Houston Area Model United Nations
Standard Committee

UNDP



Chair | Naomi Jean

Topic B: Balancing Development & Local Communities in Tourism-Dependent Regions

Houston Area Model United Nations 52

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Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Greetings Delegates!

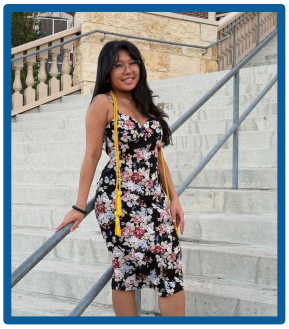
My name is Naomi Jean, your chair for the United Nations Development Programme. I am so excited to be running this committee, and I can't wait to meet you all!

I recently started my first year at the University of Houston, majoring in Political Science in the Honors program! I attended seven conferences when I was in high school, and even had the opportunity to chair some miniature MUNs in my district, but this will be my first time chairing a conference as big as HAMUN.

The UNDP is focused on long-term solutions, things that would have an impact on the countries in question for years to come. For a committee like this, my suggestion is to focus *less* on rapid-action aid and more on prolonged efforts, like restoring governments, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability.

MUN thrives off of lively discussion and compromise! We encourage you to share your ideas with others, while also keeping an open mind to the perspectives of other delegates.

I hope to reassure any first-timers that we are here to help you and make this conference a good experience! There's no reprimand for trying to participate or asking questions, we want you guys to try your best. I look forward to seeing you all in February! Feel free to contact me about any questions that you may have.



Naomi Jean
UNDP
HAMUN 52
naomijean999@gmail.com

Background Information

Committee History

Prior to the establishment of the UNDP in 1965, the United Nations' influential bodies consisted of countries within the former Allied powers of World War II. As the assembly grew from its original 51 founding states, the agenda of the UN expanded into addressing events and concerns across the globe, especially being the issue of aiding small, developed nations. The initial idea of a reserve of funds to provide socio economic assistance in developing countries was introduced in 1958 and led to the creation of the United Nations Special Fund. However, this fund only acted as a way for the UN to supply pre-investments to developing states. The direct ability to support nations with developmental projects fell within the responsibilities of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance.

These separate bodies coexisted within issues so often that the United Nations eventually decided to conjoin their abilities, creating the United Nations Development Programme.

Central Focus

The UNDP's central focus has been to eradicate poverty and improve the socioeconomic standing of impoverished countries. The programme still contributes to special funding, investing in public and private sector investments to support developing regions. Alongside direct funding, the UNDP has engaged in projects to improve education, provide clean energy, and establish fair governance to create sustainable and autonomous nations. While the UNDP's efforts fall under long term provisions, the committee's efforts are still greatly important in events of urgency. Drastic events like natural disasters or conflict often call for recovery and rehabilitation efforts. The UNDP also often coordinates with the UNHRC to address human rights crises, such as advocating for gender equality and women's rights.

TOPIC OVERVIEW

Tourism creates vast business and employment opportunities and directly contributes to nearly 10% of the global GDP [1]. Although this focuses solely on the economic value that hotels and attractions provide, tourism indirectly affects communities in high-volume destinations. Visitor spending often reaches other local industries, such as retail and restaurant establishments.

Tourist revenue can be extremely important for island destinations, such as Cuba or the Maldives, where land and natural resource scarcity can heavily affect economic opportunities. Governments in these regions consequently integrate tourism into development efforts in order to attract employment opportunities and foreign investment. Other countries with more diversified economies may still experience the weight of tourist revenue in high-volume cities. Spain, for example, is not entirely dependent on its hospitality and tourism sector, but has allocated nearly $286.77 billion USD in Barcelona for hospitality maintenance and balancing to accommodate the millions of people each year [2].

However, the influx of visitors can exceed the tourism carrying capacity, potentially damaging the "physical, economic, and socio-cultural environment" of the local area [3]. Overtourism can place significant strain on transportation and public infrastructure, which are essential for both visitors and local communities. The high concentration of visitors around tourist attractions generates a large amount of plastic waste and pollution that can damage culturally significant locations. Residential areas are often bought up and remodeled into short-term vacation rentals or are replaced entirely by resorts. Locals are forced into displacement and cannot combat the rising housing costs in their own communities.

