



From overtourism to under-tourism – and back?

Governance strategies to rebuild the tourism sector in Amsterdam in a post-COVID-19 era while preventing a 'second wave' of overtourism

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Abstract

Amsterdam is one of many cities that has struggled with problems of overtourism in the past decade. These problems include nuisance, crowdedness, rising housing prices and economic dependence on tourism, among others. The city administrators were aware of these issues and took a variety of measures, such as placing restrictions on tourism rental (AirBnB) and setting up campaigns to tackle problem behaviour of tourists. Yet, when COVID-19 put a halt to the stream of tourists visiting Amsterdam, this created a unique opportunity to make more drastic changes. This thesis has researched the ways in which COVID-19 enabled further change through the planned recovery of the tourism sector by answering the following research question: *What strategies are being formulated and implemented by stakeholders of Amsterdam's tourism sector in the stage of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent overtourism and to promote sustainable tourism instead?* To study this topic, a theoretical framework was developed including the conceptualisation of overtourism, sustainable tourism, the pro-growth and the degrowth paradigm, and governance. Particularly the concepts of pro-growth and degrowth were used to study the impact of capitalism as a dominant political and economic system on the policies regarding the tourism sector. Whereas the pro-growth discourse advocates a sustainable form of growth, the degrowth discourse argues that growth is inherently unsustainable. For data collection two methods were applied. First, fifteen documents of a variety of actors were analysed and second, thirteen semi-structured interviews with stakeholders were conducted. These have led to some interesting results. The trajectories that were already started before the pandemic were given more priority and thoroughness, such as the reputational change, and also new strategies have been implemented, the main one being an ordinance that restricts the number of tourists in Amsterdam to 20 million yearly. These strategies displayed aspects of both the pro-growth and the degrowth paradigm. Furthermore, decentralisation led to a shared responsibility for sustainable tourism between the municipality, businesses, and residents of the city. The belief was that all stakeholders need to put in the work to prevent a second wave of overtourism. Although considerable steps have been taken in the right direction, there is still progress to be made, especially regarding the environmental impact of tourism.

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List of abbreviations

Bed & Breakfast	B&B
Business investment zone	BIZ
Destination marketing organisation	DMO
Metropolis region Amsterdam	MRA

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1. Introduction

Tourism is often promoted for its wide variety of positive effects, such as boosting destination economies and cultural enrichment of tourists (Archer, Cooper, and Ruhanen, 2005). However, there are also many drawbacks to tourism, including environmental pollution, neo-colonial destination development, and overcrowding of destinations (Archer et al., 2005). The latter problem can be defined as overtourism, which occurs when the number of tourists at a destination transcends its carrying capacity and negatively impacts the lives of residents (Goodwin, 2017). Global tourist arrival numbers have grown over the past decades for several reasons, like decreasing costs of transport, so that in combination with rapid urbanisation makes overtourism especially (but not exclusively) an issue in urban areas (Dodds and Butler, 2019; UNWTO et al., 2018). The academic debate on the topic has gained traction since 2017, as the media, public, institutions and governments increasingly paid attention to the issue (Mihalic, 2020). Hot topic cities included Barcelona, Venice and Dubrovnik, to name a few. The overall argument was that overtourism is a serious problem regarding the liveability of a destination that should be addressed in a serious and scientific manner (Mihalic, 2020). So, the debate has become more serious and extensive over the past few years.

Another popular urban destination that has dealt with this issue for years now is Amsterdam, the capital city of The Netherlands. The city's cultural and aesthetic values, together with its reputation as a liberal and welcoming city to all, attracted over twenty million foreign tourists in 2019. This is an increase of 8% in comparison with a year before, and these numbers were expected to grow (CBS, 2020). With this number of tourists also came a plethora of consequences in relation to overtourism. For instance, housing prices have seriously increased with a growing demand for tourist accommodation, leading to the outplacing of low-income residents (Gerritsma, 2019). Another example is the nuisance caused by partying tourists who visit Amsterdam for its facilitation of sex and drugs in the Red Light District (Hubbard and Whowell, 2008). Also, littering has been cited as a major source of irritation among residents (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017). This is not an exhaustive list of troubles related to overtourism, but it gives a first impression of what the city is dealing with.

Although overtourism is not a novel phenomenon, the municipality of Amsterdam did not officially recognize this situation as being problematic until 2015, when it published the 'Stad in Balans' (City in Balance) agenda (Gerritsma, 2019). This agenda covers different experiments and strategies to (at least partially) solve issues around infrastructure and traffic, noise disturbance, and overcrowding of the city centre, among other things (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). As becomes apparent from these target points, the municipality was mainly focused on finding technological solutions to manage a large number of tourists rather than working to stop that number from growing, let alone decrease it. Hence, the governance regime of Amsterdam's tourism sector was failing to acknowledge and respect the city's fundamental limits to growth. One potential explanation for this is that the municipality prioritized economic interests above those of society and the environment (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Jakobs et al., no date). Accordingly, one in three residents felt excluded from this governance regime, which added to already growing feelings of irritation towards tourism (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017), leading to rising tensions between stakeholders. However, this was up until the global COVID-19 pandemic and the related travel restrictions caused for a screeching halt to tourism in Amsterdam.

The scope and uncertainty of the ongoing pandemic have caused serious economic damage to Amsterdam. It has been estimated that the city missed out on at least 8 billion euros from the tourism sector in 2020 – compared to a total revenue from this sector of 18.6 billion euros in 2019 (RTL Z, 2021). In that sense, one could argue that Amsterdam has suffered from under-tourism rather than overtourism during the lockdown (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). Yet, the prospect of

recovery of Amsterdam's tourism sector is becoming better by the day. As vaccination schemes are being implemented globally, travel and tourism are once again becoming promoted. In fact, the UNWTO has predicted that counting from September 2020, the number of international tourist arrivals will be back on the level of 2019 within two and a half to four years – and will continue to grow from there (UNWTO, 2020). This is hardly surprising, given the widely celebrated discourse of tourism as an economy-booster, which promotes the sector as a (partial) cure to the COVID-19 recession. The situation is actually similar to the financial crisis in 2008, when tourism development was one of the major strategies for recovery (Blanco-Romero et al., 2019). Yet, as the sector became more intertwined with matters such as housing, this intensified issues of overtourism, in this example by increasing housing prices for residents (Blanco-Romero et al., 2019; Gerritsma, 2019). This implies that a post-COVID-19 recovery of tourism in Amsterdam may lead to even more troubles regarding overtourism than before, creating a bittersweet forecast. The pressing question that arises then is not *why*, but *how* this recovery of tourism in Amsterdam is planned.

Although literature exists on the relation between natural/political disasters and recovery of tourism, the COVID-19 pandemic has been unique in its scope and its impact on the modern world. Hence, there is much uncertainty about the impact of this virus on different tourism destinations, as well as the duration of this impact. This situation could actually be seen as an opportunity for Amsterdam and other destinations to 'build back better' now that overtourism-related issues are (temporarily) absent. For instance, the intention has been expressed to attract more 'quality tourists' to the city (Van Bommel, 2020). Suggested strategies to this end include a ban on AirBnB and an expansion of tourist taxation measures (Van Bommel, 2020). However, research is needed to understand what measures are being taken exactly by tourism stakeholders to prevent a second wave of overtourism and support the recovery of sustainable tourism in Amsterdam instead. Besides, an assessment of the effectivity of these measures contributes to the understanding of the contemporary developments around the recovery of the tourism sector in Amsterdam.

This thesis contributes to bridging this knowledge gap by studying the governance processes related to the recovery of Amsterdam's tourism sector, and by interpreting the differences with the pre-COVID-19 management plan, both in terms of formal policies and behaviour in the streets. In doing so, this thesis answers the following research question:

- a. What strategies are being formulated and implemented by stakeholders of Amsterdam's tourism sector in the stage of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent overtourism and to promote sustainable tourism instead?

Following from this main research question, three sub-questions are formulated:

- b. What are the similarities and differences between the contemporary plans to manage tourism, compared to the pre-COVID-19 plans?
- c. How are the past issues of overtourism considered and taken into account in the contemporary plans?
- d. What effects do the strategies already implemented have on the behaviour of tourists and residents in popular tourist spots?

The following chapter will set out a theoretical framework to operationalise the concepts mentioned in this introduction. Next, chapter 3 will elaborate on the methodology of this thesis. After that, chapter 4 will discuss the results of the first method and chapter 5 will discuss the results of the second method. Chapter 6 will then provide a discussion that puts the results of this thesis in the context of the academic debate on these topics. Finally, chapter 7 will provide a conclusion.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Overtourism

Before elaborating further on the concept of overtourism, it is crucial to ascribe a more precise meaning to this word. This thesis adopts the definition as formulated by the UNWTO, namely: “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way,” (UNWTO et al., 2018, p. 4). Important to stress here is that it is not merely the absolute number tourists that is the issue, but more so their relative impact on the destination. This thesis makes a distinction between three factors that overtourism comprises, based on the literature of UNWTO et al. (2018) and Dodds and Butler (2019):

- a. Overcrowding due to too many visitors
 - i. Example: overcrowded streets and public transport
- b. Too many negative impacts caused by visitors
 - i. Example: noise disturbance due to drunk tourists
- c. Too many negative impacts caused by the tourism industry
 - i. Example: rising housing prices for residents due to a growing demand for tourist accommodation in the city

This thesis combines both a and b, as both are directly visible and sensible when tourists are present in a certain geographic area, while c is not. In that sense, overcrowding is also a negative impact – partially – caused by visitors. A number of theories have arisen regarding the concept of overtourism, which also differ in their focus on this quantitative/qualitative distinction in the problematic aspects of overtourism. For instance, the carrying capacity of a destination is based on a countable number of tourists, whereas the concept of welfare includes the aspect of qualitative liveability of a destination (Mihalic, 2020). This chapter will explain some of these theories more in-depth below. Although there is considerable attention for the economic and environmental consequences of overtourism, most research is focused on the societal impacts, as well as the reactions that these impacts provoke from residents, such as anti-tourism movements (Milano, Cheer, and Novelli, 2019). Coming back to the definition given above then, residents directly experience a negative effect when too many visitors are in their city, and/or when visitors misbehave. In fact, it could be argued that overtourism is actually a social construction of residents, as only cities with articulate residents who are relatively uninvolved in the tourism sector are “likely to be vocal in opposition to excessive numbers of visitors,” (Dodds and Butler, 2019, p. 4; Goodwin, 2017; Milano et al., 2019). This is clear in the case of Amsterdam, where numerous efforts have been made by residents, either individually or collectively, to address their dissatisfaction with tourism in the city to the municipality (Gerritsma, 2019).

This can be explained through Doxey’s destination irritation index (Irridex) model. Doxey (1975) differentiated four levels of irritation that explain residents’ emotions and reactions towards tourism and the tourists:

1. Euphoria: a sense of excitement, welcoming tourists;
2. Apathy: recognizing tourism as a source of income and investment;
3. Annoyance: growing tourist numbers and large-scale tourist industry initiate feelings of irritation;
4. Antagonism: verbal and physical expression of these irritations, considering tourists as the source of all problems.

Hence, as negative effects of tourism become more prominent in a destination, social interactions also become more negative and the support amongst residents decreases (Mihalic, 2020). As briefly mentioned in the introduction, the municipality of Amsterdam has responded to this uproar by setting up the City in Balance agenda in 2015. Not long after, an updated document was published containing the six target points for the years 2018 to 2022. These are: less nuisance, attractive functional blending, more space in the streets and on the water, improved financial balance in economy of visitors, sustainable recreation and resources, and the spreading of visitors (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018). Regarding the latter, Dodds and Butler (2019) explained that this is especially tricky in city centres where specific attractions are located, such as Dam Square in this case, as tourists generally do want to visit these places. Yet, it is exactly the city centre where residents experience most disturbance and irritation (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017), which demonstrates the complex nature of the overtourism issue. Furthermore, a major challenge lies in managing the city's infrastructures and facilities as reducing their capacity will negatively affect not only tourists but also the residents who make use of them (Dodds and Butler, 2019).

A more metric tool to tackle overtourism is to decide a destination's upper limit, or carrying capacity (Mihalic, 2020). This can be understood in two ways: "the maximum levels of overcrowding that visitors are willing to accept and the maximum levels of tourism and its (negative) impacts that local residents are willing to accept" (Mihalic, 2020, p. 4). Amsterdam knows three types of visitors: overnight visitors, day trippers and cruise ship passengers (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Yet, to understand the potential pathways for reducing the number of tourists, it is crucial to understand what attracts them. The municipality has indicated that the most important determinants for growth of tourism are the GDP, available income, consumer price index, exchange rate, population size and political (in)stability of the destination, as well as the travel motive, distance and available alternatives of the tourist (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Some differences exist, as Americans and Asians react mostly to change in prices of touristic products, while Europeans react mostly to change in their own income (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). However, while knowing this, stopping – or reversing – the growing number of tourists (at least prior to the pandemic) is challenging because destinations are generally concerned about damaging their reputation if they deter tourists, and constraining travel to the city is a complicated matter (Dodds and Butler, 2019). Instead, Amsterdam has included the demotion of tourism in their management plans to not promote the city any further, which is in accordance with the request of the city's residents, while avoiding the reputation of being anti-tourist or even xenophobic (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Goodwin, 2017). A good example hereof is the removal of the 'I Amsterdam' letters from the Museum Square, which were a popular tourist attraction, with the aim of making the area less crowded (NOS, 2018). Hence, the focus is more on limiting the growth of tourism than on degrowing.

Since stakeholders deem it irresponsible or simply impossible to constrain the number of tourists in Amsterdam, they see it as their only option to find technological solutions to efficiently and effectively manage those tourists (Dodds and Butler, 2019; Jakobs et al., no date). Also the UNWTO et al. (2018, p. 5) claims that overtourism is a matter of "absence of good management and uncontrolled development," and not one of transgressing limits to growth. In that sense, overtourism is perceived as a technological problem rather than a political one. However, it could be argued that urban tourism is a tool to sustain the city's capitalistic economic system (Fletcher, 2011). This implies that the politics that govern this economic system are responsible for overtourism. Also, Milano et al. (2019, p. 7) argue that "adequate long-term solutions require policy maker interventions rather than simply relying on technical and industry-driven approaches." Hence, to overcome overtourism, it must be acknowledged that there are limits to growth, and the political will needs to be present to prevent the tourism sector of Amsterdam to transgress those limits

(Dodds and Butler, 2019). By doing so, the sector could recover from the COVID-19 pandemic in a more sustainable manner. What such a scenario would embody is discussed in the following subchapter.

2.2. Sustainable tourism

It is difficult to provide a singular term or definition of the concept of sustainable tourism. For instance, this thesis uses the term 'sustainable' rather than 'responsible', as the latter can be viewed from the standpoint of the tourism themselves, so how they behave (for example, being noisy in the bars and quiet in the streets), whereas the first is more of a concept that is used in management and policy-making by tourism authorities, which is the main focus of this thesis (Mihalic, 2016). However, this does not mean that 'sustainable' and 'responsible' are mutually exclusive in their meaning and their use in political and academic debates. Hence, 'sustainable' is a rather ambiguous concept. Yet, the term is valuable in its widespread significance in the global discussion on overtourism.

Additionally, it can be argued "that a precise definition of sustainable tourism is less important than the journey towards it" (Hardy, Beeton, and Pearson, 2002, p. 483). That is why this thesis applies the term to indicate intentions that move away from overtourism. That is, whereas "overtourism reflects uneven exploitation of the planet's finite resources and is very often embodied in the reproduction of inequalities" (Milano et al., 2019, p. 8), sustainable tourism aims for a fair distribution of the costs and benefits that come from tourism. In light of the business-aspect of tourism, a common explanation of sustainability is the concept of 3 P's, which are often-used indicators to measure and describe the impacts of tourism (Alhaddi, 2015):

- A. People (society)
- B. Planet (environment and natural resources)
- C. Profit (economy)

The first pillar – people – is mostly captured in the embodiment of Amsterdam's residents as the main stakeholder suffering from overtourism in this debate. Important here is that civil society is involved in the governance regime of Amsterdam's tourism sector, together with the municipality and the private sector (Gerritsma, 2019; Goodwin, 2017). The inclusion of local residents – and all other stakeholders – in governance is important to avoid conflict and seek solutions (Gerritsma, 2019; UNWTO et al., 2018). However, as power is distributed and shared between these different stakeholders, not all residents feel as if they have the power to influence how tourism is managed in the city (Arts and Van Tatenhove, 2004; Gerritsma and Vork, 2017). Hence, herein lies a major governance challenge.

The second pillar – planet – is evident from the debates on the link between climate change and the travel industry. Particularly air travel is often critiqued because of its polluting character, and as a result, many efforts have been made to neutralize these effects or to find greener travel alternatives (Green, 2005). For instance, the construction of high-speed railway travel has been encouraged as a solution to promote more environmentally-friendly travel to Amsterdam (Kroes and Savelberg, 2019). Yet, to decrease the number of flights to and from Amsterdam airport with more than 5%, structural changes need to be made to the city infrastructure and the allocation of resources to travel companies and institutions (Kroes and Savelberg, 2019).

Of course, such a change will cause major shifts in the distribution of financial resources between stakeholders. This links to the third pillar, profit, which can be recognized in the economic importance of the tourism sector for the city. Changing the status quo of tourism numbers can go against the interests of actors who gain economic benefit from tourism, such as owners of souvenir shops and hoteliers. Still, to come to a situation wherein people, planet and profit are all fairly and

equally represented in Amsterdam's tourism sector, most likely the number of tourists will need to be smaller than that in 2019. Considering this necessity, an important concept is that of degrowth, which will be discussed in the following subchapter.

