

Future-Proofing (Cruise-)Destinations: A Strategic Blueprint for Competitiveness in a STRIDE

(Cruises: Legal itineraries and interdisciplinary stopovers, University of Le Havre Normandy - Faculty of International Affairs, 8 - 9 October 2026)

Prof.Dr.Dr.hc Alexis Papathanassis

Cruise Tourism Management
Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences

E: apapathanassis@hs-bremerhaven.de

T: +49 471 4823 100

M: +49 173 613 2565

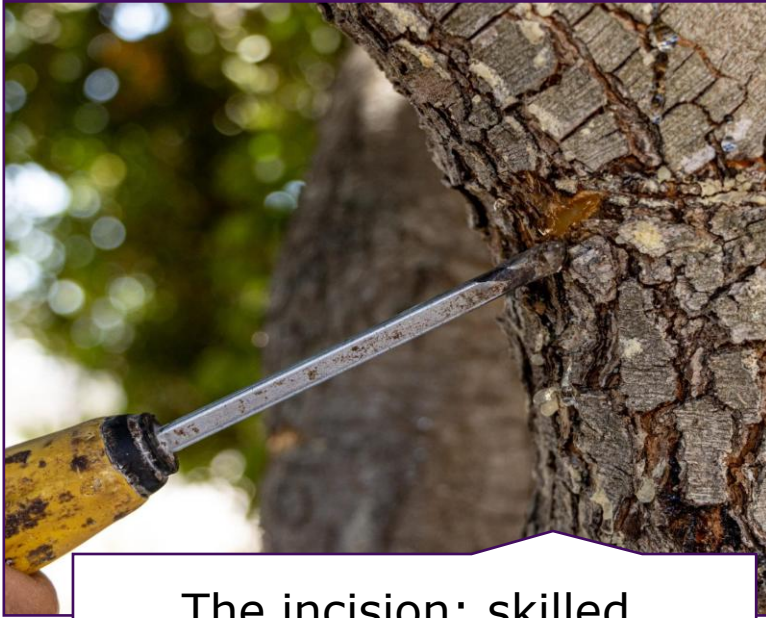
The 'Weeping Tree' Metaphor



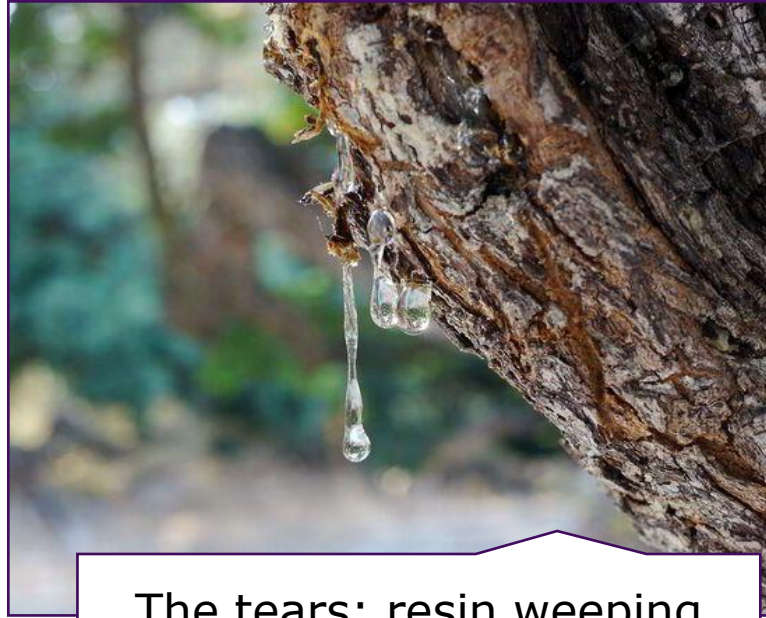
The mastic tree grows all around the Mediterranean. But only in a handful of villages on one Greek island does it weep tears that harden into gold.