While there are clear drawbacks to exceeding the capacity for tourism, attempting to restrict tourism entirely is not viable for these destinations' stability. The challenge facing tourism-dependent regions is therefore determining how economic development can continue without overwhelming the communities and resources that sustain it.

1. World Bank. "Tourism." World Bank, www.worldbank.org/ext/en/topic/tourism.
2. Barcelona City Council. "New Government Action for Better Tourism Management." Barcelona City Council, ajuntament.barcelona.cat/turisme/en/actualidad/noticias/new-government-action-for-better-tourism-management-1433657.
3. World Tourism Organization. 'Overtourism'? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions. UNWTO, 2018, www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284420070

The effects of over-tourism depend on how a destination accommodates its visitors, and how much of its resources remain available to local communities. This remains extremely difficult for both nations with and without economic advantage, as the destinations themselves rely almost entirely on tourism.

Venice, Italy, for example, which has generated more than $1.5 billion USD each year since 2022, still struggles to provide affordable housing and accessible transportation to its residents [4]. Constant overcrowding of tourists on water buses prevents locals from boarding, and the conversion of homes and local restaurants into short-term vacation rentals has heavily limited access to affordable housing. Although the nation of Italy itself is diverse in economic resources, tourist agencies claim that there is "virtually no economic activity in Venice outside of tourism" [5]. Without the revenue derived from tourism, Venice would not be able to upkeep the already vulnerable infrastructure that it maintains as tourist attractions, rendering the city financially reliant on the industry.

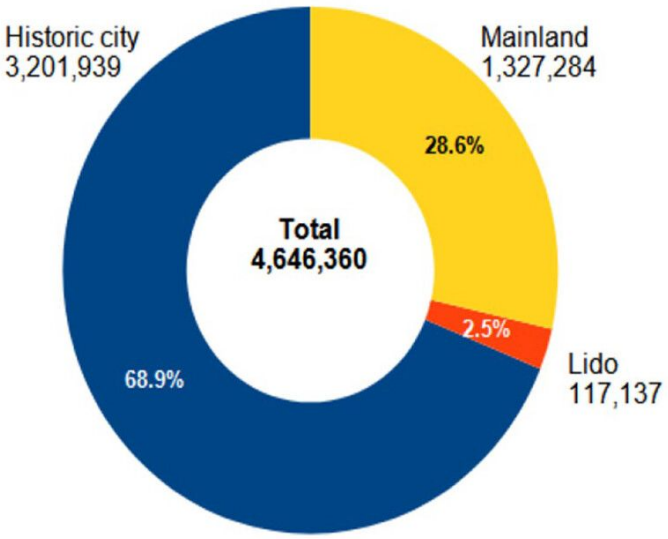


Figure 1. Roughly 70% of tourist activity in Venice floods the historical center, which includes culturally significant landmarks and pieces of Venetian history.

Even in regions where displacement is curbed by complete separation, the development of tourist accommodations still affects the environment and indirectly displaces the local communities. In the Maldives, resorts are created within the "one island, one resort" model, which separates these vacation spots entirely from local populations [6]. This isolation of tourist development allows for companies to significantly alter island ecosystems, clearing landscapes of trees and dredging

4. "Venice Tourism Statistics." Road Genius, roadgenius.com/statistics/tourism/italy/venice/.
5. "Overtourism in Venice." Responsible Travel, www.responsibletravel.com/holidays/italy/travel-guide/overtourism-in-venice.
6. Naseem, Sara. "Rebranding Destruction: Using 'Sustainability' to Mask Harm in the Maldivian Tourism Industry." SOAS University of London, 6 Jan. 2025, www.soas.ac.uk/about/blogs/rebranding-destruction-using-sustainability-mask-harm-maldivian-tourism-industry.

beaches to construct new resorts. The erosion that happens within these islands still drastically affects the ecosystems of neighboring islands, especially surrounding coral reefs. Locals who rely on the reefs for fishing ultimately lose their source of income, and the resort-hosting islands become permanently affected by the environmental erosion.

