Stakeholder Perspectives on Tourism Before, During, and After the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of Giethoorn

Master of Science Thesis

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Preface

The inspiration for this thesis arose from my deep passion for my home, Aruba. As a small island in the Caribbean, it stands as one of the most sought-after tourist destinations, attracting nearly 20 times the number of tourists compared to its local residents. Witnessing firsthand the impact of tourism on a destination motivated me to pursue the direction of the MTO master's program. This thesis represents the final step towards my graduation, as I work towards my future goal of contributing to Aruba's growth with the knowledge I have accumulated over the years.

The journey of writing my thesis had its share of unexpected challenges, leaving me unsure if I would complete it on time. Due to financial and time constraints, I was unable to conduct my fieldwork abroad or study the case I had envisioned. Nevertheless, I persevered through uncertainties, and I am grateful for all the valuable experiences gained along the way. My hope is that this thesis will prompt you to consider the diverse perspectives of tourism destinations worldwide.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Martijn Duineveld. I will forever be grateful for his guidance, feedback, and support throughout my work and thesis process, especially when he took on the role of my supervisor halfway through my thesis, during a period when I was facing challenges.

Furthermore, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all the individuals I interviewed for their valuable time and willingness to share their ideas and perspectives with me. Your contribution was indispensable, and without you, this research would not have been possible. Through our conversations, I gained insightful knowledge and had the privilege of experiencing the beauty and culture of Giethoorn.

To my family and partner, I am profoundly thankful for your constant support, allowing me to dream big and pursue better education across the world. Your belief in me was so strong that my parents even booked their flights for my graduation ceremony at the beginning of my thesis process—this means the world to me.

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Abstract

The global tourism industry has been witnessing substantial growth and diversification in recent decades, leading to the emergence of overtourism as a significant concern in numerous tourist destinations. Overtourism, characterized by an overwhelming influx of visitors exceeding the destination's carrying capacity, poses challenges to the well-being of local communities, cultures, and environments. However, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a temporary pause in tourism activities, offering an opportunity for destinations to reevaluate and address overtourism-related issues. This thesis examines the perceptions of stakeholders in Giethoorn regarding the tourism situation before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by answering the following research question: *How do the diverse stakeholders in the discussion surrounding tourism and overtourism in Giethoorn perceive the situation, governance, and potential solutions during the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic?* To study this topic, a literature review was developed including the conceptualisation of overtourism, sustainable tourism and tourism measures. The theoretical framework focused on Greggory's Constructive Theory of Perception as lens to shed light on how personal experiences, beliefs, and social contexts influence stakeholders' views. Using a qualitative study design, data was collected through nine semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in Giethoorn. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analysed for recurring themes. Stakeholders in Giethoorn hold distinct perceptions regarding tourism and overtourism before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders present different views on existing measures and propose spreading tourists across areas and times, promoting alternative attractions, and improving boat rental systems. The significance of fostering meaningful experiences and attracting a different type of tourist is also emphasized. Collaboration, dialogue, and a shared vision are essential to create an inclusive tourism sector that benefits the community, environment, and visitors alike. The findings underscore the importance of ongoing discussions and cooperation among stakeholders to tackle overtourism effectively and ensure the well-being of Giethoorn as a tourist destination.

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1. Introduction

Tourists think that the whole of Giethoorn is an amusement park. They often ask me what time it closes here – Schipper Alex Petter (Westerink, 2017).

In this thesis, my objective is to investigate the perceptions of diverse stakeholders in Giethoorn concerning the tourism situation, governance, and potential solutions both before, during, and after the pandemic. Overtourism, a widely discussed phenomenon in recent years, has been exemplified by destinations like Venice, Barcelona, and Rome struggling to manage an overwhelming influx of tourists (Pechlaner et al., 2019). This has prompted examinations of the economic, societal, and environmental impacts of tourism, as well as the perspectives of residents, in various tourism destinations. Moreover, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has sparked debates about resetting tourism strategies and adopting more sustainable approaches (Bhatt & Seabra, 2022). This research holds significance as it seeks to ascertain whether the pandemic has influenced stakeholder perceptions in Giethoorn and aims to identify potential solutions within the broader context of tourism and overtourism. By delving into these facets, this study contributes to the comprehension of stakeholder viewpoints and enriches discussions on tourism practices and the management of overtourism in Giethoorn and similar destinations.

In recent decades, there has been noticeable growth and diversification in the global tourism market, which has positioned it as one of the world's fastest-growing economic sectors, according to some experts (Glaesser et al. 2017). It can be argued that factors such as globalization and advancements in transportation have made tourism more accessible and affordable, leading to an increased number of people traveling to different parts of the world (Kasimoglu, 2012). Scholars suggest that since the 1960s, there has been an increase in the ability to go on leisure holidays (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). One possible contributing factor to this trend was the availability of holiday packages that provided better opportunities for a larger number of people to travel abroad (Kasimoglu, 2012). It is worth noting that the number of international tourist arrivals has seen significant growth, from 25 million in 1950 to 1.186 billion in 2015, with projections indicating a further increase to 1.8 billion by 2030, according to the World Tourism Organization (Glaesser et al. 2017).

The surge in tourists has been considered a crucial element in the economic development strategy of many countries and has been utilized as a tool for development by some experts (Manhas et al. 2016). The tourism industry is seen to bring advantages to tourist destinations, such as employment opportunities, economic income generation, and promotion of cultural exchange (Glaesser et al. 2017). However, it is important to note that the growth of tourism has also led to a range of problems, including unequal distribution of financial benefits, overcrowding of destinations, and negative impacts on the environment and local culture, as some scholars argue (Archer et al., 2005). These issues have become increasingly evident in recent years and have gained global attention (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). Numerous publications and tourism research have focused on impact analysis and discussed the concept of overtourism in tourist destinations (Capocchi et al. 2019). While the concept of overtourism has been discussed since the 1980s by authors such as Jungk (1980) and Krippendorf (1986), it gained significant attention in 2017. Destinations have reached a critical point of perceived tourism development, leading to radical changes in the perceptions of locals towards tourism (Goodwin, 2017). In some cities, residents are even protesting against what they perceive as an overwhelming influx of visitors, feeling pushed out of their own homes (Vagena, 2021). Overtourism is defined as a phenomenon in which locals or visitors feel that there are too

many visitors, exceeding the destination's carrying capacity and negatively affecting the quality of life in the area (Goodwin, 2016). Scholars like Coldwell (2017) suggest that poorly managed tourism has the potential to cause more damage and disruption.

In Europe, cultural centers and peripheral regions have been grappling with overtourism for decades (Boissevain J., 1996). Initially, the influx of tourists was seen as a positive development, as it was perceived to bring wealth and new guests. Cities like Rome, Paris, and London were traditionally visited as part of longer tours (Pechlaner et al. 2019). However, with the decrease in travel costs, these cities transformed into affordable weekend destinations accessible to all types of travelers, including those with lower incomes like students (Boissevain J., 1996). As high-density tourism becomes a concern, residents are increasingly prioritizing their quality of life over the income generated by the tourism industry, leading to further discussions about the peak or limit of tourism (Pechlaner et al. 2019).

1.2 Problem statement

Despite extensive scientific research and debates in recent years, there are abundant existing approaches and definitions to the problem of overtourism (Żemła, 2020). However, since overtourism is still in the primary stage of research, there are numerous gaps in the current knowledge of impacts and solutions to the issue (Garcia-Buades et al., 2022). The current debate on overtourism extends the issues of tourism development that were earlier attempted, and now takes place in a much wider scope of destinations and is more complex, making it necessary to further explore (Żemła, 2020).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that the existing literature and research on overtourism primarily predates the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on the world and the tourism industry, introducing uncertainties regarding its effects on various tourist destinations (Orîndaru et al., 2021). Researchers argue that this presents an opportunity for destinations to "build back better" by addressing overtourism-related issues that were temporarily absent during the pandemic (Bhatt & Seabra, 2022). While previous studies have examined residents' opinions of tourism destinations, there is a notable gap in research regarding stakeholders' perceptions concerning the tourism situation, governance, and potential solutions before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This research aims to fill this significant knowledge gap by examining the perceptions of diverse stakeholders during these three distinct time periods.

Filling the research gap regarding stakeholder perceptions before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic in tourism destinations would yield several important contributions. Firstly, it could provide a comprehensive understanding of how stakeholder perceptions have evolved and potentially changed due to the pandemic. This information could be crucial for policymakers, destination management organizations, and tourism stakeholders to develop effective strategies for tourism development post-pandemic. Moreover, an examination of stakeholder perceptions from multiple perspectives, including residents, industry stakeholders, and local authorities, could offer a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with overtourism and post-pandemic tourism recovery. This comprehensive view could support the development of inclusive and participatory tourism management approaches that consider the diverse interests and concerns of all stakeholders.

1.3 Research questions

Based on the previous description of the problem statement, this study aims to to investigate the perceptions of diverse stakeholders in Giethoorn concerning the tourism situation, governance, and potential solutions before, during, and after the pandemic. The central research question is: *How do the diverse stakeholders in the discussion surrounding tourism and overtourism in Giethoorn perceive the situation, governance, and potential solutions before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?*

To answer this question, the following sub-research questions have been determined:

1. How do the stakeholders involved perceive the tourism situation in Giethoorn considering the periods before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

2. How do the stakeholders involved perceive the governance of tourism in Giethoorn before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

3. What potential solutions for Giethoorn's tourism sector are perceived by the stakeholders, and what challenges do they identify that need to be addressed to facilitate their implementation?

1.4 A case study of Giethoorn

To address the research questions, the research focuses on Giethoorn as a case study area. Giethoorn is a Dutch village located in the Overijssel province of the Netherlands. It is part of the Steenwijkerland municipality and is known as the "Venice of the Netherlands" due to its distinctive canal system and picturesque houses. Giethoorn has gained international attention for its unique features. It is particularly relevant to examine the research question in Giethoorn due to the village's extensive media coverage in the Netherlands and on social media platforms, which has shed light on concerns related to overtourism. The village's distinctive characteristics, including its small population of 2600 inhabitants and lack of car roads, provide an intriguing context to investigate the impacts of a high influx of visitors.

In recent years, the number of visitors to Giethoorn has continued to grow, with 972,270-day tourists recorded in 2019, making it one of the most visited areas in the Netherlands (Steenwijkerland, 2020). The tourism season has also extended beyond the traditional months of April to September, resulting in businesses remaining open throughout the year (Davidse, 2021). This rapid growth of tourism has raised concerns about the quality of life and well-being of residents, as issues such as overcrowding, nuisance, and noise disturbances have been highlighted by media reports and activist groups. Giethoorn has one of the highest published ratios of annual tourists per resident, surpassing 351 tourists per resident in 2019 (Borgs, 2022). Additionally, governmental reports indicate that the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted Giethoorn to propose new plans aimed at addressing overtourism, with an increased emphasis on promoting sustainable cultural and nature-based tourism initiatives. These factors make Giethoorn a fitting case study for this research.

1.5 Structure

This research consists of seven chapters, each serving a specific purpose within the study. The first chapter is the introduction, providing a contextual overview and describing the problem statement, research questions, and case study. Chapter two encompasses the literature review, where relevant literature on overtourism, sustainable tourism, tourism measures, and an overtourism conceptual model is examined. In chapter three, the theoretical framework is presented, focusing on Greggory's

constructive theory of perception as the theoretical lens. Chapter four elaborates on the research methodology, covering aspects such as research design, method, data collection, data analysis, and considerations of validity and reliability. Chapter five presents the research findings, categorized into three perceptions and analysed across three time periods: before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion is then provided in chapter six, where the results are critically examined in relation to existing literature. Finally, chapter seven concludes the study by presenting an answer to the formulated research questions.

2. Literature review

This chapter serves as an introduction to the literature review section of the thesis, offering insights into the ongoing debates within the academic landscape. It delves into the existing literature surrounding the concept of overtourism, exploring topics such as the overtourism conceptual model, tourism capacity, the multifaceted impacts of tourism, residents' perceptions towards tourism. Furthermore, the literature pertaining to sustainable tourism is examined as a possible foundational framework to counter the challenges posed by tourism. Finally, a compilation of recommended tourism measures is presented, showcasing potential strategies aimed at fostering sustainable development within the context of overtourism. As the study progresses, the insights gleaned from this review will contribute to the larger discussion of the research and findings.

2.1 Overtourism

In recent years, there has been an increasing awareness and academic attention to the phenomenon of overtourism (Garcia-Buades et al., 2022). Constant tourism growth and excessive volume of visitors raise concerns and grow debates about whether tourism caps or limits should be implemented to address the issue (Veríssimo et al., 2020). Most literature on overtourism is from 2017 or later, the phenomenon itself is not new (Peeters et al., 2018). Studies exploring the effects of tourism on local communities emerged in the 1970s, including discussions of the risks of destination saturation (UNWTO, 1983) and the pressure of tourism on residents (Boissevain, 1977; Williams, 1979). Doxey's "Irritation Index" (Doxey, 1975) is an important contribution to the impact studies domain, defining the four emotional stages that residents may experience as tourist numbers increase, with the final stage being "antagonism between hosts and guests." Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) (1980) also highlighted that "tourism destinations suffer from their own success." Although these publications did not use the term "overtourism," they clearly demonstrated the potentially negative impacts of rapid tourism growth (Peeters et al., 2018).