The 'Tree that Weeps':

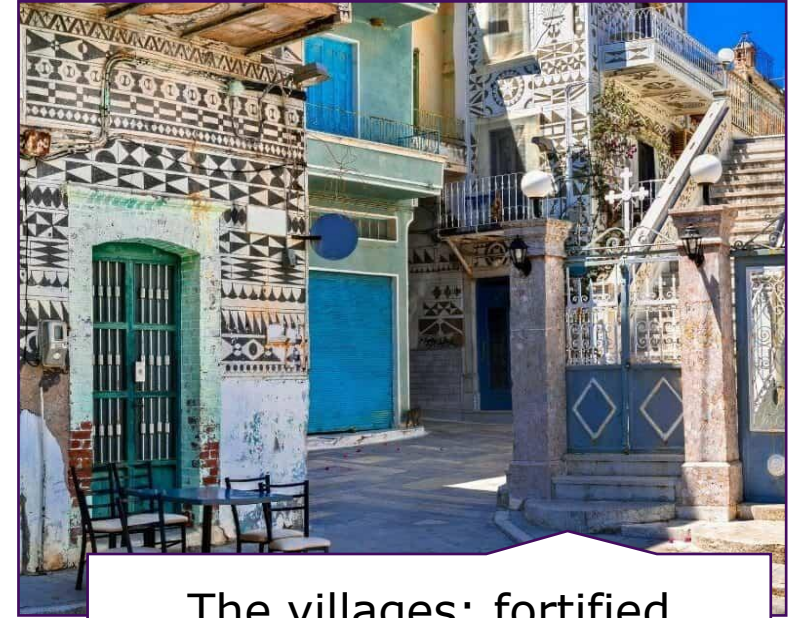
The Chios Mastiha story



The incision: skilled, deliberate, shallow enough to keep the tree alive.



The tears: resin weeping from the wound, slowly hardening into value.



The villages: fortified monuments to five centuries of collective organisation.

Image sourcing: Wikimedia Commons (search 'mastic Chios'), Chios Mastiha Growers Association press kit

It gives nothing voluntarily...
It must be wounded skillfully!

From Mastiha to Destination Management:

Why only in Chios?



The 'Soil'

- Place / Destination-specific assets & identity



The 'Incision'

- Strategic intervention — executed, not written



The 'Tears'

- Value created for visitors & residents



The 'Hardening'

- Measurable, lasting impact



The 'Hands'

- Competencies, transmitted between generations



The 'Cooperative'

- Governance & stakeholder organisation

Success is a system, not an ingredient!



Foods, Supplements, Beverages, Beauty Products



Reframing an ancient, anonymous commodity!
The tree and the resin did not change...

Prof.Dr.Dr.hc Alexis Papathanassis

Cruise Tourism Management
Bremerhaven University of Applied Sciences

E: apapathanassis@hs-bremerhaven.de

T: +49 471 4823 100

M: +49 173 613 2565

A Resource-Based View of Destination Starategy



Core Elements of an Impactful (Cruise-) Destination Strategy

Beyond Generic Market Research-induced Measures!

Destination Strategy Blueprint

S

Smart

Data, IoT & digital connectivity
(Gretzel et al., 2015; Boes et al., 2016)

T

Triple-bottom-line

Environmental, social & economic sustainability
(Elkington, 1997)

R

Resource-Based View

Leveraging unique destination assets
(Barney, 1991; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003)

I

Inclusive

Socio-cultural community involvement
(Murphy, 1985; Jamal & Getz, 1995)

D

Destination Management

Tourism flows & carrying capacity
(Butler, 1980; UNWTO, 2007)

E

Evolution

Long-term strategic growth
(Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2013)

Mastiha Success Formula

"Ancient tree new tears"

"The tree must outlive the harvest"

"Soil... only in Chios"

"Every grower belongs and profits from the cooperative"

"Never cut too deep"

"Replanting for later seasons"



Destination Resilience

Smartness and Sustainability – The 'Learning Destination'



Smart

Data, IoT & digital
connectivity

PLANNING: Cruise arrivals are tourism's most forecastable flows. Itineraries are published 18–24 months ahead. When do ports find out and how do they act on that information.

MANAGING: Utilisation of arrival schedules (planned and real time – AIS) to organise excursion departures. Dynamically route passengers (e.g., signage and destination apps) and warn residents (e.g., publish a 'cruise day forecast'). Streamline (de)embarkation (e.g., biometrics, luggage logistics) to increase time-at-port.