2.3. Degrowth paradigm

As argued thus far, overtourism is not merely a technological matter, but more so a political and economic one. To tackle all issues associated with it, the degrowth paradigm is supported by scholars who argue for acknowledgement of a destination's limits to growth. The term 'degrowth' began to gain traction after protests against consumerism in the early 2000s (Kallis et al., 2018). Yet like with the concept of sustainable tourism, different definitions of degrowth exist in the academic field (Fletcher et al., 2019). The main argument of interest for this thesis is degrowth's call for a "radical transformation of the political economy within which sustainability is pursued" (Fletcher et al., 2019, p. 1746). The aim is to move towards a post-capitalist system of producing and consuming, thereby reducing the existing inequalities in society (Blanco-Romero et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2019). So, overall less resources can and must be extracted from the planet and used, and the resources that *are* used can and must be distributed more equally and fairly amongst the population (Cosme, Santos, and O'Neill, 2017). According to Kallis et al. (2018), to actually transform the economic system would require a certain level of bottom-up activism, however, as planned degrowth is unlikely to happen. That is because of the powers and interests of the political and economic authorities globally whose wealth would be impaired by such a transformation of the economic system that moves away from the current form of capitalism (Kallis et al., 2018).

The concept is well-represented in a variety of professional fields, including political science, economics, history and anthropology (Kallis et al., 2018). As tourism is an interdisciplinary field that is interconnected with these fields, degrowth is an interesting concept to use when studying the political and economic context of the phenomenon of tourism in general. More specifically, the degrowth paradigm challenges the inherent need to grow of capitalist institutions and promotes the acknowledgement of limits to growth to turn the trend of overtourism around. So, whereas the concept of sustainable tourism described above supports the idea of growth but argues for a more sustainable way of growing, the degrowth paradigm actually argues that growth is inherently unsustainable. Prospering of societies is still supported, but in a different type of economy, with a focus on issues of inequality and environmental limits to growth (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). An essential step in the transition to degrowth is the transformation of values, moving away from the fetishization of 'newer' and 'more' that capitalism entails (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

On a more practical level, the degrowth paradigm claims that tourism management is very much a social struggle in which the rights and needs of local residents should be prioritized over those of tourists and the tourism industry (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019; Valdivielso and Moranta, 2019). Resistance from residents could be prevented, given that "strategies for degrowth in tourism must be progressive, inclusive, just and equitable" (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019, p. 11). To achieve this, governments play a central role in facilitating a shift in values, in regulating the power of corporations and promoting sustainable, social entrepreneurship instead, and in moving away from tourism-dependent economies, which facilitate unsustainability and inequality (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). In that way, the rights of residents are prioritized above the rights of tourists and the tourism industry (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019).

Although many governments of destinations struggling with overtourism claim to work on sustainable tourism, caution should be taken when hearing such claims. Often intentions of sustainable tourism are often not supported by the goals and tools that are still very much pro-

growth, but are only used to ‘respond’ to criticism on overtourism and keep up their reputation (Higgins-Desbiolles et al., 2019). To understand how the discourses of pro-growth and degrowth are reflected in tourism management policy, this thesis adopts the framework of Blanco-Romero et al. (2019), shown in table 1.

Table 1: 6 Ds and 6 D-Ds (Blanco-Romero et al., 2019)

Pro-growth discourse	Degrowth discourse
Deseasonalisation	Decommodification
Decongestion	Disparity reduction & collectivisation
Deluxe tourism	Dignifying working conditions
Discredit contestation	Deconsumerism
Decentralisation	Detailed spatial planning
Diversification	Detouristification & retouristification

The six Ds of the pro-growth discourse are the policy strategies used to promote growth while also attempting to mitigate the negative effects of this growth. These six Ds are derived from the previous outline of Milano (2018), who proposed five Ds as strategies to manage overcrowding in tourism destinations. Deseasonalisation is especially relevant for destinations with a clear touristic season, like when the climate is most pleasant or when particular events take place, as the aim is to spread out this peak in tourist numbers more evenly over time to decrease overcrowding. Decongestion is the spreading of tourist numbers not in time like with deseasonalisation but in space to diminish overcrowding in certain locations, often the ‘hotspots’ of a destination. Deluxe tourism is about attracting more high-quality tourists to a destination to improve the economic revenue coming from tourism. This relates to diversification, which is the increase in variety of activities, products and tourist experiences. Decentralisation entails the transfer of control and responsibility for certain activities from the government only to also including non-governmental actors, specifically businesses and civilians (Milano, 2018). Finally, ‘discredit contestation’ has been added to the framework used here, which is the discrediting of views and arguments that oppose the feasibility of a pro-growth (sustainable) discourse.

Secondly, Blanco-Romero and her colleagues formulated six D-Ds from a perspective degrowth to explain how this paradigm can be implemented in policy to pursue a fairer, more sustainable tourism sector. First of all, decommodification is the process of removing something from the market, so that it has no market value. This links to deconsumerism, which is the process taking away the focus on the purchasing of goods and services and on the interests of consumers more generally. Disparity reduction and collectivisation is about curbing inequality in who benefits from tourism and who does not, or who is even impaired by it. Dignifying working conditions entails the improvement of the work situation of those who work in the tourism sector. This can be for instance a fair income, but also a safe work environment, regular working hours or being treated respectfully. Detailed spatial planning is the large-scale coordination of spatial planning, considering the coherence between different processes that take place within the area, and how that area is intertwined with the areas around it. Finally, detouristification and retouristification can be described as the deconstruction and reconstruction of a destination’s tourism sector as it is, questioning the fundamental beliefs and values that it is based on to structurally change the essence of the sector. To conclude, in this line of thinking, the degrowth paradigm is an antithetical response to the pro-growth paradigm, designed to show how destinations could change their ways. Basic beliefs about the (un)sustainability of growth are challenged, so that the problem of overtourism can be tackled more rigorously. Hence, this is a useful perspective for studying Amsterdam’s plans to recover their tourism sector.

2.4. Governance

This thesis uses the umbrella-term governance to refer to acts of governing the tourism sector, including which strategies are implemented, how, why and by whom (Kooiman, 1999). Central elements of contemporary (neoliberal) governance approaches include decentralisation, meaning a shift in governing power to civil and corporate actors, and an increase in information-based steering (Evans, 2012). Different actors are involved in governance, who can have different interests, motivations, and available resources such as financial means, knowledge, social status, and legal options (Arnouts, Van der Zouwen, and Arts, 2012). Hence, they can all implement different strategies to steer the tourism sector in a certain direction. According to Bax (2011), governmental actors are generally said to have three types of policy instruments:

- Sticks: regulations to which the subjects are legally mandated to comply with. Those who do not, will be punished, for example with use of detention or fines;
- Carrots: economic instruments used to motivate subjects to follow a certain measure, such as subsidies; and
- Sermons: information instruments mostly focused on making subjects aware of the (positive or negative) consequences of their behaviour to steer them in the desired direction.

In practice, these instruments can be combined to use a variety of tools to reach a certain goal (Bax, 2011). Furthermore, this thesis applies these three types not only to the governance actions of governmental actors, but also to those of civil and corporate actors. For instance, although non-governmental actors cannot establish legally binding regulations, as we will see, they can indeed encourage or push a governmental body to do so. Yet before coming to the results of this thesis, the following chapter will explain the methodology of this study.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case study of Amsterdam

The choice of Amsterdam as a case for studying the concept of overtourism is based on three motivations. First, Amsterdam has received lots of media attention regarding mass tourism, overcrowding and excessive nuisance as perceived by residents. As explained in the previous chapter, such social resistance is crucial in labelling a situation as overtourism. In fact, Amsterdam can be seen as a leading example of urban overtourism in western Europe. However, there are cases in southern Europe, mostly the city Barcelona, that are more extreme in this regard (Milano et al., 2019). Yet because the different travel restrictions as a result of COVID-19 did not allow me to physically travel to another country to collect data, or at least made for a very insecure situation, staying in my home country, which is The Netherlands, was the most secure option.

Second, Amsterdam has shown a proactive governance regime that plans to address pre-COVID-19 difficulties, and hence plans the contemporary recovery of the tourism sector in specific ways, more so than for example Berlin (Redactie Trouw, 2021; Van Bommel, 2020). For instance, it has been argued that the pandemic has motivated a shift towards the founding of Amsterdam's tourism on art and culture, instead of sex, drugs and nightlife (Redactie Trouw, 2021). This made Amsterdam an interesting case for studying the ins and outs of actively planning the recovery of tourism at an urban destination in a post-COVID-19 era.

Third, as Dutch is the lingua franca in The Netherlands and also my mother tongue, this allowed me to speak to people who do not speak English and to read documents that are only available in Dutch. All this enabled data collection to be more thorough and complete. Besides, I have been to Amsterdam numerous times before the COVID-19 pandemic, which helped me compare the situation today to the 'normal' situation before as a form of participant observation, contributing to interpreting the results of the document analysis and interviews, which will be explained further below.

3.2. Data collection

This thesis has applied three different, qualitative methods to collect data. First, a method of desk research was applied, namely an analysis of (non-)governmental documents and policy papers regarding the issue of overtourism in Amsterdam. In total, fifteen documents were analysed, of which twelve produced by the municipality of Amsterdam, two produced by amsterdam&partners, the city's destination marketing organisation (DMO), and one by the Van Gogh Museum, a cultural institution. All but one have been derived from the online search engine Google. Only the document of the Van Gogh Museum has been provided by an informant via e-mail. The document analysis has been split up into two parts. First, documents published before the outbreak of COVID-19 were analysed to explain the pre-pandemic situation. Second, documents published since March 2020, when the Netherlands first went in lockdown as a consequence of the risk of COVID-19, were analysed. The focus here was on the measures being implemented to solve the issues and on the predictions being made about the future of the tourism sector in a post-COVID-19 era. Hence, documents were selected based on their relevance to these topics. The way the documents were analysed will be described in the following subchapter. The goal of this analysis was not to statistically prove or dismiss a certain hypothesis on the issue of overtourism in Amsterdam, but rather to create a broad understanding of how the issue is framed in the discourses that determine policy making and management of tourism in the city. This analysis served as a baseline for understanding which of the current policies and management plans regarding the tourism sector fit in a pro-growth, and which fit in a degrowth discourse.

The second method was one of field research, namely interviewing different stakeholders of Amsterdam's tourism sector. In total, twelve interviews were conducted between July and September 2021, ranging from 30 to 60 minutes in length, with an average of 40 minutes. One interview was with two persons, making a total of thirteen people who were interviewed. The choice was made for semi-structured interviews as this allowed for an interview guide to provide some clarity on topics that should be discussed, while also providing the freedom to explore other topics as they came up during an interview (Bernard, 2017). The use of an interview guide also ensured the collection of reliable qualitative data (Bernard, 2017). As Dutch was the lingua franca in the research area, this was also the spoken language during the interviews. Interviews were conducted with stakeholders from the public, private and civil sphere, so that this thesis covers the viewpoint of different roles in Amsterdam's tourism sector. For this reason, the interview guide consisted of two parts: a set of crucial questions that were asked to all interviewees, and a set of specific questions for individual interviewees depending on their role, as different backgrounds ask for different focuses. The full interview guide can be found in appendix A, but generally questions were divided into four categories:

- Problems and management strategies related to overtourism prior to the outbreak of COVID-19;
- Changes in the perception of problems and the effectiveness of management strategies since the outbreak of COVID-19;
- The role of the public and private sectors in managing tourism; and
- The possibility and probability of different scenarios for the recovery of the tourism sector from this time onward.

Because of the desire to speak to a variety of different stakeholders, at first specific individuals have been selected, which is referred to as purposive sampling (Bernard, 2017). From there, snowball sampling was applied by asking interviewees for references to any other interesting persons, which has the advantage of becoming able to reach actors that would otherwise be difficult to contact (Bernard, 2017). This has been proved useful, as six interviewees have been reached via this method. This has been repeated until twelve interviews were conducted, and no new, interesting potential interviewees were brought forward (or agreed to do an interview).

At the time of data collection, the lockdown in The Netherlands was slowly but surely being lifted as more people were being vaccinated against COVID-19 and the number of hospital admissions was decreasing. However, this did not mean that everything was 'back to normal' just yet. For this reason, my aim was to interview people face-to-face as much as possible, but I also accepted online or telephone interviews if the interviewee preferred so. The preference for real-life interviews was based on the idea that body language and facial expressions provide important additions to the writing of the interview results (Porter, 2012). Additionally, personal contact may enhance an interviewee's trust in the researcher, being more free to provide information about relatively sensitive topics (Newing, 2010), in this case for example discussing other stakeholders. Almost all interviewees happily agreed to a face-to-face interview, but in some cases an online interview was more convenient in terms of time management. Either way, the interviewee was asked for permission to record the interview before starting the interview, to which all interviewees agreed.

Finally, the third method was participant observation. By taking on a role as participating observer, I have placed myself in two situations, so that I could study the behaviour of tourists while minimizing reactivity (Bernard, 2017). The two locations that I have visited were the Van Gogh Museum (80 minutes) and the central train station (20 minutes). I have focused mainly on two things: what

measures are said to be implemented in these locations to minimize the negative effects of tourism, and how effective do these measures appear to be based on the behaviour of tourists in these locations? Because this has all taken place in my home country, where I know the language and common cultural practices, it was not as time-consuming to get a taste of what was happening than when I would have done this in a foreign environment (Bernard, 2017). However, the tricky part then was to maintain a sense of greenness or objectivity when observing practices happening in my own culture, because I am so accustomed to those things (Bernard, 2017). When observing tourists – many of whom come from different cultures – this would be less of a problem. However, as many tourists during the time of writing were Dutch people coming from different parts of the country, ‘day trippers’, this did not fully apply. Hence, I have attempted to understand the heterogeneity of both Dutch culture and those of the tourists. Additionally, only by acknowledging my own biases I have been able to transcend them and produce ‘objective’ knowledge in that sense (Bernard, 2017). Because these observations were only for enhancing my personal understanding of the situation and not for the sake of data analysis, I have not taken descriptive field notes such as the observed behaviour or the environment.

3.3. Data analysis

Before being able to analyse the data from the interviews, the recordings had to be transcribed. This was done non-verbatim, so that only the necessary speech was included in the transcription, and speech such as stutters or fillers like ‘uh’ were left out. This made for a clearer, better readable transcript. Transcripts were made in Dutch, so the same language as spoken during the interview, but quotes in the results have been translated to English. From there, the data of both the interviews and document analysis were ready for coding.

Coding is useful for identifying key topics and their patterns in data, providing a framework of topics (Newing, 2010). Mostly deductive coding was used, meaning that a predefined set of codes was established before starting the coding process, which is useful for providing a guideline in data analysis so that the process went smoother (Newing, 2010). Additionally, inductive coding was used to include some additional codes which have been derived from the data during the coding process (Newing, 2010). In short, based on the literature of Newing (2010), the following steps have been taken to develop the coding scheme (see Figure 1: Coding scheme):

1. A pre-defined set of codes has been formulated based on the theoretical framework of this thesis (specifically Table 1: 6 Ds and 6 D-Ds (Blanco-Romero et al., 2019));
2. In the first round of analysis of both the documents and transcripts, this set of codes has been adjusted and complemented, so that all topics of interests were included;
3. Codes have been formulated for all topics and subtopics;
4. This second set of codes was structured to follow a hierarchical method, as key words have been divided into mutually exclusive topics and subtopics that are specified for the six features of both the pro-growth discourse and the degrowth discourse, as well as the three different policy instruments, so that a focus on the research question is ensured.

To analyse the data, codes were ascribed by interpreting the meaning of a piece of text, and then making a note of the code that matched that meaning. To code the documents, this was done using Microsoft Edge as a PDF reader. To code the interview transcripts, the computer program QDA Miner Lite was used.

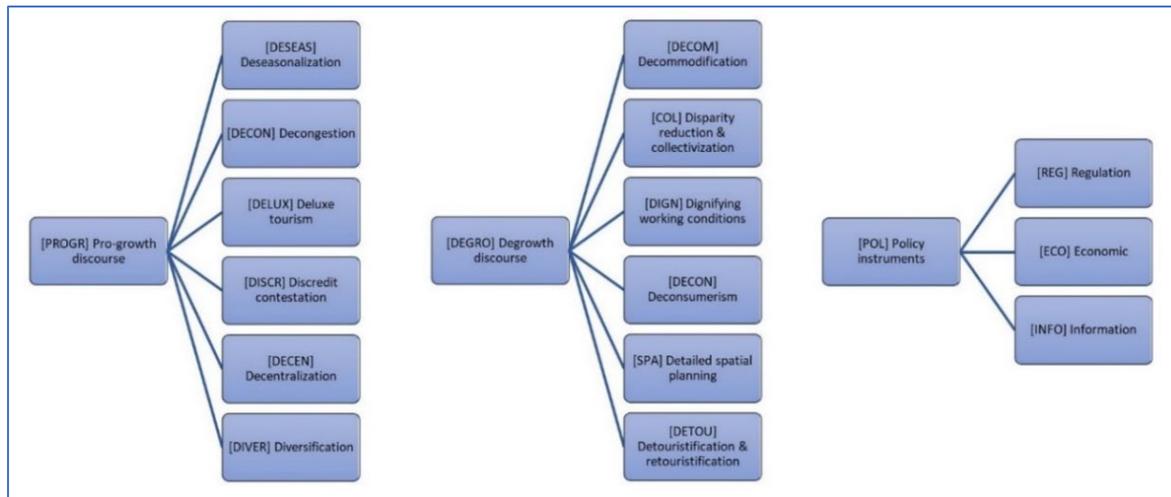


Figure 1: Coding scheme

Based on the coded data, arguments and statements have been extracted that link to either the pro-growth discourse or the degrowth discourse. These have been related to the actors that reproduce them – either the public or the private sector. The data gathered from participant observation has provided me with “an intuitive understanding of what’s going on in a culture and allows [me] to speak with confidence about the meaning of data,” (Bernard, 2017, p. 266). With this information, it has become possible to describe how different actors plan to restore the tourism sector in Amsterdam, their motivations for doing so, and how certain stakeholders collaborate to achieve a common goal. However, it should be stressed that no ‘one size fits all’ solution exists for overtourism (Goodwin, 2017), so this research is not necessarily generalizable to other tourism destinations struggling with overtourism.