Overtourism has been defined by UNWTO (2018) as *"a destination's situation where tourism excessively influences the perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way".* In most academic literature, overtourism is generally understood as a subjective perception held by tourism actors, in which residents, tourists or both perceive that a destination has an excessive number of visitors, leading to a transformation of the destination's character, loss of authenticity, and heightened irritation and annoyance (Capocchi et al., 2019; Doxey, 1975; Goodwin, 2016). Notably, the common factor in these definitions is the centrality placed on how overtourism impacts the quality of life of residents (Koens et al., 2018; UNWTO, 2018). Gössling et al. (2020) further suggest that overtourism can be seen as a psychological response to tourism pressure, which can disrupt and harm the relationship between people and places, potentially leading to a shift in residents' attitudes towards tourism.

The negative consequences of overtourism are multifaceted and include economic dependency, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural tensions. While environmental issues have traditionally been the focus of concern, there is a growing recognition of the importance of socio-cultural impacts, including changes to the lifestyles of local residents and the loss of a destination's authenticity (Koens et al., 2019). The impacts of overtourism have been extensively researched in different destinations around the world. However, most of the research on overtourism was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused an unforeseen disturbance in the tourism industry with worldwide lockdowns, a huge fall in international demand and travel restrictions. The virus resulted in massive social and economic impacts, as international travel was reduced by 72% in 2020 (UNWTO, 2023). Researchers argue that the effects of the Covid-19

pandemic bring uncertainties regarding the impact of the virus on different tourism destinations (Orîndaru, et al., 2021). It is also debated that destinations dealing with overtourism-related issues were presented with the opportunity to "build back better" after receiving a reset during the pandemic when they experienced an all-time low in tourists numbers (Bhatt & Seabra, 2022).

2.1.1 Overtourism conceptual model

Peeters et al. (2018) present the concept of overtourism through a conceptual model in which perception is seen as part of the capacity. This model is used to gain comprehension of how overtourism is conceptualized in the literature including the linkage to tourism capacity, tourism impacts and residents' perception of tourism. The conceptual model, depicted in Figure 4, offers a comprehensive framework that considers various influential factors on overtourism, encompassing the destination's physical environment, economy, residents, heritage, environment, and visitors. This model aims to share a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of overtourism and its impacts. The overtourism model acknowledges that each destination possesses its distinct "tourism market mix, volume, and growth," which sets the foundation for examining overtourism. Factors like high tourism density or a significant presence of Airbnb accommodations in the lodging sector are identified as triggers for overtourism within the model. These triggers contribute to the overall impacts on tourism, which are interdependent with factors such as tourism density, environmental pressures, and the efficacy of existing policies.
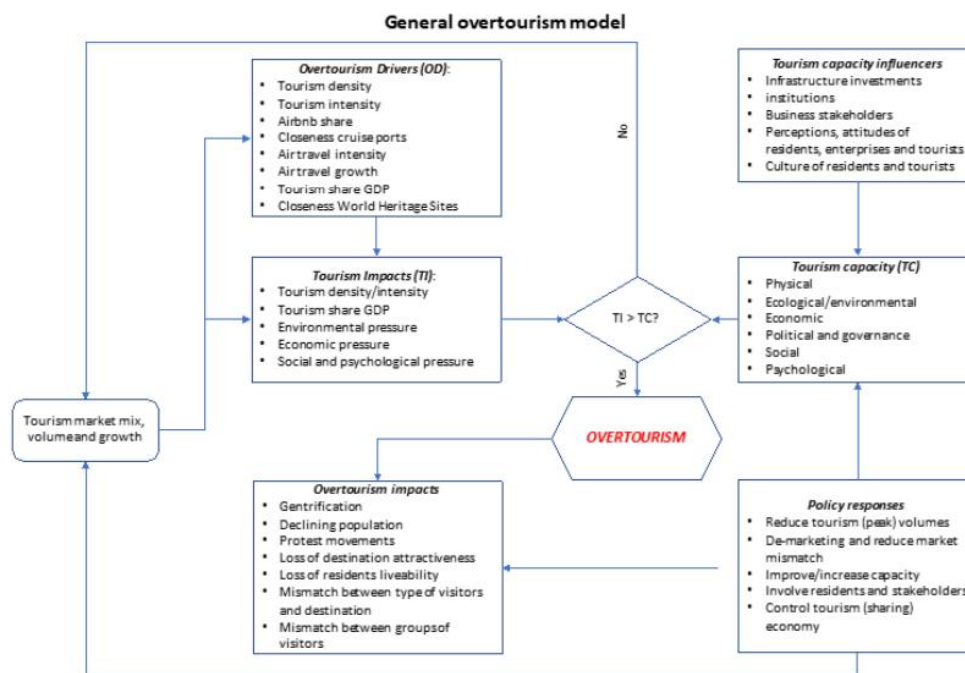
Figure 2: Conceptual model of overtourism by Peeters et al. (2018).

Significantly, the model recognizes that the thresholds for each impact domain are not universally consistent across destinations. These thresholds can vary due to factors like infrastructure investments and the evolving perceptions and attitudes of residents. Overtourism, if left unchecked, can result in undesirable outcomes such as gentrification and social or cultural conflicts between visitors and residents. To address these challenges, effective policy responses are crucial. The model underscores the importance of managing the implications of the tourism market in terms of volume and growth, as well as mitigating the multifaceted impacts associated with overtourism. This

involves considerations of the destination's carrying capacity and the implementation of strategies to minimize the adverse effects of overtourism.

2.1.2 Tourism capacity

Overtourism is often linked to the number of visitors to a particular destination (Peeters et al., 2018). However, it's important to distinguish between "crowding" and "density." Crowding is generally a psychological response to density and refers to feelings of having a lack of privacy or unwanted interactions (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1992). On the other hand, density refers to the number of people in each area, regardless of whether they feel crowded. Over-population in a particular area can place pressure on resources, infrastructure, and even residents (Gray, 2001). The World Travel & Tourism Council report (2017) notes that overcrowding can lead to problems ranging from alienated residents to overloaded infrastructure in both established and emerging destinations. This can affect countries, regions, cities, and individual sites such as parks, beaches, and museums (Peeters et al., 2018).

The rapid tourism growth is stimulating large numbers of debates on destinations' carrying capacity and the capacity to take care of the overpowering arrival of tourists in comparison to the number of residents. The topic of carrying capacity dates to earlier studies such as Van der Borg et al., in 1996 on the issues of tourism growth, carrying capacity and balance in destinations. The concept of carrying capacity in tourism is described as "the level of human activity an area can accommodate without the area deteriorating, the resident community being adversely affected, or the quality of visitors experience declining" (Middleton & Chamberlain, 1997). The carrying capacity approach tries to comprehend the competence of a tourist destination to endure the use of its resources (Peeters et al., 2018). The model by Mowforth & Munt (2003) categorized the carrying capacity into five measurements:

1. Ecological-environmental capacity refers to the highest stage of tourist development or recreational activity that can be maintained without damaging or compromising the environment further than its natural state.

2. Physical-facility capacity relates to the maximum level of tourist development or recreational activity that can be accommodated without saturating facilities or causing physical deterioration of the environment through overuse by tourists or insufficient infrastructure.

3. Social-perceptual capacity is reached when residents no longer welcome tourists because they perceive that tourism is causing environmental degradation, damaging the local culture, or crowding them out of local activities.

4. Economic carrying capacity is the ability of a destination to absorb tourist activities without extracting other beneficial activities. This concept assumes that any capacity limit can be overcome at a cost - ecological, social, cultural, or even political.

5. Psychological capacity is the individual's ability to endure overcrowding. This capacity is surpassed when residents and tourists no longer feel comfortable in the destination area due to elements such as residents' perceived need to adapt their habits, perceived negative attitudes of locals or other tourists, crowding of the area, or deterioration of the physical environment.

Mowforth & Munt (2003) further discusses that it's important to understand that the carrying capacity measurements depend on the context of the situation being measured and that this includes the values of those providing the conditions for the measurement. This indicates that destinations will have various capacities when it comes to the balance of diverse categories of carrying capacity as well as within these categories (Williams, 2009).

2.1.3 Impacts of tourism

The literature discusses that tourism generates positive and negative impacts that are outlined in diverse data by governments, businesses, and industry organizations. These impacts are divided into three main categories: environmental, economic and social (Westcott & Anderson, 2021). Peeters et al, (2018) research based on 41 case studies in destinations around Europe, identifies the main impacts of tourism in table 1 below.

Table 1: Impacts of tourism (Peeters et al. 2018).

Impact	*Processes*	*Impacts*
		Environmental
Pollution	Increasing usage of natural resources (land, water, and energy)	Strong and noticeable contribution to pollution of water, land, air and noise and/or solid waste disposal problems
Infrastructure	Increasing (sometimes sudden) demand for and usage of (tourism-directed) infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities	Tourism-generated investments in tourism specific infrastructure impair the investments in infrastructure needed by residents and the wider destination community
Visual	(Construction of) tourism infrastructure like airports, cruise ports and hotels disturb natural or cultural landscapes	Visual (aesthetic) pollution of natural or cultural landscapes
Congestion	Tourists' concentration on and in a limited number of routes, activities and facilities. Tourists tend to go to move over a limited number routes, causing congestion on these routes	Overcrowding of infrastructure (congestion), facilities and at (commercial) activities
Damage	Increased visitation of natural, historical, and architectural sites	Damage to natural, historical and architectural sites
Overcrowding	High numbers of tourists at natural, historical, and architectural sites	Overcrowding at natural, historical, and architectural sites
		Economic
Inflation	Increasing demand for certain specific tourism goods and services and production factors (intermediaries, land, capital, labour, real estate (gentrification) causing increased prices and disappearance of supply for inhabitants	Inflation of prices and reduction of the availability of certain goods, services, and factors of production aimed at inhabitants and for other sectors and functions (industry, agriculture, housing, etc.).
Economic dependence on tourism	Seasonal changes in tourist visitation and/or change in forms	Economic dependence on tourism, including being strongly impacted

	and types of jobs created/demanded	by seasonality and the degradation of other sectors/types of employment
Infrastructure cost	Increasing (sometimes sudden) demand for (tourism-directed) infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities	Reduction of the quality and increase in the maintenance cost for infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities specifically directed at inhabitants
Accessibility	Overcrowding leading to a reduction of accessibility of infrastructure, sites and facilities	Reduced accessibility of infrastructure, sites and facilities for both residents and visitors, inhibiting the regular performance of activities of both residents and visitors may not be able to reach for instance shops or work in their daily local travel
Destination Image	Increasing awareness of non-residents at the destination, possibly leading to negative visitor experiences	Degradation of destination image as perceived by visitors
		Social
Degradation of infrastructure	Increasing demand for (tourismdirected) infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities (including gentrification)	Degradation of infrastructure, facilities and (commercial) activities specifically directed at residents
Touristification of residential areas	Tourism accommodation and services spreads into residential areas, such as through Airbnb	The character of residential areas changes in such a way that they become less suitable for residents
Marginalization of residents	Increasing number of visitors vs. Residents	Marginalisation of resident population (excessively high number of tourists per resident)
Hostility	Increasing number of visitors vs. residents differing from the population in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, wealth, and political, social, religious and/or moral values	High possibility of misunderstanding, leading to varying degrees of host/visitor hostility (conflicts, protests, etc.), more pronounced with higher 'exotic' visitor shares
Criminality	Some forms of tourism tend to attract misbehaving and even criminal guests thus increasing crime at the destination	Degradation of (perceived) safety due to increased crime and violence and problems related to uncivilized behaviour, alcohol usage, prostitution, gambling and drug trafficking
Modification of recreational areas	Increasing visitation by non-residents of sites, events, and activities	Modification of events, activities, and architectural and historical sites to accommodate visitors and based on commercial interest
Loss of cultural identity	Changes in the structure, values and behaviour of resident population (incl. family structures and consumption patterns)	Relinquishment/weakening of cultural traditions, values and moral standards leading to a loss of community spirit and pride and a loss of cultural identity

2.1.4 Residents' perception of tourism

Establishing 'the right number' of tourists that is considered sustainable is argued by researchers to be complex and has even been questioned as possible (Żemła, 2020). Evaluating overtourism is not apparent, some measures try to comprehend overtourism in an objective approach such as tourism intensity which is tourists per resident or tourism density which relates to tourists per square kilometer (Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1992). It is further debated that instead of utilizing objective numbers to gain an understanding of the sustainable number of visitors to destinations, it is recommended to use regular surveys of residents' or tourist's perceptions (Veríssimo et al., 2020).

In destinations with rapid tourism growth residents are often left feeling saturated and protest for a reduction in tourism. Previous research indicates that resident's perceptions on the impacts of overtourism impose resident's quality of life (Pechlaner et al., 2019), their position on future tourism development and their hospitable manner toward visitors (Martín, Guaita, & Salinas, 2018). Tourism impacts and their relationship with residents' perceptions are further explained through various academic research models. The models by Butler (2006) and Doxey (1975) focus on the adjustment in resident attitudes towards tourism over time. While other theories such as Ap and Crampton (1993) looked at the potential resident's strategies for responding to tourism impacts which include the four strategies: embracement, tolerance, adjustment, and withdrawal. The mentioned frameworks all recognize that the social impacts of tourism change through time as a reaction to the duration and extent of the exposure of residents to tourist development as well as the structural adjustments to such development (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). The theories recognize that the impacts, the residents' perceptions, and reactions toward tourism are not fixed. However, these frameworks vary in their concepts of the possible direction change may take place.

