ASU Center for Sustainable Tourism

Overtourism and the Coronavirus Pandemic: A Sustainable Tourism Plan for Sedona, Arizona
By: Kim Pham | Advisors: Dr. Christine Vogt & Dr. Kathleen Andereck | School of Community Resources and Development

Overtourism

Prior to 2020, advances in digital technology, transportation, growing economies, and destination promotion made traveling more accessible and affordable. Overtourism became a threat with many negative impacts. Overtourism is generally perceived as the overcrowding condition of visitors that deteriorates the local cultural and natural resources, residents' quality of life, and visitors' leisure experience [1]. Residents in heavily visited places are protesting against tourism.
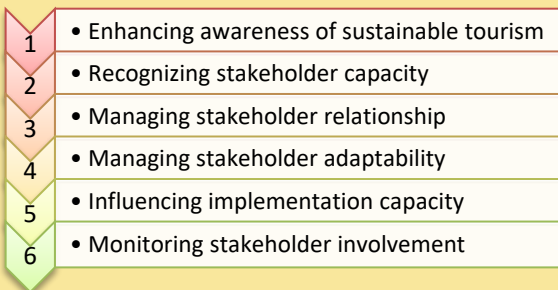

Cultural clash
Loss of community
Loss of natural habitat
Seasonal unemployment

Pollution
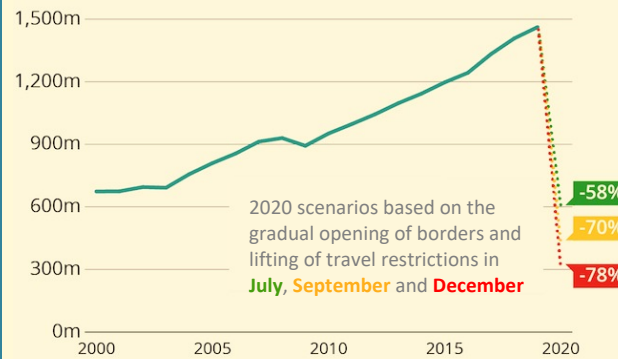Traffic congestion
Increased crime
Increased prices

Tourism and the Coronavirus Pandemic

2020 scenarios based on the gradual opening of borders and lifting of travel restrictions in July, September and December

-58%
-70%
-78%

International visitor arrivals worldwide since 2000 (in millions) [2]

"The coronavirus pandemic would set the global tourism industry back by 20 years" [3]. In Arizona, the industry had lost $7 billion in visitor spending by July 2020 [4].

Sustainable Tourism

Environmentally Friendly
Culturally Appropriate
Sustainable Tourism
Economically Viable
Socially Just

Sustainable tourism ensures the harmony of the economy, environment, culture, and society. It emphasizes mutual benefits and involvement among stakeholders as well as the resiliency of destinations in times of change/crisis [5].

Sedona, Arizona

➢ Sedona is famous for red rock landscapes, state parks, and trails; also as a backdrop for many Western movies.
➢ Sedona has approximately 10,000 local residents. Before the pandemic, Sedona welcomed 3 million visitors yearly.
➢ There were concerns about overtourism (e.g., traffic congestion, noise pollution), especially from local residents.
➢ A **Sustainable Tourism Plan** (ST Plan) (2018-2023) was formed with stakeholders' input to address overtourism. Different tactics (e.g., reduction of destination marketing, promotion of public transport) have been applied.
➢ The coronavirus pandemic has brought upon changes in the ST Plan to help businesses recover from the crisis.

The Multi-Stakeholder Involvement Management Framework (MSIM) in Sustainable Tourism Plan [6]

1 • Enhancing awareness of sustainable tourism
2 • Recognizing stakeholder capacity
3 • Managing stakeholder relationship
4 • Managing stakeholder adaptability
5 • Influencing implementation capacity
6 • Monitoring stakeholder involvement

Tourism stakeholders are any entity that is involved with or influenced by, or that may influence tourism activities (e.g., tourists, local communities, businesses, governments, research institutions, non-profit groups) [7].

Research Questions

Q1. How can a destination address overtourism through Sustainable Tourism Plan (ST Plan)?
Q2. How can ST Plan be adjusted during time of crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic?
Q3. To what extent does stakeholders' involvement in the Sedona ST Plan fit the MSIM framework?
Q4. What modifications could be made to the MSIM framework based on the case of Sedona?

Methods: The Case Study of Sedona, Arizona

➢ Research time frame: June to December 2020.
➢ Document analysis: The ST Plan document, meeting minutes, news, contracts, and progress reports, etc.
➢ Participant observation: The researcher attends 3 to 5 stakeholder collaborative meetings.
➢ In-depth interview: Approximately 10 stakeholder representatives (e.g., city manager, tourism officer)
➢ The Sedona Chamber of Commerce & Tourism Bureau supports the research.

Contribution: Academically, the study enriches literature about ST Plan. It tests the MSIM framework for applied improvements. Practically, the study's findings will be useful for destination managers to solve overtourism and manage a crisis (e.g., coronavirus pandemic) via ST Plan.

1. UNWTO. (2018). 'Overtourism'? – Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism.
2 & 3. WEF. (2020, September 2). COVID-19 could set the global tourism industry back 20 years.
4. AZCentral. (2020, July 23). 2019 was a record year for Arizona tourism. Here's the 'recovery mode' plan for 2020.
5. Liu, Z. (2003). Sustainable tourism development: A critique. Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 11(6), 459-475.
6. Waligo, V. M., Clarke, J., & Hawkins, R. (2013). Implementing sustainable tourism: A multi-stakeholder involvement management framework. Tourism Management, 36, 342-353.
7. Sheehan, L. R., & Ritchie, J. B. (2005). Destination stakeholders exploring identity and salience. Annals of Tourism Research, 32(3), 711-734.
> Photo sources: Sedona.net, Dw.com, TheConversation.com. Lonelyplanet.com
> Diagrams and charts are adapted from: bhutantourismsociety.com, weforum.org