as a reaction to the negative effects of touristification (Jover, Barrero-Rescalvo, and Díaz-Parra 2023).

The discussion of the right to the city from the perspective of the commons resurfaced during the recent global economic crisis. In response to the privatisation of resources and services resulting from austerity policies and the loss of trust in market-based systems and the state to protect natural resources, the urban commons movement emerged (Eidelman and Safransky 2021; Pecile 2022).

In the post-crisis period, this movement was confronted with the development of an important form of capital accumulation, the intense touristification of the urban fabric, driven by local elites to reorganise the cultural, spatial and social order of the city and prioritise the needs of investors and mass tourism (Pecile 2022). The rapid touristification of the neighbourhood destroyed the social capital made up of emotional and material ties that residents have to their neighbourhoods, leading to a sense of loss of place and at times to a feeling of mental distress (Cocola-Gant 2023).

Scholars have problematised the tourism growth model that treats cities as commodities, reminding us that the natural limits to growth of many destinations have already been exceeded by a model that reinforces inequalities and has disastrous consequences for the environment and humanity (Andriotis 2018; Buscher and Fletcher 2017). Around the world, mass tourism has sparked protests and concern (see, for example, the anti-tourism mobilisations in Barcelona, Hughes 2018; Milano, Novelli, and Russo 2024, and Lisbon, Fernandes and Batel 2023) and calls for alternative management and governance measures to combat tourism monoculture and unregulated growth strategies (Milano, Novelli, and Cheer 2019).

In the theoretical part of this article, we discuss the complex links between touristification, tourism monoculture and housing crisis in the context of overtourism in Southern European cities. We then foreground some ideas from the Lefebrian discourse on the right to the city and the alienation of everyday life to provide an insight into the contemporary urban struggles of social movements fighting for the defence of the urban commons and the right to neigbourhood in the context of overtourism.

Tourism development in Greece and the case of Chania: historical context

Tourism is an important sector of the Greek economy. In the latter half of the 20th century, the Greek tourism industry grew due to the increasing global demand

for tourist services, the charter flight revolution and the tourism policy of the military regime (1967–74). For the junta leadership, tourism served both as a means of creating political consensus and as the main instrument for increasing the gross national product, with state incentives driving the expansion of the sector without regard for spatial planning, environmental protection and labour rights (Nikolakakis 2017). In the 1980s and 1990s, state funds continued to flow into the tourism sector, transport infrastructure was expanded, and favourable legislation facilitated the development of the tourism sector (Andriotis 2003).

In recent decades, the state has continued to play a decisive role in promoting the development of tourism with favourable measures and subsidies for tourism businesses. The tourism sector has survived the negative shocks during the recession without significant loss of its competitive position at international level and has been used as an important engine for the country's development, especially for the post-crisis recovery (Agiomirgianakis and Sfakianakis 2022).

More recently, with Law 4251, the Greek state introduced the 'Residence by Investment' or 'Golden Visa' programme, which promoted the growth of tourism in the wake of the economic downturn to fill short-term economic gaps. The programme provides a five-year residence visa in Greece for an investment of €250,000. Later, the limit for investing in real estate in high-demand areas was raised to €500,000 (Law 5007/2022) to combat the negative effects of uncontrolled property development and the housing crisis. In April 2024, an amendment to the law raised the limit of the required amount to €800,000 in areas with high demand (including islands with more than 3100 inhabitants such as Crete) and limited it to €400,000 in other areas.

As Surak and Tsuzuki (2021) have shown, the economic impact of comparable Golden Visa programmes in other European countries was negligible and the impact on the real estate market was small. Greece was the exception, as the real estate market was significantly affected by the investments for the Golden Visa programme, which was responsible for one third of real estate transactions. According to data from the Bank of Greece (2024), of the total €2.1 billion in foreign direct investment in Greece in the first half of 2024, €1.14 billion (54.2%) is attributable to the acquisition of real estate (Bank of Greece 2024; see also Rousanoglou 2024). In the post-pandemic period, there was an increase in both new applications for investor permits for Golden Visas (from 4352 in 2022 to 9411 in 2024) and renewals of investor permits (from 1281 in 2022 to 4029 in 2024) (Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum 2024).

Foreign investors and property funds are attracted by the governmental policies. The growth of tourism and the Airbnb economy has had some positive effects on the country's economic recovery efforts. The Airbnb economy mobilises complementary economic activities ranging from building renovation and cleaning services to leisure businesses. This process enables locals to become quasi-entrepreneurs and increase their income, property owners to benefit from higher revenues through rising rents and house prices, and many professionals (e.g. architects and civil engineers, designers, contractors, real estate agents and cleaners) whose jobs have been severely impacted by the economic crisis to work in a variety of Airbnb-related economic activities (Balampanidis et al. 2021).

However, the growth of tourism also has several downsides. The rapid increase in tourist demand creates space for the development of STRs and

the transformation of urban areas. For example, the touristification of place-based activities, values and ideas that are attractive to tourists is changing the highly antagonistic political landscape of the Athenian neighbourhood of Exarcheia. It is in danger of becoming an exoticised place for tourist attractions losing the identity it once had as a place of political and creative expression (Pettas et al. 2022). Also, a local Airbnb economy has developed because of the increased tourist influx into Thessaloniki, facilitating (re) investment in housing by powerful market players competing against amateur hosts, professionalising short-term rentals and displacing low-income residents (Katsinas 2021).

