Governing tourism flows: measures and rules to monitor, influence, guide, inform visitors' behavior and their degree of acceptance and consensus.

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Abstract

In the first year of research several activities have been conducted to improve our understanding on visitor management measures introduced both at tourist attraction or destination level to monitor, influence, guide, manage, educate and inform different types of visitors, characterized by varied motivations, expectations and level of satisfaction. A critical analysis of the literature has highlighted most common streams, gaps due to the lack of a shared terminology, a lack of classification and level of acceptance between more or less favourable measures among visitors and residents, and a tendency to assume direct measures are negatively perceived, because they might reduce freedom of choice.
In addition a collection of cases about the introduction of management measures such as regulations, reservation system, ticket payments, mobility plans helped to identify most recent adoption of measures, and aimed to find a shared classification.
In this presentation, results emerging from this phase will focus on:

- Lack of a shared classification of visitor management measures and the use of a rather broad set of different terminologies based on different definitions;
- A lack of acceptability rank on visitor management measures, but trends and assumptions;
- crowding as valuable variable and the main reason to adopt a restrictions (in terms of accessibility)?
- Methods used to collect cases and emerging results in a variety of cases.

The research program planned for the first months of 2024 includes field research on some cases. Firstly we will conduct interviews with managers of the 5 destinations involved in the project of the "grandi destinazioni italiane per un turismo sostenibile" funded by the Development and Cohesion Fund of Tourism to jointly develop measures, activities, and actions by promoting a sustainable strategy and good practices. Secondly in collaboration with a study conducted by CISET and the Municipality of Venice, we will plan activities to study the introduction of the experimental phase of the "contributo di accesso". Moreover we will focus on another case concerning the pilot test of the introduction of access regulation at the Juliet's House in Verona. Finally we will investigate on more recent cases concerning municipalities of Venice and Florence which are regulating short-term rentals accommodation.

Lack of a shared classification of visitor management measures and the use of a rather broad set of different terminologies based on different definitions

Although most of the literature on the management of tourist flows focuses on the concept of carrying capacity and the negative impacts of overtourism. This analysis aims to investigate the management of visitors within tourist attractions and destinations by adopting a broader concept of "flow". We consider the set of city users (visitors, tourists and residents) who have to share the same space and/or use same services, and are subject to rules and regulations aiming to govern accessibility, mobility, and services.

By collecting definitions of visitor management, and main characteristics, *emerged the use of different terminologies and synonyms* (e.g. hard/soft direct/indirect) based on different concepts (and so based on different intentions). As a consequence **this aspect contributes to the lack of a common and shared classification of measures**, which studies and reports analyzed, mainly base their definition on the objective the measures mean to achieve. Observing this evolution in chronological order, we discuss these aspects. Although studies on visitor management, especially in natural sites, reconduct on 80's and 90's studies based on the notion of carrying capacity and related concepts, in McCool and Christensen (1996) *the visitor management in national park suggested two types of management actions* based on previous studies of Lime in 1977 and 1979. The categorization identified by both authors regards the opportunity of park managers to adopt *direct* or *indirect* measures to limit overcrowding and congestions mainly in the area or during peak seasons, by regulating visitors' behaviour and not the numbers of visitors. Consequently, *congestion is more related to unmanaged or uncontrol behaviour of visitors*, and their recreational activities, rather than assuming an issue on the total amount of visitors. However *the difference between these measures relies on the impact and effect on visitors*. For example, **direct measures** aim to directly intervene on the visitor behaviour, by limiting their actions, activities, accessibility, and apply also sanctions, fines or penalties to inappropriate behaviour (McCool and Christensen, 1996). On the other hand, **indirect measures** emphasize on information and educational aspects of the visitor experience, by attempting to "change the factors recreationist use to make decision about appropriate behaviour" (McCool and Christensen, 1996, p. 69). This second category regards all ways to influence visitors for instance by providing information at visitor centres, or also on official websites, about appropriate behaviour (or safety measures), promoting activities and off-the-beaten-track itineraries, and leave messages and directions on signs.