2.2 Sustainable tourism

The topic of sustainable tourism has been written about a lot in the last decade. Despite this, there is a lack of consensus regarding its definition, with various definitions being used in the context of tourism (Butler, 1999). The many explanations of the term drive everyone to use the phrase most applicable to them (Wheeller, 1993). The Brundtland Commission in Our Common Future (1987) served the original definition of sustainable development; "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This definition has been the point of diverse interpretations, it has become a process, a product, a form of ideology or a political catchphrase (Wall 1996).

The World Tourism Organization (2005) defines sustainable development as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". The organization further implies that sustainable tourism development management practices can be relevant to all types of destinations and all forms of tourism. To guarantee long-term sustainability three important dimensions of sustainability principles require to be in balance; environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development (UNWTO, 2005).

The model by Sanagustín Fons in figure 3 further describes these three dimensions. Sustainable tourism aims to meet the demands of present-day tourists and the tourism industry, without compromising the natural environment and opportunities for future generations. This entails achieving a balance between economic, social, aesthetic, and other factors related to tourism while upholding cultural integrity, preserving the environment, and conserving biological diversity and other essential life-support systems (Stanciulescu, 2004). To achieve sustainable tourism development, it is further necessary that all relevant stakeholders are participating while being

informed, constantly monitoring impacts and implementing the essential corrective measures when needed (Butler, 1999).
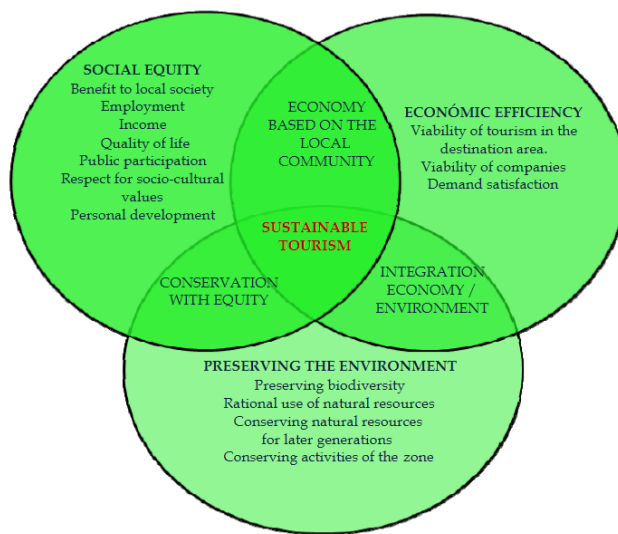

Figure 3: Sustainable Tourism Model (Fonds, 2011).

Environment: Ensuring the maintenance of essential ecological processes and conserving natural heritage and biodiversity. By doing so, the environment can be protected while still promoting tourism.

Economic: establish economically sustainable operations that can provide long-term benefits to all stakeholders. This includes ensuring fair distribution of socio-economic benefits such as stable employment, income-earning opportunities, and social services to host communities. By achieving these goals, sustainable tourism can also contribute to poverty alleviation efforts.

Socio-cultural: take into consideration the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities. This involves preserving their built and living cultural heritage, as well as traditional values. By doing so, sustainable tourism can contribute to intercultural understanding and tolerance.

2.3 Tourism measures

To address the impacts of tourism different measures have been proposed before the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2018 during the 7th UNWTO Global Summit on Urban Tourism, the UNWTO brought out a report with the intention to support the governance of the growing urban tourism streams and the impacts on the residents and cities. The report suggests eleven strategies with 68 measures that are aimed at supporting visitor growth.

The recommended strategies and measures by the UNTWO 2018 report to address visitor growth, stakeholder involvement and community benefits are as follows:

Strategy 1: Promote the dispersal of visitors within the city and beyond.

- Host more events in less visited parts of the city and in its surroundings.
- Develop and promote visitor attractions and facilities in less visited parts of the city and in its surroundings.

- Improve capacity of and time spent at attractions – Create joint identity of city and its surroundings.
- Implement travel card for unlimited local travel.
- Mark entire city as inner-city to stimulate visitation of less visited parts.

Strategy 2: Promote time-based dispersal of visitors.

- Promote experiences during off- peak months.
- Promote dynamic pricing.
- Stimulate events in off-peak months.
- Set timeslots for popular attractions and/or events aided by real-time monitoring.
- Use new technologies (apps and others) to stimulate dynamic time-based dispersal.

Strategy 3: Stimulate new visitor itineraries and attractions.

- Promote new itineraries at the city entry points and through the visitor's journey, including at tourist information centres.
- Offer combined discounts for new itineraries and attractions.
- Produce city guides and books highlighting hidden treasures.
- Create dynamic experiences and routes for niche visitors.
- Stimulate development of guided tours through less-visited parts of the city.
- Develop virtual reality applications to famous sites and attractions to complement onsite visits.

Strategy 4: Review and adapt regulation.

- Review opening times of visitor attractions.
- Review regulation on access for large groups to popular attractions
- Review regulation on traffic in busy parts of the city
- Ensure visitors use parking facilities at the edge of city.
- Create specific drop-off zones for coaches in suitable places.
- Create pedestrian-only zones.
- Review regulation and taxation on new platform tourism services
- Review regulation and taxation on hotels and other accommodation
- Define the carrying capacity of the city and of critical areas and attractions etc.
- Consider an operator's licence system to monitor all operators etc.
- Review regulation on access to certain areas of the city for tourist related activities.

Strategy 5: Enhance visitors' segmentation.

- Identify and target visitor segments with lower impact according to the specific city context and objectives.
- Target repeat-visitors
- Discourage visitation of the city of certain visitors' segments

Strategy 6: Ensure local communities benefit from tourism.

- Increase the level of employment in tourism and strive to create decent jobs.
- Promote the positive impacts of tourism, create awareness and knowledge of the sector amongst local communities.
- Engage local communities in the development of new tourism products.

- Conduct an analysis of supply-demand potential of the local communities and promote their integration in the tourism value chain.
- Improve quality of infrastructure and services considering residents and visitors
- Stimulate development of impoverished neighbourhoods through tourism

Strategy 7: Create city experiences that benefit both residents and visitors.

- Develop the city to fit with the residents' needs and desires and consider tourists as temporary residents.
- Develop tourism experiences and products that promote the engagement of residents and visitors.
- Integrate visitor facilities within local festivities and activities.
- Create and promote local city ambassadors.
- Promote art and culture initiatives such as street art to provide fresh perspectives on the city and expand visitation to new areas.
- Extend opening times of visitor attractions.

Strategy 8: Improve city infrastructure and facilities.

- Create a city-wide plan for a well-balanced, sustainable traffic management.
- Ensure that major routes are suitable for extensive tourism activity and that secondary routes are available at peak times.
- Improve urban cultural infrastructure.
- Improve directional signage, interpretation materials and notices.
- Make public transport better suited for visitors.
- Set up specific transport facilities for visitors during peak periods.
- Provide adequate public facilities.
- Create safe cycling routes and stimulate bicycle rentals.
- Set up specific safe and attractive walking routes.
- Ensure that routes are suitable for the physically impaired or elderly visitors in line with accessible tourism principles.
- Safeguard quality of cultural heritage and attractions
- Ensure cleaning regimes fit with tourism facilities and with peak times.

Strategy 9: Communicate with and engage local stakeholders.

- Ensure that a tourism management group (including all stakeholders) is set up and is regularly convened.
- Organize professional development programmes for partners etc.
- Organize local discussion platforms for residents.
- Conduct regular research among residents and other local stakeholders.
- Encourage locals to share interesting content about their city on social media.
- Communicate with residents about their own behaviour.
- Unite disjointed communities.

Strategy 10: Communicate with and engage visitors.

- Create awareness of tourism impact amongst visitors
- Educate visitors on local values, traditions and regulations.
- Provide adequate information about traffic restrictions, parking facilities, fees, shuttle bus services, etc.

Strategy 11: Set monitoring and response measures.

– Monitor key indicators such as seasonal fluctuations in demand, arrivals and expenditures, patterns of visitation to attractions, visitor segments, etc.
– Advance the use of big data and new technologies to monitor and evaluate tourism performance and impact.
– Create contingency plans for peak periods and emergency situations.

The proposed measures and practices aim to minimize the effects of tourism on the infrastructure, mobility and congestion, natural resources, and socio-cultural impacts (UNTWO, 2018). The key to addressing overtourism according to the UNTWO (2018) is governance. However, this is recognized as a complex issue where there is no one-size fits all solution to deal with overtourism. To achieve sustainable development, tourism should be integrated into a comprehensive strategy that encompasses the entire city. (Koens, 2018). It is essential that all stakeholders involved adapt to the planning which takes into consideration the capacity limits and aspects of each destination (Goodwin, 2019).

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter provides the theoretical framework that guides the research on stakeholder perceptions of tourism in Giethoorn before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Greggory's constructive theory of perception is employed to understand how stakeholders construct their perceptions and gain insights into their perspectives on the tourism situation, governance, and potential solutions. This theoretical lens allows us to delve into the cognitive processes that shape stakeholder perceptions, providing a deeper understanding of their viewpoints through a constructivist approach.

3.1 Greggory's constructive theory of perception

Perception, a fundamental cognitive process, enables us to gather information from the environment through our sense organs like the eye, ear, and nose. These organs are part of sensory systems that receive sensory inputs and transmit them to the brain (Spielman et al. 2020). Psychologists face the challenge of explaining how physical energy received by the sense organs forms the basis of perceptual experience. Sensory inputs are transformed into our perception of objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches (Démuth, 2013). A major theoretical debate revolves around the extent to which perception relies solely on stimulus information. While some argue for direct perceptual processes, others contend that perception depends on the perceiver's expectations, previous knowledge, and the interplay between stimulus and cognitive processes.

Gibson and Gregory presented divergent perspectives on the nature of perception. While Gibson (1972) advocated for the sufficiency of sensory input in perceiving reality without the need for interpretation, Gregory (1974) put forth an alternative theory. Richard Gregory's Constructivist Theory of Perception posits that sensory information alone cannot fully explain perception. According to Gregory, perception is an active and dynamic process that encompasses the generation of inferences and interpretations derived from prior knowledge, individual experiences, and contextual factors. Gregory's constructivist approach rejects the notion of perception as a passive reflection of sensory stimuli, instead emphasizing its role in constructing a mental model of reality that integrates both sensory input and cognitive inferences.

3.2 Top-down processing

In the context of Gregory's Constructivist Theory of Perception, top-down processing plays a crucial role in shaping our perceptual experiences. Top-down processing refers to the influence of higher-level cognitive processes, such as expectations, knowledge, and beliefs, on the interpretation and construction of perceptual stimuli (Gregory, 1974). It involves the active engagement of the perceiver's preexisting mental representations and concepts in guiding the perception of sensory information. Therefore, what we perceive is not a direct reflection of an objective truth, but rather a subjective interpretation influenced by our cognitive processes. According to Gregory, perception is not a passive process of directly registering and reflecting sensory input but rather an active and constructive process driven by top-down influences. He argued that our prior knowledge and expectations about the world significantly impact how we interpret and make sense of sensory information.

Understanding the role of top-down processing in Gregory's Constructivist Theory of Perception provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of human perception. It emphasizes the importance of cognitive factors in shaping our perceptual experiences and highlights the interactive nature of perception, wherein sensory input and cognitive processes continually inform and influence each other (Gregory, 1974). The role of interpretation in perception explains why people

can perceive the same sensory information differently or why we perceive the same thing differently depending on our motivation or emotions.
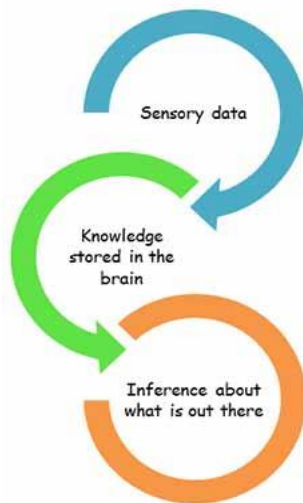

Figure 4: Gregory's Top down processing theory (1970).

3.3 Perceptual hypothesis

In Gregory's Constructive Theory of Perception, the concept of perceptual hypothesis assumes a significant role in understanding how individuals form their perceptions. According to this theory, perception involves the generation of hypotheses or predictions about the nature of the sensory information received from the environment (Gregory, 1974). In the process of perception, the individual's brain actively generates hypotheses based on prior knowledge, expectations, and contextual cues. These hypotheses serve as tentative explanations or interpretations of the sensory input. The brain then compares these hypotheses with the incoming sensory information to determine the best fit (Démuth, 2013).