Also, a local Airbnb economy has developed because of the increased tourist influx into Thessaloniki, facilitating (re)investment in housing by powerful market players competing against amateur hosts, professionalising short-term rentals and displacing low-income residents.

The heavy dependence of the Greek economy on tourism[1] makes it particularly vulnerable to adverse circumstances that could affect tourism activities, such as pandemics (Petrakis and Kostis 2020). Moreover. increasing tourist arrivals lead to much more intensive work for employees in the tourism sector, whose increased productivity has not been adequately compensated with a fair share of the sector's profitability, and as tourism plays a significant role in overall income inequality, the profit–wage gap widens (Missos, Rodousakis, and Soklis 2021).

The exponential investment in real estate associated with the tourism boom has led to a housing crisis with a shortage of long-term housing and rising prices for renting or buying houses, exacerbating the already existing problem of access to affordable housing for large sections of the population (Maloutas, Siatitsa, and Balampanidis 2020).

While the state has encouraged foreign investment through the flexible Golden Visa schemes and facilitated the growth of the Airbnb economy, it has failed to address the imbalance between supply and demand in the domestic housing and long-term rental market, for example through social housing programmes or the creation of new student accommodation. On several of the most visited islands of the Aegean, such as Crete and Santorini, the vast and increasing flows of tourists has led to a public debate on the issue of overtourism and its environmental, social and economic impacts (Panousi and Petrakos 2021; Sarantakou and Terkenli 2019; Vourdoubas 2020). Chania is a coastal city particularly attractive to tourists and visitors looking for escape experiences in selectively 'unspoilt' places, with activities that can be associated with history and cultural tourism. The city has experienced rapid tourism growth after the financial crisis and is one of the few cities in Greece that protest mobilisations has been organised by grassroots social movements. It is therefore an interesting case study for new conceptual and empirical insights into the narratives and strategies of addressing overtourism in small Mediterranean cities.

The rich history of Chania is evident in the archaeological remains and historical sites. These include Byzantine and Venetian city walls, mosques and a synagogue, Christian churches, Venetian buildings and an Egyptian lighthouse, which are mainly located around the old harbour. Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Venetians and Ottomans colonised the area and left their mark on the city's

landscape and culture. After years of uprisings against Ottoman rule, Crete was declared an autonomous region in 1898. Chania became the capital of the Cretan state (Kritiki Politeia, 1898–1913) and experienced a cosmopolitan period of growth and prosperity, followed by the unification of Crete with Greece in 1913 (Detorakis 2015).

The districts in the city centre are of historical and cultural interest. Splantzia was a Muslim neighbourhood that was later settled by the newly arrived refugees from Asia Minor after the Greek-Turkish population exchange under the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). The hill of Kastelli is the site of ancient Kydonia, which was later settled by the Venetians and was the residence of the richest Muslims during the years of the Ottoman Empire, most of whom were Islamised Venetian feudal lords. Evraiki was the old neighbourhood of the Jewish community, which was dissolved after the Nazi genocide and later inhabited by locals, and Tophanas, on the western edge of the harbour, was the place of the Christian elites during the Cretan state. The neighbourhoods of Nea Chora and Koum Kapi, at the western and eastern ends of the old town, were among the first places to be settled outside the city walls (see Figure 1).

In the interwar period, despite the initial difficulties, refugees from Asia Minor brought their cultural heritage to their new homeland and significantly enriched the local society and economy. After 1960, Chania slowly began to develop into a tourist destination, following the development path of the island's tourism industry. In the mid-1960s, Crete became a place of alternative tourism linked to the youth radicalism of the 1960s and the hippie movement in the remote northern areas of the island (Nikolakakis 2017).

Since the 1980s, a process of touristification has been taking place in the old city, supported by the local government's policy of making the harbour city an attractive tourist destination. This included the redevelopment of the previously run-down Koum Kapi beach in the 1980s, pedestrianisation projects in the streets and squares around the Venetian harbour and the 'heritagisation' of the old city that began in 2003 and continues to this day through the reconstruction of the fortifications, which emphasises the monumental character of the city and promotes tourism development (Andrianakis 2024).

Figure 1: Historical neighbourhoods around the port of Chania (Edited by Maria Tamvaki).

Positionality and methodology

We live in cities in Crete and our interest in overtourism developed through observing the radical transformation of historic neighbourhoods, the colonisation of everyday life by the logic of tourism monoculture and the violence of real estate capital in displacing vulnerable people. As members of the academic staff of the University of Crete, we share the concerns of our students to find affordable rental housing and the pressure of landlords to vacate their houses in the summer season to make them available for short-term tourist rentals. We have participated in public discussions at anti-racist festivals organised by grassroots social movements on the issue of overtourism. Our interest intensified when we conducted a study on urban deprivation in Crete for the Observatory for Social Inclusion of Crete and residents of the neighbourhoods of Splantzia and Koum Kapi expressed their concern about the impact of tourism growth in their communities.