This distinction has been used in other studies also aiming to preserve heritage resources, improve the quality of the visitor experience (Pedersen, 2002; Alazaizeh *et al.*, 2016), managing outdoor recreation (Manning and Lime, 2000) or controlling the visitor impact (Park *et al.*, 2002) rather than just focusing on overcrowding and congestion, which was one of most crucial issues in park management since 90's (McCool and Christensen, 1996). The continuum debate on these two main features has collected more or less detailed definitions according to the context of application (natural area, heritage site), the objective of the measures and expected results to face site issues and challenges.

As already suggested by Mc Cool and Christensen (1996) "literature seems to contain many apparent synonyms for these techniques" and "there has been no definitive illumination of the variables that describe a direct-indirect management continuum" (p.70). This lack of a shared use of terminology, often based on "different" synonyms,

whether from the authors point of view it does not lead to a continuum in the research, on the other hand it shows differences emerging between these types of measures, with *consequent difficulties in being able to establish a common classification or at least the key characteristics*. As a consequence research on the perception of these management measures and their level of acceptability, which can be investigated depending on the context and the type of user (means visitors, tourists and residents), is poorly developed on a theoretical level.

In addition to this first direct-indirect classification, another distinction in the literature in two others very widespread categories concerns the application of **soft** and **hard measures**, contributing to increase the use of synonyms.. As far as the initial objective of visitor management is concerned, it follows the same intentions as studies that adopt a direct/indirect classification, for example by regulating visitors activities, educate visitors, reduce impact to improve visitor experience (Kuo, 2002; Mason, 2005). The meaning that distinguishes *hard* and *soft* approaches responds to the interpretation defined between *direct* and *indirect* measures, only that the vision given by Kuo (2002) in addition to proposing the two categories to indicate that the former have the objective of regulating the activities of visitors and the latter to focus on the educational aspect, actually it already shows a *physical*, *economic* and *regulatory* feature of the hard measures. This underlines that despite the possibility of attempting a classification between these two broad categories, there might be various ways of intervention that can suggest a sphere of action towards the physical environment, the establishment of regulations and economic actions. For example, limitations of accessibility, or limitation of services capacity (i.e. parking lot), have an impact and control a more *physical aspect of the environment*. In the second sub-category there are more rules and regulatory aspects that introduce constraints on time and number of visits to limit visitor activities. Whereas economic measures attempt to use price strategies to incitive or disincentive visitors behaviour, for instance reducing fees to visitors who use public transport, or rise ticket prices in peak seasons. On the other hand, soft measures are divided by their use of *information*, *visitors codes* or *interpretation* (Kuo, 2002), which recall the emphasize of education and information (McCool and Christensen, 1996). Mason (2005) based on Kuo (2002) categorization, distinguishes soft approaches in educational and self-regulation measures, which refers to the codes of conduct (Mason and Mowforth, 1996). However in order to control visitors numbers, and adapt resources of a protected area, he recognized a main “regulatory” approach to hard measures.

A clear example that emerged from this analysis and which suggests a difficult identification whether it has a direct/indirect or hard/soft effect on visitors, concerns the *economic measure* according to Kuo (2002), through the introduction of pricing strategies that can incentivize or disincentivize the visit or even modify the behavior of the customer visitors.
However, is this measure *direct* or *indirect*, *hard* or *soft* towards visitors? According to Kuo (2002) it is a *hard measure*, so it would have an impact on visitor activity, rather than soft measures’ purpose of educating visitors. Also according to Øian et al., (2018) payment schemes, such as taxation, user fees but also concession, licence and permit for certain activities, even though for their economic purposes are described as hard in the regulation of visitors behaviour. The regulation through *hard* approaches use “formal rules and restrictions on physical access in terms of fences, gates and *payment schemes*” (Øian *et al.*, 2018, p. 55). Whereas using the other terminology (so direct

and indirect) Manning and Lime (2000), who adapted previous Lime's categories, identified an entrance fee, or the price differentiation due to zone, season, transport etc as *indirect* measure because *attempting to modify the visitor behaviour*. Also in Martin et al., (2009) charge fees is firstly considered an indirect management actions, even though their identification of 6 categories does not align with the direct/indirect continuum. As a result if these categories might seem interchangeable, they don't satisfy the concept established a priori, and the payment of a ticket has perceived as a hard measure when it represent a way to *physically and economically limit* access, but it has also been perceived as an indirect measure because it attempts to encourage or discourage the visit through *influencing visitor behaviour*.