KNOWING: Cruise lines know more about guests than the destinations. Smart destinations negotiate data-sharing into agreements and collect data on their guests preferences and consumption patterns.

SCALING: Online/AI Visibility and Bookability = Direct source market access = Demand control + less platform- or operator-dependency.



**Triple-
bottom-line**

Environmental, social &
economic sustainability

ECONOMIC DIMENSION: Transit calls produce less income than turnarounds (crew provisioning, bunkering, hotel nights, air connectivity), and much of the spending 'leaks' into line-owned excursions.

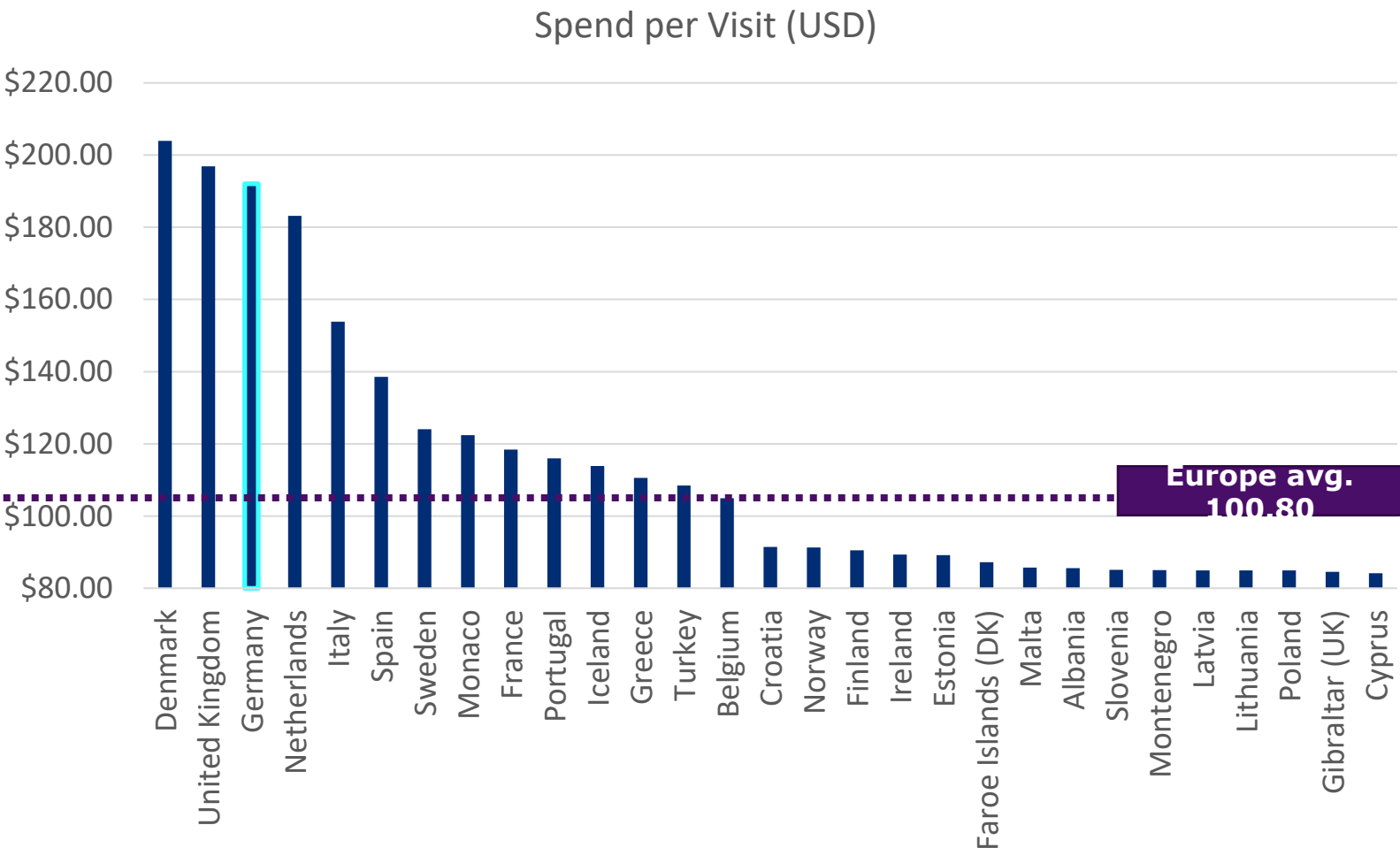
ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION: Shore power is a 'must' (EU onshore-power requirement by 2030, EU ETS).