Perceptual hypotheses allow individuals to make sense of ambiguous or incomplete sensory data by filling in missing information and resolving ambiguities. They guide attention, focus, and perceptual judgments (Gregory, 1974). Prior experiences and expectations heavily influence the hypotheses generated, shaping how individuals interpret and perceive the world around them (Gregory, 1974). It is important to note that perceptual hypotheses are not fixed or rigid but are continually updated and revised based on new information. If the sensory data does not align with the initial hypotheses, individuals may adjust their perceptual interpretations accordingly (Démuth, 2013). The concept of perceptual hypothesis within Gregory's Constructive Theory highlights the active nature of perception and the role of cognitive processes in shaping individuals' perceptual experiences. It emphasizes that perceptions are not direct reflections of the sensory input alone but are constructed through a dynamic interplay between top-down influences, such as expectations and knowledge, and bottom-up sensory information (Gregory, 1974).

3.4 Visual illusions

In Greggory's Constructive Theory of Perception, the phenomenon of visual illusions holds particular interest as it sheds light on how our perceptual system actively constructs our visual experiences. Visual illusions refer to situations where our perception of an object or scene deviates from the objective reality of the sensory input (Mcleod, 2023). According to Greggory's theory, visual illusions arise due to the interaction between bottom-up sensory information and top-down cognitive processes. Our brain combines sensory input with our prior knowledge, expectations, and contextual

cues to generate a perceptual interpretation of the visual scene (Gregory, 1974). In some cases, these cognitive processes can introduce biases or distortions, leading to the experience of a visual illusion.

One prominent example is the Müller-Lyer illusion, where two lines of the same length appear different due to the presence of arrow-like fins pointing inwards or outwards at the line ends. Despite the objective lengths being identical, our perceptual system interprets the lines as different lengths (Démuth, 2013). This illusion highlights how our prior knowledge and expectations about the depth and shape of objects influence our perception. Another well-known example is the Ponzo illusion, where two identically sized horizontal lines placed between converging lines appear to be of different lengths. The converging lines create a depth illusion, causing us to perceive the top line as longer than the bottom line (Mcleod, 2023). This illusion demonstrates how our perceptual system takes into account depth cues to interpret the relative size of objects.

In Greggory's Constructive Theory, visual illusions serve as compelling evidence that perception involves an active construction of our visual experiences. The illusions illustrate how our brain combines sensory information with internal cognitive processes to generate a perceptual interpretation that may deviate from the objective reality of the stimulus (Gregory, 1974). However, the idea that perception involves top-down processing and Gregory's discussion of visual illusions is argued against. One criticism directed towards constructivists is that they may have underestimated the abundance of sensory information available to us in the real world compared to controlled laboratory settings (Mcleod, 2023). They often use size constancy as an example, explaining how individuals perceive an object's size despite changes in the retinal image. However, real-world perception involves a variety of sensory inputs, such as other objects, backgrounds, the distant horizon, and movement (Démuth, 2013). Considering this broader context is essential for a comprehensive understanding of perception and how individuals interact with their environment.

3.5 Operationalization of theory

Through the lens of Greggory's Constructive Theory of Perception, the analysis of the stakeholders perceiption on Giethoorn's tourism is expected to uncover the inherent subjectivity of stakeholder viewpoints. Diverse stakeholders are likely to hold unique perceptions shaped by past experiences, beliefs, and the social context. This theoretical framework emphasizes personalized perceptions formed by individual backgrounds and interactions, challenging the idea of fixed perspectives.

The research intends to explore how stakeholders' past experiences significantly influence their perceptions, manifesting in the positive and negative outcomes of tourism. The variations in these encounters, ranging from residents to entrepreneurs, will contribute to unique perspectives, showcasing the diverse range of experiences within the community. Furthermore, stakeholders' beliefs are expected to introduce complexity, impacting their perspectives on tourism. The social context, including the presence of international tourists, might further amplify these varying viewpoints. Regarding governance, the study anticipates that stakeholders' beliefs about the efficacy of regulations will play a pivotal role in shaping their perceptions of government actions. The social context within Giethoorn is expected to leave an imprint on stakeholder perceptions, potentially influencing their attitudes towards potential solutions.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, the methodological approaches employed in the research of this thesis are explained. It begins by providing an overview of the research design as a qualitative case study. It then introduces the case study of Giethoorn. An explanation of the used data collection methods is provided, followed by a description of the process of data analysis. Finally, the chapter addresses the validity and reliability of the research.

4.1 Research design

In the research design of the thesis, Greggory's Constructivist Theory of Perception is utilized to inform the selection of research methods and instruments. This theory emphasizes the active and constructive nature of perception, highlighting the role of cognitive factors in shaping individuals' interpretations of overtourism. The qualitative research approach is chosen for this thesis due to its suitability in exploring and understanding the complex and subjective nature of tourism measures and impacts. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of individual perspectives, beliefs, and meanings associated with tourism, providing a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Tenny and Brannan, 2022). This approach further allows for flexibility and adaptability in data collection and analysis, allowing for the emergence of unexpected insights and themes. Moreover, qualitative research is well-suited for exploring diverse stakeholder perspectives, including local residents, tourists, and industry professionals. It allows for a comprehensive exploration of their perceptions, attitudes, and experiences, providing valuable insights into the multi-faceted impacts of tourism (Kalu & Bwalya, 2017). This approach is particularly relevant in the study of tourism, as it recognizes the significance of social, cultural, and environmental dimensions that quantitative approaches may overlook.

This research utilized a case study approach to examine the stakeholders perceptions before, during and after the Covid-19 era. By selecting specific examples, the case study method allowed for a focused investigation within a broader research field (Yin, 2003). Given the limited knowledge of whether the pandemic has influenced stakeholder perceptions, this design proved valuable in gaining insights. Additionally, conducting a case study was a practical choice, ensuring the research remained manageable within the constraints of time and resources available.

4.2 Case study Giethoorn

The case study on which this research will focus is Giethoorn. Giethoorn is a Dutch village located in the Overijssel province of the Netherlands. It's part of the government of Steenwijkerland and has 2600 inhabitants (Borgs, 2022). Known as the "Venice of the Netherlands" Giethoorn has gained international attention for its distinctive canal system and picture square houses.

Giethoorn was chosen as a case study for this research due to its extensive media coverage in the Netherlands and on social media platforms, highlighting concerns related to overtourism. The village's unique characteristics, including its small population of 2600 inhabitants and absence of car roads, present an intriguing context to investigate the impacts of a high influx of visitors. Secondly, considering practical constraints such as budget and travel time, Giethoorn emerged as the optimal choice for data collection within the Netherlands. By selecting Giethoorn as the research site, the study can be carried out effectively, making optimal use of available resources and ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the research topic without unnecessary financial or logistical burdens.

Another aspect is choosing Giethoorn offers the possibility to communicate directly with the local stakeholders in Dutch, eliminating the need for a translator and facilitating deeper engagement with the community. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic has prompted Giethoorn to propose new

plans aimed at addressing overtourism, with a renewed emphasis on promoting sustainable cultural and nature-based tourism initiatives (Borgs, 2022). As an observer who had the opportunity to visit Giethoorn in 2019, before the pandemic, it is particularly intriguing to examine the current state of tourism in the village.

Figure 5: Information brochure with map of Giethoorn (Arendshorst, 2020).

4.3 Data collection

For the method of data collection, this study is built upon the examination of interviews to derive insightful perspectives and experiences of Giethoorn's stakeholders. Whenever required for contextualization, I have also drawn upon around fifteen reports from the Giethoorn municipality and ten news articles. However, it's important to note that these materials do not form the foundational basis of the analysis.

4.3.1 Interviews

From May 2023 to June 2023, a total of 9 interviews were conducted, each with a duration ranging from 30 to 60 minutes on average. The majority of these interviews took place face-to-face, allowing for more personal interaction and potentially fostering a greater willingness among interviewees to share sensitive information (Jennings, 2005). However, in certain cases, stakeholders expressed a preference for conducting the interview online. It is important to note that all interviewees provided consent for the interviews to be recorded, ensuring accurate documentation of the discussions.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured, allowing for a guided conversation that focused on the research subject, while also providing stakeholders with the opportunity to share any additional information they deemed relevant (Bernard, 2017). To ensure the reliability of the collected qualitative data, an interview guide was developed before the commencement of the interviews. This guide consisted of four main themes, each accompanied by 13 open-ended questions, as well as an introduction and closing section. The same questions and themes were used for each interviewee, promoting consistency and comparability (Boeije, 2010).

The four main themes explored in the interview guide were background information, overtourism, the perception of residents regarding tourism, and sustainable tourism measures. For ease of reference, the complete interview guide can be found in Appendix A. Given that Dutch is the language spoken by the people of Giethoorn, the interviews were conducted in Dutch and the interview guide was also written in Dutch.

To capture the diverse perspectives on tourism in Giethoorn, a total of 9 interviews were conducted with stakeholders representing the private, public, and civil sectors. Table 2 provides an overview of the interviewed stakeholders. To ensure a comprehensive selection of participants, a list of potential interviewees was compiled and contacted with a request for an interview. This approach is known as purposive sampling, where stakeholders with specific characteristics are intentionally chosen (Boeije, 2010). Moreover, interviewees were also asked to recommend other relevant stakeholders, leading to the adoption of a snowball sampling technique (Boeije, 2010). This approach proved fruitful as it facilitated the inclusion of additional insightful participants, and in some instances, stakeholders even proactively reached out on my behalf to potential interviewees.

Table 2: Overview of interview stakeholders

Interview	Stakeholder	Category
1	Hotel owner	Entrepreneur
2	Boat Rental owner	Entrepreneur
3	Steenwijkerland Municipality	Government
4	Hotel owner	Entrepreneur
5	Marketeer	Media
6	Museum worker	Resident
7	Hostel owner	Entrepreneur
8	Researcher	Government agency
9	Museum owner	Entrepreneur

4.4 Data analysis

The initial phase of data analysis involved transcribing the interview recordings. Transcription was performed using a non-verbatim approach, which means that only the crucial elements of speech were included in the transcriptions. To enhance the readability of the transcripts, speech features like stutters or filler words such as 'mh' were omitted. Since the interviews were conducted in Dutch, the transcriptions were initially done in Dutch as well. However, the quotes were translated into English.

The second step in the data analysis process involves coding, which entails organizing and categorizing qualitative data (Medelyan, 2023). Coding is a method used to identify patterns within large amounts of data, enabling a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Boeije, 2010). In order to cluster data segments that are related and establish connections between them, codes were assigned to different segments of the data. This process aimed to facilitate the comprehensibility of data categorization. The codes were developed and assigned manually by thoroughly reading through the data. While manual coding can streamline the overall analysis process, it is also a time-consuming task (Bodine, 2021). This research employed a combination of deductive and inductive coding approaches. Initially, deductive coding was utilized, starting with a predefined list of codes. However, as the analysis progressed, inductive coding was employed to modify and expand the existing code list (Bodine, 2021). The manual coding process resulted in nine main categories, which are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 3 Main coding categories

Category 1	Culture, heritage and community
Category 2	Negative impacts Giethoorn tourism
Category 3	Benefits Giethoorn tourism
Category 4	Tourist behaviour

Category 5	Change in tourism trends after COVID-19
Category 6	Governance
Category 7	Implementation and effectiveness of measures
Category 8	Tourism challenges
Category 9	Possible future tourism measures and regulations

The final phase encompassed the interpretation and synthesis of the analyzed data. To achieve this, a thematic analysis approach was employed to identify recurring themes and patterns by exploring the connections both within and between codes and themes. By delving into these relationships, a comprehensive understanding of the tourism situation in Giethoorn was developed. The process involved constructing a thematic overview, which served as a visual representation of the diverse themes and elements identified throughout the analysis. Careful attention was given to crafting detailed and explanatory interpretations of the data in the results section, aiming to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions. These interpretations shed light on the various factors that contribute to the tourism landscape in Giethoorn and revealed the intricate interplay among them. Furthermore, the results section was enriched with relevant quotes extracted from the interviews. These direct quotes added authenticity and depth to the findings by capturing the personal experiences and perspectives shared by the interviewees (Sandelowski, 1994). By incorporating these quotes, the study achieved a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnected elements that shape the tourism landscape in Giethoorn. The combination of interpretations and quotes provided a clear and insightful depiction of the research findings.

4.5 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are recognized as two key indicators of the quality and accuracy of qualitative research (Boeije, 2009). Reliability in research refers to the extent to which the methods and procedures used yield consistent and stable results. Enhancing reliability is crucial as it ensures that the findings are dependable and can be replicated by other researchers, strengthening the validity of the study. According to Boeije (2010), if a phenomenon is measured repeatedly using the same research methods, the outcomes should remain the same, assuming the phenomenon itself has not changed. However, in qualitative research, achieving the same level of replication becomes challenging due to the absence of standardized data collection methods (Taherdoost, 2021). In order to enhance the reliability of the research, a semi-structured interview guide was utilized for all ten interviews to ensure consistency in addressing the same topics and questions. The researcher also maintained a neutral tone while prompting questions to different interviewees, potentially contributing to improved reliability. Additionally, all interviews were recorded with the interviewees' consent and subsequently transcribed and coded using a consistent method. It is important to note that when replicating an interview, variations in the interpretation of questions may result in different conversational directions, consequently leading to diverse outcomes. Furthermore, to enhance reliability, transparency is emphasized, and it is acknowledged that personal experiences and biases of the researcher may influence the interpretation of data, as these factors vary among individuals (Pannucci & Wilkins, 2010).