3.4. Limitations

In qualitative research, validity should be interpreted differently than its original meaning in quantitative research, namely that the measurement instruments, data and findings are accurate and trustworthy (Bernard, 2017). Instead of using this positivist meaning of validity, this thesis acknowledges that multiple realities exist, both for the researcher and the participants (Noble and Smith, 2015). The focal point is to explain the representativeness of the findings in relation to the phenomenon of interest (Noble and Smith, 2015). One limitation regarding the document analysis then is that only written (so formal) argumentations are included, so unwritten (informal) debates are left out. Regarding the semi-structured interviews, there is a heavy reliance on the accuracy and honesty of the interviewees’ answers. For instance, interviewees could tend to answer in a socially desirable manner, giving the ‘right’ answer or an answer that reflects well on themselves (Newing, 2010). One tool applied in this thesis to oppose this effect is between-subject triangulation, meaning that several different people have been interviewed about the same topics, to gain a variety of perspectives (Newing, 2010). In addition, respondent validation is used by asking all interviewees to comment on their quotes as used in the findings before finalizing this thesis (Noble and Smith, 2015). Furthermore, cross-method triangulation has been applied by including document analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation in the research, which has helped to overcome for example the limitation of only formal argumentation in the documents (Newing, 2010). Because participant observation has not been used officially in the findings of this thesis, this method will also not be further discussed here. Regarding data analysis, the process of coding the data is also subject to the interpretation of the researcher, which means that is impossible to predefine a set of criteria that should be met in order to ensure validity. For instance, the

assumption that a pro-growth and degrowth discourse exist leads to researcher bias in recognizing these in the data and coding them as such. In fact, by using the concept of overtourism, the assumption is made that there even is such a thing and that it is problematic. Yet by acknowledging the existence of these presumptions by describing them in the theoretical framework helps to explain the researcher's perspective on reality, and hence strengthen the validity of the research.

Reliability in quantitative research is often associated with falsifiability, meaning that another researcher could one-on-one replicate a study and check whether they got the same results (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2007). In qualitative research then, the focus is on consistency and confirmability (Noble and Smith, 2015). The use of a semi-structured interview guide contributed to both, as it provides a certain grip on the topics discussed and the questions asked. However, for instance differences in wording and interpretation of a question may cause conversations to develop differently when replicating an interview, hence leading to different results (Newing, 2010). Furthermore, as described above, the interpretation of data differs for each researcher, based on their personal experiences and biases, so awareness hereof is crucial (Saunders et al., 2007). The use of an interview guide and a coding scheme based on relevant literature has helped to prevent tunnel vision on certain topics, or disregarding others. As for the generalisability of this study, caution should be taken when applying the findings of this thesis to different contexts or destinations. As mentioned in the previous subchapter, each destination has its own historical, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental context, so that no 'one size fits all'-solution for tourism can be found. Comparisons can be made to identify similarities and differences, but the findings for the situation in Amsterdam cannot be copied and pasted to any other destination struggling with problems of overtourism.

Finally, this thesis has some practical limitations. First and foremost, because of the holiday period, not all the persons contacted for an interview were able to participate. Although a saturation point has been reached for data collection, more insights from especially the private sector may have been interesting. Second, as all of the interviews and documents analysed for the purpose of this thesis were in Dutch, and the results are written in English, some interpretations of meaning may have been altered in translation. Finally, as already described in this chapter, the interviews that were conducted via digital ways (Microsoft Teams or phone call) might lack some of the depth and trust that were present in face-to-face interviews.

4. Results (document analysis)

This chapter will discuss the issues linked to tourism and their related measures as identified in policy documents of the municipality of Amsterdam, as well as relevant documents from other actors, in the periods before and since the outbreak of COVID-19. As explained in the theoretical framework, each subchapter is divided into two categories: direct negative effects (noise and other forms of disturbance, safety, littering, and crowdedness) caused by visitors, and indirect drawbacks (rising housing prices, loss of identity, et cetera) caused by the tourism industry (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c, 2020b).

4.1. Documents from before COVID-19

This subchapter discusses eight policy documents that were published (or are based on data that was collected) before the outbreak of COVID-19.

4.1.1. Negative impacts caused by visitors

The analysed documents have shown that most problems related to visitors exist in the city centre, as all neighbourhoods that suffer from high touristic pressure and unfavourable liveability are located there (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b), so that is why most measures also focus on this area. The three most negatively affected neighbourhoods are Burgwallen-Oude Zijde, Burgwallen-Nieuwe Zijde, and Grachtengordel-Zuid; other areas in Amsterdam that suffer the most are South, and the areas around Vondelpark and Oosterpark (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b). To tackle the problems that arise in these neighbourhoods, the municipality of Amsterdam expresses the importance of policy, regulation, and monitoring thereof. It was said that in order to prevent demonstrations of residents, the municipal government should intervene to control the touristic pressure on the city, especially in the neighbourhoods that are under high pressure, to ensure liveability of the city while continuing to welcome tourists (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b). This can be done by controlling mostly the supply, and, to a lesser extent, the demand. To this end, the municipality has published one programme that includes almost seventy measures to control the effects of visitors on the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). The motto is: "The visitor is welcome, but the resident comes first," (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c, p. 2). Following from these statements, this chapter discusses the issues related to overtourism pre-COVID-19 as identified by the municipality, and their proposed policy measures to tackle these.

A main focal point thereof is the Red Light District, located at and around the Singel. This area will be referred to as the Wallen from here. A combination of bars, fast-food restaurants, coffeeshops and of course window prostitution draws in partying tourists, some of whom cause no trouble, but also others who are not as inoffensive. Research on the crowdedness of and disturbance in this area in the city centre has shown that window prostitution is unimportant to over half the respondents (visitors at the Wallen between 18-35 years old), and in fact is only the most important reason to visit Amsterdam for 1% of the respondents (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). When confronted with the suggested measure to put a halt to window prostitution, 66% of the respondents said they would continue visiting the Wallen at least as often as they did before, and only 4% said they would not visit the Wallen anymore (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). Also, the establishment of a new sex entertainment area outside of the city centre would not be a problem solver: even for the visitors who indicated that window prostitution is an important reason for visiting Amsterdam, not more than 1/4th would visit such an area (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). Hence, window prostitution is not likely to be a prominent factor in the attraction of 'nuisance visitors'. Still, prostitution policies have been designed to counter overcrowding and to incorporate the wishes of sex workers to counter disrespectful behaviours (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c).

Actually, coffeeshops are given as main reason for visitation by 22% of the respondents, and also 72% has visited or planned on visiting a coffeeshop during their stay at the time (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). This indicates a more prominent role of coffeeshops in the establishment of the ambiance and image of the Wallen. To get insight concerning the potential effectiveness of certain measures, the same research has presented these respondents with the option of the 'i-criterium', meaning that international visitors would not be allowed inside coffeeshops any longer (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). 34% of the respondents replied that they would visit Amsterdam less often, and 11% said they would never visit again (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). A total of 18% actually said they would buy weed or hash via other routes, including from street trade (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). Hence, the i-criterium seems to have only a small effect on the number of visitors coming to Amsterdam and thus to the Wallen (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b).

Another proposed measure was the implementation of an entrance fee to the Wallen (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). This could help control the crowdedness by being physically able to limit the number of people present and by implementing an economic restraint, which in turn would limit nuisance. 32% of the respondents said they would never visit the Wallen again, and 44% would visit less often (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). This would be the most effective measure of all that were proposed in lowering the number of visitors in the area, but it would least impact the visitors coming to Amsterdam to party, so probably the level of nuisance would not decrease as much as desired (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b).

The issue with the measures proposed above is that the image of Amsterdam as a party city is rooted deeply in the perception of both national and international visitors, making it difficult to steer away from this reputation (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Yet, the reputation of Amsterdam as a place of freedom does not mean that tourists can act and behave however they want, at the cost of liveability of the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). Still, the municipal college wants Amsterdam to remain a free-spirited, open and international city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c), so it has to find a balance between restraining and letting be.

At this point, a plethora of different communication campaigns exist, such as 'Enjoy & Respect' and 'We live here', to make visitors aware of the rules and fines that are in operation in the streets and on the canals of Amsterdam (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). Additionally, the municipal college has initiated the development of area-specific policies for commercial activities in public space, so that such activities can be priced, like street guides (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). Yet apart from disturbance in the public space, also the lodging of visitors in residential homes can lead to issues. A combination of exuberant behaviour and the deviant daily rhythm of visitors in the noisy apartments in Amsterdam can create serious nuisance for the other residents in the complex (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). This is especially true for holiday rentals, more than for B&Bs, as in that case there is no resident present to intervene when noise disturbance gets out of hand (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a).

On a larger scale, research of Gemeente Amsterdam (2019b) has shown that for 6% of the respondents, their most important reason for traveling to Amsterdam was the cheap travel availability. Yet overall, over half of the visitors who came to Amsterdam on a budget flight were prepared to pay more for a return ticket (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). An air passenger tax could decrease the number of passengers starting or ending their flight travel at a Dutch airport because of the higher price of a plane ticket, and some will even refrain from traveling (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). However, measures related to the aviation sector and accommodation of international visitors have relatively little impact on the number of day visitors, and because the population in Metropolis Region Amsterdam (MRA) visits Amsterdam more often and also grows more rapidly

than the Dutch population outside of MRA, there will be relatively more regional day trippers in the future (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Of all European groups, especially the British were more prone to taking a budget flight and were less often prepared to pay over €300 for a return ticket. Since the British also more often gave coffeeshops as their main reason for visiting (33%), this nationality can be seen as a group that has a relatively large contribution in the level of nuisance in the city centre (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b). Yet, it is unknown what the effects of Brexit will be on the incoming stream of British tourists (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c).

Related to this, a major tool that is being proposed is the tourist tax. For instance, in 2019 the tourist tax was increased to 7% for all providers in the city, with the plan of reviewing the system in 2020 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). This has led to a visible effect on the number of cruise ships arriving in Amsterdam, and hence the number of passengers in the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Another change was made in 2020, as the 7% tax remained, and on top of that a €3,- fee per night was added (Gemeente Amsterdam, n.d.). This fee only applies to the first 21 nights that a tourist stays in Amsterdam, and only to people more than 16 years old (Gemeente Amsterdam, n.d.). This decreases the relative difference in height of the tourist tax between cheaper and more expensive accommodations, but overall still it made the tourist tax more expensive.

The text above has demonstrated the main motivations for tourists to visit Amsterdam, and the ideas the municipality has had to diminish the reasons for 'nuisance visitors' to visit. But for the large number of visitors that was still coming, they had to consider more pragmatic solutions. The historical urban structure that gives Amsterdam its unique character is also the reason why public space is limited. The city simply was not designed for the amount of traffic that moves through the streets today (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). The municipal college has stated that it wants to create more spacious streets and waters to enhance the city's liveability and safety (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). Since 2019, an agenda to diminish the presence of cars in the city also attributes to opening more space for other functions, as 7.000 to 10.000 parking spots are removed, in combination with stimulating the use forms of shared transportation, such as trams (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). Still, destinations should remain accessible to all people and for supplying purposes, so exact spatial planning is determined per area (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a, 2019c).

Furthermore, a prominent strategy regarding spatial planning is the spreading of tourists. This happens on two levels. First, within the city of Amsterdam, campaigns are launched by amsterdam&partners to make visitors aware of the fun, beautiful and interesting things to do and to see in different neighbourhoods outside of the city centre (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). This is tricky, however, as the five most popular attractions are in or close to the city centre, namely: canal cruise, Van Gogh Museum, Rijksmuseum, Artis, and the Anne Frank House (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). Second, spreading is aimed at nudging tourists to other areas in the Netherlands, outside of the city. On a national level and in the MRA, public and parties cooperate to attract visitors to less well-known places inside and outside of the city with the aim of unburdening popular places and providing less developed neighbourhoods and regions with opportunities to develop economically instead (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). This is happening under the motto of 'Visiting Amsterdam, seeing Holland', with a particular focus on the cultural values that certain places have (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). For instance, project CycleSeeing was set up to create cycling routes connecting the city centre to other parts of MRA (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). Yet the tricky thing here is that 80% of the visitors stay in Amsterdam for less than five days (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019b), and with the main attractions being in the city centre, they will not be likely to have any time remaining to visit places such as Zandvoort.

Besides the efforts of the municipality, also businesses are said to be involved in preventing and diminishing disturbance. Entrepreneurs and/or property owners in a certain area can voluntarily unite themselves in a business investment zone (BIZ) to cooperate and jointly work towards a healthy, profitable business environment (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). BIZs are used to stimulate sustainable entrepreneurship and communication between a variety of actors from the public and private spheres to make positive changes to the neighbourhood in which the BIZ is situated. In 2018, 62 BIZs existed in the city, leading to over 3.5 million euros of investment, and a well-organised cooperation between entrepreneurs and the local government to tackle issues of disturbance in those areas by exchanging ideas and visions for the area (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a, 2019c). Meanwhile, such conversations are also being held with residents, especially those living in the neighbourhoods most affected by touristic pressure, to discuss measures and their effectiveness, as well as checking up on the attitude of residents towards tourism (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). This links to the promotion and support of social entrepreneurship in Amsterdam, which is said to enhance employment and help tackle societal challenges in the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). The Netherlands knows no regulations with regard to social entrepreneurship, but the municipal government supports these entrepreneurs by removing barriers of law and regulation where necessary and possible, and by stimulating the purchase of goods and services of social enterprises (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). Additionally, measures are being taken to enhance the branding of social entrepreneurship in Amsterdam to attract international social enterprises, impact investors and talents in this area (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015). All in all, the public, private and civil sector are said to collaborate to tackle the negative impacts caused by visitors.

4.1.2. Negative impacts caused by the tourism industry

Issues related to the negative impacts caused by the tourism industry are here divided into three categories: less affordable housing; prioritization of the wants and needs of visitors; and those related to that a loss of identity of the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b). The issue of housing relates most strongly to the size of the accommodation sector, which can be roughly divided into three categories: hotels, holiday rental, and B&Bs. Because the demand for accommodation in Amsterdam is greater than the supply, the growth of the tourism sector in Amsterdam is steered by supply (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Hence, policy mainly focus on the supply and pricing, as well as regulation, to be able to control the growth.

As of January 1st, 2017, the municipality of Amsterdam has implemented a policy that is referred to as the 'hotel stop'. This entails that the municipality does not grant any more permits to hotel initiatives that do not fit the zoning plan of an area, with the exception of a few selected areas (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). With the intention of spreading tourism within the MRA, the motto is: 'the right hotel at the right place' (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). This policy within Amsterdam does not stop cities such as Amstelveen and Diemen from building new hotels, however, so it can be assumed that part of the tourists staying outside of Amsterdam will still visit the city, but as day trippers (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Additionally, the municipality aims to improve the quality of existing hotels and hostels (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c), targeting a 'higher quality' kind of tourists.

Apart from the hotel sector, there is also the tourist rental of residents' homes. This can again be divided into two categories: holiday rental of homes, when a complete home is rented out while the residents are away, and Bed & Breakfast (B&B), when part of a home is rented out while the residents are also present (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). First off then, considering holiday rental, AirBnB is the dominant platform as it makes up 80% of the market (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b). Yet, also other platforms exist such as HomeAway and Booking.com, which all have made it easier

for residents to rent out their homes to tourists. There are also downsides to this, regarding the living environment and safety in neighbourhoods, as well as the impact on housing availability and prices (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). For instance, a large number of tourists and tourist facilities negatively affects the social cohesion of neighbourhoods (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). To minimize these negative consequences, the municipality has implemented a range of policies regarding holiday rental. The first initiatives were taken in 2014 when the municipality recognized a major growing trend in the number of advertisements on the AirBnB website and by doing so, Amsterdam was one of the first European cities to develop policies regarding holiday rental (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a).

These policies are based on the argumentation that homes are meant to live in, especially as Amsterdam is coping with a housing shortage. Since 2014, four focal points of policy have persisted: a maximum rental term (shortened from sixty to thirty days as of January 1st, 2019); a maximum number of people; no rental of corporation homes; and the requirement that the person renting out the home also lives there (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). Since January 1st, 2017, there is an obligation to register when one rents out their home, so that the municipality knows where to monitor and enforce the policies (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). The potential influence of the municipality on holiday rental was further increased with changes in the housing law at the start of 2021, so that they can step-by-step enforce the following measures (as shown in Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a):

1. Obligation to register
2. Obligation to report and/or maximum number of nights to rent out
3. Licensing obligation

Hence, the municipality can decide how much regulation is required per area, depending on the negative impacts of holiday rental on the availability of housing and/or the liveability of the area (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). As a license can be granted based on certain conditions, and revoked when necessary, this has a preventive function that is lacking with the obligation to register and to report and hence the most effective way of controlling holiday rental (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). This is especially useful for the areas that are most negatively affected, namely the three neighbourhoods mentioned at the top of this subchapter. For these located three, the rental term has been brought back to zero nights, so a complete ban on holiday rental (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). Yet, the risk then is a balloon effect, meaning that holiday rental in nearby neighbourhoods may rise to compensate for this ban (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a).

A sudden rise in the number of reported B&Bs in 2017 can be explained by the stricter regulations of holiday rental, as explained above. As B&Bs do not have a limitation on the number of nights rented out per year, this also makes it more attractive in comparison to holiday rental (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). Since January 1st, 2020, the municipality has implemented a licensing obligation for B&Bs, however, so that the number of B&Bs in the city can be limited (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a). For each neighbourhood there is a quota, a maximum number of permits, with each permit given out for a certain period of time so that the market can keep developing over time (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021a).