The study is based on a multimodal approach that includes ethnographic fieldwork and complementary data on tourist flows and trends in the city's tourism-driven economy. Analysing indicators of tourism growth was important to shed light on the problem of the expansive growth of tourist flows and the pressure on the living conditions of locals (e.g. housing situation). This strategy was also a response to an ethical problem that we needed to address. Overtourism is a taboo concept in a country whose economy depends on tourism. Not only in government policy, but also in large parts of society, the idea prevails that tourism growth is the main driver of the country's economic development and prosperity. In this context, we had to be careful in the use of the term and turn to a multimodal evidence-based analysis that includes not only interpretation of the repertories of locals' protests, but also various indicators of overtourism.

The main body of data was collected through ethnographic fieldwork. To explore the views of community members, interviews were conducted in the summer and September of 2023, when tourism activities were at their peak. The first contact and key person for recruiting the participants through a snowballing process, was a member of the neighbourhood assembly of Splantzia. The aim of the snowball method was to reach people from different age groups, genders, ethnicities and educational backgrounds. The most important criterion, however, was that they had all lived in the city at least for 20 years and had therefore witnessed the urban changes. All participants stated that tourism is an important factor affecting their lives, mostly in a negative way, with the impact of overtourism being frequently emphasised. To complement the voices of citizens with the views of local social movements resisting overtourism, additional interviews were conducted with active members of grassroots organisations in October 2023.

A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were analysed. The participants are between 32 and 90 years old, nine are women and six are men. Three of them are migrants and seven have a university education, including three out of four active members of social movements. Based on their professional and educational status, eight of the participants belong to the middle class, while the others belong to the working class. All of them signed a consent form before

the interview, which took place either at their homes (in the neighbourhoods of Splantzia and Koom Kapi) or in a local café.

In addition, local press sources, websites and social media were monitored using the keyword overtourism to capture social mobilisation and discursive protest related to overtourism, including protest actions, announcements by grassroots organisations and neighbourhood assemblies, as well as citizens' views in opinion articles in the local newspaper have been collected for the period 2018 up to 2024.

Through field observation in the touristic areas of the city during May to October 2023, spatial changes in urban fabric and specific locations (usually on or near houses that have become Airbnb accommodation) used by graffiti activists to resist overtourism were investigated. Field observations combined with informal conversations with activists give us a more comprehensive picture of the dynamics of cultural, social and spatial change in the city and the everyday forms of resistance to overtourism. A thematic analysis was then conducted to identify and interpret patterns of meaning that reveal the worldviews and actions of participants and grassroots organisations in relation to overtourism and its impact on urban life.

Trends of recent tourism growth in Chania

Due to its history, culture and beauty as well as its picturesque hinterland, Chania is considered one of the most visited destinations in the EU (Vourdoubas 2020). Over the last decade (except for the pandemic crisis), the city has experienced a constant increase in foreign tourists, accelerated by the opening of the first Greek hub of the Irish low-cost airline Ryanair on 25 April 2013.

Figure 2 shows the estimated number of international arrivals from both direct charter flights and cruise ships. There is an upward trend in international passenger arrivals, with a record number (1,807,655) of arrivals in 2024, including 1,527,901 by direct charter flights and 279, 754 by cruise ships. It is estimated that the total number of visitors to the city, including those arriving by domestic flights or by car from neighbouring cities, is close to two and a half million.

Tourist flows peak in the summer season. From June to September 2024, 1,119,043 tourists came to the city on direct charter flights alone. During this period, a city of about thirteen square kilometres with 54,559 inhabitants (2021 census), which is the main unit of the municipality of Chania (110,646 inhabitants), is transformed into a tourist landscape where many visitors crowd into a small area around the Venetian port for nightlife and leisure, accompanied by noise pollution and environmental nuisance.

The sharp increase in demand for short-term rentals due to the tourism boom in Cretan destinations, combined with the island's favourable climatic conditions and natural beauty favoured investment activity, especially by profit-oriented businessmen. In the period from 2017 to February 2025, 26,373 foreigners obtained a Golden Visa investor residence permit in Crete, 8.72% of the total permits issued in the whole country, a much higher percentage than the corresponding percentage of the population of Crete in Greece, 5.95%
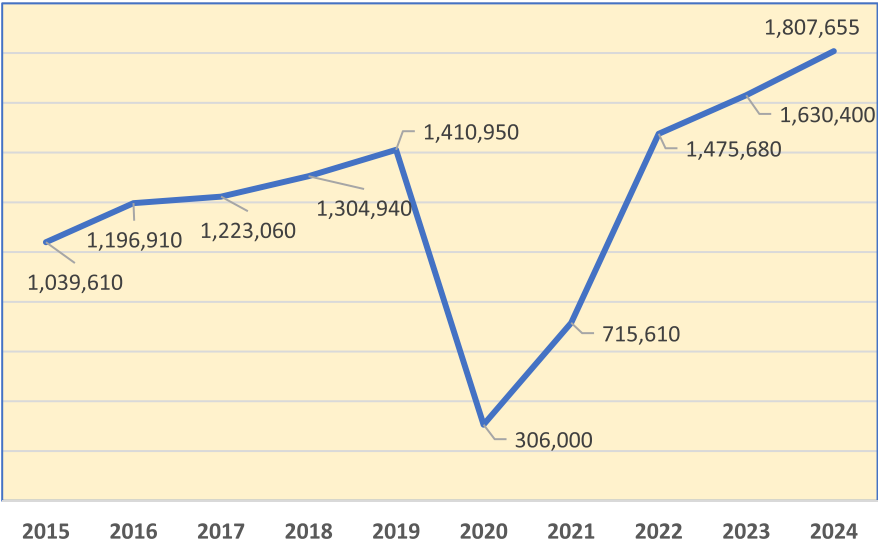
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Figure 2: Number of international passengers' arrivals by direct chapter flights and cruise ships in Chania (2015–24) (Sources: Fraport Greece 2025; Hellenic Ports Union 2025; Tourism Observatory of Western Crete 2023. Edited by the authors).

(Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum 2024). These procedures led to an upward trend in prices on both the housing market and the rental market. The SPI price index, which represents price trends in the Greek property market based on millions of pieces of property data from Greece's most popular property website, shows an upward trend in residential sales and rents for the municipality of Chania in the period 2014–24, both of which have peaked in the last three years (Spitogatos 2025). In addition, the tourism boom, which is incompatible with the city's existing hotel infrastructure, has favoured the growth of the Airbnb economy. According to the Airbnb platform (Inside Airbnb 2025), the municipality of Chania has the highest number of Airbnb rentals (5785) among all the municipalities of Crete and is about three times higher than the corresponding figure in the municipality of Heraklion (2091), the capital of the island region, although the population of Heraklion (177,064, 2021 census) is much higher than that of Chania.

As Figure 3 shows, most short-term rental accommodation is concentrated in a small area around the harbour. The long-running process of touristification of the old city has now spread to the lower- and middle-class historic neighbourhoods that were not touristified until recently (Splantzia, Koum Kapi and Nea Chora).

These changes have dramatically exacerbated the housing problem in the city. The most affected are tenants who work seasonally in the tourism sector or as contract teachers, new households looking to buy or rent a flat, and students at the Technical University of Crete and the Hellenic Mediterranean University living in Chania.

In the post-Covid era, the growth of tourism has been fuelled by strategic plans of the Municipality of Chania, which include coordinated actions by local stakeholders to promote international tourism in the city, attracting private investment, improving tourism infrastructure and services (e.g. fast internet and

Figure 3: Spatial distribution of Airbnb accommodation in central areas of Chania (Source: Inside Airbnb 2025).

hospitality for digital nomads) and developing alternative forms of experiential tourism (see e.g. Haniotika Nea 2025; Newsbeast 2024). In this context, at the end of December 2022, the Municipality of Chania presented a study for the construction of a large marina with a capacity of more than 450 boats in the historic neighbourhood of Nea Chora, to be financed through a public-private partnership (Hania News 2022b).

Resisting touristification and housing crisis

The increasing development of tourism and the Airbnb economy in Chania in recent years has sparked ongoing public controversy in the press and social media about the impact of tourism on the city's economy and society. On the one hand, local elites, tourism stakeholders and a section of society see the growth of tourism as crucial for improving economic prosperity and consider it a feasible goal to make Chania a particularly attractive year-round destination (Oikonomikos Taxydromos 2024). An opinion article in the local press emphasises that there is no overtourism, instead tourism 'breathes life into Chania, creates jobs and protects Chanians from economic misery' (Kiagias 2022).

On the other hand, grassroots social movements are questioning the increasing touristification and the radical changes in the social, spatial and economic fabric of the city and are opening up new avenues for collective action. In newspaper reports, locals express their concerns about overtourism, such as the sense that 'from April to October, you have the feeling that the sea area, which does not belong to you, has been ceded to the visitors and daily life is organised around them' (Pournara 2024).

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Grassroots organisations that have struggled for the resilience of their communities affected by draconian austerity measures (Papadaki and Kalogeraki 2017) have now incorporated overtourism into their discourse. They are inspired by radical ideologies (such as degrowth, autonomy, commons) spread by social movements in Greece in the era of austerity and use innovative practices of commoning prefiguring libertarian forms of collective life beyond state regulation and market-driven solutions (Roussos 2019; Zaimakis 2018).

In Chania, student and teacher associations, neighbourhood assemblies, squatters, solidarity economy organisations, anarchist and left-wing activists have taken part in protest actions related to overtourism effects. Shortly before Covid-19, a newly formed citizens' initiative began to question the rapid and uncontrolled tourism growth in the city's coastal zone. The members of the 'Initiative Against Touristification' organised several campaigns in 2018 and 2019, including protest events at tourist sites, neighbourhood meetings and visual resistance through banners and graffiti, to draw attention to the transformation of the city into a 'tourist land' and the negative impact of overtourism on housing. Several members of the initiative claimed on the local branch of state radio in June 2018 that the 'Airbnb trend has gripped the city' as 'property owners are evicting their tenants for profit' (Theodoraki 2018).