SOCIAL DIMENSION: Passenger-to-resident ratio, residents' tourism acceptance rate, quality-of-life index score can serve as core metrics (Examples).



EU comparison – spend per passenger visit

(Data: 377 European ports, 2024)



169.50 : 96.70
Eur. Homeports (21) Eur. Ports of Call (357)
USD per visit. The difference is not down to the country, but to the type of call

200 USD per passenger visit in Warnemünde (as a Homeport, above the German average).

The type of call is what matters!



The Potential of AI

The guest journey and what the research shows at each stage



AI becomes a port matter: Without data access and shared standards, only the cruise line optimises.



Destination Identity and Cultural Leverage

Culture the Foundation of a Tourism Production System and Attractions its Physical and Experiential Outcome!

R

Resource-based

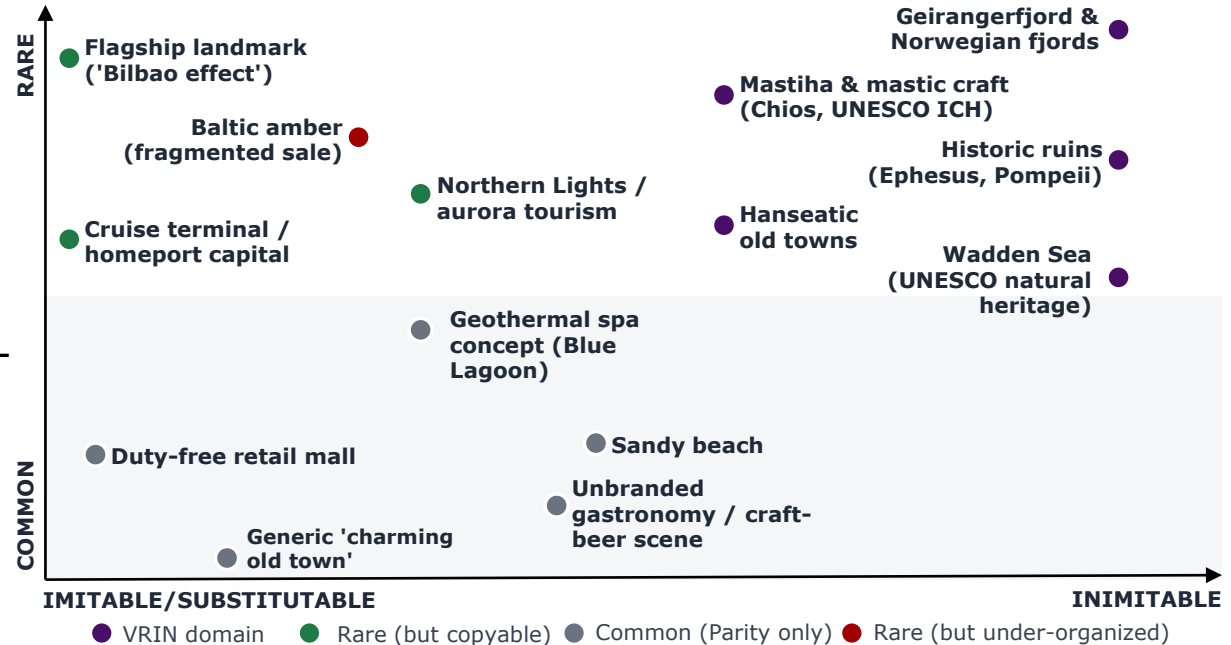
Leveraging unique destination assets

ITINERARY POSITIONING:

Port-substitutability means lower pricing and less negotiating power.