Regarding the second and third issue, the municipality has shown their worry that popular touristic areas are losing their unique identity (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). The decrease of diversity in the city centre has also strengthened Amsterdam's reputation of being a city of freedom (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). The profound influence of tourists on the city's ambiance is not only reflected in the accommodation sector, but also in other facilities, which can be defined as: touristic ATMs,

souvenir stores, cheese stores, smartshops and growshops, erotic stores, and ice cream parlours (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b). Policy measures such as a ban on the 'beer bike' have had some positive effects, but still the issue of generalization of the city persisted (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). Hence, to increase the diversity in stores in the city centre, East, West and South, the municipality started a collaboration with property owners and entrepreneurs in 2017 to create a shared vision and branching plan, with an orientation per street (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a, 2019c). This can happen for instance through establishing a BIZ as explained above. Additionally, residents are consulted about their vision on this topic, and actors such as KHN and MKB Amsterdam are included in a collaboration to improve the city centre (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020b).

A main focal point of the municipality here is the neighbourhood economy, meaning that local entrepreneurs in a neighbourhood target a variety of audiences, consisting of both residents of MRA and tourists (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). A strong neighbourhood economy is said to contribute to the liveability, employment opportunities, safety, identity and social cohesion of that area, which has happened in the Javastraat in East (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). To stimulate these economies, the municipality has several tools. For instance, to exercise some control over rental prices of municipal retail premises, these are sold to two real estate companies that agree to the diversity policy and sign to related conditions in the sales contract (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). Furthermore, the municipality has put a stop on touristic stores since October 2017, meaning stores that focus on tourists and day trippers, that sell food for direct consumption, and hybrid food stores, so for example ticket shops and bike rentals (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a). There are also subsidies available for parties that work on the branding of affected areas (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019a).

Finally, to tackle the demand for tourism facilities, control over the supply and pricing of travel options to Amsterdam should be considered. As the global population becomes wealthier, travel becomes cheaper, and more online booking becomes more diverse and accessible, more people are inclined to make city trips (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c). However, the opportunities of the municipality to control such travel options are way less than with the accommodation. For instance, they cannot exercise any control over the number of flights arriving at Schiphol, or the number of ships and trains coming to Amsterdam (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). This all depends on national and provincial policies. Still, they try to lobby the limitation of growth of Schiphol, and the stimulation of railway transportation on both a regional and international level instead (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c).

4.2. Documents from since COVID-19

It was already mentioned in 2020 that travel behaviour and hence growth of mobility could be seriously affected by global calamities, so that relatively more (Dutch) day visitors would come to Amsterdam, which would have an impact on all levels of the tourism sector (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020c). The calamity of COVID-19 is still ongoing and so it is difficult to tell what the long-term effects will be. For the year 2021, the municipality has modelled three different scenarios, most importantly based on the extent of the contact-restraining measures. The most optimistic one predicted thirteen million visitors (41% less than in 2019, over 50% more than 2020); the least optimistic model predicted seven million visitors (66% less than in 2019) (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021b). It was said that the visitor numbers will mostly be affected by factors such as foreign travel restrictions, infection rates, vaccination policies, and the attitude towards holidays (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d, 2021b). This subchapter will discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the focuses and attitudes of different actors so by analysing seven policy documents.

4.2.1. Negative impacts caused by visitors

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a clear message sent by amsterdam&partners (2020): the city does not want to go back to the pre-pandemic situation, but instead to a more balanced visitor economy that benefits the residents and is still welcoming visitors, as they are part of the international ambiance of Amsterdam. Moreover, this party declared that the matter is urgent, requiring policy and action now, to get ahead of the recovery of tourism (amsterdam&partners, 2020). To do so, this document focuses specifically on the desire to change the reputation of Amsterdam among tourists of being a 'free for all' city. By doing so, there should be a shift towards the 'valuable visitor', who primarily visits Amsterdam for its culture, but also to have a culinary experience, visit attractions, shop, etcetera, and stay in luxury hotels (amsterdam&partners, 2020, n.d.).

To target such valuable tourists in the recovery of the tourism sector since COVID-19, the 'Inspiration and Activation Campaign' has been designed. With the use of online content, such as social media ads and banners, this campaign strives to shine light on both the well-known and less well-known highlights of the city, for example on the topic of gastronomy, art, and accommodation (amsterdam&partners, 2020, n.d.). This content specifically aims to attract the valuable visitors, and secondly to provide a guide to the different cultural experiences the city has to offer (amsterdam&partners, n.d.). This campaign also reflects a second focal point of the city's strategy: the spatial spreading of tourists. amsterdam&partners (2020) suggests this could happen by spreading attractions, creating new attractions outside of the city centre, or by improving the guiding of tourists to such attractions. To do so, data collection and analysis of the online searches and bookings of both nuisance and valuable visitors is suggested, which can be used to improve communication, marketing and crowd management (amsterdam&partners, 2020). Furthermore, neighbourhoods with relatively few tourists should have more authority to establish their own identity, with all actors in the area working together to change their story and their facilities to benefit more from the visitor economy (amsterdam&partners, 2020). On the other hand, neighbourhoods that suffer from touristic pressure should be framed as welcoming and clean public spaces to stimulate respectful behaviour (amsterdam&partners, 2020). In both cases, businesses share in the responsibility to either attract tourists or to diminish the nuisance they cause, and so the municipality should support sustainable entrepreneurship (amsterdam&partners, 2020).

One specific part of the visitor economy is the nightlife. amsterdam&partners (2020) suggests the nightlife in the city should be managed more proactively by businesses, the police, and the municipality to diminish the nuisance. In turn, the municipality established a policy document called 'Future of the Night' that looks to find a balance between liveability and enjoyment of the nightlife of Amsterdam (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). Because of the overcrowding and nuisance that had been increasing for years, this diminished the tolerance for the entertainment sector (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). Yet before the pandemic, this sector attracted 1.5 million foreign tourists each year, for events such as the Amsterdam Pride and Sail, and for the reputation of hosting great music festivals such as Milkshake, linked to the reputation of being an inclusive, welcoming city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). Visitors spend about €1.25 billion on their trip, and create employment opportunities in a variety of sectors, so these events are of major economic importance to the city (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). In turn, festivals and events have a societal value as they contribute to connections between people, and hence a tolerant and inclusive society (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). However, such events and parties also caused issues related to safety, littering, and liveability of the city, so the municipality aims to diminish these issues in collaboration with the residents, entrepreneurs, visitors, and police, basing such conversations on all facts and considerations (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). In the case of security for instance, the document

states that women and lgbtiq+ people are especially vulnerable, which has led to the signage of the 'safe streets'-declaration of UN Women, the start of the #jijstaatnietalleen (you are not alone) campaign, and the implementation of nightlife hosts to safeguard the ambiance at Rembrandtplein by the municipality, as well as the hosts of parties taking responsibility themselves to protect those people (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). Law enforcement related to such issues that occur at events stands apart from the day-to-day operations, because of the planned character of events (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a).

On the day-to-day level, if issues cannot be (completely) prevented, like through campaigns and interventions to inform residents and visitors about the rules, law enforcement is necessary to punish those who break the rules and cause nuisance (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a). The municipality of Amsterdam defines their law enforcement as programmatic, information-based, and pro-active (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a). In every part of the city, priority is given to enforcing the public order and safety, controlling for misbehaviour such as urinating in public, sleeping on the streets, intimidation, vandalism, noise disturbance, etcetera (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a). A second aspect of importance here is nuisance from the hospitality sector, including coffeeshops, such as people smoking outside of a bar, causing noise disturbance for surrounding residents (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a). Third, there is a specific focus on the nuisance and safety on the water, such as excursion boats and other tourist attracts on the canals. This relates mostly to speed limits, noise, port dues, group sizes, and such (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a). Finally, one part is on the commodification of the public space, including guided tours and offering services, which create disturbance, and hence is controlled by law enforcement (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020a).

4.2.2. Negative impacts caused by the tourism industry

According to a report published by Gemeente Amsterdam (2020d), prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the absolute number of hotel stays was growing most rapidly in Amsterdam, especially in the luxury segment, while the relative number was growing most rapidly in MRA, potentially pointing to a balloon-effect due to the hotel stop in the city. Prices were dropping due to competition and the increase of the tourist tax. Also, the differences in seasonality were becoming smaller because of earlier and longer lasting peaks. Yet, with the travel restrictions that came about in 2020, foreign tourist numbers globally up to November decreased with 72% in comparison to 2020; and with 68% in Amsterdam specifically. National tourism in Amsterdam decreased with 45% in that period. It was the first time since 2009 that the number of hotel guests and stays decreased, and Amsterdam suffered more than other parts of the Netherlands because its higher proportion of foreign visitors. In fact, it was estimated that only 35% of the hotel room capacity was occupied that year. Normally, $\frac{1}{3}$ of the visitors has a business motive, the other $\frac{2}{3}$ has a recreational motive. Yet because of travel restrictions and the cancellation of business conferences and meetings, there have been very few business trips and so most visitors that came to Amsterdam in this period has a recreational motive (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). To prevent the balloon-effect from reappearing the visitors return in larger numbers, amsterdam&partners (2020) pleads for an accommodation plan for the whole of MRA, as well as researching the potential of taxation of a day trip (referred to as City Tax).

Regarding the tourist rental sector, it has been estimated that in the first half of 2020 the number of rentals decreased by 72% compared to a year earlier (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). To prevent a return to the numbers of 2019, amsterdam&partners (2020) wants to steer towards a ban on tourist rental accommodations that are not registered. Their main aim is to free up houses for people to actually live in and to stimulate the social cohesion and cultural diversity in neighbourhoods. There has been no information published about the impact of COVID-19 on the camping sector and the cruise sector (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d).

Besides a diversity in residents, the municipality also wants to bring back a wider variety of facilities in the city centre. The visitor economy of Amsterdam has proven vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic, which relates mostly to the sector structure and the international nature of the city (amsterdam&partners, 2020; Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). As over 80% of its visitors are foreign, the halt on international travel has disproportionately affected Amsterdam in comparison to other Dutch destinations (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). In fact, during the first half of 2020, the tourist sector has decreased in value about 45%, which entails the travel, hospitality, accommodation and cultural sector (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). amsterdam&partners (2020) pleads for a renewed visitor economy that stimulates sustainable growth on the aspects of people, profit, and planet. So, a visitor economy that enhances liveability, ecological sustainability, and an economic contribution to facilities that matter to residents, businesses and visitors (amsterdam&partners, 2020). This has strengthened the existing plan to move away from a monoculture of touristic facilities in the city centre, and instead provide a more diverse array of shops and services that are interesting to the residents of Amsterdam (amsterdam&partners, 2020). In turn, this should attract visitors who appreciate Amsterdam for its unique character, and add value to the city themselves (amsterdam&partners, 2020). Moving away from the existing monoculture is said to require redesigning the city centre, with a particular focus on areas such as the Red Light District, and implementing stricter measures for permit procedures (amsterdam&partners, 2020).

Changing the composition of businesses in the city also requires a certain input of the entrepreneurs themselves. Entrepreneurs in all sectors should take on responsibility to care for the city off which they earn money, like through creating employment/educational opportunities, and in turn the municipality should reward those who do (amsterdam&partners, 2020). Data from 2019 showed that 95% of the accommodation businesses practiced sustainable entrepreneurship, most of whom were involved in saving energy/water or minimizing food wastage, and in 2020, 39% of such businesses contributed to the neighbourhood in some way (amsterdam&partners, 2020).

The nightlife and entertainment sector are also actively involved in this discussion. As explained by Gemeente Amsterdam (2021c), the actors involved aim to make the sector more diverse, affordable and accessible, especially for marginalised groups and youths, so that residents feel more welcomed and attracted to the facilities of Amsterdam again, especially in the city centre. This sector wants to reach the people who were phased out of the city through gentrification, which has impaired the unique identity of the city. Visitors remain welcome, on the condition that they behave respectfully. To make such changes, the municipality wants to target new entrepreneurs to invest in the city centre, as well as consulting the residents about their plans for this area (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021c). Another interesting player in the context of sustainable entrepreneurship is the Van Gogh Museum, a cultural institution and popular tourist attraction. In their strategic plan for the period 2021-2024, Van Gogh Museum (2020) states that it wants to focus more on the Dutch public, local communities, and the youth; a goal that is emphasized by the loss of foreign visitors and hence income on which the museum depends because of the pandemic. Repeat visits are deemed most sustainable, so the museum wants to maintain its Dutch audience after COVID-19 has passed. Meanwhile, the museum still wants to maintain and expand its international reputation. The aspects of accessibility and crowd management are prioritized, for which the lockdowns have provided opportunities to make changes and prepare for the future, while growth becomes less important (Van Gogh Museum, 2020).

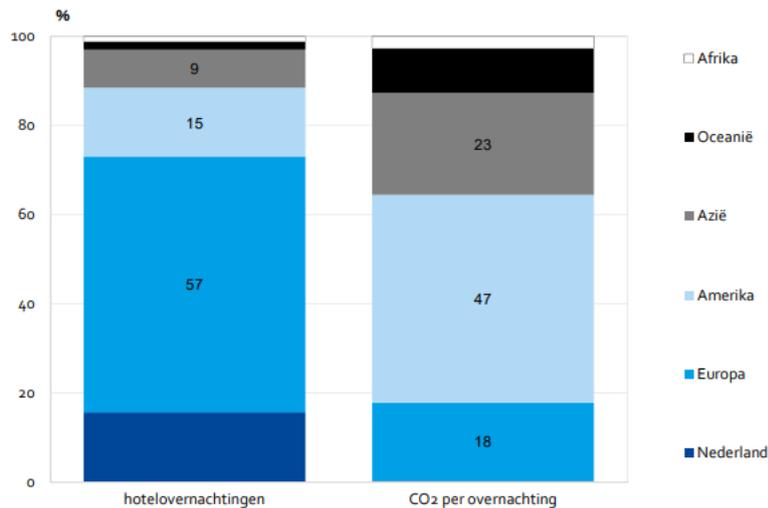


Figure 2: Carbon footprint per origin of tourists (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d)

Furthermore, the aviation sector remains a hot topic in the overtourism debate. According to the European Tourism Indicator System, the tourism sector in Amsterdam has a relatively high environmental impact (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). This can be explained with the use of figure 2. Visitors from America, Asia and Africa, as they make up 27% of the overnight stays and 82% of the carbon footprint (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). On the other hand, visitors from Europe make up 57% of the overnight stays and 18% of the carbon footprint, because of the shorter travel distances and the more frequent use of different sorts of transportation, such as car or train (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2020d). Yet, as described in the previous subchapter, budget flights are also popular among European visitors. Hence, amsterdam&partners (2020) pleads for a flight tax or a minimum price for flights, as such an economic regulation would most effectively discourage aviation travel, and at the same time it would generate resources to invest in sustainable travel options (amsterdam&partners, 2020).

5. Results (interviews)

The previous chapter has shed light on perspectives of the municipality of Amsterdam, amsterdam&partners, and the Van Gogh Museum on overtourism, both before and since the COVID-19 pandemic, based on policy documents. This chapter will elaborate on the views and opinions of thirteen interviewees on this topic. First, the issue of negative impacts caused by visitors will be discussed, followed by the negative impacts caused by the tourism industry. Finally, some remarks will be made about the roles of public, private and civil actors, as well as the debates between them and the influence of COVID-19 on that debate.

To ensure the anonymity of the interviewees, the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. Yet, to have a better understanding of the interviewees' backgrounds, motivations and viewpoints, table 2 below provides an overview of the pseudonyms and the sectors they work in.

Table 2: Overview of the interviewees

Name	Function	Name	Function
Kate	Cultural institution	Sarah	Civil servant
Julian	Cultural institution	Charlotte	Civil servant
Lucas	Business organisation	Emily	DMO
Anne	Business organisation	Luc	City planner
Simon	City council	Brian	Hotel sector
Jake	City council	Laura	Community-based
David	Economist		rental platform

5.1. Negative impacts caused by visitors

5.1.1. Nuisance

The nuisance caused by tourists can be roughly divided into three categories: crowdedness, littering and noise disturbance (Simon). This all negatively impacts the liveability of Amsterdam. The area most often commented on by interviewees is the Red Light District. They argued that this area contributed to Amsterdam's reputation of being free and welcoming to all, but in a negative way, by attracting the 'wrong' tourists. The issue is that in a small geographical space, there is "prostitution, cheap accommodation, coffeeshops, touristic stores such as erotic shops, and cheap, tourist-focused bars and food corners. A toxic combination," (Luc). Also the ambiance of the city, "with weed leaves at every street corner and on all sorts of packaging, makes it seem like you are walking in some sort of drugs city," (Sarah). Furthermore, it was said that the misbehaviour of some tourists in this area, such as shouting, stimulated others to misbehave as well because of people's herd mentality (Jake). All this combined "creates a certain demand, which is difficult to control," (Emily).