In conclusion the distinction between *direct* and *indirect* has the objective of acting on the visitor's behaviour, in an "active" and "passive" manner and it differs from soft and hard approaches. Indeed in the first case direct measures emphasize the need to regulate, sometimes limit behaviour and freedom of decision also through sanctioning actions (McCool and Christensen, 1996), while indirect group attempt to influence decision-making factors by promoting and influencing appropriate behaviour. This highlights differences between the hard and soft distinction, which according to Kuo (2002) and Øian et al., (2018), the regulatory and hard approach is more emphasized because it differs from the soft and educational approach. However, the sub-categories that show both the physical and economic aspect demonstrate the variety of ways to manage visitors, even though the direct/indirect or hard/soft distinction.

A lack of acceptability rank on visitor management measures, but trends and assumptions

This theoretical gap in the definition of a shared terminology based on varied meaning and understanding leads to a lack of classification and implications on the level of acceptability among visitors (and also residents). The literature about visitor perception on visitor management measures, or visitor satisfaction, has highlighted both a heterogeneity of cases and a different tendency and level of acceptance among visitors towards a more "regulatory" measure or educational experience. Broadly speaking *visitors seem less willing to accept a hard or direct measures* (Borrie *et al.*, 2001; Bullock and Lawson, 2008), and if applied as the only strategy is ineffective (Kuo, 2002). However *it's difficult to achieve the same level of agreement among visitors, especially comparing cases proposing similar contexts* (e.g. natural park), so different conclusions have emerged when direct measures concerned the accessibility restriction due to visitors types, or zoning related to area closure (McCool and Christensen, 1996), while the limitation of public accessibility is not completely accepted, and visitors prefer that no groups be turned away during the visit (Bullock and Lawson, 2008), or that restrictions might limit the quality of the experience (Borrie *et al.*, 2001). In addition both the willingness to accept "direct/indirect" measures might shows differences between types of visitors due to their provenience (Batarda Fernandes, 2004; Sergiacomi *et al.*, 2022), their motivations (Alazaizeh *et al.*, 2016) level of satisfaction (Moreno-Mendoza, Santana-Talavera and Boza-Chirino, 2020), and features of the context of application (McCool and Christensen, 1996).

Is the level of crowding a valuable variable, and the mainly reason to adopt a restrictions (in terms of accessibility)?

Crowding has been perceived as the main issue in correlation with the negative exceeding number of visitors on environmental resources and on social dynamics with the social community. In natural landscapes, national parks and wilderness areas, crowding and congestion have been evaluated as an **issue to limit** (McCool and Christensen, 1996) even though **crowding perception vary differently** according to visitor needs or motivations (Manning and Lime, 2000) and also type of attraction. For example certain visitors interested in more recreational activities in natural parks might have a different motivation, attitude and expectation rather than visitors interested in "solitude experiences" (Wagar, 1964). As a consequence the investigation in different settings might lead to a variety of responses, with similarities or disparities according to the experience of the visitors (Martin, Marsolais and Rolloff, 2009).

The uncertainty therefore given by the **heterogeneity of the cases and the levels of perception by visitors**, identify over-crowding situations both positively and negatively. In the first case a **positive perception** is a consequence to the awareness of popular attraction attractiveness and well-know presence of visitors, while a more **negative perception** is addressed to the risk perception, or it emerges especially in the contexts of destinations, when the local community is interviewed (Postma, Papp and Koens, 2018; Pérez Guilarte and Lois González, 2018; Eckert *et al.*, 2019).