In a joint statement in September 2019, the associations of primary and secondary school teachers called for housing policy measures from the local authorities to support teachers in rented accommodation, as 'touristification, commercialisation and market laws work against the right to housing' (Efimerida ton Syntakton 2019). At protest events in September 2023, the student unions of the Polytechnic of Chania pointed out that rents are unaffordable for most young people due to tourism and Airbnb and called for more student residences for people with low family incomes (Kriti360 2023).

The stories of the residents reveal different, sometimes controversial views on the effects of Airbnb practice. Some acknowledge the opportunity for disadvantaged households to use their 'old, sunless houses with small windows' (P8) for tourism purposes in order to increase their income. Others mention that 'buildings that were almost ruins have been renovated and became beautiful, which is good' (P10). However, many argue that the STR boom is changing the population composition of their neighbourhood displacing groups traditionally associated with the city centre, such as workers, students, migrants and older residents. An immigrant living in Splantzia for over 30 years mentions that the majority of his peers 'have moved to other, cheaper areas of the city to be able to afford the housing cost' (P3). He calls for government incentives to encourage homeowners to maintain their properties, e.g. by 'giving them a low-interest loan to renovate their houses and not forcing them to sell their property' (P3), while a middle-aged woman with a higher education background suggests 'creating dormitories for students in the neighbourhood' (P5).

Displaced tenants such as a French woman who lived in Splantzia for many years and recently moved to the cheaper neighbourhood of Koum Kapi because her 'landlady decided overnight to raise the rent from €330 to €450', noted that landlords renovate their houses to rent them out to tourists at a higher price but do not care about the condition of the houses when they rent them out to locals. She wonders: 'Am I worth less than a tourist?' (P9). Similarly,

a member of a local initiative against overtourism describes the Airbnb practice as a 'Trojan horse' that transforms the consciousness of residents, who prioritise the exchange value of their property and sell it to investors, changing the composition of the neighbourhood's population. He criticises the government's policy of promoting tourism growth instead of considering the needs of vulnerable households:

> Tourism brought capital and land exploitation to the city. Anyone who has a small house can rent it out and make some money, and others have seen it as an opportunity to invest and make a profit. [...] But it cannot be that the student union says we have no houses and dormitories to live in and the media triumphs that Crete is one of the top tourist destinations. Is that what we want? Do we want tourists and send our children away? [...] The state wants to promote the growth of tourism more and therefore subsidises tourist accommodation. Subsidising means taking free money from us taxpayers and giving it to tourism entrepreneurs instead of supporting those who need it. (P14)

Activists criticise the speculative activities in the real estate markets and Airbnb economy by local and international investors who exploit the needs of disadvantaged households and ask the crucial question of who benefits from the tourism boom in the city. A member of a social and solidarity co-operative comment on this point:

> When Chania became known as a popular destination, the 'jackals', the technical offices, companies, etc. discovered the city. They started buying houses, the old ruins for a piece of bread, renovating them and turning them either into hotels or most of them into Airbnb [...] In this street I'm the only one who doesn't have a house for tourist use. (P12)

They also point to the dark side of overtourism, namely undeclared labour in a country with a large shadow economy and a high level of corruption in the tourism sector. One squatter claims that overtourism favours 'certain interest groups' as it is linked to 'the deregulation of the labour market with undeclared work and uninsured workers' and a 'promiscuity that serves short-term profitability and leaves nothing for future generations and especially for those who live off work' (P15).

While participants claim that they don't challenge the right to mobility of tourists but rather the 'uncontrolled tourism industry that is taking over all the space in the city' (P14), several graffiti contain aggressive messages against tourists, reflecting the mood of the international movement against overtourism. For example, one graffiti with an imperative tenor links the displacement of residents to excessive tourism: 'Tourists go home because you take ours' (Figure 4), another asks: 'What the hell are we supposed to do with so many tourists? we will leave our homes for these tourists' and a spray-painted slogan at the entrance of a residential building calls for: 'No more Airbnb and regeneration'. Perhaps this contradiction shows us that there are dissenting voices that fly under the radar of interview research. In any case, the meaning of these graffiti must be sought in the context of the subculture of political graffiti in which

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Figure 4: Graffiti in the neighbourhood of Splantzia (Photo by Yiannis Zaimakis).

activists use vernacular slogans with sarcastic, aggressive and provocative language as semantic devices to reinforce their messages in public space, a well-known tactic used by Greek protesters in the heterotopias of political graffiti at critical times (Zaimakis 2015).

Alienation in everyday life and loss of community

Alienation from community life is a central theme in the narratives of the participants, who give vivid accounts of the erosion of bonds of solidarity in their communities and the enclosure of public space due to the accelerated commercialisation of space. In this sense, a participant denounces 'the removal of three community benches from Splantzia Square by the municipality after tourist shop owners complained about immigrants from the neighborhood sitting there and eating the soup' (P14) offered by the Splantzia Soupe Kitchen Initiative, disconnecting vulnerable groups from their communal spaces.