The municipality aims to repel those tourists "who only visit Amsterdam to drink and to smoke weed, who only stay at the Red Light District, who sleep in their car or who throw up in the streets," (Emily). One tool the mayor and city council of Amsterdam are looking into the 'i-criterium'¹, possibly in combination with a ban on smoking weed in public space. Interviewees generally did not think positively about the i-criterium, arguing that it is unwelcoming, difficult to explain to tourists, and resource-intensive - if not impossible - to enforce and control. Besides, interviewees were concerned with the potential rise of street trade if the i-criterium is implemented (Simon). This all requires a delicate balancing between enough and too much policing, as interviewees indicated they

¹ A residence criterium, meaning that only people registered as living in the municipality of Amsterdam can enter a coffeeshop, and hence tourists cannot.

did not want Amsterdam to become a 'police state' (Jake). They were especially afraid of the oppressive ambiance and the pressure on law enforcement that would be the result of having a police officer on every street corner, so to speak. Another suggested tool is the spreading of coffeeshops, so more intensive spatial planning focused on dissolving the breeding ground of problems as described above, possibly in combination with decreasing the total number of coffeeshops. It is argued that a more diverse functional area leads to less nuisance. Finally, interviewees have indicated that the (further) legalization of weed in the United States and Europe could help in deterring the 'wrong' tourists, as "people need a different reason to travel to Amsterdam, because they already have those coffeeshops at home" (Kate). Yet, this is out of the hands of the municipality of Amsterdam. All in all, one interviewee indicated that foreign press is already picking up on this with articles stating that smokers and prostitution visitors are no longer welcome in the city, which is said to be a good sign (Emily). Besides these measures specifically aimed at coffeeshops, the municipality has implemented for instance clever lighting to limit noise disturbance at certain places (Jake). One interviewee specifically argued that such creative solutions are necessary to diminish nuisance, rather than avoiding certain types of tourists (Luc). For instance, one type of 'wrong' tourists is said to be crowds of British tourists on bachelorette parties, who cause lots of trouble.

Interviewees emphasized the political tenor of this discussion, reflecting a plethora of different opinions. One interviewee indicated that conservative political parties use this discussion as a way to impose their agenda, especially related to prohibiting weed and prostitution (Simon). Still, interviewees did not consider it fair to frame these sectors as the ultimate problem, and one interviewee actually indicated that they were more concerned about the procurement processes of coffeeshops than the retail, as weed production happens illegally in the Netherlands, and the booming business of pills such as XTC in Amsterdam's party scene (Lucas). This shows that different actors consider different 'solutions' appropriate, based on their perception of the problem.

Instead of the 'party and drugs' tourists, the city wants to attract valuable, or respectful, visitors "who come to enjoy our beautiful city, to shop and go to restaurants and such, without bothering the residents," (Sarah). Valuable visitors can contribute to the city on three aspects: economic, social and, environmental (Emily). This term is not to be confused with 'quality tourist', which carries the connotation of someone with a fat wallet and an appetite for luxury. On the contrary, it was argued that for instance backpackers are just as welcome, as long as they behave respectfully in the city and towards its residents:

"A student coming to Amsterdam without any money, eating his peanut butter sandwich in the park and enjoying the city, is just as welcome as someone who stays in a five-star hotel, as long as they clean up their mess after them, have friendly contact with the residents, do not cause nuisance, and preferably add to the social cohesion. If they spend some money in the city, that is a plus, but not the most important factor," (Emily).

Several interviewees made statements in line with the quote above, arguing that gentrification of the tourism sector should be avoided, so that the city does not become enjoyable for "just the bored, rich Americans" (David), but instead that everyone feels welcome in Amsterdam, regardless of their origin or budget. Especially cultural institutions emphasized their aversion to the term 'quality tourist', indicating that anyone who enjoys art and culture is welcome, rich or poor, party animal or plain Jane. Furthermore, one interviewee advocated the donut economy, saying that this will contribute to shared norms and values and protecting the planet, while still welcoming all different kinds of visitors (Laura). Yet, the prerequisite for Amsterdam's hospitality is said to be respectful behaviour, without abuse of all the levels of freedom that the city offers.

To attract valuable visitors, several interviewees indicated the necessity of providing and promoting the appropriate services and facilities. These include, for instance, cultural institutions such as museums, culinary restaurant experiences that are aimed at making Amsterdam a 'food capital', gay-friendly facilities to promote Amsterdam as a 'gay capital', but also a boosting nightlife resembling that of Berlin to give a positive direction to the city's image of freedom (Kate, Lucas, Sarah, Emily). Furthermore, the authenticity and culture of the city should be emphasized to make its uniqueness a reason to visit. The task for governmental, entrepreneurial, and civil actors then is to create new icons and stories that show the real, authentic Amsterdam (Lucas, Laura). The new image of Amsterdam should be fully developed by 2025, when the city celebrates its 750th anniversary. It was explained that data profiles of visitors are used to identify the strong and weaker points in Amsterdam's marketing plans and make appropriate changes to it (Emily). Related to this, a popular argument was that the facilities that Amsterdam offers should be interesting to the residents and if they are, they are also interesting to tourists (Lucas, Luc). The importance of facilities shared by both residents and tourists will be elaborated on further in the context of monoculture below.

One specific group of valuable visitors being targeted is businesspeople, regarding congress and business travel. Interviewees indicate that for this renewed image to attract congress visitors, it also needs to include culture, culinary and nightlife opportunities (Simon, Lucas). It was said that those visitors usually "stay for a few days, go to a concert, go out for dinner, visit a museum if they have an extra day, so they are respectful visitors that we increasingly want to attract and for which we have to put in the work" (Sarah). To attract these visitors, the organisations of such congresses need to be attracted, preferably for a longer period of time, and to do so, the city needs to be attractive for that target group. Besides the economic importance of this sector for the city, some stated that also the social and environmental impact that congresses have on Amsterdam should be considered. Yet, interviewees also acknowledged the potential impact of COVID-19 on this sector: "businessmen will travel very differently, and a lot less, which used to be 30% of the tourism sector of Amsterdam" (Laura). One example mentioned was that probably fewer people will move to Amsterdam to work for companies that also allow employees to only work online (Emily). Yet, there was also confidence that the sector will partially restore: "online networking simply does not work well and that is an important function of congresses" (Sarah). One suggestion was that the transmission of knowledge will be online, but the meetings and events will be offline.

5.1.2. Crowdedness

Although the charming, 17th-century ring of canals is unique in its beauty, the historical city centre's spatial planning also poses some problems related to crowdedness in the public space (Luc). This problem is contested by some: "Amsterdam is not as crowded as London or Paris if you are discussing mass crowds in a certain place. Also, it is not as crowded as it was in the 1950s in Amsterdam," (Lucas). Furthermore, it was said that extreme events of crowdedness at one point in time are exaggerated in how often they occur, contributing to the negative perception on this topic (Julian). Yet still, the general agreement among interviewees was that Amsterdam struggles with its public space, with given examples such as narrow roads and little space for cycle parking. One tool to tackle this is spreading by the promotion of sites outside of the city, such as Volendam, Zandvoort (Amsterdam beach) and Muiderslot (Amsterdam castle). The general opinion was that such spreading is only effective in the case of repeat visits, so people coming to Amsterdam for the second, third, fourth time. However, people coming to visit for the first time and staying for two or three days still want to see the highlights, which are in the city centre: "You will go to the Red Light District, the Anne Frank House, the Museum Square, and then you are already out of time," (David). Also, the shift to more online activities since the outbreak of COVID-19 is said not to decrease the

popularity of Amsterdam's hotspots in the long run: "You can use the online domain in a lot of ways before a visit. However, you cannot *replace* a physical visit. I do not think that is desirable either" (Julian).

Hence, some interviewees advocated the spreading of tourists within the city by creating new attractions outside of the centre, referred to as place making (Emily). Especially the city parts West and East have grown in popularity, one interviewee mentioned, partially with the help of hotels in these parts that promote the highlights there (Anne). If people stay in hotels outside of the city centre, and attractions in that area are promoted properly, people spend at least some part of the day there, and hence the city centre becomes less crowded. One example is the Javastraat, a street in the Indian neighbourhood in East:

"Because the pressure on the city centre continued to grow, shops and residents started for looking for a place in the Javastraat. That changes the facilities, so modern bars and stores arrived but also many ethnic stores remained. [...] Now that is an interesting, authentic spot in Amsterdam for both residents and tourists," (Luc).

Because certain shops and services move out of the city centre by themselves when the rents become too high, spreading of authentic experiences is also partially an automatic process. However, this mainly affects residents and not tourists: "Residents go to other parts of the city because of the nice restaurants and stores there, they do not come to the city centre anymore, but tourists do not know about those facilities, so they stay in the city centre" (Sarah). Hence, the municipality aims to improve communication about such facilities with tourists. One tool is the inspiration-activation campaign, which is focused on highlighting certain attractions and drawing in certain groups of people (Emily). This especially targets holiday tourists, as congress visitors more often already stay outside of the city centre (around RAI), so they are more inclined to explore other parts of the city (Sarah). This method of spreading could give the city multiple centres, rather than just the historical city centre, creating a more comfortable, enjoyable city for all those who move around there (Simon).

Spreading is not the only tool to tackle the city's crowdedness, however. For instance, the city has a low-traffic policy, which barely facilitates cars in the city as it is quite expensive to drive and park in the city. This way, the city becomes a more spacious place for the people to exchange thoughts and goods (Luc). Furthermore, a licensing policy has been implemented for commercial exploitation of the public space, meaning that one has to have an exemption to give tour guides or have a B&B for example. That way, crowdedness and related nuisance should be decreased, and not anyone can make money from the public space anymore (Jake). A more drastic proposed measure to decrease the number of tourists coming to the city was to limit the number of transportation opportunities from and to Amsterdam.

Regarding accessibility, Schiphol Airport was a much-discussed topic. Budget flights as cheap as €30 for a two-way trip are said to heavily influence both the number and type of tourists coming to the city in a negative way. Furthermore, interviewees argued that the current price for air travel does not equal the severe environmental impact it has (Brian). The first and most-argued strategy to counter this is to increase the price of a plane ticket by implementing a flight tax. Second, the number of flights arriving at and departing from Schiphol Airport could be decreased through influencing the slot coordination, meaning the management of capacity at an airport (Simon). Third, the opening of Lelystad Airport could help spread the pressure on the region around Schiphol Airport, although opinions on this matter varied and were nuanced carefully, as one interviewee mentioned it was a sensitive topic in the city council (Jake). However, the responsibility and

opportunity to make such changes lies in the hands of the national government rather than the municipality. The slot coordination actually falls under European law, but the Dutch government is working on increasing their control thereof (Jake). Still, interviewees stressed the necessity for the municipality of Amsterdam to actively lobby for a flight tax and a halt to the growth of Schiphol Airport, making sure that the voice of the city is heard (David).

A popularly addressed alternative to air travel was railway travel. London served as an example for how this could improve transportation from and to Amsterdam: “If you fly to London, you land in a remote area and have to travel some distance by subway or bus, which is quite inconvenient. If you take the Eurostar, you travel very comfortably and you can just remain seated until you arrive at the very heart of London” (Jake). However, this same interviewee also said that ProRail claims such trajectories are difficult and can take years to realize. Furthermore, Amsterdam is accessible via road and water, for example by tour bus, cruise boat or party boat, where there are still many improvements to be made in environmental sustainability (Simon, Brian).

Because the city has so many means of access, some argued that the high number of tourists is not surprising, or controllable for that matter: “We cannot prevent people from coming, there is freedom of movement, we have Schiphol Airport and train stations and such, we cannot change anything about that” (Sarah). Still, the current pandemic is also seen as an opportunity to implement more sustainable technology and economy, as the technology now used will only increase in cost in the future (Brian). This is said to be supported by the target audience: “I believe that many people will want to travel differently, stay closer to home, and understand that they can make a difference,” (Laura). All these measures together should prevent the matter of crowdedness from worsening: “Nobody wants Amsterdam to become like Venice” (David).

5.1.3. A critical sidenote

A critical sidenote given by multiple interviewees is that tourists are not the only ones to blame for nuisance in the city. One example was that the littering in the streets during the lockdown was still a problem, so evidently linked to residents more than tourists (Anne). Secondly, during that period, cycles were still parked in all the wrong places, and cycle paths were just as crowded (Luc, Brian). Third, noise disturbance should also be attributed to local people: “There are also boys from the province who come to Rembrandt Square to cause trouble, and a lot of the noise disturbance on the water is caused by residents” (Simon). In addition to these arguments, some claimed that residents should not complain too much, because they have chosen to live in the city so they should have known they live in a busy, noisy environment (Julian). Besides, regarding the issue of crowdedness, one interviewee expressed their understanding of the tourists who only get one chance in their life to visit Europe: “They experience their trip at a rapid pace and they want to see and record all the highlights. We as west-Europeans do not think that is a relaxed way to go about it, but for them, it is their only chance” (Julian). Furthermore, residents are said to be wealthy and fervent travellers themselves, so it would be hypocritical to condemn those who travel to Amsterdam (Brian). This was emphasized by one interviewee arguing that Amsterdam is not of the people but rather they live there; public space is for everyone (Luc). In fact, it was explained that the history of tourism in Amsterdam goes back 400-500 years to the era of inns, so the welcoming, hospitable character of the city should be acknowledged and respected (Brian). Tourism is also said to benefit the city because of the incoming cash flow, which also pays for certain facilities that residents use as well, and it inspires some to come live and work in Amsterdam (Simon, Luc). One interviewee concluded: “You have to cherish tourism, but not conform to it” (Luc).

5.2. Negative impacts caused by the tourism sector

5.2.1. Accommodation

A notable event in 2021 has been the ordinance that limits the amount of yearly overnight stays in Amsterdam to 20 million, with a threshold of 18 million, meaning that action should be taken to prevent a crossing of that limit. Some interviewees expressed their support for this measure, stating that putting a quantitative limit on tourism should help diminish the crowdedness and nuisance in the city, rather than just focusing on attracting valuable visitors. They argued that the acceptance of this ordinance was a unique event in Amsterdam, demonstrating that drastic measures need to be – and are – taken (David, Simon). They also criticized the measures already taken to tackle overtourism: “The growth in tourist numbers from 20 to 22 million, you will not deal with through spreading. Maybe it helps a little, but it is not a sufficient solution” (David). On the other hand, there are interviewees who have expressed their dissatisfaction with this ordinance:

“Our first reaction was: sure, the election campaigns have started. There were 30.000 people supporting this initiative, and it has been re-written a number of times to make it at least a little doable on a juridical level. Do we have to take that seriously?” (Anne).

Those who agreed with this opinion stated that they do not support the idea of setting a maximum to the number of tourists, saying that it is very unwelcoming and most of all undoable: “Are you going to close the gates?” (Brian).

This ordinance directly impacts the hotel sector. A stop on the establishment of new hotels was already in place before in an attempt to limit the number of tourists coming to the city. One argued downside hereof was that this stop only encourages private investors to buy and rent out properties, leading to several issues that will be discussed further below (Luc). Second, the hotel stop in Amsterdam cannot stop other cities in the MRA from increasing their hotel capacity. These cities have a market opportunity and enough space, so making arrangements with them is said to be crucial but difficult. A regional hotel strategy exists but is based on mutual understanding and agreements rather than stringent rules (Jake).

This links closely to the topic of the tourist tax in Amsterdam. Several interviewees agreed that a heightening of the tourist tax would benefit the city: “There are more people using the city’s sanitation for instance, so they have to pay a certain amount for that as well” (Luc). Especially one interviewee claimed that a number of 30% would be fair, saying that hotels have made enormous profits since the hotel stop, so they should repay the city and its residents with that money (David). However, opinions were mixed about the effectiveness of such a heightening on bringing down the number of tourists:

- “We have already heightened the tourist tax because research has shown that in combination with the fixed fee per night, that is the most effective tool you have as a municipality,” (Jake).
- “The tourist tax is a difficult topic of debate because there have been many experiments with it, but nobody really knows what works and what does not as of yet” (Emily).
- “We do not believe that increasing the tourist tax works to regulate the visitor number. The increases made in recent years have not shown any association between the two,” (Anne).

Yet, even if the hotel stop and tourist tax are effective, critics argued that tourists will still come to Amsterdam, simply staying in hotels in the MRA and coming to the city during daytime: so-called day trippers. These also include people coming by bus, plane or boat for just one day (or night), and Dutch visitors coming to Amsterdam without an overnight stay, which are especially important to

consider since the outbreak of COVID-19 (Brian). In fact, the municipality has actively attracted Dutch visitors during the pandemic to help its businesses and institutions during the economically difficult times (Sarah). Yet, critics argued that day trippers contribute little to the city in economic or social senses, and they advocated the taxing of for instance museum tickets. Through such taxes, day trippers still contribute to the city and pay for the facilities they use, such as the city's cleaning costs (Anne). However, a downside then is that residents also pay the tax if they visit a museum (Charlotte). A more positive way of implementing this idea is to provide a discount for certain facilities for visitors who stay in a hotel in Amsterdam (Brian). Not all interviewees agreed that a hotel stop would be outweighed by an increase in day trippers, however: "That effect will never be 100%. There will never be as many people staying in the MRA as in the city itself," (David). In fact, this interviewee argued that this argument was mainly made by hotels, who try to pin the problems on the day trippers that they do not benefit from.

Besides the hotel sector, the tourist rental sector plays an important role in the availability of accommodation in Amsterdam. The original idea behind AirBnB² is quite romantic, interviewees explained. It was about a home swap of two parties, visiting the other's place for a holiday (Emily). They also said that if AirBnB was still a small-scale platform for such swaps, that would not be an issue. Yet, in ten to fifteen years a lot has changed, commercial investors have become involved and people see it as their right to rent out their homes (Jake). This had led to several problems. When touching upon these, the main argument was: "A house is for living in" (Simon). Tourist rental was said to drive up housing prices and extract properties from the housing market. Because people became able to make money with their home, the option to rent out (part of) a house for some time actually became a selling point: "Advertisements on Funda said 'This house has a nice room for the use of a B&B', which drove up the asking price" (Simon). Furthermore, property investors could buy houses to then rent out for outrageous prices, supposedly supported by the Dutch government:

"Policy in 2015 recommended the Dutch housing market to foreign investors by letting go of the rental regulation so that rental prices could further be increased. Hence, the current housing crisis touches upon AirBnB and tourist rental, but it is a lot more complex than just that," (Simon).