V.R.I.N. TOURISTIC ASSETS:

Valuable, Rare, Inimitable and Non-substitutable attractions (natural and human-made), landmarks and experiences.



I

Inclusive

Socio-cultural community involvement

ANTI-CRUISE SENTIMENT: Cruise tourism is visible and often serves as an outlet for wider tourism- or sociopolitical-conflicts. Community involvement ensures that local residents' and local suppliers' concerns are taken into account and can facilitate compromises (berth agreements, caps, excursion licensing). This can help prevent exclusion bred referendums, protests and bans.

POSITIVE SERVICE ENCOUNTERS: Tourism satisfaction and destination loyalty rests on 'Hospitality'. Quality entails consistently positive holiday encounters... not only with service professionals, but with all residents the guests come in contact with.



Europe – Growth Through Diversity:

A region is more than the sum of its ports

high
↑
Tourism development
—
low

EXCLUSIVE

Differentiation through unique locations, limited capacity
e.g. Visby · Santorini · Dubrovnik · Geiranger
15.8% of passenger visits · avg. USD 87

AUTHENTIC

Development potential, cost advantage, room for innovation
e.g. Wismar · Stralsund · Sassnitz · Split · Constanța
5.6% of passenger visits · avg. USD 86

ESTABLISHED

Reputation & brand – focus: sustainability and visitor management
e.g. Copenhagen · Stockholm · Tallinn · Venice · Amsterdam
18.0% of passenger visits · avg. USD 87

GATEWAY

Hub: turnaround, arrival, maximum value creation per call
e.g. Kiel · Rostock-Warnemünde · Barcelona · Southampton
60.6% of passenger visits · avg. USD 165

What makes a route attractive?

Destination factor	Importance
Destination mix: highlights + discoverie	● ● ●
Attractiveness of the destination	● ● ●
Accessibility of the destination	● ● ●
Port connectivity (hub quality)	● ● ●
Quality of the onshore experience	● ● ●
Security situation	● ● ●
Connectivity/reliability	● ● ●
Local environmental management	● ● ●

low — Infrastructural development → high



Integrative Destination Management

Cruise Tourism is an Evolving, Regional Multi-Stakeholder Eco-System... Not a Local Cruise Terminal!

D

Destination Management

Tourism flows & carrying capacity

OVERCROWDING: Overtourism is a seasonal/temporal and localised phenomenon. Defining more granular carrying capacity thresholds is key to managing overcrowding (esp. when it comes to cruises with pulses of 3,000–6,000 people within a short period in key attractions).

SEASONALITY: Normalising seasonality is central to optimise infrastructure- and attraction-capacity utilisation. Berth caps, slot systems, dispersal routing, and differentiated port fees are effective tools.

CLUSTER MANAGEMENT: The governance of cruise tourism cannot be left to port authorities and local tourism authorities alone. Regional- and private sector-actors need to be involved.

E

Evolution

Long-term strategic growth

TOURISM LIFE-CYCLE MANAGEMENT: As tourism develops over time management failures emerge and locals' perception shifts.

TOURISM INTEGRATION: Single-purpose cruise infrastructure creates an 'tourism evolutionary trap' and dependencies (i.e., tourism monocultures). Resilient port destinations invest in 'convertible assets', which can serve several tourism segments, as well as the domestic leisure and culture industry.

TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION: Strategic investment ahead of the fleet development curve (i.e., Order books point to methanol- and LNG-capable, shore-power-ready ships and fleet polarisation).