The interviewees problematise the abrupt changes that overtourism brings to the urban fabric and invoke the right of residents to remain in an appropriate living environment. A member of the Old Town Residents' Association criticises the rapid touristification of the neighbourhood, with which 'we can no longer

keep up' and emphasises the solidarity of the residents as an act of resilience, a response to the depersonalisation of the space. For her, Splantzia 'must not become a faceless piece without a neighbourhood', because 'the tourists change every night and cannot give personality and colour'. She calls on the authorities 'to stop burdening the place with all the crowds that come and oppress the residents' (P5) and reminds them of their duty to support the most vulnerable residents so that they can remain in their communities.

Another elderly resident expresses feelings of expulsion and dispossession caused by the loss of neighbourhood networks and the increasing lack of identification with place:

> And you see houses being renovated, who's going to stay, a stranger took it. Here three Englishmen bought the house next door. [...] there are a few [residents] left who, because of age and helplessness, feel a bit confused, frustrated [...]. You used to see people sitting on the sidewalks, talking. Now you go out on the street, who do you say good morning to? All that remains is a feeling of depression. (P2)

The sense of alienation from the place is expressed through fears for the loss of city identity and through retrospective memories that convey both nostalgia for community life of the past and criticism of social change in their neighbourhoods. Older participants articulate confrontational narratives in which they praise the vibrant atmosphere of former community life and inclusive practises for immigrants by describing the nightly gatherings of old Russian-Pontian returnees from the former Soviet Union or 'romantic foreigners', who 'loved the old city' and 'had become one with the locals' (P 5). He discredits the current state of alienation in everyday life, in which the local space is transformed into a consumer landscape that undermines the ability of residents to take ownership of their own neighbourhood.

They report the closure of the Ouzeri Stavros, a meeting and entertainment place for workers and sailors in Splantzia, and point to the noise pollution and the appropriation of public space by the owners of tourist restaurants and bars:

> Those who live around the square suffer on summer evenings. The shops play music until early in the morning, many people stay out late drinking beer and making a lot of noise [...] The chairs reach to the front of the monument on the street and in the evenings you can't pass by. And around the square you see garbage. (P12)

Similarly, one participant invokes her right to a quality life 'to go out and do their business, go for a walk, drink coffee in peace and quiet, without noise and fuss' (P4). Another recalls his youth to illustrate the radical transformation of nightlife in the historic centre and its colonisation by the consumption and entertainment of mass tourism, which displaces former youth cultures and affective communities with distinct musical tastes.

> I remember walking down to the harbour [in the 1990s] and there were the shops where you could listen to jazz and rock and where the more sophisticated part of the youth hung out. Now the tourist kitsch predominates, there are shops that cater exclusively at a tourist audience. (P14)

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The sense of loss of community and protest against the all-consuming frenzy of nightlife is sarcastically written on the wall of a house in Splantzia, labelled with the symbol of the nearby squat. It uses a pan that combines the words tourist + sex and the well-known graffiti activist technique of the anagram (from sex to exs) to emphasise the message: 'We need neighbours, not touristexs.'

While most participants are concerned about the erosion of everyday urban life and the transformation of a working-class neighbourhood into a commercial area with crowded tourist shops, restaurants and bars, some others see the presence of tourists in their neighbourhood in a positive light because 'they are like residents, they shop in the mini-markets, participate in neighbourhood life and do not cause problems' (P11). This different attitude by a few participants towards tourism in the city's popular neighbourhoods opens up a new possibility: the 'quiet' tourists could be integrated into the mood of the neighbourhood and revitalise it economically.

Reclaiming open spaces and urban commons

Grassroots initiatives resisted the appropriation of monuments that are linked not only to the city's history but also to community life. Since Covid-19, activists—mainly from the educated middle classes (architects, teachers, archaeologists, etc.)—organised a protest campaign against the possibility of turning the historic building on Castelli Hill, where the squatted Roza Nera house is located, into a luxury hotel.[2] The 'Citizens' Initiative against the Hotelisation of the Monuments on Castelli Hill' pointed out the dangers of tourism growth for the identity of the old town. In July 2022, the initiative declared that the old city of Chania 'has turned into a recreational area with few permanent residents and is in danger of losing its historical identity, while the monoculture of tourism destroys its sustainable development and burdens its future' (Hania News 2022a).

A new circle of protest formed in the spring of 2024 after the eviction of Roza Nera by the police. Squatters and activists of Roza Nera marched through the neighbourhoods, chanting slogans and distributing leaflets against the persecution of strategic investors on the Castelli Hill, in the outskirts of the city and on the beaches. They pointed out against the 'expansion of voracious tourist capital in our neighbourhoods, which are gradually transforming them from living cells', vibrant communities of daily communication and interaction, into 'deadened tourism resorts' (Agonas tis Kritis 2024). They also hung a large banner on the Venetian fortress wall of Chania against the hotelisation of the squatted building of Roza Nera (see Figure 5).

