

Geographic Mapping of Tourism in Rural Areas: A Case Study of Cumbria, United Kingdom

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Abstract : Rural tourism has become more obvious and prevalent, with tourists' increasingly seeking authentic experiences. This movement accelerated post-Covid, putting destinations in danger of reaching levels of saturation called 'overtourism'. Whereas the phenomenon of overtourism has been frequently discussed in the urban context by academics and practitioners over recent years, it has hardly been referred to in the context of rural tourism, where perhaps it is even more difficult to manage. Rural tourism was historically considered small-scale, marked by its traditional character and by having little impact on nature and rural society. The increasing number of rural areas experiencing overtourism, however, demonstrates the need for new approaches, especially as the impacts and enablers of overtourism are context specific. Cumbria, with approximately 47 million visitors each year, and 23,000 operational enterprises, is one of these rural areas experiencing overtourism in the UK. Using the county of Cumbria as an example, this paper aims to explore better planning and management in rural destinations by clustering the area into rural and 'urban-rural' tourism zones. To achieve the aim, this study uses secondary data from a variety of sources to identify variables relating to visitor economy development and demand. These data include census data relating to population and employment, tourism industry-specific data including tourism revenue, visitor activities, and accommodation stock, and big data sources such as Trip Advisor and All Trails. The combination of these data sources provides a breadth of tourism-related variables. The subsequent analysis of this data draws upon various validated models. For example, tourism and hospitality employment density, territorial tourism pressure, and accommodation density. In addition to these statistical calculations, other data are utilized to further understand the context of these zones, for example, tourist services, attractions, and activities. The data was imported into ARCGIS where the density of the different variables is visualized on maps. This study aims to provide an understanding of the geographical context of visitor economy development and tourist behavior in rural areas. The findings contribute to an understanding of the spatial dynamics of tourism within the region of Cumbria through the creation of thematized maps. Different zones of tourism industry clusters are identified, which include elements relating to attractions, enterprises, infrastructure, tourism employment and economic impact. These maps visualize hot and cold spots relating to a variety of tourism contexts. It is believed that the strategy used to provide a visual overview of tourism development and demand in Cumbria could provide a strategic tool for rural areas to better plan marketing opportunities and avoid overtourism. These findings can inform future sustainability policy and destination management strategies within the areas through an understanding of the processes behind the emergence of both hot and cold spots. It may mean that attract and disperse needs to be reviewed in terms of a strategic option. In other words, to use sector or zonal policies for the individual hot or cold areas with transitional zones dependent upon local economic, social and environmental factors.

Keywords : overtourism, rural tourism, sustainable tourism, tourism planning, tourism zones

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