The presence of high numbers of visitors in certain peak hours or seasons might contribute to congestion and crowding, especially in those contexts where these externalities affect the resources and capacities of the services. If there is a link between the number of visitors and **risk perception** in natural landscape or archaeological sites, **high number of visitors is negatively evaluated** (Roman, Dearden and Rollins, 2007), and **leads to a sensitive response** for limiting group size and accessibility (Alazaizeh *et al.*, 2016; Sergiacomi *et al.*, 2022). For instance visitors' awareness about environmental impact and coral condition in a marine protected area has also investigated the visitor perception of crowding during snorkeling recreational activity, by showing a different perception as the group size increases (Roman, Dearden and Rollins, 2007). A survey carried out to assess the LAC in this fragile MPA, and visitors' perception both about reefs and corals condition, and satisfaction with their experience, identified that *the rise of visitors was evaluated as a problem* also for their satisfaction. Even though crowding issue is relevant in management of other fragile area, such as archaeological sites, in Petra Archaeological Park, a strong connection with visitor **perception of the preservation use** of the site led to evaluate sensitively management measures aiming to limit the number of visitors and the length of stay in fragile area (Alazaizeh *et al.*, 2016). Consequently *visitors understood the need of resource protection*, and the number of visitors has been addressed to limitation; however the investigation on their experience demonstrated a weak willingness to accept personal trade-off or freedom restrictions. Also in Sergiacomi et al., (2022) the evaluation of visitors' opinion on the park management strategy, *crowding has been identified as an issue to address* with the development of alternative itineraries, new technologies and pricing policies. Asking visitors their opinion on the visitor management measures highlighted sensitive feedback on organizational issues.

Considering the **satisfaction of the experience**, *crowding* at the entrance, due to long queues or long waiting time, and for the services, *might be negatively perceived when a lack of visitor management is the consequence of high numbers of visitors*. This

might be pointed out both by visitors and managers of the attraction, which firstly notice the need to find new strategies for instance to manage the accessibility of the attraction with different time-entry schedule (Benfield, 2001). Overcrowding in limited peak hours, or days, become a problem for managers when long queues with logistic issues or observed people misbehavior (e.g. visitors walking off-track) that damage paths or vegetation, diminish the tourist experience (Benfield, 2001). Consequently crowding when related to the tourism experience, emerge by the need, or the lack of visitor management measures.
Also in Batarda Fernandes (2004) visitor pressure in certain peak period is related to a logistic and management issues and "it would have a prejudicial impact on the quality of the visitor experience" because visitors survey negatively evaluated an hypothetical increase in visitors numbers because.

On the other hand, when there is no evidence of the lack of management and logistic measures due to overcrowding, it emerges **visitors' awareness and apparent consensus of experience in crowded famous attractions**. For example, results of visitor experience in Stonehenge, which is described as *high visited attraction* especially in peak seasons, shows that *overcrowding isn't perceived as an issue*, but the period of investigation might lead to different scenarios (Mason and Kuo, 2008). In addition the evaluation of visitor experience might suggest differences between types of visitors and despite high numbers of attendance *crowding isn't an high relevant issue for visitors* in a museum (Chen and Ryan, 2020).
According to Bullock and Lawson (2007), even though differences in visitors regard a mixed response between the choice of solitude in wilderness areas and a willingness to enjoy groups of visitors in recreational settings, in their research it emerges that on the top of Cadillac Mountain (within an American National Park), where the presence of visitors is high and known, *this is positively perceived rather than neutral*. In particular, depending on the experience they had, **the interviewees liked the presence of other visitors, while others perceived the peak as crowded**. In addition one interviewee enjoyed the crowd as part of the experience, and **generally speaking it's not crowd an issues but the behavior of visitors when impacting resources** (Bullock and Lawson, 2007). Moreover it's also pointed out that crowd might lead to misbehavior if congestion influence visitors to walk off-trail paths (Park *et al.*, 2002).
Also in the case of Dolomites passes, the visitor survey at Passo Sella showed an unexpected response due to traffic conditions. In details from visitors perception crowding on transports, such as buses, and at the Pass was "welcomed favourably", and well tolerated. (Scuttari, Orsi and Bassani, 2019). "This seems to suggest that tourists in this specific context are seeking for social interactions both on the pass and on the bus, and some crowding may be positive as long as it is adequately handled by transport supply" (p.253).