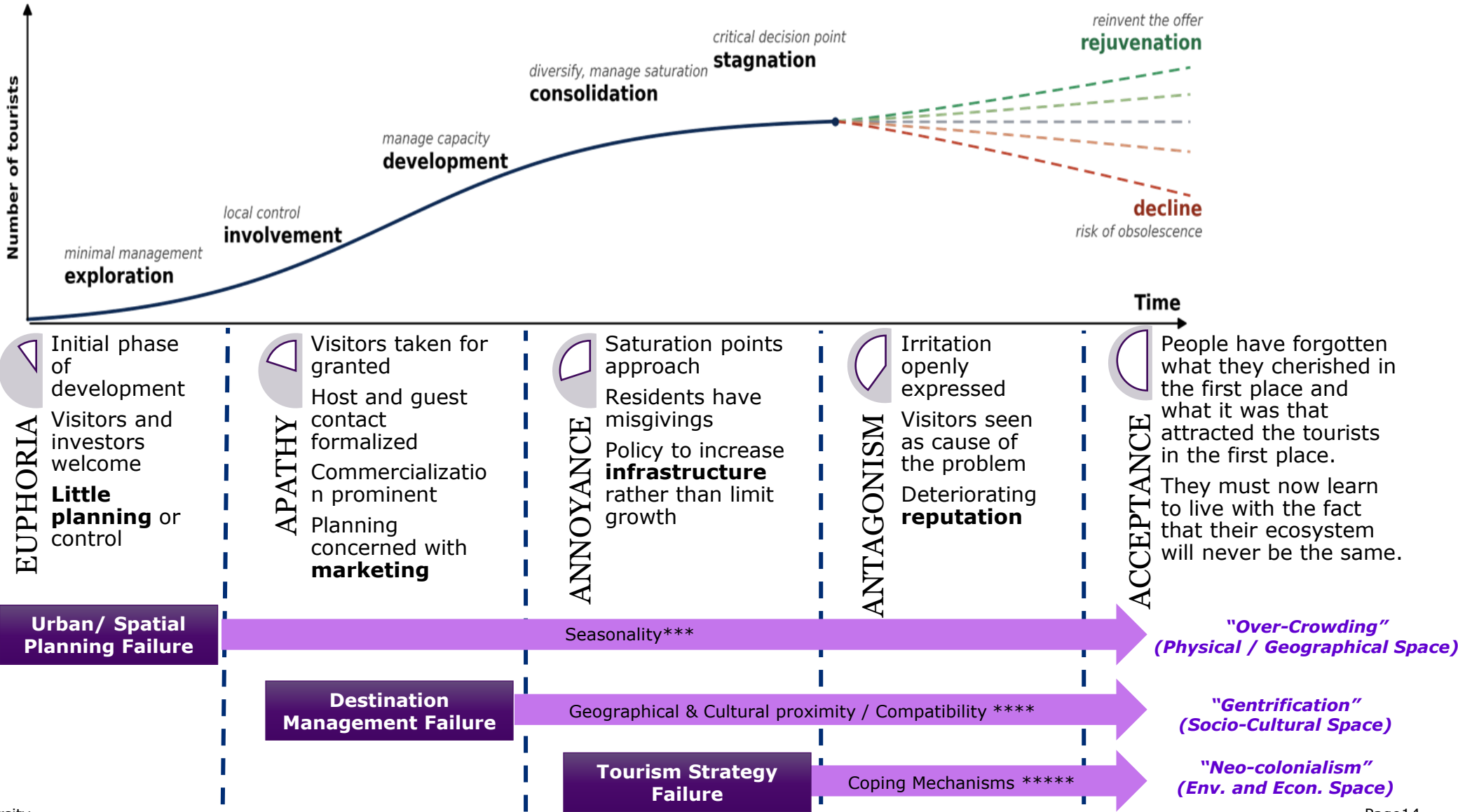


Conceptualising Destination Evolution and its Management

This we know since the mid 70s... Yet we still talk about the buzzword 'overtourism'!

Butler's (1980)
TALC*

Doxey's (1975)
'Irridex'***



What does research say about tourism/cruise levies?

Between steering effect and displacement risk

Flat-rate levies carry displacement risk

With substitutable neighbouring ports, flat-rate levies shift tonnage, not overall demand.

Mak (2008); Cavallero & Zagler (2024)

Earmarking boosts acceptance

Visible investment in infrastructure and environment boosts acceptance among guests and cruise lines.

Uzun Kocamış et al. (2025)

Emissions-based assessment as an option

Tourism volume correlates with CO₂ emissions. Levies can be linked to emissions impact.

Voit & Rhoden (2024)

Differentiated > flat-rate

Calveras & Sákovics (2025),

Steering effect overestimated, data value underestimated

Venice's entry fee barely reduced visitor numbers, but for the first time delivered robust tourist flow data.