Displacement also comes in sociocultural form, which equally affects the sustainability and reliance of tourism within the local population. Many regions within the United States, most notably the islands of Hawaii and Puerto Rico, experience a complete commodification of cultural practices and traditions due to commercial tourist developments. In 2010, the disproportionate increase in tourism was so severe that tourists outnumbered Native Hawaiians by 30 to 1 [7]. Tourism companies constructed large resorts along shorelines that locals frequented for fishing, and adapted Hawaiian dance traditions into performances for visitors.

Similarly, businesses in Puerto Rico began accommodating visitors at the expense of Boricuan culture. In San Juan, tourism has driven establishments to "hire non-Spanish speakers to cater to tourists," [8].

Residents in Puerto Rico who only speak their native language lose the ability to enter businesses and gathering spaces that previously supported their communities. Cultures within these destinations become commercialized and leave no longstanding resources for those that do not directly accommodate tourist efforts.



Figure 2. Boricuan residents marched in San Juan to protest against legislation, such as Act 60, which provides incentives for foreign investors to buy properties for tourism development in Puerto Rico.

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7. "Tourism and Prostitution in Hawaiian Culture." Cultural Survival Quarterly, Cultural Survival, www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/tourism-and-prostitution-hawaiian-culture.
8. Rojas-Lebron, Gabriela. "Gentrification in Puerto Rico: The Impact on Displacement and Local Livelihoods." ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America, 24 Oct. 2024, revista.drclas.harvard.edu/gentrification-in-puerto-rico-the-impact-on-displacement-and-local-livelihoods/.

In Bali, the hospitality industry's overconsumption of resources has worsened existing shortages. While local communities combat water and food scarcity in the dry seasons, hotels continue to consume a large share of resources to support the influx of visitors. In 2014, the tourism industry drew up nearly 3 million liters of water per day [9]. Many farmers sold fertile land to commercial projects because of the rising water prices, further pushing residents toward employment in the tourism industry. The reliance on the tourism sector only worsens the water scarcity in Bali, and enables the industry to continue its overuse of local and public resources.

TOPIC HISTORY

Displacement in many of these destinations stems from decades of systemic development issues, but modernization has vastly expanded the ability for over-tourism to take effect. The first expansion of international tourism resulted from many changes after World War II. The commercialization of aircraft made international travel more accessible, and improvements in many international economies prompted people to travel for leisure. International tourism grew from 25 million tourist arrivals in 1950 to more than 160 million arrivals in 1970. Tourist efforts began to attract large amounts of outside spending, which prompted many regions to incorporate tourism directly into their development efforts. The coastal city of Acapulco, Mexico, was redeveloped entirely in the 1950s, as the city built luxury hotels and commercial businesses to accommodate visitors [10].



Figure 3. Barcelona appoints José Antonio Donaire as the city's first commissioner of sustainable tourism. Donaire states that the city can take "not one tourist more" and must immediately address the overcrowding and resource strains that are a result of the 16 million tourists that visit Barcelona each year.

Leisure and entertainment continued to drive tourism growth, with the 1992 Summer Olympics bringing massive attention to Barcelona [11]. Cultural

9. "Bali's Water Crisis." Sustainability Minor, University of Notre Dame, 2014, susminor.nd.edu/capstone-projects/2014-balis-water-crisis/.
10. "The Distribution and Growth of Tourism since the Second World War." Academia.edu, www.academia.edu/29670795/The_Distribution_and_Growth_of_Tourism_since_the_Second_World_War.
11. "Travel without Leaving a Trace." The UNESCO Courier, UNESCO, courier.unesco.org/en/articles/travel-without-leaving-trace.

attractions such as La Sagrada Familia and Park Güell continued to draw visitors long after the Olympics had ended, eventually warranting the city to implement restrictions at popular locations.