Validity in qualitative research encompasses the degree to which the findings accurately portray the phenomenon under investigation (Boeije, 2010). External validity, also known as generalizability, pertains to the extent to which the findings of a study can be generalized or applied to populations, settings, or conditions beyond the specific context of the research (Boeije, 2010). It focuses on the ability to draw broader conclusions and make meaningful connections to other contexts or groups. However, it is important to note that the limited sample size of 9 interviewees in this research

compared to the population of Giethoorn, which is 2600, may have resulted in capturing only a narrow range of experiences and perspectives. Internal validity in qualitative research pertains to the degree to which a study accurately captures and establishes a meaningful relationship between the variables under investigation within the specific research context (Boeije, 2010). Maintaining a high level of internal validity is crucial as it ensures the integrity and credibility of the research findings. To enhance the internal validity of this study, several measures have been taken. As the researcher, who holds an outsider position in the Giethoorn tourism sector, personal experiences and feelings have been defined and minimized the use of probing words to reduce biases and avoid influencing participants' perspectives. However, it is important to acknowledge that this approach could potentially result in findings that may not fully represent the complexity of the data. Furthermore, the research procedures and decisions have been thoroughly documented in a systematic and transparent manner, facilitating accountability and transparency. This documentation increases the confidence in the internal validity of the research (Boeije, 2010). However, it is worth noting that the internal validity of the study could be compromised since triangulation, the use of multiple data collection resources to demonstrate consistency, has not been employed.

4.6 Limitations

To conclude, there are limitations in this thesis that should be noted. First, the sample size of 9 interviewees, while informative, may not fully encapsulate the diversity of perspectives within Giethoorn's population of 2600. Consequently, the external validity or generalizability of the findings beyond Giethoorn could be constrained. Additionally, despite efforts to maintain a neutral stance, my own researcher biases and experiences could unintentionally influence the interpretation of the data, potentially affecting the study's internal validity. The absence of triangulation, a technique involving multiple data sources to establish consistency, might limit the overall credibility of the study.

Another limitation arises from the limited time available for this master's thesis research. A more extensive study could have been conducted if a greater timeframe had been available, potentially leading to more comprehensive research outcomes. This could have entailed engaging with a larger number of stakeholders, thereby enriching the depth and breadth of the findings. Lastly, the study's contextual focus on a specific time period and location may restrict the transferability of findings to other temporal or geographical settings.

5. Results

This chapter presents the primary outcomes of the research, derived from in-depth interviews conducted with diverse stakeholders of Giethoorn. The focus of this chapter is to discuss the stakeholders' perceptions regarding three key aspects: the tourism situation, governance, and potential solutions in Giethoorn. Each aspect will be analysed across different time periods, encompassing the periods before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, an examination of how these findings relate to perception theory will be included for each category.

5.1 Perception of tourism situation in Giethoorn

5.1.1 Before the COVID-19 pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Giethoorn attracted numerous visitors from around the world each year. The interviewees revealed that there were both positive and negative aspects to tourism in Giethoorn prior to the outbreak. Tourism brought about improvements in the city's liveability, such as extended opening hours for supermarkets, enhanced public transport, and increased job opportunities. As an entrepreneur from Giethoorn stated, "If tourism wasn't here, then the bus line would have stopped driving 14 years ago; it's purely because of tourism that it still operates today."

According to the actor representing the Steenwijkerland government, the number of international tourists had been steadily increasing in the years preceding the pandemic. Many international tourists who visited Giethoorn did not venture beyond the village and only stayed for a short visit. Large groups of Asian visitors, arriving by bus, would be unloaded in the village to wander around. These bus tourists were notorious for spending very little and causing disturbances. While the government was pleased with the influx of visitors to Giethoorn, they desired for them to stay in the area longer, as it would benefit the local economy and entrepreneurs. However, the interviewees revealed that around 30 days a year, tourism in Giethoorn reached its peak, particularly during the summer months and weekends with pleasant weather. During this period, the interviewees experienced a significant impact on the liveability of the area, with diverse consequences.

The actor representing the government explains that around 2015 the government began receiving reports of nuisance caused by international tourists in Giethoorn. The interviewees highlighted common issues such as damage to boats caused by inexperienced tourists colliding with other vessels or the sides of the waterways. Another problem mentioned was the inadequate number of trash bins in the city center, as cars are not permitted in this area. This led tourists to leave their trash in various places, causing inconvenience for the residents. An entrepreneur from Giethoorn stated, "Garbage is also a thing, for example, we find our mailbox completely full of garbage."

The majority of interviewees emphasized that parking nuisance was a significant problem in Giethoorn, as tourists occupied parking spaces in the city center. An inhabitant of Giethoorn mentioned, "They drive down our street and park in our parking lot. If you are away for a while, to do groceries by car, you can no longer find a parking spot." The interviewees expressed that the parking issues in Giethoorn also impeded the access of emergency services. Due to the narrow roads in the center, which are mostly inaccessible by car, the influx of tourists and vehicles obstructed emergency responders' ability to reach their destinations promptly.

As a researcher from Giethoorn pointed out, "The parking nuisance leads to issues with the flow of emergency services. So the fire brigade and the police can't get through." Another interviewee, an entrepreneur from Giethoorn, added, "Suppose a fire breaks out or someone has a heart attack or

needs help, and there is such a large crowd. Then the emergency services may not be able to arrive on time at the location of the incident."

The severity of these effects depended on the proximity to the city center. Those residing in the heart of Giethoorn experienced greater tourism pressure. As an entrepreneur from Giethoorn explained, "Because tourists are literally walking in front of your house, you can't reach your house by car, and emergency services can't pass through the stream of tourists to reach you. Even when you go shopping, you have to navigate through the tourists. For these people, the urgency is much higher."

Although the majority of interviewees, including entrepreneurs, residents, and the government actor, expressed that many inhabitants of Giethoorn did not have issues with the overall tourism situation, the government acknowledged that those born in Giethoorn were aware of its status as a tourist destination and the resulting busyness. Many locals were entrepreneurs who earned their livelihood from the tourism industry. An entrepreneur from Giethoorn remarked, "Residents know that tourists come to Giethoorn, and they were proud of that. Many people who move from Amsterdam or the Randstad say, 'I'm coming to Giethoorn for some peace and quiet.' Well, then, you shouldn't come to Giethoorn."

The interviewees emphasized that residents who grew up in Giethoorn rarely had problems with tourists. They understood the dynamics of hosting international guests, which made their experience of tourism different from that of someone who moved to Giethoorn seeking tranquility. As another entrepreneur and resident of Giethoorn stated, "As long as you know as a resident, you don't want to sail through the busiest part of Giethoorn by boat during the busiest time of the year and then at the busiest time of the day. Then the tourist activity won't bother you as much."

For most interviewees, the tourism situation in Giethoorn was manageable, with only 30 days of extreme busyness each year. However, one interviewee, responsible for researching and analyzing crowding situations in Giethoorn, argued that even with only 30 busy days, the support for the area was inadequate compared to the number of visitors, indicating signs of overtourism. This interviewee emphasized the disruption caused by excessive crowds, citing concerns about safety and the failure of the village to meet the standard norms in the Netherlands. Furthermore, during the busiest days of the year when all the terraces were full and all the boats had been rented, there would be nothing more to offer additional visitors. The interviewee posited that entrepreneurs would not appreciate a situation where more visitors arrived without the ability to provide them with adequate hospitality.

5.1.2 During the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviewees share a common perspective on the situation in Giethoorn. Initially, international tourists, including frequent Asian visitors, ceased their visits to the village, and bus tours with large groups of visitors also came to a halt. However, there was a rise in the number of Dutch visitors. The Steenwijkerland government actor explains this phenomenon by stating, "That was filled in by people from just nearby. The Dutch who could not continue to far destinations, now thought hey we can go to Giethoorn." The increase in Dutch visitors resulted in a similar number of days where Giethoorn experienced overwhelming crowds and a noticeable impact on the liveability of the village, even without international tourists. The Dutch tourists expressed surprise at the bustling nature of Giethoorn during the pandemic. An entrepreneur interviewed in the accommodation sector shares, "We regularly received people who then came to stay with us during the COVID period and then said yes, we thought we are going to Giethoorn now because it is quiet now. They had not expected it to be so busy, but the whole of the Netherlands came here."

The entrepreneurs in Giethoorn considered themselves fortunate as the village remained busy even amid the pandemic. However, the impact of COVID-19 measures varied across sectors. Boat rentals, for instance, indicate that they were least affected by the pandemic rules, as individuals were still allowed to sail with their own family. One entrepreneur states, "At one point, in the Netherlands, you were of course no longer allowed to do anything, but you were still allowed to sail in a boat with your own families. So we've been very busy in the corona time. All entrepreneurs. That was just luck for us entrepreneurs." On the other hand, entrepreneurs in the accommodations sector faced challenges. There was a great deal of uncertainty as Dutch visitors would often book hotels at the last minute due to the frequently changing COVID-19 measures. Entrepreneurs had to make last-minute decisions, adjust their plans, and adapt to maintaining distance from guests. One interviewee, an entrepreneur in the accommodations sector, describes the difficulties they faced with implementing social distancing measures, stating, "That was not possible, so we found that difficult. It was neither a good fit for us nor a good fit for our destination, although there were still many things to do."

5.1.3 After the COVID-19 pandemic

Looking at the period from the post-COVID-19 period until the present, the interviewees provided similar accounts but also expressed differing perspectives on certain aspects. All interviewees acknowledged that international tourists have started to return, but their numbers are still significantly lower compared to pre-pandemic levels. This includes Chinese visitors, who used to constitute a large portion of tourists in Giethoorn but are currently scarce. The interviewees cited various reasons for the lack of international tourists after the pandemic. An entrepreneur from Giethoorn remarked, "Looking back, we had many Chinese guests, but they are still not here. Even in other distant destinations, everyone remains cautious. There are also fewer advance bookings, as they consider the consequences of the past." The Steenwijkerland government actor mentioned conversations with other destinations in the Netherlands, such as Amsterdam and Volendam, which reported an increase in Chinese tourists. Therefore, the government anticipates that international tourists, including Chinese visitors, will eventually return to Giethoorn. A research sector interviewee indicated that these visitors are expected to become more feasible again starting from the following year.

In the absence of international tourists, the gap in Giethoorn's visitor numbers has been filled by domestic tourists and those from neighboring regions. This trend was observed during COVID-19 and continues after the pandemic, as revealed in the interviews. A marketer stated, "You can see that the image of the Netherlands has changed, resulting in an increased number of visitors. I believe the image has improved mainly because people have discovered their own country more." Another noteworthy aspect frequently mentioned by the interviewees is the decrease in day tourism. Although bus tours have resumed in Giethoorn, the group sizes have significantly reduced from 50 people prior to COVID-19 to now only accommodate around ten people. The interviewees explained that large bus tours have not fully returned because they are typically planned years in advance.

This situation is similar to group travels to Giethoorn, as reported by the interviewees. The large group visits have not yet resumed, which the interviewees consider logical given the lengthy planning process required for group trips. A research sector interviewee elaborated, "It takes at least two years from the initial idea to planning and implementation of a group trip. You need time to prepare, advertise, gather the group, make decisions, and then carry out the trip." Furthermore, the shift towards more private boat tours has been observed in the boat rental sector. According to an entrepreneur in boat rentals, this preference for traveling with a small group has led to an increase in demand for private boat tours. Another entrepreneur mentioned that the decrease in day tourism

can be seen in passing rental boats, which are not fully occupied. They stated, "Coincidentally, I was discussing this with someone from the boat rental today. He confirmed that there are indeed fewer day trippers now compared to before COVID-19."

Moreover, the interviewees noted an increase in overnight stays in Giethoorn compared to pre-pandemic times. This is attributed to recent developments that have expanded the availability of overnight accommodations. However, the Steenwijkerland government actor expressed concerns about the limited capacity for overnight visitors in Giethoorn, raising questions about the implications if Chinese tourists were to return in large numbers.

The interviewees offered diverse perspectives on the level of busyness in Giethoorn after the COVID-19 pandemic. Most interviewees agreed that it feels just as busy or even busier than before. An entrepreneur in the accommodation industry shared, "that it is our experience that I am now really back at the old level. In fact, we had the best April ever last April, better than before covid in terms of revenue." Another interviewee from the cultural sector stated, "I dare say almost as many tourists are coming again as they were before COVID. Maybe even more. It has become more intense again because, of course, they had to sit inside for a while due to COVID. Now it erupts again with doubled force because the people who crave a vacation." However, one interviewee in the boat rental sector had a different perspective, suggesting that although it might be busy on the water, it feels less crowded overall compared to the pre-pandemic period when it used to be busy both on the water and outside of it. According to this interviewee, "now it's not too bad compared to before the corona. I still think it's less, it feels less crowded."

Several interviewees from diverse backgrounds highlighted unique aspects related to the post-pandemic period, which were mentioned infrequently. For instance, one interviewee from the accommodation sector observed a change in travel behavior among visitors to Giethoorn compared to the pre-COVID-19 era. They noted a decrease in the use of public transport for traveling to Giethoorn. The interviewee attributed this shift to public transportation strikes and the high cost of train tickets. It is worth noting that this perspective was only shared by a single interviewee.