Venice case study (2024–2026)

3.9 million overnight guests in Venice in 2024
A record despite the entry fee for day visitors.



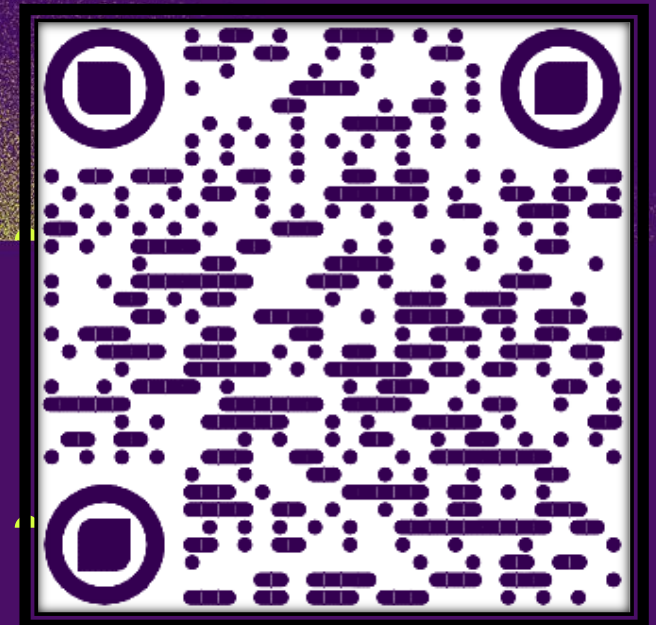
Remember:

“Destination development is a **macro-task**.
Like the Mastiha tree, it takes **decades** of
consistent care to produce its resin.
Attention to resin volume **is not** success...
The process- and value- **intention** of its tears
is!”



Thank you for your attention

To download my presentations
(including this one) scan here:





Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Alexis Papathanassis

Cruise Tourism Management · Hochschule Bremerhaven

T +49 471 4823-100

M +49 173 6132-565

E apapathanassis@hs-bremerhaven.de

W www.hs-bremerhaven.de

**Hochschule
Bremerhaven**

SCAN & CONNECT



TEDx Talk



Google Scholar



**ORCID / Web of
Science**



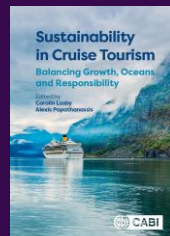
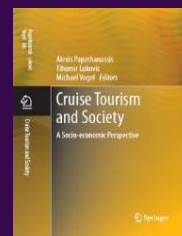
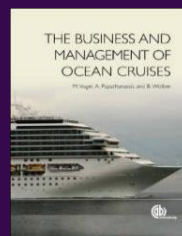
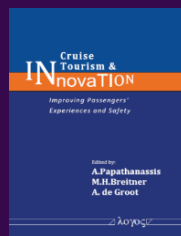
ResearchGate



LinkedIn



Facebook



Downloads & more:
papathanassis.com

References

- Ap. J. and J. Crompton (1993). "Residents' Strategies for Responding to Tourism Impacts", Journal of Travel Research. 32(1): 47-50. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004728759303200108>
- Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. Journal of Management, 17(1), 99–120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/014920639101700108>
- Boes, K., Buhalis, D., & Inversini, A. (2016). Smart tourism destinations: Ecosystems for tourism destination competitiveness. International Journal of Tourism Cities, 2(2), 108–124. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-12-2015-0032>
- Brouder, P., & Eriksson, R. H. (2013). Tourism evolution: On the synergies of tourism studies and evolutionary economic geography. Annals of Tourism Research, 43, 370–389. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2013.07.001>
- Butler, R. W. (1980). The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. The Canadian Geographer, 24
- Calveras, A., & Sákovics, J. (2025). A tourist tax in a vertically-segmented destination with congestion effects. SERIES. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13209-025-00303-2>
- Cavallero, C., & Zagler, M. (2024). The beach: Tourism tax competition along the Italian coasts. Journal of Economics. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00712-024-00890-x>
- Chen, K.-T., Jia, S., Wang, J., Yang, D., & Ding, Y. (2023). Dual-channel ticketing and pricing strategies in cruise revenue management. Maritime Policy & Management. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03088839.2023.2224376>
- Dimitrov, M., & Stankova, M. (2019). Enhancing the destination image through promoting popular river cruise destinations. CBU International Conference Proceedings. <https://doi.org/10.12955/cbup.v7.1340>
- Doxey, G.V. (1975) A causation theory of visitor-resident irritants: Methodology and research inferences. In Travel and Tourism Research Associations Sixth Annual Conference Proceedings (pp. 195–98).
- Elkington, J. (1997). Cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st century business. Capstone.
- Espinet-Rius, J. M., Fluvià-Font, M., Rigall-Torrent, R., & Oliveras-Corominas, A. (2018). Cruise tourism: A hedonic pricing approach. European Journal of Management and Business Economics, 27(1), 101–122. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJMBE-11-2017-0053>
- Faulkner, B & Tideswell, C 1997, 'A framework for monitoring community impacts of tourism', Journal of Sustainable Tourism, vol. 5,no. 1, pp. 3-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669589708667273>
- Gretzel, U., Sigala, M., Xiang, Z., & Koo, C. (2015). Smart tourism: Foundations and developments. Electronic Markets, 25(3), 179–188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12525-015-0196-8>