The expansion of short-term rentals brought an influx of visitors into residential areas and historical cities. In Kyoto, many investors purchased homes or even entire apartment buildings to convert into short-term lodges, also known as *minpaku [12]*. Japanese residents began experiencing disturbances from tourists arriving at rentals, with investor-owners doing little to contribute to or support the affected neighborhoods. The city later introduced restrictions limiting minpaku to a short period between January and March, and required all owners to maintain their rentals regularly.

However, restrictions on private rentals were accompanied by continued investment in hotel construction. Kyoto had encouraged the construction of new hotels to accommodate international visitors. By 2019, the number of hotel rooms in the city had increased to more than 46,000, with commercial land pricing surpassing cities as populated as Tokyo *[12]*. Municipal land, including former elementary school sites, were leased off for hotel development. Residents raised concerns about losing access to properties important to the public, some of which had also provided evacuation space during disasters. The pressure on residential neighborhoods consequently continued through other forms of development. Controlling private rentals addressed disturbances around individual properties while the city continued allocating land and former public facilities to tourism.



Figure 4. In 2024, city officials in Kyoto's Gion district enforced "tourist bans" that prohibited entry to private alleyways and roads.

12. "Kyoto and the Peril of Overtourism: Interview with Mayoral Candidate Murayama Shōei." Nippon.com, www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/c07701/kyoto-and-the-peril-of-overtourism-interview-with-mayoral-candidate-murayama-shoei.html.

The growth of online booking platforms further catalyzed the effects of short-term rentals in tourist destinations. Websites such as Airbnb have contributed to higher housing costs and extreme cases of displacement. By 2022, the rate of short-term rental listings for entire housing units in Havana, Cuba increased by more than 6100 percent in the span of two years [13]. Accommodations could now expand beyond resorts, existing in homes that were already occupied or needed by local residents, and placing tourism and residential housing in competition for the same properties.

In 2018, the World Tourism Organization released a report proposing 11 strategies in hopes of managing the rapid growth of tourism in eight European cities. The report most notably recognized an increase in negative attitudes towards visitors, with terms such as "tourismphobia" gaining popularity [14]. The tense relationship between European residents and tourists was ultimately connected to the overcrowding and noise that inhabited high-volume locations. Many local communities could not see the positive contributions that tourism had brought to destination cities.

For other regions, however, economic reliance on tourism and visitor spending became apparent and vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic. For most small islands, tourism is the "economic lifeline" for their developing economies. Nearly 30% of the GDP across small island economies is produced from the hospitality and tourism sector, even exceeding 40% in the Bahamas [15]. Travel restrictions threatened the income for hotel, transportation, construction, and agricultural industries. Local governments struggled to provide assistance, as the fall in tourism revenue and employment reduced the amount received from income taxes.

The damage caused by the pandemic left these tourism-dependent regions more reliant on restoring visitor revenue rather than combating the developmental effects of reliance. Today, communities in these regions continue to struggle with local displacement and resource depletion. Efforts to restore the industry have ultimately brought back many of the

13.Santiago-Bartolomei, R. (2022). In Two Caribbean Cities, Digital Platforms Drive Gentrification: With the help of apps like airbnb, short-term rental housing elevates costs and fuels displacement in Havana and San Juan. NACLA Report on the Americas, 324–329. https://doi-org.lscsproxy2.lonestar.edu/10.1080/10714839.2022.2118024
14. World Tourism Organization. "New UNWTO Report Helps Cities Manage Impact of Tourism." UN Tourism, 17 Sept. 2018, www.untourism.int/global/press-release/2018-09-17/new-unwto-report-helps-cities-manage-impact-tourism.
15. Rashid, Hamid, Poh Lynn Ng, and Hoi Wai Jackie Cheng. "The COVID-19 Pandemic Puts Small Island Developing Economies in Dire Straits." UN/DESA Policy Brief, no. 64, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1 May 2020, desapublications.un.org/policy-briefs/undesa-policy-brief-64-covid-19-pandemic-puts-small-island-developing-economies-dire.

pressures that existed before the pandemic, and governments remain responsible for addressing the damage of overtourism without cutting off a necessary sector of their economy.