These studies that investigated the motivations of visitors, or their experiences and levels of satisfaction, it emerged that crowded situations did not contribute to the reduction of satisfaction, unless there is a lack of visitor management measures, and that this variable actually did not emerge among the most significant issues. However it is good to remember that the heterogeneity of the cases does not allow us to make distinctions or associations, but to underline that often the crowd and its impacts are more of relative importance due to the risk of damage, the need of preservation rather than just guarantee the quality of the experience.

Methods used to collect cases and emerging results in a variety of examples

In addition to our research in the literature review, the exploration of cases in visitor management both at destination and point of interest level, helped to gather information about the introduction of several measures, booking systems and regulations. The collected materials regards newspaper article, reports, urban or tourism strategies/plan, restrictions text (e.g. laws, regulations), and also research papers.

It has also emerged a panel of cases as natural areas (e.g. parks, specific natural attractions within the park, coast areas), cultural sites, that tested and/or introduced access rules, ticket payment or the reservation for visits, whereas destinations implemented regulations and policies, for instance concerning taxes, permit for enterprises or entrepreneurs, and urban planning for accommodation.
In this table a selection of serval examples emerged by the collection of cases summarizes pilot test or implementation of visitor management measures focusing on visitors, tourists, and residents (so city users) within different context.

Context	Access rules	Economic measures - pricing	Digital	Information
Natural area (e.g. national park, POIs within the park, protected area, beach…)	• Regulation of national park (which might regulate accessibility, activities allowed, mobility) • Booking system to reserve services/entrance /parking space with private vehicles; • Ticket payment to reserve services/entrance /parking space; • Mobility plans which might implement mobility services (e.g. shuttle, public transport); • Mobility plans with regulation on accessibility and traffic; • Access rules (e.g. ordinance with total limit of attendance).	• Ticket payment to reserve services/entrance/parking space; • Permit/License for activities (e.g. fishing);	• Real-time traffic condition or services availability (e.g. parking space) system; •	• Official website of the Park etc which provide accessibility conditions; rules (self-regulation rules); • Direction and signs;
Cultural heritage attraction	• Booking system to reserve a time-entry; • Ticket payment;	• Ticket payment; • Pricing strategies (e.g. week vs	• Mobile app for destination/tourist attraction	• Official website of the attraction;

	• Access rules (e.g. regulation to impose a visitors' cap); •	weekend prices);	(information, virtual tour etc)	
Destination	• Mobility plans which might implement mobility services (e.g. shuttle, public transport); • Mobility plans with regulation on accessibility and traffic; • Regulation to limit the annual total amount of tourists (e.g. ordinance); • Regulation to limit group size for tourist guides; • Regulation to limit "more touristic" commercial activities;	• Tourist tax; • Permit/licence for commercial activities (e.g. in certain areas); • Tourist card/destination card	• Mobile app for the destination (information, virtual tour); • Crowd monitoring system; •	• Marketing campaign to raise awareness; • Official website of the destination; •