References

- Guo, W., Feng, L., Xie, X., & Yang, Z. (2024). Advancing river cruise product design: Insights from cross-quality elasticity of river cruises to ocean cruises. *Current Issues in Tourism*. 2568–2591. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2024.2393671>
- Harrill, R. (2004). "Residents' Attitudes Toward Tourism Development: A Literature Review with Implications for Tourism Planning", *Journal of Planning Literature*. 18(3): 251-266. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412203260306>
- Jamal, T. B., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186–204. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383\(94\)00067-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(94)00067-3)
- Lau, Y., Yip, T., & Kanrak, M. (2022). Fundamental shifts of cruise shipping in the post-COVID-19 era. *Sustainability*, 14(22), 14990. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su142214990>
- Ma, M., & Hassink, R. (2013). An evolutionary perspective on tourism area development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 41, 89–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2012.12.004>
- Murphy, P. E. (1985). *Tourism: A community approach*. Methuen.
- Orciuolo, P., Severini, D., & Bosich, D. (2025). Sailing toward energy efficiency by wearable AI for demand response in cruise ship passengers. *AEIT International Annual Conference*. (1), 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.23919/aeit67669.2025.11218126>
- Papathanassis, A., & Bundă, N. R. (2016). Action research for sustainable cruise tourism development: The Black Sea region case study. *Tourism in Marine Environments*, 11(2–3), 159–177. <https://doi.org/10.3727/154427315X14513374773562>
- Ritchie, J. R. B., & Crouch, G. I. (2003). *The competitive destination: A sustainable tourism perspective*. CABI Publishing.
- Uzun Kocamış, T., Uzut, İ., Özdemir Güzel, S., & Kazan, G. (2025). A comparative analysis of taxation systems in the top ten tourist destinations worldwide. *Journal of Business Administration and Social Studies*, 9, 0026. <https://doi.org/10.5152/JBASS>
- Voit, A.-K., & Rhoden, I. (2024). Environmental externalities in the tourism sector through COVID-19. *European Journal of Tourism Research*, 36, Article 3601. <https://doi.org/10.54055/ejtr.v36i.2646>
- Verma, R., Ekka, B., Kanekar, R., Chande, K., & Wong, L. S. (2025). Dynamic pricing algorithms: Impact of AI on revenue management and room rate optimization. *ASIANComNet 2025*. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ASIANComNet68615.2025.11579607>
- X. Wang and H. Zhang, "St-Dorl-Enabled Dynamic Recommendation for Tourism Systems," 2025 10th International Conference on Information Science, Computer Technology and Transportation (ISCTT), Nanchong, China, 2025, pp. 178-181, <https://doi.org/10.1109/ISCTT66403.2025.11137893>
- Wernerfelt, B. (1984). A resource-based view of the firm. *Strategic Management Journal*, 5(2), 171–180.
- World Tourism Organization. (2007). *A practical guide to tourism destination management*. UNWTO.