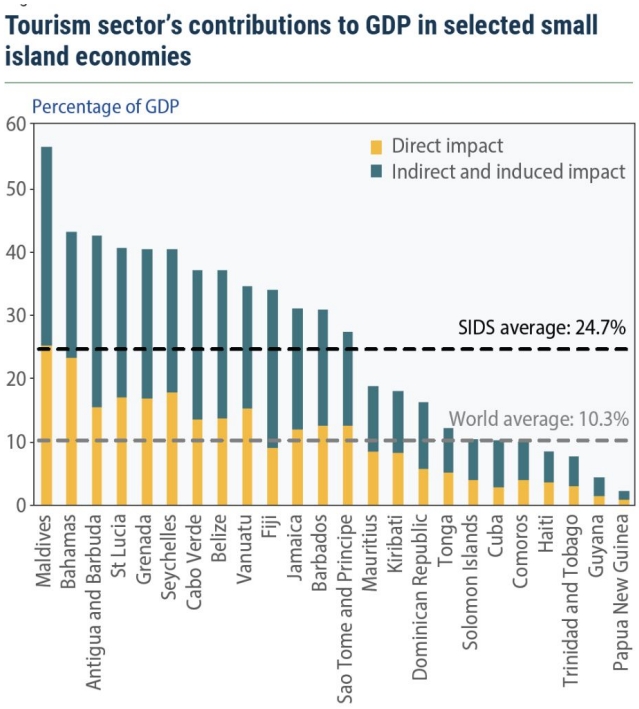


Figure 5. The tourism industry contributes to nearly 25% of GDPs of small, developing island economies on average, significantly larger than the world average of 10.3%.

Case Example: Community-based tourism in the Maldives

Following the pandemic, a major decline in visitors threatened the stability of business and commercial sectors in the Maldives. Tourist establishments produced no revenue, further weakening the government's ability to support local communities. Many hospitality workers were laid off and could not provide for their families.

In April 2021, the UNDP and Ministry of Tourism introduced the Reimagining Tourism project in hopes of creating more sustainable tourism methods [16]. The program encouraged local institutions to participate in hospitality projects, which gave communities greater influence over development. Local councils would incorporate tourism into land use plans, alongside training and regular audit mechanisms. The project also reconnected tourism with traditional livelihoods and heritage by training women and the youth to participate in the industry.

While the project reestablished public participation in developing new tourist establishments, pre-existing damage from large resorts in the Maldives continued to harm the surrounding populations. Despite many establishments advertising themselves as "Environmentally-friendly luxury island

16. United Nations Development Programme. "Government of Maldives and UNDP Sign Re-Imagining Tourism Project." UNDP, www.undp.org/maldives/press-releases/government-maldives-and-undp-sign-re-imagining-tourism-project.

[destinations]", resort renovations and construction continued drawing resources from inhabited islands, including the invasive tree grabbing and dredging practices [6]. Because of the separation between local islands and large tourism operations, an audit cannot, on its own, prevent another island's resort from extracting resources or damaging surrounding ecosystems that many local residents depend on.

6. Naseem, Sara. "Rebranding Destruction: Using 'Sustainability' to Mask Harm in the Maldivian Tourism Industry." SOAS University of London, 6 Jan. 2025, www.soas.ac.uk/about/blogs/rebranding-destruction-using-sustainability-mask-harm-maldivian-tourism-industry.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How can tourism-dependent regions limit the harmful impacts of excessive development without threatening the economic stability of visitor frequent destinations?
- To what extent does short-term rental oversaturation affect housing and property scarcity for local residents? How can we prevent housing crises and property inflation in these regions?
- How could tourist establishments continue development without damaging or depleting the resources needed by local communities?
- Can tourism properly incorporate local traditions without changing them to accommodate visitors or excluding residents from cultural spaces?

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