One specific investment company mentioned was Blackstone, which was said to have bought 1700 Dutch houses, most of these in Amsterdam, and 300 of which are currently not occupied, hence extracting much-needed living space from society (Brian, Laura). One interviewee argued that COVID-19 proved the effect of AirBnB on rental prices, because when properties remained unoccupied by tourists, the demand was going down and so were the prices (Lucas). As a result, the common view was that commercialisation of homes drives up the purchase/rental prices and outplaces many of Amsterdam's residents, such as young people who grew up in the city but now cannot afford a place to live anymore (Emily). Furthermore, there is also a social element to tourist rental as the community feeling is disturbed:

"The police once explained that if you have many visitors in an area with much tourist rental apartments, that negatively impacts the social security. Not that those tourists are criminals, but the eyes and ears in a neighbourhood disappear. They constantly change." (Jake)

² Interviewees generally referred to the tourism rental sector simply as AirBnB, so this thesis will stick to using AirBnB as umbrella term. However, more platforms exist that contribute to the problems associated with short-term tourist rental.

Besides, it was argued that AirBnB and similar platforms pose unfair competition to the hotel business: “AirBnB is basically a hotel without caretaker, which often goes together with nuisance,” (Simon). One interviewee explained that hotels have to take into account food safety, fire safety, music copyright fees, waste charges, and much more (Brian). Furthermore, the hotel sector contributes to social sustainability on different levels, such as employing people with a disadvantage on the labour market, and opening up their hotels for the homeless and schools during the pandemic. This view was supported by the statement that AirBnB does not want to cooperate with the agenda of the municipality, so that working together towards sustainable goals becomes impossible (Jake). Someone also argued that the profit of AirBnB goes to foreign tax havens, not to the benefit of Amsterdam (Brian). Hence, interviewees agreed that AirBnB – and tourist rental more generally – must be constrained.

Regarding the municipality’s methods of tackling these problems, interviewees varied in their opinion. While some argued that the municipality is working on tightening legislation, already having for instance the obligated use of registration numbers for each address (Emily, Simon), others say the problem lies with the enforcement of such rules (Luc), and others again dispute the municipality’s approach, saying that they were simply too afraid to take a more drastic measure: prohibiting AirBnB in the whole city, like The Hague did (David, Brian). The method of permits is too complex and difficult to enforce, one interviewee explained, but perhaps the result a political manoeuvring of parties who supported the original idea behind AirBnB – without any form of payment – as part of a circular economy in their programmes and did not want to betray their voters (Brian). Hence, answers to the question of how to tackle tourist rental remained mixed amongst interviewees.

5.2.2. Monoculture of stores and services

Interviewees argued that the COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the vulnerability of Amsterdam’s visitor economy, especially in relation to international tourists (Jake, Kate). The core of this debate then was whether the tourism sector is a vital part of Amsterdam’s economy. Before 2015, tourism was considered a positive impact on the city in both economic and social terms, but this changed into a more negative perspective when the debate on crowdedness arose (Anne). This interviewee argued that the measures now being taken to curb tourism demonstrate that governmental actors underestimate the importance of the visitor economy to Amsterdam, and hence a lack in insight of this sector. Yet, others believed that the visitor economy only benefits some, like the big businessowners and hotels, and not the city as a whole:

“There are many people earning money from the tourist sector, but it costs the city a lot of money as well. As a resident, I pay taxes for all the times the grass has to be renewed and a cleaning crew has to come here [at Museum Square], but how often do I come here and why do I have to pay for that? You know who earns from this? Not me, but that cheese store, that Nutella store, so the revenue model in the city becomes skewed. So, the idea that tourism is good for the economy is now contested” (Julian).

Furthermore, one interviewee argued that the visitor economy is also a matter of crowding out types of economic activity focused on residents:

“Amsterdam has a very dynamic economy, and if you allow many touristic facilities, then many other things cannot exist here. I believe it is underestimated how successful Amsterdam’s economy could have been without tourism. Amsterdam has a lot more to offer, right?” (David).

This latter argument brings up the issue of monoculture in the city centre. The vulnerability of the visitor economy is recognized by both entrepreneurs and cultural institutions, who are coming to the realisation that they also need to attract local, regional and national customers, although it remains questionable whether this trend will continue when tourist numbers rise again in the future. For instance, the Van Gogh Museum has decided already in March 2020 it wants to become less dependent on international tourists and hence attract more Dutch visitors. Implemented tools therefor include a shift in marketing budget to the national market and changes in programs. As Dutch visitors are more loyal to the museum, this helps reduce vulnerability when international tourists stop coming, like in the case of COVID-19, and they bring more personal stories and experiences. This pandemic actually provided an opportunity to target the national audience, as these people had difficulties with obtaining tickets in the overheated market pre-COVID-19 (Julian).

Besides benefitting the financial health of such organisations, attracting a more local audience also helps combat the expanding monoculture of tourist-oriented shops and facilities in Amsterdam. This was argued to be especially true for the city centre, which was also hit the hardest by the implications of COVID-19 (Sarah). To counter this phenomenon of a touristic monoculture, governmental and private actors work together on place branding, to give seven different areas their own identity again. These renewed identities should be marketed and managed well, which in turn will attract valuable visitors as mentioned before (Anne). Since the pandemic, the municipality has made extra subsidies available to support businesses, as well as taking special measures such as rent reductions and the expansion of terraces to compensate for the 1.5-meter restriction (Sarah). A sidenote made by one interviewee is that place branding should not become too much of a marketing strategy: "It will irritate the residents when they do not live in the Leidsebuurt anymore, but in Leidseplein entertainment district," (Simon). Place branding could also be used to give relatively new parts of the city, such as New-West, a unique identity and make them more attractive for visitors (Emily).

The main argument for diversification is that what is interesting to the residents is also interesting to tourists: "They do not want a street with just rubber ducks and weed lollipops. They do not want to see all the same things in Copenhagen and Lisbon and Amsterdam, but they want to travel to experience the unique identity of those cities" (Sarah). This not only benefits the tourists, but also the residents that can make use of these facilities. For instance, one interviewee explained that half of the income of GVB (the city's public transport business) comes from international tourists (Lucas). A more diverse array of shops and services will also make tourists stand out from the crowd less, which decreases the level of irritation of residents (Luc). Linking back to the argument that attracting valuable visitors does not necessarily mean becoming an expensive city, one interviewee argued: "If the city becomes too expensive (and it already is quite expensive), you will see that the facilities will adapt to that, which is not necessarily to the benefit of all residents" (Anne).

A major public intervention in this level was the halt to touristic shops. Such shops outpace resident-focused stores because of rising rental prices, while abusing the free image of Amsterdam for commercial gain (Jake). A sidenote here is that one interviewee explained the online and supermarket-oriented shopping behaviour of residents also contributed to this outplacing, however. Still, interviewees argued that government intervention was necessary in the neoliberal economic context of Amsterdam to put a halt to the growing number of ice cream parlours and Nutella shops as "money does not bring out the best in people", and to support social entrepreneurship instead (Jake). Following this ban, the municipality has taken – and continues to take – legal actions to decide on the definition of souvenirs, such as clothing and 'ready to fly'-packaged cheese (Sarah). They argue that the interests of entrepreneurs cannot be leading in this case, so limitations must be

set and rules made (Simon). This is a cat-and-mouse game between government and creative entrepreneurs that work to avoid the 'touristic shop' label, as there is little ground for an objective line between tourist and non-tourist shops (Charlotte, David). Additionally, these stores did suffer little from the pandemic because of their financial backups and government support.

On the other hand, interviewees have argued that it is not the sole responsibility of the government to tackle the issue of monoculture, but also of those entrepreneurs who benefit from the tourism sector (Simon, Emily). They should not only consider their short-term wins, but also the long-term future of the city that their business plan depends on. One interviewee referred to Amsterdam as a site of the tragedy of the commons, where multiple free-riders are solely focused on profit without considering public, private and civil parties that suffer from their behaviour. Instead, he mentioned that the city should maintain its unique qualities:

“The tourist sector has a responsibility for the entire city, not just for its residents but also to keep Amsterdam a welcoming, enjoyable place to stay for visitors because it is a unique and authentic place, not simply another touristic city with only touristic facilities,” (Simon).

The necessity for entrepreneurs to change was emphasized by one interviewee: “If the city is not proud to have you anymore and there are no international tourists, what is left of your right to exist?” (Julian). On the one hand, there was confidence that entrepreneurs could experience a sense of ownership over a renewed city centre identity and change their business plan accordingly to a better revenue model that acknowledges the authenticity of the city and its different regions (Lucas). Yet, another interviewee recognized that those same entrepreneurs are currently in survival modus because of COVID-19, dealing with ill staff and overdue payments to suppliers, and hence have no time or resources for completely revising the business system (Laura).

5.3. Governance implications

Interviewees in general were critical towards the methodology of the municipality. One interviewee specifically claimed there is a lack of vision and determination (David). For instance, the 88 measures are said to be incomplete, short-term solutions to show they take the issue seriously without having to take more drastic measures to solve long-term problems, such as prohibiting AirBnB or increase the tourist tax (David, Laura). Also, the response to issues of overtourism was said to be too slow: “We could have expected the issues of 2019 already ten years ago. It really frustrated me that they did not start to think about this back then already” (David). The reason for this is said to be the claimed economic importance of tourism in the eyes of the municipality (Julian). On the other hand, one interviewee argued that the municipality of Amsterdam is more daring than other European cities in some policies, such as the discouragement of car traffic in the city, while still trying to learn from those cities to improve their own approach (Luc).

Interviewees agreed that a multitude of methods should be implemented by the municipality, rather than focusing on just one. However, some argued that the possibilities of the municipality are limited, as their options are laid down in national law, even though they supported the idea that the local government should steer as much as possible, like in the case of the monoculture in the city centre (Jake, Simon, David). A critical note was that “you do not want the municipality to become too patronizing, to regulate everyone and everything, which they are often inclined to do” (Charlotte). Also the involvement of the national government was said to be lacking: “Tourism is 1-2% of the Dutch GNP but there are only two officials in The Hague who focus on this, while agriculture is 4% but there is a whole ministry for that” (David).

The municipality works together with private and civil actors as well on this topic. This is considered a fruitful process by most: “You will agree with each other about the direction to take for 80%, and for the other 20% you will probably never agree, but we leave that for what it is. We use that 80% to work towards a sustainable visitor economy” (Emily). Entrepreneurs are consulted and work together in BIZ’s, so that they can provide input to the municipality and make changes themselves (Anne). Such changes can take a long period of time to happen, for instance ten years, and they require the collaborative effort of different businesses and institutions in a certain place, but they do happen and they benefit a variety of people that make use of Amsterdam’s public space (Julian). Business organisations such as MKB Amsterdam are said to be useful in such processes, as they can mediate between actors and help establish a new image of Amsterdam through communication with its members (Lucas). Civil actors in this governance structure are said to be well-represented. However, one interviewee indicated that this had not always been the case: “I think that residents are very frustrated because in the previous years they already noticed the increasing problems, but nothing happened to combat these” (David). Residents should know they have the power to change things in their surroundings and also use that power, because they have important knowledge and a passion for the city (Laura, Lucas). Generally, interviewees thought positively of civil participation, but some argued the debate should shift more towards what *is* desirable and effective rather than what *is not* (Lucas, Anne).

Several interviewees commented that COVID-19 changed the character of the debate. The general argument was that the necessity to do something about tourism was already there, but the urgency and speed have increased significantly (Sarah, Luc). The consciousness of politicians and entrepreneurs about the problematic aspects of overtourism has been triggered by the pandemic, urging them to take action (Emily). With more people agreeing on the topic, the debate has also become less hostile (Jake). Furthermore, one interviewee expressed the belief that this crisis has spurred the development of innovation in technology, which can help tackle these problems, *if* different actors work together towards a common goal (Brian). With another lockdown announced in December 2021, the projection of being back on 2019’s level in 2024 feels like an illusion, and the impact of COVID-19 on the overtourism debate in Amsterdam is still being constantly redefined (Anne).

6. Discussion

This chapter will put the findings of the document analysis and of the interviews into a theoretical perspective, going back to the concepts of overtourism, sustainable tourism, the pro-growth and degrowth paradigms and governance, as discussed in the theoretical framework. This is done to provide a conclusive answer on the three sub-questions and the main research question as given in the introduction, and to simultaneously explain the relevance of these findings in the context of existing academic debates. After interpretation of the results, three recommendations for future research are given based on the limitations of this thesis.

6.1. Answering the research questions

6.1.1. The influence of COVID-19 on the debate on overtourism

This subchapter will answer the first research question of this thesis, namely: **What are the similarities and differences between the contemporary plans to manage tourism, compared to the pre-COVID-19 plans?** First of all, to understand the situation before the outbreak of COVID-19, this thesis relies on the results of the document analysis as presented in chapter 4. The situation since that outbreak is covered in both the document analysis and the interviews. When comparing the two, several aspects stand out.

First of all, the similarities between these two periods stem from the fact that the problem of overtourism was already recognized before the pandemic. Moreover, the need to consider ‘people, profit, planet’ to establish a more sustainable tourism sector also existed before COVID-19. For instance, the debate on how to tackle nuisance in the city centre, such as the contemplation of an i-criterium in coffeeshops, or renewing the spatial planning of the area, was already held. This relates to the aim to find a more appropriate balance in Amsterdam’s reputation of freedom while not devolving into ‘free-for-all’ havoc. Hence, both periods are characterised by efforts to renew the image of the city. Also the vulnerability of the visitor economy and the loss of the city’s identity were recognized, and therefore a neighbourhood economy became promoted instead. Again here the focal point is the city centre as the monoculture was most prominent in that area. In both periods, the stop on tourist stores in the city centre is stated as an important measure in tackling these issues. It was argued that facilities should be more focused on Amsterdam’s residents, which in turn would actually be more interesting to valuable visitors as well.

Issues of crowdedness are also acknowledged in both periods. For instance, a permit system for commercial activities in public space, such as guided tours, exists to moderate such phenomena. Also spreading – both within and outside of the city – is implemented to release some pressure from the city centre. Furthermore, a hotel stop has been enforced before COVID-19 and on top of that, the tourist tax has been increased, both in an attempt to decrease the number of tourists coming to Amsterdam yearly. Finally, in both periods it was argued that the municipality of Amsterdam should lobby a flight tax and against the growth of Schiphol Airport, and encourage more sustainable travel options such as train travel instead. Earlier research has also found that cheap flights can contribute to overtourism (Goodwin, 2017), so that a flight tax could make a positive difference. Regarding the governance structure, both periods have a strong focus on regulatory policy instruments, such as permit procedures and law enforcement. Furthermore, communication strategies in the form of campaigns are implemented to affect the behaviour of tourists, mostly with the aim of diminishing nuisance. Besides such effort of the local government, an emphasis has been placed on social entrepreneurship, the use of BIZ’s, and citizen consultancy, demonstrating the decentralisation of responsibility to tackle issues of overtourism. A good example of social entrepreneurship is the initiative ‘Our city Amsterdam’. This initiative was started by four actors from the hotel sector to

make their voice heard on a variety of topics, such as heightening the prices of plane tickets, banning platforms such as AirBnB in Amsterdam, and attracting valuable visitors (onzestad.amsterdam, n.d.).

Moving on to the differences between these two periods, several issues and matters that were already recognized in the debate previous to COVID-19 have received significantly more attention since then. One of them is AirBnB. As discussed, the problematic effect of tourist rental on the housing market and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods in Amsterdam were known before, in accordance with the literature (see Fletcher et al., 2019), and regulations were implemented to constrain this sector. Yet since the pandemic, more actors have actively expressed their objection to and efforts have been made to ban tourist rental from parts of the city. The same is true for the intention to change the image of Amsterdam from a sex and drugs-city to a culture-city. Although the necessity for such a change existed prior to COVID-19, since then it has been stressed by many, and more resources have been spent to make that change happen. Examples of alternative reputations are that of food capital, gay capital (also recognised by Gerritsma, 2019), nightlife scene, congress city, and cultural hotspot, all with the aim of attracting valuable visitors. Especially the attraction of congresses and other forms of business travel has received more attention since the pandemic. However, some also argued that business travel will not rebound to its previous numbers, which is supported by research from the Dutch ABN Amro bank stating that online meetings will partly replace physical meetings even after the pandemic (ANP, 2021). This relates to the fact that COVID-19 has proven the suspected vulnerability of the visitor economy, and this has contributed the argument that the private sector also has part of the responsibility to change the economy to a more diverse and sustainable one. Another topic of interest here is gentrification, in relation to both residents and tourists. Interviewees agreed that a tourists spending pattern did not matter that much, meaning that focusing on the quality-aspect of tourism is not necessarily linked to monetary wealth in the pro-growth paradigm as argued by Blanco-Romero et al. (2019). Also diversification of Amsterdam's crowd was emphasized in the period since COVID-19, with growth being subordinate to inclusion of all people to live in or visit the city. Still, the emphasis is on creating a sense of deluxe tourism regarding culture when it comes to attracting valuable visitors.

Furthermore, the potential balloon effect of the hotel stop that was implemented before COVID-19 was already recognized, but the consideration of day trippers as being problematic was emphasized by more actors since the pandemic. This is related to the increased number of Dutch visitors during the pandemic, who visit Amsterdam during the day but do not stay overnight. This has been encouraged by the municipality for economic reasons. Yet, day trippers' overall contribution to crowdedness and touristic facilities, while contributing relatively little to Amsterdam's economy, was mentioned more, and the potential for a taxation of these day trippers was further investigated for when tourist numbers start to rise again. Also increased attention has gone to the establishment of an MRA-wide accommodation plan in order to improve the effectiveness of the hotel stop regarding this issue. The same is true for the option to further heighten the tourist tax. This can be linked to the hotel stop especially since economists have argued that this stop has significantly increased accommodation prices, as the demand kept growing while the supply stagnated, and hence a higher tourist tax would be justified (Van Dijk and Badir, 2019). Increases have already been made in 2019 and 2020, as explained in chapter 4, but still some interviewees pleaded for another increase to benefit the city and perhaps decrease the tourism number in the long run. This is supported by columnist Huppel who believes that the higher prices may cause some tourists to choose another, cheaper destination instead (Huppel, 2019). Perhaps the most notable change in policy regarding the decrease in tourism number has been the ordinance of a maximum of 20 million overnight stays per year, which signifies a quantitative emphasis on the current problems. This will be discussed further in the following subchapter.