Two interviewees expressed perspectives that differed from the majority of the other interviews. A marketing sector interviewee noted a shift in the visitor groups currently coming to Giethoorn and highlighted an increased emphasis on discussing societal themes. These themes include conversations about sustainability, the well-being of residents and visitors, and achieving a balanced approach. The interviewee observed that such discussions have become more prominent compared to the pre-pandemic period. Similarly, an interviewee from the accommodation sector mentioned that post-pandemic visitors no longer view Giethoorn solely as a travel destination, but also seek meaningful experiences during their stay. The interviewee eloquently described this shift, saying, "People have taken the time to experience that when you're cooped up somewhere it's annoying, but as soon as you come out, you realize how many beautiful things there are." They further emphasized that the sudden inability to travel had made people appreciate the value of exploring new places and treasuring the experience.

The previously mentioned elements concerning the post-COVID-19 tourism situation and mindset were met with disagreement from other interviewees, who indicated a lack of substantial differences in mentality. One interviewee held a distinct opinion, suggesting that the current approach still perpetuates certain practices that are known to be unnecessary or could be approached differently. The driving force behind this continuation is primarily attributed to short-term profit considerations, reminiscent of the pre-pandemic era. The interviewee emphasized their viewpoint, stating, "I do believe that tourism should place more emphasis on sustainability.

However, I also acknowledge that ultimately, regulations will need to be imposed by legislation since the majority of the target audience lacks intrinsic motivation."

5.1.4 Theory of Perception analysis of perceived tourism situation

Analysing the tourism situation in Giethoorn through Greggory's Constructivist Theory of Perception provides valuable insights into the subjective nature of stakeholders' perceptions. Overall, the diverse stakeholders in Giethoorn perceive the tourism situation through their own subjective lenses, which are shaped by their past experiences, beliefs, and social context. Greggory's Constructivist Theory of Perception sees perceptions as not fixed or objective, but rather constructed by individuals based on their unique backgrounds and interactions with the tourism environment.

When it comes to past experiences, the results highlight how residents and entrepreneurs in Giethoorn have experienced the positive and negative impacts of tourism over the years. Their past experiences of increased job opportunities, extended opening hours, and economic benefits shape their perceptions of tourism. For instance, residents who have grown up in Giethoorn and have a deep understanding of the dynamics of hosting tourists may have different perceptions compared to those who moved to the village seeking tranquility. The results further mention different beliefs held by stakeholders in Giethoorn. For example, entrepreneurs express pride in the tourist attraction status of the village, while some residents feel that tourism has disrupted their quality of life. These contrasting beliefs shape how stakeholders perceive the tourism situation and influence their attitudes toward tourism development and management. The social context of Giethoorn plays a significant role in shaping stakeholders' perceptions. The results mention the impact of international tourists, including large groups of Asian visitors, and the challenges associated with their behavior and the management of crowds. The social context of hosting international visitors in a small village creates a unique set of perceptions and experiences among stakeholders.

5.2 Perception of governance Giethoorn

5.2.1 Before the COVID-19 pandemic

The governance in Giethoorn before the COVID-19 pandemic was explored during the interview with the Steenwijkerland government actor, revealing their awareness of the tourism impacts previously mentioned. The government actor acknowledged the issue of sailing in the village canals and expressed ongoing efforts to find measures for the busy periods, which occur only a few days a year. However, addressing this issue has proven to be complicated. Initially, the government implemented boat permits with a maximum number of boats to prevent further overcrowding. However, these restrictions were found to conflict with European regulations, as they limited market access for others. Consequently, the government had to lift the maximum amount of permits, resulting in a change from 580 permits owned by 40 individuals to 1200 permits. To address the situation, the government introduced an entertainment fee, essentially a tax per rented boat. The tax amount varied based on the type of boat, with the intention of promoting the rental of old wooden punter boats over the wider iron plows, which incurred higher taxes. The government actor stated that this measure generated revenue, but it hasn't effectively mitigated the issue of overcrowding. Additionally, an interviewee from the boat rental sector expressed their dissatisfaction with these measures, citing increased congestion and a high fee of €500 for a small boat. They stated, "In practice, it doesn't work. As entrepreneurs, we have proposed alternative ideas, but so far, the municipality has not been receptive and has pursued its own path." Another entrepreneur raised concerns about the utilization of available data and the monitoring of sailing movements in

Giethoorn. They stated, "It just makes more money for the government. But whether the number of sailing movements is actually monitored and whether we do anything with the available data, I am not sure. That is actually a shame because you could very well use it to better regulate tourism."

The government actor indicates that they actively engaged with entrepreneurs and residents to discuss various topics related to tourism. Through these discussions, they identified several areas that required improvement. One of the agreed-upon aspects was the need for better guidance in finding parking spaces. An interviewee, who is a resident of Giethoorn, mentioned that they have been raising concerns about the parking situation to the government since 2004. As a measure, the government implemented traffic controllers at the neighbourhood entrance during specific times. However, according to the interviewee, this measure is considered insufficient as the traffic controllers are not present all day. The interviewee remarked, "They don't come until noon, and when they leave, I don't always see that either. But I think it's half a measure."

According to the interviews, the government of Giethoorn implemented various measures to improve the overtourism situation in the period before COVID-19. As stated by an interviewee in the boat rental sector, the government decided to discontinue the propaganda that was previously carried out in Amsterdam to promote Giethoorn as a potential day trip destination. The interviewee emphasized this shift by stating, "The government decided not to continue with this." In addition, the government took early measures to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism. One such measure was the introduction of electric boat motors for rental boats, replacing gasoline motors known for their loud noises and smoke emissions. This environmentally friendly approach aimed to create a more peaceful and cleaner sailing experience throughout the village. Furthermore, stickers were created for inhabitants to attach to their mailboxes and trash cans, designed to prevent tourists from mistaking them for public trash cans. The effectiveness of these stickers, however, was questioned by an interviewee in the accommodation sector who stated, "I don't know exactly from where that was done, whether it is from the municipality or a village interest association. But right now it doesn't make much difference, I think people probably don't mean anything by it but they just don't look."

According to the government actor, there were two key elements that they have been closely examining in Giethoorn: the state of public transport and the difficulty of spreading tourists across different areas. The government acknowledged the shortcomings of the existing public transport system, which they considered to be inadequate. They also recognized the challenge of diverting tourists from popular attractions, as highlighted by an interviewee in the marketing sector who explained, "It has been extremely difficult to get people off their schedule who are traveling through Europe and want to follow the highlights of Instagram." To address the issue of tourist distribution, a proposed approach discussed for years prior to the pandemic involved connecting rental boats with a GPS system. This technology would enable the monitoring of crowded areas, allowing for the redirection of tourists to less congested regions. However, an interviewee in the accommodation sector expressed their disappointment with the lack of progress, stating, "My experience is that there is a lot of talk about it, but not much actually happens, actually nothing as far as I know. They've been talking about that for years and that app can be launched a long time ago. But yeah, it's still not here." Similar sentiments were echoed by other interviewees, who shared their perspectives on governance in Giethoorn. An entrepreneur interviewee highlighted the gap between promises and actions by stating, "The policy of the municipality, there is also something to say about that, of course. Because yes, in the eyes of the entrepreneur and in the eyes of the resident, they are not actually doing their best for them. And every year there is actually a discussion about it's too

busy, it's unliveable, it's this, it's that. And the municipality actually promises a lot, but little is implemented. And then we have local entrepreneurs who do have ideas."

5.2.2 During the COVID-19 pandemic

The majority of measures aimed at managing tourism in Giethoorn were developed and implemented prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during the pandemic, the government took the opportunity to reassess the effectiveness of these measures. The Steenwijkerland government actor indicated that the government predicted that once COVID-19 subsided, the influx of tourists would resume, affirming the need to continue addressing the tourism situation even during the pandemic.

Throughout the COVID-19 period, data was collected and analyzed, which allowed for the establishment of measurement scenarios. These scenarios were based on visitor numbers, and specific measures were determined for each scenario. Examples of these measures included the deployment of traffic controllers, implementation of one-way traffic, and, in the worst-case scenario, the possibility of closing the village entirely. The mayor would play a crucial role in this situation, with the authority to shut down Giethoorn if necessary, supported by police cars on the roads. An interviewee involved in this process during the pandemic shared their insights, stating, "In our head, we have that threshold. In Corona, we really had a hard border. I knew that if we exceeded that limit, we had to take measures." Additionally, another interviewee from the marketing sector mentioned the use of visitor monitoring systems to track the number of visitors in real time. This data allowed them to identify peak periods of overcrowding and make future predictions. Moreover, they raised the question of whether promoting alternative locations to visitors would be enticing enough to divert them from overcrowded areas.

5.2.3 After the COVID-19 pandemic

Following the pandemic, the Steenwijkerland government engaged in discussions regarding potential improvements in Giethoorn. However, it is noteworthy that the majority of projects were conceived and developed before the pandemic. This point is emphasized by an entrepreneur interviewee who states, "But that had nothing to do with COVID, that had come before then. There are not really measures that are due to COVID, but that they have been working on for years. COVID hasn't actually changed anything." The interviewee's remark highlights the continuity of ongoing initiatives that were already in progress prior to the pandemic.

Despite the absence of pandemic-induced changes, there were a couple of new initiatives implemented after the pandemic. One such plan involved the introduction of electric bikes, which had been conceptualized before the pandemic but put into action afterward. Presently, designated hubs allow visitors to rent electric bikes in Giethoorn and return them at different locations. According to the government actor this initiative aims to provide sustainable transportation options for tourists and enhance their mobility within the region. Furthermore, the government is also working on transforming the Steenwijk station into a tourist port for the entire region, recognizing the significant number of visitors arriving by train. This project reflects the government's commitment to developing the station as a central hub for tourism, thereby facilitating convenient access and promoting the region's attractions.

During the interview, the actor representing the government also highlighted the importance of spreading tourists over time in the area, as it would be beneficial for all stakeholders. Entrepreneurs in Giethoorn often face challenges during peak hours when an overwhelming number of visitors arrive, making it difficult for them to provide optimal services. The government actor acknowledges the complexity of this issue, as it is perceived by some that the government is against tourism in

Giethoorn, which is not entirely true. An interviewee in the marketing industry shares insights on this topic, noting that the shift in the tourism stream after COVID-19 has made it easier to implement spreading measures. The majority of visitors now come from closer proximity, enabling better communication and control over their activities. With domestic tourism, there is a higher level of influence in directing guests to different areas and activities. In contrast, international visitors often prioritize visiting the popular highlights, making it more challenging to disperse them across various locations.

In the current post-pandemic situation, the measures implemented during COVID-19 to manage crowds in Giethoorn are still in place. The scenario-based approach is used to determine the appropriate response as the number of visitors increases. Initially, a small group of traffic controllers is deployed, and if the situation becomes even busier, additional traffic controllers are brought in. A prediction model is utilized to forecast tourism crowds and guide the deployment of police resources. According to a research interviewee, they predict the tourism crowds for the next seven days and set a threshold to identify when the predicted volume exceeds a certain limit, prompting the deployment of traffic controllers and extra police personnel.

The interviews shed light on the status of measures taken by the government before the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts have been made to improve parking services, although certain areas in the village still require attention. An entrepreneur expresses frustration regarding the governance after COVID-19, stating, "It's been a very difficult time in which we are still suffering, I think, because the government pursues very unclear policies and does not have a clear vision for the future." Another interviewee, an entrepreneur in the boat rental sector, highlights changes in the boat rental situation. Previously, the busiest period was from 11 am to 5 pm, but after the number of boat rental permits increased from 580 to 1200 before the pandemic, the peak shifted to 1 pm to 4 pm. However, with all the boats now booked in a single timeslot, the situation has become even busier than before. The interviewee remarks, "So actually it hasn't been thought through very well. Agreements should have been made about how to manage the situation more effectively."

Lastly, the government of Steenwijkerland has undertaken efforts to address certain infrastructure issues in Giethoorn. Specifically, damaged parts in the canals and village moat, such as the pillars of the bridge, were replaced due to incidents where tourists collided their boats into them. An entrepreneur in the accommodation sector acknowledges that prior to these repairs, many inhabitants were dissatisfied with the damage caused. However, the issue of trash management has been a persistent concern predating the pandemic. The interviewee further states, "Then I must also say that yes, the municipality did not want to place a trash can anywhere in the area, probably because the car cannot reach it to empty it, etc. Those are the things that are really annoying." This highlights the frustration expressed by inhabitants regarding the lack of adequate trash disposal facilities.

5.2.4 Theory of Perception analysis of perceived governance

The results provide examples of stakeholders' past experiences with governance measures in Giethoorn. The government's attempts to regulate boat permits and implement an entertainment fee reflect past efforts to address overcrowding. Stakeholders, such as entrepreneurs and residents, who have directly experienced the consequences of these measures, have formed their perceptions based on their past interactions with governance policies. Furthermore, stakeholders in Giethoorn hold different beliefs about the effectiveness of governance measures. Entrepreneurs in the boat rental sector express dissatisfaction with the current measures, citing congestion and high fees. Their beliefs shape their perception of the government's actions and their efficacy in managing

tourism. Similarly, an entrepreneur questions the government's use of available data and its impact on regulating tourism, reflecting a belief in the importance of data-driven decision-making. Lastly, the social context of governance in Giethoorn influences stakeholders' perceptions. The results highlight the ongoing discussions and interactions between the government, entrepreneurs, and residents. Stakeholders' perceptions are shaped by their social interactions and the dynamics of power and communication within the community. For example, the interviewee's remark about the municipality not being receptive to alternative ideas suggests a strained relationship between the government and entrepreneurs.