The interviewees invoke the right to the commons of the historic city to defend themselves against tourism-driven property development that destroys the affective quality of certain buildings in the city and its heritage. Activists and some residents emphasise the need to protect the urban commons, which are threatened by both tourist accommodation speculation and local government policies. They highlight their opposition to investment projects to the construction of a hotel on the historic Castelli Hill, which undermine the

Figure 5: Banner of Rosa Nera squat activists reading: 'The whole city knows, it takes responsibility, Rosa Nera will never be a hotel' (Photo by Yiannis Zaimakis).

'history [...] the soul of the city [...] that should be highlighted and promoted' (P5). The activists often utilise a Lefebvrian critique of the growth imperative of capitalist society, which transforms the use value of urban spaces into exchange value and undermines the citizens' right to the city:

> People organise the spaces of the city in such a way that they can accommodate the uses they need. We live in capitalism today; with its functions and the relationships it creates [...] City authorities often dictate how public space is to be used. They rent it out to a shop owner to give him money. They do not realise that the use is not just about money but about giving value to something important. Free space is very important to citizens. (P14)

In the post-Covid era, in the context of the intensification of tourist flows, social movements and local organisations have joined forces to mobilise against construction plans for the benefit of the tourism industry. In the neighbourhood of Nea Chora, for example, residents protested both against the local government's plans to build a marina to attract affluent tourists and against the construction of hotels in the historic area by entrepreneurs. The announcement of the 'Nea Chora Neighbourhood Assembly' in December 2022 underlines the risks of overtourism for a radical change in the area, stating: 'We oppose the grand plan to create a city only for tourists and investors, without green spaces, without residents and without consultation with them' (Nea Kriti 2022).

In the same vein, an activist describes the way in which the public space is being reshaped to meet the demands of tourism growth promoted by the local government planning and the tourism industry:

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> Nea Chora, a popular refugee and working-class neighbourhood with an urban fabric that had the cohesion of a community with close ties of people to cafes and meeting places, is slowly being integrated into the tourism plans [...] the popular beach of Nea Chora [...] is now being included in the planning that will connect Agioi Apostoloi with the old town and the construction of large hotels. This leads to conflict, as they are trying to change the city. (P14)

The mobilisation against the growth of tourism has spread to areas associated with summer resorts, bathing and recreation for the locals, such as Falasarna, a protected area of natural beauty, sandy beaches and an important archaeological site 59 km west of Chania. In the summer of 2023, activists founded the citizens' initiative #save_Falasarna to prevent the construction of a large hotel on the beach of Pachia Ammos.[3] The initiative called for actions in Falasarna, including festivals and free archaeological tours, and claimed the right of citizens to free public beaches and the protection of their natural environment against the arbitrary companies that operate on the beach and threaten the natural commons. The grassroots mobilisation was successful, as the construction of the hotel was not approved by the local authorities.

The protests against overtourism have revived old debates among environmental activists about the impacts of mass tourism projects, which are often associated with the loss of control over natural resources to private, state and/or supranational interests and the gradual destruction of local ecosystems. Interviewees complain that the beach has become a fenced-off area with sunbeds, seating and night-time entertainment for tourists. One activist told us: 'I go to Falasarna to swim and relax. But when a company appears that wants to appropriate all this and rake in the profits, then we must react. It's about the rights of the citizens in this area' (P14).

Concluding remarks

While most urban tourism studies examine overtourism in large southern European cities, this study aims to stimulate a discussion on the urban struggles surrounding tourism growth in small Mediterranean cities. From the perspective of critical urban studies, it offers an in-depth examination of urban transformations in a historic Mediterranean city whose social and cultural fabric are threatened by an ongoing process of increasing touristification promoted by both neoliberal tourism markets and state policies.

Chania is a small coastal city where uncontrolled tourist flows threaten the very conditions that have made the city so popular with Greek and foreign visitors: the beauty of the natural environment and the distinct social fabric associated with historic neighbourhoods linked to local culture, rich cultural heritage, Cretan cuisine, local musical traditions and a relaxed and quality everyday life. The fact that Chania is one of the few Greek cities where grassroots social movements have put the problem of overtourism on their political agenda makes it an intriguing case to discuss how small historic cities in Greece deal with the problem of overtourism. A key focus of the study is to bring to the fore, alongside other grassroots voices, some 'invisible' actors, usually excluded from

the mainstream discussion on tourism, who fight for progressive urbanism and invoke the right to the city to support the quest for a just city.

The analysis of our data shows how overtourism is transforming the historic centre of Chania from a vibrant place of social encounter, leisure and youth creativity for locals and sporadic visitors into a place of consumption and entertainment for mass tourism. It also reveals how the process of touristification is spreading to the neighbourhoods of the popular classes, transforming long-established lifestyles, changing their social fabric and displacing vulnerable people against the backdrop of a growing housing crisis caused by the combined effects of real estate speculation and overtourism.

The interpretation of participants' views on overtourism shows a diversity of narratives. Immigrant tenants and low-income residents tend to focus on material issues, complaining against rising rents and living costs as well as the displacement of vulnerable residents. Most long-established residents focus primarily on post-materialist issues, including place alienation, the deterioration of the quality of community life, the touristification of the urban night and the sense of uprooting identity ties to the historic centre (Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021). Looking back, some elders recall an imagined past in which things were better managed and organised in solidarity as well as inclusive neighbourhoods that no longer exist. This 'retrotopia', which slides into a nostalgic past rather than a promising future (Bauman 2017), is often accompanied by a sense of frustration, vulnerability and expulsion (Cocola-Gant 2023).