6.1.2. The consideration of past problems in contemporary strategies

The previous subchapter has explained the similarities and differences in Amsterdam's approach on overtourism before and since the COVID-19 pandemic. This subchapter will further elaborate on these differences exist by answering the second research question of this thesis, namely: **How are the past issues of overtourism considered and taken into account in the contemporary plans?** The aim is to explain the changes in attitudes, motivations and interests of the actors in Amsterdam's tourism sector, particularly in relation to the impact of COVID-19, that influence the implemented strategies. In other words, *why* do these differences exist. Such reasonings can be derived from two major changes, which occurred since the emptiness of the city due to the travel restrictions and lockdowns. These changes are that COVID-19 has: 1. made the already acknowledged vulnerability of the visitor economy rather unavoidable, and 2. provided opportunity to make structural changes. So, on the one hand there is a sense of urgency, and on the other a sense of opportunity.

First of all, regarding the sense of urgency, the steep decline in visitor numbers since the pandemic has undermined not only Amsterdam's economy, but also its social and cultural foundations. The private sector has suffered greatly from the lockdowns, especially those businesses that are mostly dependant on foreign visitors. Although they had knowledge of this dependency before, the severity and urgency to make changes in their business plan are now experienced to an extent like never before. Residents have indicated that the empty streets feel awkward, and museums take measures to attract more Dutch visitors by have taking on a more resident-oriented approach. Recent news from the municipality of Amsterdam on 24 December 2021 mentioned that 165 properties in the city centre can no longer be used as tourist store, sex shop, smartshop or anything along those lines (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021d). Because these properties were temporarily out of use, the municipality could change their use in the zoning plan, and shops and facilities that are more useful for residents should return there (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2021d). This shows the continuing efforts made by the municipality to help the city centre transition to a neighbourhood economy, thereby countering the monoculture. In turn, this should lead to a more sustainable situation on both an economic and social level and a shift towards degrowth, as also explained by Higgins-Desbiolles et al. (2019). Besides, this is also to the benefit of tourists, as residents "form integral part of the tourism experience," (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020, p. 63). Without locals, a substantive part of the tourism experience is lacking. So, if residents are returning to the city centre and enjoy themselves there, it also becomes a more pleasurable place to be for tourists. A prime example of the worst-case scenario is Venice as residents have moved away in large numbers, and like multiple interviewees stated, nobody wants to be like Venice. As research has found that some residents actually consider moving out of Amsterdam because of the crowdedness, nuisance and prominence of the tourist industry (Pinkster and Boterman, 2017), this threat should be taken seriously.

The renewed focus on residents and day trippers is to tackle the problems that come from a lack of international tourists, especially regarding a visitor economy as prominent as in Amsterdam where many businesses rely on these tourists, which can be referred to as 'under-tourism'. COVID-19 poses a new challenge in the academic debate on under-tourism as destinations are not necessarily competing to fish from the same tourist pond, as explained by Gowreesunkar and Thanh (2020), but rather there is an overall shortage of tourists. While disease has always been a problematic factor in the attraction of tourists, for example when labelling places like Burkina Faso as 'diseased destinations' that come to suffer from under-tourism as a result, the global outbreak of COVID-19 means that destinations globally suffer from tourists' safety and security concern (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). It can be expected that some destinations will recover more quickly from this concern than others, leading to shifts in destination popularity standards.

One factor that impacts the popularity of a tourist destination is the soundness of infrastructure, and as Amsterdam is easily accessible via plane, car, train and boat, this should contribute to the potential for recovery (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). In fact, there are plans to extend Amsterdam's metro network to reach Schiphol Airport to improve the city's accessibility (Bleeker, 2021), which stands in sharp contrast with the pleas for advocating sustainable travel from many interviewees. The high level of accessibility poses the risk of flipping back to the other side of the same coin: overtourism. Furthermore, the danger is that especially large hotel and store chains have the financial buffers to survive this period of under-tourism, and small, local businesses do not, further fostering the monoculture. As the situation around COVID-19 is highly uncertain, so is the prospect of the recovery of international tourism, and so national tourism becomes more important to tackle under-tourism. This is in accordance with the efforts of the municipality to stimulate regional and national tourism. To conclude, the problematic aspects of the visitor economy are not news to those involved in Amsterdam's tourism sector, but the urgency of solving those problems is, as issues of under-tourism present themselves.

Second, regarding the sense of opportunity, as mentioned already the most outstanding event since the pandemic has been the adoption of the ordinance that puts a quantitative limit on the number of tourists who can stay in Amsterdam yearly, which is 20 million. A local news channel highlights that it is interesting that this ordinance, called 'Tourism in Balance', also sets a minimum number, which is 10 million (Kleijn, 2021). This is because COVID-19 has shown the negative implications of *too few* tourists (Kleijn, 2021), whereas the situation before then showed the issues related to *too many* tourists. Yet because there are no pre-defined measures to take when numbers are close to crossing a limit, there is scepticism about the effectiveness of this development. However, there is also optimism that more pro-active action will be taken when the upper limit gets in sight (Kleijn, 2021). Regarding the theoretical debate on overtourism, this ordinance demonstrates the government's utilisation of the carrying capacity concept, specifically the maximum level of tourists that residents are willing to accept (Mihalic, 2020). As Amsterdam is perhaps the first city in the world to set a numerical limit to tourism (Kleijn, 2021), this makes the city a unique case in studying this topic. Furthermore, this ordinance demonstrates the power of residents to make a change – as it all started with a citizens' initiative and a signed petition – and that residents are aware of their power. This shows a continuation of the trend that "residents are starting to make use of their cultural, social and institutional capital to influence politicians, policy-makers and media" (Pinkster and Boterman, 2017, p. 468).

Besides the quantitative step that has been taken, another aspect that is more qualitative is the renewal of the reputation of Amsterdam as a tourist destination. By aiming to attract valuable visitors, Amsterdam is one of many destinations that is "now acknowledging that a handful of affluent travellers are better than many tourists who do not spend but rather spoil the destinations and go away" (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020, p. 51). These intentions have already been set prior to COVID-19, but the absence of tourists for some time provided several unique chances to make more drastic changes to for instance spatial planning and communication strategies. However, what discourages a variety of actors to counter Amsterdam's reputation is the fact that bad publicity or image can cause under-tourism, too, which is just as problematic as overtourism (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). This is confirmed by the minimum number established in the ordinance as explained above. Some interviewees have expressed their dissatisfaction with the length to which the municipality and other organisations go to solve problems of overtourism, including the argument that they are fearing reputational damage. This shows that perhaps authorities are not making such far-reaching reforms as they say. Another remarkable development here is the further constraint of AirBnB. As we have seen, AirBnB and like platforms were already a target of municipal policy before,

but since the outbreak of COVID-19, more rigorous actions have been taken to constrain their options. This is related to the argument that the pandemic has proven the AirBnB-effect, as rental prices decreased as tourists stayed away. Although not all agree that these actions are rigorous *enough*, it should be noted that some argued they felt as if the pandemic provided a unique opportunity to take such measures.

Not everyone agrees on the necessity to decrease tourist numbers in the long run, however. Tourism is said to be a scapegoat for Amsterdam's problems, which the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be caused by residents more so than tourists. Examples are the excessive number of parked bicycles and the littering in public space. This phenomenon relates strongly to the argument that the belief of actors that long-term change is possible is a major factor in the process of change. Sceptics claim that 'you cannot build a fence around Amsterdam', and hence you cannot control the amount or type of tourists that come to the city, while activists urge the importance of drastic change and teamwork between the public, private and civil spheres.

All in all, the results of both the document analysis and the interviews match up by demonstrating that COVID-19 has resulted in an increased sense of urgency and opportunity to systematically change Amsterdam's tourism sector. Although teamwork is difficult to achieve when the players have different interests and beliefs, the debate has become less hostile. When the tourist streams suddenly stopped, many considered it the ideal time to make image changes, implement more sustainable technologies and stricter measures, and work towards a neighbourhood economy. In that sense, the pandemic has served as a clean slate from which to rebuild a new type of tourism.

6.1.3. The influence of contemporary strategies of the behaviour of tourists and residents

Thus far, this thesis has shown that a plethora of strategies has been implemented up to this point to further control the impact of the tourism sector on the liveability of Amsterdam. Not only tourists, but also residents are affected as these measures change the dynamics of the city. The aim then is to create a more pleasant living environment for residents, and a more pleasant visitor experience for tourists. This section will explore to what extent this aim is achieved by the existing strategies by answering the third research question, which is: **What effects do the strategies already implemented have on the behaviour of tourists and residents in popular tourist spots?**

First and foremost, regarding the quantitative aspect of the tourism sector, it is too soon to tell the effects of instruments such as the ordinance and the last increase in the tourist tax, as these have been put into place after March 2020, and hence COVID-19 is still the primary factor in the number of tourists arriving. This is especially true when it comes to international tourism. However, when considering the qualitative aspect, the intention of some actors to transform the city's reputation seems to have been set in motion. A variety of foreign press has already commented on the fact that Amsterdam is no longer welcoming 'sex and drugs' tourists into their city. Instead, these news sources explain that the city wants to attract the right kind of tourists and that visitors are welcome but not at any price (SchengenVisaInfo.com, 2021), that soft drug tourism is coming to an end (Euronews, 2021), and that visitors behaving disrespectfully towards the city's heritage and residents are not welcome anymore (NLTimes.nl, 2021). A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that the newly implemented modern technologies under supervision of amsterdam&partners are effective. This is in line with literature stating that "smart technologies are considered the most effective solution to tackle effects of overtourism," (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020, p. 60). Amsterdam uses smart technologies both before a visitor arrives, aiming to attract valuable visitors, and during a visit, aiming to spread out tourists and lead them to less popular facilities and attractions. Furthermore, in an era where trips are planned online from A to Z and platforms such as

TripAdvisor are a primary source of information, the image that a potential tourist has of a destination is substantially made out of information found online (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). Whether that image is positive or negative will decide if someone decides to go to that destination, or continue to search online for another (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). Therefore, if actors of Amsterdam's tourism sector manage to create an image that is unattractive to the 'sex and drugs' tourists because it has little to nothing to offer to them, they can deter that type of tourists. In the same way, if they manage to establish an image that is attractive to those interested in culture, history, culinary experiences, or something along those lines, that type of tourists will be drawn in. The efforts to undo the monoculture of touristic shops and facilities in the city centre can help to bring back the city's authenticity, which may actually make the city more interesting to tourists looking for a unique experience that they cannot find at home or at another tourism destination (Hospers, 2019; Pinkster and Boterman, 2017). At the same time, it contributes to residents' sense of home (Pinkster and Boterman, 2017).

DMOs, in this case amsterdam&partners, play a key role in establishing the desired image. They are responsible for regulating the tourism sector in such a way that it benefits the destination, its residents *and* the tourists (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). amsterdam&partners is a non-profit organisation in the public-private sector, suggesting that they are an independent body that does not seek to show favouritism to one specific type of actor. Hence, the influence they have is likely to be positive in the sense that it comes to the collective benefit of the city. As we have seen, they set up a variety of campaigns and implemented smart technology, and their efforts have already been picked up by foreign press. Another suggestion would be to make a promotional video to highlight the aspects of Amsterdam that the city wants to be known for, as this has been found to be effective in the case of China (Shani et al., 2010).

Perhaps even more influential than a DMO is the opinion of other tourists. In fact, personal experiences are valued more than the words of qualified marketers (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020). In the online spheres, ordinary people can easily share their experiences on platforms such as travel forums and social media. This can have a huge impact of the decision-making processes of those who read those experiences as nowadays "word of mouse travels quicker than word of mouth," (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020, p. 52). When thinking of the type of tourists coming to Amsterdam, this could perhaps become a vicious circle. If visitors interested in cultural heritage and museums visit and share their positive experiences on Amsterdam's unique and extensive offer of such facilities, this may inspire others who are interested in those things to visit. The same is true for partying tourists who have enjoyed themselves in the city. That is where image change comes in as described in the previous paragraph.

The measures being implemented to steer the tourism sector in another direction do not only affect tourists though, but also residents. The Irridex model of Doxey (1975) then provides a useful tool for analysing residents' attitude towards tourism. As already described, tools to combat the city centre's monoculture or the extent of AirBnB help to increase the liveability. Furthermore, residents have found and displayed their power to make a change in the ordinance. Based on the results of this thesis, 'tourismphobia' of residents was not as bad in Amsterdam as it was in other cities to begin with though, such as Barcelona and Rome, where they have been "voicing their concern regarding the development of the tourism industry via protests, graffiti and physical intimidation," (Gowreesunkar and Thanh, 2020, p. 54). However, looking at the Irridex model, anti-tourist anger can not only be physical but also verbal to reach level 4 (antagonism) (Doxey, 1975), and Amsterdam is probably at that level. This is confirmed by the common view that tourism is the evildoer causing most of what is wrong with the city. Also, residents have expressed a certain sense of anti-tourism as

they have expressed their irritation through actions such as the 'We live here'-campaign and signing the 'Tourism in Balance' petition (Mihalic, 2020). Not all residents are as resentful towards tourists; some feel no more than irritation (level 3), and some are actually happy with tourism, mostly those who benefit from it economically (level 1-2). Also other researchers who looked at Amsterdam found that not all residents feel irritation, levels of irritation vary, and most irritation is related to tourists in the city centre (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017; Hospers, 2019). In fact, the emptiness of the streets during periods of lockdown may have resulted in increased understanding of the problems of under-tourism, so that COVID-19 could provide an exceptional opportunity to substantially mitigate feelings of antagonism and irritation. Positive developments such as the improvement of the housing market and low levels of nuisance should be maintained as the tourism sector recovers, so that residents can benefit from the positive effects while earlier negative effects remain curbed. In conclusion, if Amsterdam's actors manage to bring back a more positive outlook on tourism in residents, the key then is to find ways to prevent the situation from escalating again, returning to the previous levels of annoyance and antagonism.

6.1.4. The future prevention of overtourism

The previous answers to the three sub-research questions of this thesis now help to answer the main research question here, which is: **What strategies are being formulated and implemented by stakeholders of Amsterdam's tourism sector in the stage of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent overtourism and to promote sustainable tourism instead?** To do so, this subchapter will place the results of this thesis in the context of the three different types of policy instruments and of the pro-growth and degrowth paradigms. A sidenote here is that while the problematic nature of the pro-growth paradigm is challenged through the degrowth paradigm, this does not entail that the latter is free of any issues. Rather, this thesis argues that its implementation has many obstacles on the road, but it is well worth the effort to try to incorporate more and more elements of degrowth in the tourism sector to improve its sustainability regarding people, planet and profit. This is not to say that tourism is morally bad and it should be banned, but that capitalist ideals of continuous growth and monetary wins should be reconsidered to move towards a more sustainable approach.

Although the pandemic is far from over, and hence it is too soon to tell what the precise effects will be, this thesis has found some interesting trends in the changing approach on policy since its outbreak in March 2020. Considering the changes described in chapter 6.1.1., several elements stand out. First of all, regarding the implemented information strategies, or sermons, the main change is the increased focus on the image change of Amsterdam. By aiming to attract a different type of tourists than the ones that are said to cause the most nuisance, this image change is a *qualitatively* oriented measure. The multiple lockdowns have provided 'clean slate' from which Amsterdam's DMO and other marketing actors could reconsider their overall approach. For tourists present in Amsterdam, sermons are used for spreading them, including the information-activation campaign. Yet, the lack of effectiveness of the 'Visit Amsterdam, See Holland'-campaign for first-time visits that was explained by interviewees is confirmed by earlier research (Koens, Postma, and Papp, 2019). Regarding the issue of nuisance, the 'We live here'-campaign that is put up by civilians remains in place, using photorealistic stickers of residents on doors and windows to make tourists aware that the Red Light District is a residential area rather than an entertainment area (welivehere.amsterdam, n.d.). Additionally, signage across the city indicates the consequences of certain behaviour such as public urinating, which are fines, in order to steer tourists into behaving differently.

Furthermore, economic instruments, or carrots, are used to motivate actors to act in compliance with the vision of the municipality. One form is the use of subsidies, in the context of this thesis for

BIZs, place branding, sustainable initiatives, and COVID-19-related losses. All but the latter are aimed at stimulating actors from the private sector to make one or more positive changes to the neighbourhood in which they are situated, and therefore to Amsterdam. Yet, subsidies to support businesses that suffer from the consequences of the pandemic – coming from both the local and the national government – can actually cause unfair competition between businesses who receive such benefits and those who happen to (just) fall by the wayside. In the national discussion on the issue, the main complaint is that the entitlement to financial compensation feels arbitrary and unfair, with many sectors – such as taxi companies – feeling left out (Accountancy Vanmorgen, 2020). Now that most subsidies have stopped, sectors that are continuously suffering, including the tourism sector, do not receive any additional help (Het Parool, 2021), showing that actors in the tourism industry are disproportionately hurt by the pandemic in comparison to other industries. Furthermore, the pandemic can help the monoculture to persist as the larger tourist store chains have more financial buffers to overcome periods with little to no customers and generally receive larger compensations than smaller family businesses for instance. All in all, opportunity inequality in the private sector may be boosted by government measures regarding COVID-19. Another form of carrots, on a smaller scale, is giving discounts for relatively unknown attractions (outside of the city centre) to increase the spreading of tourists (Hospers, 2019). Carrots can also be making certain goods or services more expensive, to deter people to behave in a certain. Most notable is the tourist tax and the debate on implementing a day tripper tax. These taxes should decrease the number of tourists to combat crowdedness, nuisance and touristic monoculture, and at the same time make sure the city and its residents benefit from tourism, not just the businesses. Regarding the latter, the issue of making a division between tourists and residents is acknowledged in the literature without stating any possible solutions (Dodds and Butler, 2019).