5.3 Perception of solutions

The interviewees expressed diverse perspectives on potential solutions to address the issue of overtourism in Giethoorn. One widely mentioned approach, advocated by actors from various sectors, including the government, is the need to spread tourists across different areas or times. They emphasize the importance of encouraging visitors to stay longer in the region. To achieve this, it is crucial to offer a range of activities and attractions beyond Giethoorn itself, including the station as a focal point. The Steenwijkerland government aims to alleviate crowds at the station by advising tourists to postpone their visit to Giethoorn when it is currently congested, suggesting they explore nearby areas instead. However, some entrepreneurs in Giethoorn do not agree with this approach, perceiving it as making tourism in Giethoorn more challenging. They believe that the government's actions hinder their ability to provide services effectively. Nonetheless, the actor representing the government argues that spreading tourism over time and across different areas benefits not only the community but also the entrepreneurs. It ensures that visitors do not arrive during peak hours when the entrepreneurs may struggle to accommodate them.

This perspective aligns with the proposed solutions provided by other interviewees. One interviewee highlighted that a sense of reduced crowding can be achieved by simply directing a small percentage of visitors to arrive at different times. However, spreading people to other areas poses challenges as most visitors are determined to visit Giethoorn itself. The only viable option, according to this interviewee, is to entice them to visit early in the morning or later in the afternoon instead of the busiest hours between 11:30 am and 3:30 pm. Another entrepreneur suggested a potential method for distributing tourists by reconsidering the boat rental system. The current practice of renting boats for only an hour proves to be ineffective, particularly in the central area where traffic congestion occurs. This causes stress and diminishes the enjoyment of the experience, as visitors are preoccupied with returning the rental on time. In response to this challenge, an interviewee from the boat rental sector proposed a concrete approach. They developed an app that provides tourists with designated sailing routes, allowing them to track boat locations and identify the busiest areas. This app offers the possibility to redirect tourists to less crowded spots. While currently only four entrepreneurs are participating in the app, there are plans to expand its reach in the future. The interviewee expressed their concept by stating, "I'm not saying it solves it, but it could at least reduce the issue. And of course, it could also contribute to the overall spreading of tourists."

An additional interviewee from the accommodation sector expressed reservations regarding the effectiveness of the app. They emphasized that the majority of visitors to Giethoorn are motivated to avoid traffic congestion. Therefore, it is crucial to address this concern not only by promoting the app at the moment of boat rental but also by explicitly explaining the busy nature of the area and the visitor's desire to avoid being stuck in traffic when returning the boat. The interviewee further argued that adopting the client's perspective is vital since visitors do not want to incur additional costs for returning the boat late. A potential solution suggested by the interviewee is to present an alternative, less congested route on the map as a means of instructing people who rent boats. The

interviewee expressed their viewpoint by stating, "I think you can kill two birds with one stone because you are not stuck in traffic jams on the water, and it ensures a better flow and fewer bottlenecks in one place." Another approach to address the issue of tourism distribution involves proactive communication about the current level of busyness in Giethoorn, allowing visitors to decide whether or not to visit on a particular day. A marketing sector interviewee further supported this idea by explaining that the guest's experience is compromised during peak visitor periods. Therefore, it becomes crucial to create compelling offers for alternative areas and provide clear communication about crowd levels in popular places, making the visitor's choice an essential factor to consider.

The actor representing the government recognizes the importance of attracting a different kind of tourist who is interested in experiencing the nature and culture of the area. However, they acknowledge that achieving this goal requires the support and voluntary participation of companies rather than forcing them into a specific solution. This approach aligns with the perspectives shared by other interviewees. A research interviewee emphasizes that to further develop the destination, it is essential to identify areas where nature experiences can be offered to attract a different type of tourist. Describing the current tourist type, the interviewee states, "They still facilitate the hit-and-run tourist there, so the bucket list. People who come are taken into the village, spent nothing, are pushed onto a tour boat, do a tour of an hour and go back to the touring car and hop on to Paris, so to speak." An entrepreneur interviewee adds to this solution by emphasizing the importance of creating deeper connections and fostering a sense of belonging with the village or the local history. They believe that when visitors develop a genuine bond and feel part of a cultural or natural adventure, their experiences become more meaningful. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of return visits or at least leaves them with a positive impression, as opposed to a fleeting encounter that often leads to dissatisfaction. The interviewee expresses this viewpoint by stating, "People are therefore more likely to come back or at least be positive about their experience, rather than a short-lived fling that often results in a negative aftertaste." An interviewee from the boat rental sector also highlights this perspective, posing a question as a solution: "Do you want to have tourists who spend money or tourists who don't actually spend anything and, as a result, cause 100% nuisance?" Underlining the importance of attracting tourists who actively contribute to the local economy rather than being a source of inconvenience.

In addition to the discussed solutions, another approach suggested during the interviews involves creating awareness among the target group about the impacts of tourism by implementing a fee that compensates the community and nature. While this measure might result in a lower number of guests, the ones who do visit would have an exclusive experience, and it would be easier to regulate the situation. The marketing interviewee emphasizes that the feasibility of this approach depends on the existing laws and regulations. It entails making tourists responsible for the damage caused by tourism and even considering the option of charging higher fees on busier days to discourage excessive visitation. The interviewee concludes their point by stating, "We eventually have to come up with that policy and also the realization. With the money that this generates, that is not necessarily for the entrepreneur, but we will ensure that nature continues to flourish and that the inhabitants ultimately also have good facilities." One specific facility that emerged as a topic during the interviews is the provision of trash bins in the village. An entrepreneur from the accommodation sector, who also resides in the center of Giethoorn, highlights the significance of this solution by stating, "Well, what would at least help the quality of life and address a small part of the effects of overtourism or just the influx of tourists in the high season, is simply placing trash cans and investing in them. That would really mean a lot to the residents."

During the interviews, it became evident that some interviewees believed that few solutions were necessary or feasible for the situation. One museum owner expressed their perspective by stating, "I think that Giethoorn can change very little. The changes are simply not possible because of the different views of the village. Everyone has to adapt, and not much will be able to change." The interviewee also highlighted that the main challenge lies in achieving consensus among the inhabitants. In the past, this has proven difficult as individuals tend to have different opinions on various matters, making it challenging for the government to make decisions. However, the interviewee emphasized that this does not imply that small issues, such as the parking problem, should be neglected, as they contribute significantly to the overall disturbance.

5.3.1 Theory of Perception analysis of perceived solutions

Entrepreneurs in Giethoorn express their frustration with government actions that they believe hinder their ability to provide effective services. Their experiences with previous measures shape their perception of the currently proposed solutions and their effectiveness in addressing overtourism. Furthermore, stakeholders hold different beliefs about the effectiveness of various solutions. The government emphasizes the importance of spreading tourists across different areas and times, arguing that it benefits both the community and entrepreneurs. However, some entrepreneurs disagree, perceiving this approach as making tourism in Giethoorn more challenging. Their beliefs influence their perception of the government's proposed solutions and their alignment with their own interests.

When it comes to the social context of governance and stakeholder interactions in Giethoorn shapes perceptions of solutions. The results highlight the diverse perspectives expressed by stakeholders from different sectors, including the government, entrepreneurs, and the marketing sector. The dynamics of power and communication among these stakeholders influence their perceptions of proposed solutions and their potential effectiveness. These examples illustrate how stakeholders in Giethoorn construct their perceptions of solutions based on their past experiences, beliefs, and the social context in which they operate. The theory highlights that perceptions are subjective and actively constructed, influencing stakeholders' attitudes and behaviors towards proposed solutions.

5.4 Synthesis of findings

The findings reveal that in Giethoorn, tourism prospered before the pandemic, attracting international tourists, while giving rise to perceived challenges such as overcrowding and strained infrastructure. Local stakeholders held varying perspectives, with urban transplants expressing concern about the tourism situation, while long-time residents of Giethoorn had a distinct outlook due to their familiarity with the intricacies of hosting international visitors. The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped tourism dynamics, substituting foreign tourists with domestic counterparts. Stakeholders observed shifts in travel behavior and a growing desire for meaningful experiences. Governance initiatives enacted before the pandemic encompassed permits and fees, yet opinions on their effectiveness varied. During the pandemic, adaptable measures were implemented to manage crowds. Following the pandemic, the introduction of new initiatives was limited, and stakeholder viewpoints on their efficacy diverged. Stakeholders proposed a range of perceived solutions regarding the tourism situation, yet many expressed scepticism regarding the feasibility of implementing certain measures or achieving community consensus. Analysis using the Theory of Perception revealed that the divergent perspectives on solutions in Giethoorn were shaped by stakeholders' prior experiences, beliefs, and the social context in which they operated. The findings further show that the challenge of attaining consensus among residents and the existence of differing opinions were recognized as potential obstacles to implementing solutions effectively.

6. Discussion

In this chapter, a reflection on the findings of the study will be given, considering the literature review in chapter 2. The focus of the discussion chapter will be on critically discussing the link between the research findings and literature about overtourism, sustainable tourism and tourism measures.

6.1 Overtourism

Overtourism is defined by UNWTO (2018) as "a destination's situation where tourism excessively influences the perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors' experiences in a negative way." The literature emphasizes that overtourism is understood as a subjective perception held by tourism actors. This aligns with the insights of my research, where it became clear that different actors had different perceptions of the tourism situation in Giethoorn depending on who you ask. What one actor considered as a problem the other might not see as a problem. The inhabitants and entrepreneurs who had been living in the village their entire life considered Giethoorn to be busy for only 30 days. However, the people who move from urban areas to Giethoorn for peace have an opposite perspective. My research further raises the question, based on the definition of overtourism by UNWTO, if the destination situation where tourism excessively influences the perceived quality of life for less than a month a year is still considered overtourism. Would it be viewed as overtourism for 30 days a year, which in this situation might not be possible to completely change the destination's character and result in a loss of authenticity in Giethoorn for the entire year. My research on Giethoorn brings forward that it might not be possible to place every destination in the same box when deciding on if it falls into the category of overtourism or not.

Moreover, the overtourism conceptual model by Peeters et al. (2018) presented in the literature suggests overtourism as an established reality. However, in practice, this notion lacks clarity, as the definition of the problem varies depending on the perspectives of different stakeholders in Giethoorn, for instance. The findings from this research challenge the accuracy of the model, as it portrays overtourism with a mix of objective criteria, such as visitor numbers, and subjective criteria, where actors' emotions and sentiments are used to determine overtourism, like citing gentrification and population decline as indicators. As a result, the model's applicability to real-world scenarios becomes questionable and calls for a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to understanding overtourism in destinations like Giethoorn.

The majority of literature on overtourism predates the COVID-19 pandemic. However, recent research by Bhatt & Seabra (2022) conducted during the pandemic indicates that destinations grappling with overtourism-related issues had an opportunity to "build back better" during a period of significantly reduced tourist numbers. It is worth noting that the research by Bhatt & Seabra (2022) does not discuss the fact that not all destinations experienced a decline in visitor numbers during the pandemic. In the case of my research in Giethoorn, the opposite was observed. Diverse stakeholders perceived the tourism situation as equally busy or even busier than before COVID-19, making the concept of "building back better" uncertain due to the absence of a tourism reset. These findings align with the conclusions of Orîndaru et al. (2021), who argue that the impact of the virus on tourism destinations remains uncertain, necessitating further research to comprehend the potential changes brought about by the pandemic. My research in Giethoorn revealed various perceived changes in the tourism situation, including shifts in tourist demographics, implementation of measures to prevent the spread of the virus, and alterations in group sizes. According to UNWTO (2023), the virus has had significant economic and social repercussions, resulting in travel restrictions, lockdowns, and a 72% reduction in international travel. However, little is known about

the long-term impacts of these changes. In the case of Giethoorn, the findings suggest that while visitor numbers remained high, there was a shift from international to national tourists.

6.1.1 Tourism capacity

In the context of carrying capacity, which refers to a destination's ability to sustainably utilize its resources (Peeters et al., 2018), my research aligns with the findings of Mowforth & Munt (2003) regarding the importance of understanding that carrying capacity measurements depend on the specific context being assessed, including the values of those involved in the measurement process. This perspective is reflected in my research, where different stakeholders discuss the capacity of tourism from various viewpoints. The level of human activity that Giethoorn can handle without detrimental effects on the area, the local community, or the quality of visitors' experiences varies for each stakeholder. Some stakeholders reported negative impacts on their livelihoods during certain periods, such as 30 days per year, while others did not share the same concerns. My research further emphasizes that during the busiest 30 days in Giethoorn, the physical facility carrying capacity is reached, as entrepreneurs are unable to provide services to the influx of tourists once everything is fully occupied. This has an impact on the quality of visitors' experiences, but only during a specific period each year. These findings align with the model proposed by Mowforth & Munt (2003), which categorizes carrying capacity into five measurements, including physical facility capacity. The results indicate that during the busiest time of the year, this capacity is exceeded, affecting infrastructure such as parking difficulties and canal traffic congestion. However, my research reveals that the social-perceptual capacity, where residents no longer welcome tourists due to perceived environmental degradation and harm to local culture, is not reached according to the stakeholders' perceptions, even during the peak period. Ecological-environmental capacity was raised as a concern by only one stakeholder, suggesting the need to explore the upper limit of tourist development that can be sustained without further environmental damage, as it is currently not a major consideration for many stakeholders.