Other participants, particularly long-established and well-educated residents, call on policy makers to adopt adaptive measures to strengthen social resilience in their communities and protect the social fabric, the quality of urban life and the most vulnerable groups. These 'resilient' narratives are consistent with the argument that the intense commercialisation and touristification of historic cities is destroying some of the elements (cultural heritage, hospitality, quality of life, traditional meeting places) that originally attracted new residents and visitors (Diaz-Parra and Jover 2021).

Other narratives derived from radical activists who go beyond complaints and discursive protests. They are social movements members who claimed the right to the city during the economic crisis through cooperatives of solidarity economy, squats and street politics (political graffiti, marches, neighbourhood assemblies, etc.) and now incorporating the issue of overtourism into their repertoires of discourse and collective action. Their discourse foregrounds the Lefebvrean notion of the right to the city as a strategy for appropriating space and participating in decisions about the use of community spaces and changes in neighbourhoods (Balzarini and Shlay 2016). They question the imperative of tourism growth and oppose government and/or corporate projects and speculative investments that alter the urban fabric and undermine the urban pulse and livelihoods. Through activist practices and mobilisation, they defend the urban and natural commons associated with affective environments and aesthetically pleasing places threatened by the increasing touristification of the urban areas and demand the reappropriation of their neighbourhoods.

In contrast to the mass mobilisations against overtourism (Hughes 2018 Milano, Novelli, and Russo 2024;), which are often led by lower class residents as victims of spatial displacement (Monterrubio 2017), this study indicates that in

a city where overtourism has only recently emerged, social movement activists, mainly from the educated middle class, raise awareness about overtourism through occasional protests and campaigns.

Activists' mobilisations and narratives reveal a post-capitalist imaginary that seeks opportunities for the rediscovery of solidarity and social justice through radical urban politics, reclaiming their right to the city. Members and commoners of local social enterprises and squatters are fighting for spatial justice, a demand 'for greater control over how the spaces in which we live are socially produced' and a struggle 'for democratic rights to urbanised space' (Soja 2010, 7). They criticise the alienating processes of enclosure of the commons (Alonso González 2014), that ignore people's experiences and understanding of their livelihoods. They also remind us that, under the pressure of overtourism, historic cities are in danger of becoming sites of tourism monoculture, that reinforce existing inequalities and colonising the imaginary of the inhabitants by turning them into 'calculating machines' that think in terms of the cost–benefit logic of the tourism and real estate market.

The anxious concern by both activists and residents for the quality of urban life in a communal living environment is particularly relevant in a small city like Chania, which has preserved the special character of its urban fabric for decades and has not followed the rapid urbanisation of other cities in the country. In a sense, narratives about the right to neighbourhood and the choice of everyday life of urban neighbourhood function as discursive sites of resistance to an uncertain world of rapid and uncontrollable social change through overtourism.

Given the indication of the weakening of traditionally positive tourist experiences in the city,[4] this research suggests that uncontrolled tourism growth can ultimately degrade the quality of daily life not only for locals but also for tourists. Future studies based on larger samples of participants could shed more light on the diverse and controversial discourses within and between different social groups, including locals, activists, policy makers, tourists, investors and tourism stakeholders.

Furthermore, comparative studies in small historical coastal cities in southern Europe can reveal similarities and differences in terms of the reactions of locals and social movements to overtourism and the role of the state and local governments in accelerating or limiting the phenomenon. This perspective is crucial for a broader debate in urban studies on alternative strategies to cope with rapid tourism growth, whether through strategies to strengthen the resilience of destination communities and/or by exploring the potential of tourism degrowth to enable a truly sustainable and just city, as some radical voices suggest in this study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes

1   The Institute of the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises estimates the total

contribution of tourism to the country's economy in 2023 at between 62.8 and 75.6 billion euros, which corresponds to between 28.5% and 34.3% of GDP (INSETE 2024).

2   The Roza Nera squat is, located in the historic Castelli Hill building in the old city, which had donated it to the Technical University of Crete (TUC) in 1985 to accommodate its educational and research needs. The place was abandoned until 2004, when a group of activists founded the squat that functioned as a social centre for cultural, political and solidarity actions (Kousis, Della Porta, and Jiménez-Sánchez 2008). On 5 September 2020, the police evicted the squatters with a view to the building's commercial use. In July 2021, the building on Castelli Hill was reoccupied, and Rosa Nera squat was reopened. On 1 April 2024, the squat was once again evicted by the police, triggering a new wave of protests (Flashnews.Gr. 2024).

3   See the announcement on the Initiative's Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/groups/savefalasarna/.

4   The annual report of the Tourism Observatory of Eastern Crete shows that in a prefecture where the tourist experience is traditionally highly valued, the percentage of visitors complaining about traffic congestion, lack of parking and green spaces and inadequate waste collection systems has gradually increased in recent years (Tourism Observatory of Western Crete 2023).

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