This classification between access rules, economic measures, digital tool and information helps to describe and reconduct visitor management measures which focus mainly focus on the accessibility (and mobility) within the POI or destination.
In natural contexts *regulation* of national park in order to guarantee the environmental ecosystem and safeguard resources, measures have always been implemented to regulate accessibility, recreational activities (e.g. zoning), but also mobility by allowing the transit of certain vehicles due to the peculiarity and fragility of landscapes, roads, paths, itineraries, vegetation and fauna. Considering that natural area also represents the living space of communities, in this context other visitor management measure have been identified, although they are not implemented by national park authorities. For instance *booking systems* to reserve services, such as a public transport, the parking space, or the entrance to a specific spot, are tools that allow the management of users (visitors, tourists, and residents) in a specific time and place. The novelty of these measures is that are planned and implemented by several stakeholders, which are involved in the destination, and are not necessarily related to private measures.
Sometimes the reservation requires the payment of a fee. The *ticket payment* might be addressed to the use of a service, such as the transport or the parking lot when it's the only way to guarantee access and visit of the specific point of interest, but it may also concern the entrance. For instance since 2021 in Val del Mis at Cadini del Brenton during summer (peak season), the Ente Parco delle Dolomiti Bellunesi introduced a ticket to regulate the accessibility of visitors also providing more services such as the visit at botanical garden nearby and a gift. The cost was of 2€ and the aim was to spread the flows. In addition the payment of a ticket, and reservation, has regarded some cases of beaches in summer 2023, such as Sardinia coast (e.g. Lu Impostu and Cala Brandinchi, Cala Coticcio, Cala Brigantina, La Pelosa), in which access to the

beach was limited, and also accessible with a local tourist guide. Other measures concern mobility within the destination and natural contexts, by *providing new services* to promote sustainable mobility or regulate traffic in relation to the season. Other access rules might *limit the total number of users*, but it is not necessarily related to the reservation and ticket payment, because it might limit accessibility in collaboration with local stakeholders, such as tourism service providers which guarantee the visit. For example the number of visitors is limited by permits for authorized tourism operators to provide their services by respecting local rules.

Even though the payment of a ticket can regulate the accessibility or mobility conditions, it's also an economic measure that be implemented also without a total limit of users (or tickets to sell). This means that the price for the visit, or services, regard a visitor management measures, which can be applied with different pricing strategies. For instance at Stonehenge in addition to a booking system to guarantee the visit, a price differentiation according to days of the week, and seasonality aims to encourage or discourage the visit in planned times. In addition other measures concerns the destination context, as tourist taxes, but also tourist/destination card which can encourage the use of local transport, the visit of famous and off-the beaten-track attractions, and the duration of the stay. Other economic measures allow tourism operators to get a license or permit for commercial activities, especially in fragile area as historical center with the aim to preserve heritage, and cultural, social and economic fabric of the destination. However these latter measures can be introduced by local ordinance and they are related also to urban planning strategies.

Regarding *digital measures* addressed to visitors who can use these tools, it has found a real-time traffic condition or parking space availability systems to provide real-time information about the attendance and encourage or discourage users to visit the attraction. For instance at the Pilat Dune in France, which is one of the highest sand dune in Europe, visitors should check in advance the parking availability on the official website because during peak season there is a limited availability and it is forbidden parking on the streets. Consequently in order to guarantee the availability this monitoring system has been introduced in recent years.

Providing *information* about the attraction is the first measure to reach users and raise awareness and expectation of their visit. Most official websites of natural parks, but also of attractions and destinations, provide information about the visit, rules to be followed, notices when new services or rules are introduced; and overall they are the first measure of information. For instance due to high numbers of visitors in peak hours or peak season, information about accessibility conditions might encourage the visit in low hours/season by providing alternatives. In addition at destination level also the promotion of marking campaign aimed to inform visitors about consequences of misbehaviour, or raise awareness about unappropriated manners. For instance the Stay Away Campaign (2023) in Amsterdam aimed to limit disrespectful forms of tourism in the city; or the Vienna's "un-hashtag" campaign (2018) to encourage visitors and tourists to take fewer photos and enjoy the city.

Despite the attempt to give an initial classification on the basis of the cases that have been identified, there is a continuous increase of situations at the destination or tourist attraction level in which attempts are made to manage and improve the number of visitors and above all the way of visiting and accessibility. Some considerations that

emerged concern first of all the particularity and heterogeneity of each case, in which the introduction of a measure for test or implementation periods responds to defined priorities. Consequently, the objectives they intend to achieve can only go beyond the intention of limiting the number of visitors, but rather improve accessibility (as highlighted in the cases of mobility and urban plans), improve the management of spaces with the opening of new entrances or areas to visit, improve or implement booking systems that allow the organization of internal resources also to improve waiting times.

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