The fines mentioned above are part of the regulations, or sticks, used by government actors to steer the tourism sector. Fines are used in a direct way by punishing the subjects for breaking the law. These are mostly related to issues of nuisance, including speeding on the canals, sleeping in a car, and the use of hard drugs. Furthermore, we have seen the tightening of the net around AirBnB, with more legal compliances and increased law enforcement to punish any violators. Also the debate on the i-criterium that started prior to March 2020 is still going today, indicating the public interest in tackling problems related to coffeeshops and ‘weed tourism’. Last but not least, the ordinance that has been put in place illustrates a major shift in the mindset of the local government, which is now obligated to take action when a quantitative line in the tourism sector is crossed.

The general consensus of the interviewees then was that the focus should not be on just one instrument, but rather on a combination of different strategies. Still, the most used and the most impactful tools and strategies as found in this thesis are regulatory instruments, indicating the prominent position of the local government in this debate. This is not surprising given that the local government has the responsibility to keep tourism in check (Hospers, 2019). However, there are three main factors that the municipality has no direct control over: 1. Hotels in the rest of MRA, 2. Flight tax, and 3. Legalization of weed in Europe. Furthermore, some people argued that the municipality should have more legal powers to control what happens within the city borders, while others said that the municipality’s approach is a tad patronising, and still others said that the municipality is simply not doing all they can.

This brings us to more of an ethical question, namely to what extent it is desirable to constrain and regulate all activity in a city that is known for its liberal, free spirit. The dominance of regulatory instruments means that the viewpoint of the local government is probably the most influential one in answering this question. However, the process of decentralisation also demonstrates the

important contribution of businesses as well as civilians in this debate. This is especially true for the businessmen who, according to some, should by now acknowledge the vulnerability of the visitor economy and make the necessary changes to also attract local and regional clientele. This is in line with the argument made by Mihalic (2020) that overtourism is partly the result of a destination's supply when tourism businesses do not sufficiently manage the negative effects of the sector. Therefore, the stimulation of social entrepreneurship by the municipality can help to change this. Also citizen participation has been acknowledged as crucial, which is confirmed by Gerritsma (2019), who stated that residents in Amsterdam are often considered and treated as stakeholders in the problem-solving processes related to overtourism. The importance of this has been emphasized by the UNWTO in a report on managing overtourism (UNWTO et al., 2018). Overall, while the local government remains a main player in this debate, also businesses and residents have the power to make changes in the tourism sector.

This brings us to the representation of the pro-growth and degrowth paradigms in the results of this thesis. Several topics received relatively much attention, both in the document analysis and in the interviews, and these have been selected in the tables below. Table 3 presents an overview of the topics part of the pro-growth paradigm, and table 4 does the same for the degrowth paradigm.

Table 3: Findings on the pro-growth paradigm

Theory	Case
Deseasonalisation	N.A.
Decongestion	Spreading of tourists
Deluxe tourism	Attracting valuable visitors, avoiding nuisance tourists (related to image change)
Discredit contestation	Beneficial aspects; tourists as scapegoat
Decentralisation	Responsibility of the business sector
Diversification	Place branding; solving issue of monoculture to provide tourists with an 'authentic experience'

Table 4: Findings on the degrowth paradigm

Theory	Case
Decommodification	Restrictions on tourist rental, permit systems for commercial activity in public space
Disparity reduction & collectivisation	Increasing the tourist tax so that hotel profits benefit the city
Dignifying working conditions	N.A. (Prostitution policies)
Deconsumerism	Neighbourhood economy
Detailed spatial planning	Planned restructuring of the city centre; hotel stop decided for each zoning plan per area
Detouristification & retouristification	Ordinance; image change (including the i-criterion); stop on tourist shops

As shown in these tables, there are one D and one D-D that are not found in the results, namely deseasonalisation and dignifying working conditions. Regarding the latter, the prostitution policies that should make visitors treat the people working in the Red Light District with more respect are an interesting development, but these did not come back in any of the interviews, nor were they much discussed in the policy documents, and because of that, this D-D is deemed not applicable in this case. On the other hand, strategies regarding decongestion, deluxe tourism, decentralisation, diversification, as well as decommodification, deconsumerism, detailed spatial planning and

detouristification were prominent in the results. Some results have confirmed that the local government is indeed held back from making rigorous changes in the city's approach on tourism by economic interests. Measures are being taken to increase the sustainability of the sector, while these do not tackle the fundamental problems related to continuous growth. For instance, the spreading of tourists tries to alleviate the pressure on the city centre, but it does not challenge the status quo of trying to continuously attract more tourists. Also diversifying the supply of goods and services, attracting valuable visitors and social entrepreneurship do not deal with the capitalist values that the tourism sector is founded on. Moreover, discrediting any argument that a large and growing number of tourists has negative consequences for the city and for the planet supports those capitalist ideals of growth and consumerism. In that sense, the capitalist system still runs the city.

However, also elements of degrowth are found, and this is in line with the research of Kallis et al. (2018) saying that degrowth is somewhat of a utopia that will never be reached one hundred percent, but serious steps can be taken in its direction. Moves have been made towards the decommodification of housing and public space, for instance, and towards the deconsumerism of the city more generally. This means that monetary resources have become prioritized less over the interests of the people of Amsterdam. Also, the revenue of the accommodation sector is said to come to the benefit of the city more collectively since the heightening of the tourist tax, and the idea of a day tripper tax is on the table. The concepts for renewed spatial planning of the city centre acknowledge that many problems related to tourism are intertwined with one another, so that a large-scale, overarching strategy is required to deal with them. The process of an image change and the ordinance 'Tourism in Balance' are indicators of de- and retouristification as they challenge both the qualitative and quantitative fundamentals of the tourism sector as it was before COVID-19. Although these do not dominate the pro-growth elements of the policies that are in place, they do indicate a strong move in the direction of degrowth, away from the capitalist value that growth is necessary and desirable for the economy and for society.

Overall, the fact that both paradigms are reflected in the results of this thesis actually shows that both paradigms are well-represented in the debate on the future development of the tourism sector in Amsterdam. Here it should be said that the aim of this thesis is not to promote either a pro- or degrowth paradigm, but to show that these are very much intertwined in practice. Whereas theory can make clear categories and distinctions, real-life cases are messy in the sense that many processes and factors overlap and interlace with one another.

In conclusion, these two tables help to answer the main research question of this thesis as they show the most important strategies that are being formulated and implemented by a variety of actors to steer the recovery of Amsterdam's tourism sector in the (for them) desired direction. The dominant belief is that the situation prior to COVID-19 is undesirable and serious measures should be taken to prevent returning back to that state when tourist numbers start to rise again. The pandemic has increased the mutual agreement of actors on this problem, which helps with finding and implementing a set of solutions (Dodds and Butler, 2019). Strategies relating to both the pro- and degrowth paradigm are used to reach that goal, but especially the ordinance that has been put into place in 2021 is a notable, unique event that perhaps steers the debate into the direction of a degrowth-viewpoint. Such a policy intervention is likely to be more effective than initiatives such as social entrepreneurship and the use of smart technologies for spreading (Milano et al., 2019). This is in line with the argument made by Fletcher et al. (2019) that moving beyond capitalist ideals of economic growth and consumption is a step towards degrowth. It is too soon to tell what the impact of this ordinance truly is, however.

6.1.5. Final remarks

Having answered all the research questions of this thesis, there are two things left to discuss here. These have to do with the contribution of this thesis to the larger academic debate on sustainable tourism. First and foremost, silence speaks volumes when it comes to one of the three P's: that of planet. Instead, mostly people and profit were the centre of attention. When steering interviews in the direction of environmental sustainability, it became clear that this was not the issue of interest in the debate on the recovery of the tourism sector in Amsterdam. Of course the flight tax and more sustainable travel options were touched upon sometimes, but the main focus was on the tourist number when considering these topics. Issues such as littering, air quality and climate change were most often left unspoken about, which is remarkable considering the amount of global attention going to the climate. This relates to the fact that there is no environmental 'D' included in the degrowth paradigm. To include the importance of environmental sustainability, the concept could be extended with a key word such as 'durability', to not just provide an antithesis to the pro-growth paradigm but to reach beyond it. All in all, the lack of attention for the environmental aspects of recovering tourism in a post-COVID-19 period makes for an interesting result as it shows that despite all the global efforts to tackle climate change, it is still subordinate to economic and social aspects.

Second, although this thesis originally focused on the issue of overtourism, it has found that there is another problematic side to the same coin: under-tourism. The lack of – mostly international – tourists that are coming to Amsterdam shows the vulnerability of the visitor economy that the city is founded on. This causes trouble for especially small businesses. There is relatively little research done on the issue of under-tourism, as discussed in chapter 6.1.3., let alone when considering a destination that is well-known for its problematic situation of overtourism. By explaining a bit more about the inequalities that such a switch causes, namely small versus big businesses, and about the impact that COVID-19 has had on this switch, namely increasing the cooperation of different actors to tackle overtourism, this thesis contributes to the limited academic debate on under-tourism. The process of post-pandemic policy planning has been elaborated, which contributes to academic literature on the recovery of tourism during and after this global event. Furthermore, regarding the literature on overtourism, the results have shown that cities actually *can* regulate quantitative and qualitative aspects of tourism; mostly seen in the ordinance and the foreign press stating that 'sex and drugs' tourists are no longer welcome in Amsterdam. Finally, an interesting result is that residents are considered active participants in the governance regime on tourism, as they have started and signed the petition that led to the ordinance, initiated the 'We live here'-campaign, and started a community-based rental platform as a response to the problematic character of AirBnB and similar tourist rental platforms. In conclusion, under-tourism is found to be just as seriously problematic as overtourism, but in this case, it has provided an opportunity to turn things around and get more actors to agree that the pre-COVID-19 situation of tourism is undesirable, so that new tools and strategies are formulated to prevent a 'second wave' of overtourism in the future.

6.2. Future research

As with all research, there are certain factors that were outside of the scope of this thesis. Based on three of these limitations, I would like to make suggestions for further research. First of all, the repercussions of COVID-19 are far from over. Data collection for this thesis ended in September 2021, and since then, a lot has happened in for instance the transportation sector and the hospitality sector, which directly affects tourism in Amsterdam. This thesis has shed a first light on the impact of COVID-19 on the situation on overtourism, but further research is needed to understand the development of the influence of this pandemic over time. For instance, the responses of business owners to the continued insecurity of the situation could be studied, or the change in attitudes

among residents. All this would help to better explain how such a global force either enforces or changes the combination of aspects of the pro- and degrowth paradigm among Amsterdam's tourism sector actors in order to balance out the previously known problematic situation of overtourism with current issues related to under-tourism.

Second, the cruise sector has not been studied extensively in this thesis. However, there is data to suggest that this sector is a major part of the overall visitor number, mostly as day trippers, and hence has quite an impact on the city. That is, almost half a million cruise passengers arrived in MRA in 2018 (Amsterdam Cruise Port, 2019). The interests of this sector may be different from those of other sectors related to tourism, as it is independent from for instance accommodation and transportation businesses (since these are already included in a cruise). The sector's impact may have changed over the course of COVID-19, however, because of changes in things such as people's travel behaviour. This would be interesting for further in-depth research. Additionally, a bold assumption would be that cruise passengers are most often interested in things such as culture and culinary experiences, making them valuable visitors as defined by amsterdam&partners, and hence they would be an interesting group to attract. To do so, further research may be useful for learning *how* to attract them, and what impact they would actually have on the city and its tourism sector.

Finally, the ordinance that has just been accepted makes Amsterdam a unique case in putting a hard, quantitative regulation on the destination's carrying capacity. The question still remains how the local government is planning on practically enforcing this ordinance. Interviewees indicated that as of now, there is no plan ready for when the tourist numbers rise to 18 million and action should be taken to prevent this number from reaching above 20 million. The same goes for the threat of staying below 10 million visitors yearly. It is unsure if – and if so, when – this plan will be made, who will make it, and what philosophy it will be based on. Being such a unique case, following the further elaboration of this ordinance is highly interesting to study the rather theoretical concept of carrying capacity in a very practical case. This will help other cities struggling with overtourism to learn whether such an ordinance is an effective and feasible measure, or not.

7. Conclusion

In the year 2019, before most people had ever heard from a SARS-virus, tourism numbers in Amsterdam reached almost 22 million. Residents spoke up about the problems that they encountered related to tourism, including nuisance and crowdedness directly but also rising housing prices and a tourist-oriented city centre indirectly. When COVID-19 took over all of our lives in March 2020, lockdowns were implemented and travel restrictions prevented tourists from coming. In Amsterdam, this brought businesses, civilians and the municipality to the harsh realisation that the city's visitor economy was fragile and overall unsustainable. In fact, problems related to under-tourism became dominant over the previous problematic situation of overtourism. At the same time, COVID-19 provided a clean slate from which to rebuild tourism differently. The city was already working towards a reputation change as it wanted to move away from a 'sex and drugs' image and towards being a capital of culture to draw in valuable visitors. Yet, the pandemic brought a unique opportunity to make more structural changes, the ordinance 'Tourism in Balance' being the most outstanding one.

The use of a 'demand and supply' perspective was found to be prominent for deciding what changes need to be made in the city to impact the type and number of tourists. Tackling overtourism is done by changing the things that the city has to offer, for example by implementing a stop on touristic stores and on new hotels, and by changing the demand, so the type of tourists that they attract. In doing so, residents are considered to be important stakeholders. The city's motto remains: "The visitor is welcome, but the resident comes first," (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2019c, p. 2). Examples of campaigns and petitions have shown the power that residents hold and acknowledge regarding this debate. Furthermore, social entrepreneurship was found to be a major factor in the shared responsibility for a sustainable tourism sector. As businesses depend on tourism, they have an intrinsic drive to help keep the sector viable. On the other hand, the pandemic has shown that a certain amount of local and regional customers is necessary as well to not depend on tourism too much, so the municipality stimulates efforts from the private sector to move away from the visitor economy model, especially in the city centre.

Most of the tools explained in this thesis are regulatory instruments, meaning that the municipality exercises substantial control over the recovery of the tourism sector, aiming not to return to the situation of 2019. Albert Einstein (allegedly) once said that: "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results" (Wilczek, 2015). Although insane is a strong word, it does help to make the point that if destinations that struggled with overtourism before do nothing to change their supply and demand now, they *will* go back to that situation sooner or later. While key topics such as valuable visitors and a neighbourhood economy have remained the same, substantial changes in the city's approach have been made since then to move towards that desired situation quicker. This thesis has contributed to the academic literature on sustainable tourism by explaining the impact that COVID-19 has had on that approach thus far. As aspects of both the pro-growth and degrowth paradigms are represented, this thesis has showed that real-life cases are not as clear-cut as theory, but instead many different viewpoints and strategies are mixed to create the unique social, economic and historical context of a city. Therefore, there is no 'one size fits all'-solution for overtourism. Furthermore, although the economic and social impacts of tourism in Amsterdam are well-represented in the debate, what remains missing is a serious consideration of the environmental impact of tourism. Amsterdam's public, private and civil sector have all made considerable efforts to move towards a more sustainable tourism sector since the outbreak of COVID-19, but that does not mean that they can rest too much now. There are still major steps to be taken.

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Appendix A

Introductie

Mijn scriptie gaat over de toeristische beleidsontwikkelingen in Amsterdam en de invloed van de COVID-19-pandemie hierop, met het in acht nemen van voorheen bestaande problemen door *overtourism*. Het doel is om in kaart te brengen hoe groot de invloed van de pandemie is op de toekomst van de toerismesector op het gebied van beleid en handhaving. Heeft u verder nog vragen voor we beginnen?

Toestemming tot opnemen?

Interview vragen

Zou u kort uw functie kunnen beschrijven en de bijbehorende werkzaamheden in relatie tot toerisme kunnen toelichten?

Wat waren volgens u de grootste problemen met betrekking tot toerisme vóór de pandemie?

Welke maatregelen werden in die tijd genomen om deze problemen aan te spreken, en waren deze (voldoende) effectief volgens u?

Wat was de rol van uzelf/uw sector hierin?

Denkt u dat de situatie van vóór de pandemie weer zal terugkeren?

 Zo ja: vindt u dit wenselijk?

 Zo nee: wat is uw visie op de ontwikkeling tijdens/na de pandemie?

Hoe wordt de vrijheid die Amsterdam karakteriseert gewaarborgd onder een groeiend aantal maatregelen?

Heeft u bij (andere) actoren (ook) een verandering in mindset opgemerkt ten opzichte van toerisme in Amsterdam sinds COVID-19?

Wat is uw reactie op de verordening die is aangenomen op 8 juli 2021, die vaststelt dat per jaar maximaal 20 miljoen toeristen mogen overnachten in Amsterdam?

 Is dit haalbaar/effectief?

 Is dit wenselijk?

Hoe reageren inwoners van Amsterdam op de maatregelen die momenteel worden getroffen? Wordt hun stem (meer) gehoord in dit proces?

Welke maatregelen zou u graag geïmplementeerd zien worden? (Bijvoorbeeld AirBnB, Lelystad Airport). Wat kan u(w sector) hieraan bijdragen?

Wie dragen (verder) de verantwoordelijkheid om de benodigde veranderingen te maken?'

Afsluiting

Bedankt voor uw tijd!

Toestemming om naam/functie te gebruiken?

Referenties naar collega's/kennissen om te interviewen?