6.1.2 Impacts of tourism

The impacts of tourism in Giethoorn, as revealed in my research, align with the key impacts identified in the findings of Peeters et al. (2018). These impacts can be categorized into three main groups: environmental, economic, and social. In terms of the environmental impacts, my research identified issues such as waste pollution, congestion of infrastructure, and damage caused by overcrowding in Giethoorn. These findings correspond to the environmental impacts highlighted in Peeters et al.'s (2018) study. In contrast, the economic impacts in Giethoorn were less prominent in my research. One notable economic impact was the accessibility of regular activities for both residents and visitors. Regarding social impacts, my research identified the marginalization of residents, whereby the number of visitors exceeds the local population. This finding aligns with the social impacts outlined in Peeters et al.'s (2018) research.

In addition, it is important to note that while my research aligns with the main impacts identified by Peeters et al. (2018) in Giethoorn, there were several impacts highlighted in their study that were not explicitly perceived or reported by the stakeholders in my research. This suggests that the perception of impacts may vary among different stakeholders and emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the diverse range of impacts that tourism can have on a destination

6.1.3 Residents' perception of tourism

A big element of this research was looking at the perception of tourism, which includes the resident's perception. The results of my research were aligned with the literature discussions by

Zelma (2020) and Veríssimo et al. (2020) who described establishing "the right number" of tourists that is considered sustainable is considered to be complex and is even questioned as possible. To gain an understanding of the sustainable number of visitors to destinations it is recommended to use a regular survey of residents' or tourists' perceptions. It was clear from my research results that the stakeholders each had their own perception of tourism. For some, there was no possible number of visitors that would not be considered sustainable. For others, it depended on the day or it depended on whether the stakeholder was local or from an urban area. Therefore, my research diverged from the viewpoint of measuring tourism using Kuentzel & Heberlein, 1992 approach in which tourism intensity is measured as tourist per resident or tourism density which relates to tourist per square kilometer.

Further literature, including works by Butler (2006) and Doxey (1975), has examined residents' perceptions of the impacts of overtourism, particularly focusing on how resident attitudes towards tourism evolve over time. These studies discuss how the social impacts of tourism can change in response to the duration and extent of residents' exposure to tourist development, as well as the structural adjustments accompanying such development (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). These theories acknowledge that the impacts, perceptions, and reactions of residents towards tourism are not fixed or static. However, the results of my research indicate that the relationship between perceived impacts and residents' perception of tourism is more complex than a simple adjustment of attitudes over time. In the case of Giethoorn, the residents who were born and raised in the village have maintained a consistent perception of tourism over the past decade. Rather than residents' attitudes changing, it is the nature of tourism itself that undergoes constant transformation. This includes factors such as the influx of diverse demographics over the last 20 years, the influence of social media on travel behavior, and unexpected events like the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings challenge the notion that residents' perception of tourism changes solely in response to the duration and extent of their exposure to tourist developments.

6.2 Sustainable Tourism

The literature on sustainable tourism emphasizes the importance of active participation and informed engagement from all relevant stakeholders, along with continuous monitoring of impacts and the implementation of corrective measures when necessary (Butler, 1999). However, the findings of my research suggest that this ideal scenario is not fully realized in the case of Giethoorn. The majority of stakeholders expressed feeling uninformed and unheard in tourism governance processes. Sustainable tourism does not appear to be the primary focus of tourism governance in Giethoorn, as the emphasis lies on meeting the demands of present-day tourists without compromising the natural environment. Additionally, my research reveals that efforts are being made to diversify tourism to different areas and attract visitors interested in nature and culture. While this approach does not fully align with the literature's definition of sustainable tourism, it may be considered an alternative tourism approach, such as qualitative tourism, which is not extensively discussed in the existing literature.

The results of my research raise the question of whether sustainable tourism should automatically be considered the ultimate and only alternative solution for destinations. While sustainable tourism is often regarded as the ideal approach, the findings from Giethoorn indicate that alternative approaches that effectively balance tourism with the destination's specific context and needs should also be explored. This suggests the importance of further examining and researching alternative approaches that go beyond the conventional sustainable tourism framework.

6.3 Tourism measures

Looking at the literature on the proposed tourism measures before the Covid-19 pandemic to minimize the effects of tourism on the infrastructure, mobility, congestion, natural resources and socio-cultural impacts (UNWTO, 2018). The results of my research do not implement the majority of the measures. Addressing overtourism is recognized as a complex issue where there is no one-size fits all solution, however, Goodwin (2019) emphasizes that it's essential that all stakeholders are involved to adapt to the planning. This has come up earlier in this chapter when discussing residents' perceptions of tourism and sustainable tourism. This is an aspect that lacks in the governance of Giethoorn that does not align with the proposed recommendations of the literature which is complained about by the different stakeholders. The strategies that are proposed by UNTWO (2018) and align with the opinions of the stakeholders brought up in the results of my search are mainly improving city infrastructure and facilities as well as communicating with and engaging local stakeholders. In general, there are not many measures taken in Giethoorn to address the tourism situation, a few that are brought up and align with the UNTWO (2018) report are plans of using new technologies to stimulate dynamic time-based dispersal, ensure visitors use parking facilities at the edge of the city, make public transport better suited for visitors, stimulate bicycle rentals and advance the use of big data and new technologies to monitor tourism performance and impact. I would argue that having this list of proposed measures does not lead to these measures being applied in certain destinations. Such as in example of the research on Giethoorn has shown that the government has not implemented many measures, however, the stakeholders have diverse ideas to improve the liveability and tourism situation in the village.

The literature on pre-Covid-19 tourism measures aimed at mitigating the impacts on infrastructure, mobility, congestion, natural resources, and socio-cultural aspects (UNWTO, 2018). However, the findings of my research indicate that the majority of these measures have not been implemented in Giethoorn. Addressing overtourism is acknowledged as a complex issue with no one-size-fits-all solution, but Goodwin (2019) highlights the importance of involving all stakeholders in adaptive planning. This lack of stakeholder involvement is evident in the governance of Giethoorn, which does not align with the recommended practices outlined in the literature, as reported by various stakeholders. The strategies proposed by UNWTO (2018) that resonate with the opinions of the stakeholders in my study primarily focus on improving city infrastructure and facilities, as well as fostering communication and engagement with local stakeholders. However, there are few measures implemented in Giethoorn to address the tourism situation. Some measures that align with the UNWTO (2018) report include plans to employ new technologies to encourage dynamic time-based dispersal, ensure visitors use designated parking facilities on the outskirts of the city, enhance public transportation services to cater to visitors, promote bicycle rentals, and leverage big data and new technologies for tourism performance and impact monitoring.

It is important to note that the mere existence of a list of proposed measures does not guarantee their implementation in specific destinations. The case of Giethoorn exemplifies this, as the government has not executed many of these measures, despite stakeholders expressing diverse ideas to enhance the liveability and tourism situation in the village.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Research questions

This research focuses on examining the perception of tourism in the case study of Giethoorn. The primary objective was to understand the perceptions of diverse stakeholders in Giethoorn concerning the tourism situation, governance, and potential solutions both before, during, and after the pandemic. Specifically, the aim was to understand whether the pandemic has influenced stakeholder perceptions in Giethoorn and to identify potential solutions within the broader context of tourism and overtourism. In the following chapter, we will address the main research question and identify recommendations for future research. However, before doing so, it is essential to address the three sub-questions that were formulated to guide this investigation.

1. How do the stakeholders involved perceive the tourism situation in Giethoorn considering the periods before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

Before the pandemic, Giethoorn was a popular destination attracting a significant number of international tourists each year. The stakeholders' viewpoints revealed a mix of positive and negative aspects associated with tourism. While it brought improvements to the city's liveability and economic opportunities, issues such as overcrowding, infrastructure strain, and parking nuisance emerged, particularly during the busiest 30 days. Some stakeholders that moved to Giethoorn from urban areas expressed concerns about the sustainability of the tourism situation, while residents who grew up in Giethoorn had a different perception due to their understanding of the dynamics of hosting international visitors.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the dynamics of tourism in Giethoorn shifted dramatically. International tourists ceased their visits, and Dutch visitors took their place. Despite the absence of international tourists, the village still experienced overwhelming crowds due to domestic tourism. The perceived impact of COVID-19 measures varied across sectors, with boat rentals being less affected compared to accommodations. The decrease in day tourism and the preference for private boat tours were notable changes observed during this period. After the pandemic, international tourists slowly began to return, although in smaller numbers compared to pre-pandemic levels. The gap was filled by domestic tourists and visitors from neighbouring regions. While some stakeholders believed that Giethoorn felt just as busy or even busier than before, others perceived a slight decrease in crowding. Additionally, shifts in travel behaviour, increased emphasis on societal themes, and a search for meaningful experiences during the stay were noted by a few stakeholders, indicating potential changes in visitor mentality.

2. How do the stakeholders involved perceive the governance of tourism in Giethoorn before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

The stakeholders' perceptions of the governance of tourism in Giethoorn before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic revealed a complex and multifaceted situation. Before the pandemic, the government of Giethoorn implemented various measures to address the challenges of overtourism, such as boat permits, an entertainment fee, and environmental initiatives. However, stakeholders expressed mixed views on the effectiveness of these measures, with concerns raised about overcrowding, parking, data utilization, and the need for better regulation. The government acknowledged the need for improvements but faced difficulties in finding viable solutions that aligned with European regulations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government adapted its approach and implemented scenario-based measures to manage tourism crowds. The deployment of traffic controllers, one-way traffic,

and the possibility of closing the village were among the strategies employed. Data collection and real-time monitoring played a crucial role in decision-making during this period. However, it should be noted that the majority of projects and initiatives were developed before the pandemic, and the situation did not drastically change during this time. After the pandemic, the government engaged in discussions to identify potential improvements, but it became apparent that most projects were conceived prior to the pandemic and remained ongoing. Some new initiatives were implemented, such as the introduction of electric bikes and the transformation of the Steenwijk station into a tourist port. The government emphasized the importance of spreading tourists over time to alleviate the challenges faced by local entrepreneurs. However, stakeholders expressed varying opinions on the effectiveness of these measures and the government's commitment to addressing the issues.

3. What potential solutions for Giethoorn's tourism sector are perceived by the stakeholders, and what challenges do they identify that need to be addressed to facilitate their implementation?

Stakeholders in Giethoorn perceive several potential solutions to promote sustainable tourism in the village's tourism sector. Spreading tourists across different areas or times emerged as a widely mentioned approach, supported by actors from various sectors, including the government. Encouraging visitors to explore nearby areas and providing a range of activities and attractions beyond Giethoorn itself were emphasized as essential strategies. However, some entrepreneurs expressed concerns about the potential challenges these measures pose to their ability to provide services effectively. The stakeholders also highlighted the importance of addressing traffic congestion and boat rental issues. Suggestions included developing an app to track boat locations and redirect tourists to less crowded areas, promoting alternative sailing routes, and improving communication about traffic conditions and congestion. Proactive communication about crowd levels and offering compelling offers for alternative areas were suggested as means to manage visitor expectations and spread tourism more effectively.

The government acknowledged the importance of attracting a different kind of tourist who is interested in experiencing the region's nature and culture. They emphasized the need for voluntary participation and support from companies rather than imposing specific solutions. Stakeholders highlighted the significance of creating deeper connections, fostering a sense of belonging, and developing meaningful experiences to enhance the overall tourist experience and encourage return visits. Creating awareness among the target group about the impacts of tourism and considering the implementation of fees to compensate the community and nature were also mentioned as potential solutions. However, it should be noted that some interviewees expressed skepticism about the feasibility of implementing certain solutions or achieving consensus among the community. The challenge of achieving agreement among the inhabitants and the existence of differing opinions were identified as potential obstacles to implementing solutions effectively.

Based on the answers to the sub-questions, it is possible to answer the main research question:

How do the diverse stakeholders in the discussion surrounding tourism and overtourism in Giethoorn perceive the situation, governance, and potential solutions before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic?

In conclusion, the stakeholders engaged in the discussion on tourism and overtourism in Giethoorn have distinct perceptions regarding the situation, governance, and potential solutions before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. They all recognize that Giethoorn experiences overcrowding for only 30 days a year, which is not a persistent issue throughout the year. However, stakeholders recognize that during this period, there are various negative impacts and congestion in the region

that need to be addressed and improved. They believe these challenges are crucial for the development of liveability and tourism in Giethoorn. However, stakeholders differ in their opinions on the effectiveness of existing measures and proposed solutions. The government's efforts, such as boat permits, entertainment fees, and the promotion of alternative attractions, received mixed reviews. Some entrepreneurs expressed dissatisfaction with the measures, citing increased congestion and high fees, while others raised concerns about data utilization and the lack of progress in implementing solutions. Stakeholders hold diverse perspectives on the governance of tourism in Giethoorn, with some perceiving a lack of clear vision and responsiveness from the government.

Despite these differences, stakeholders have put forth various strategies to address overtourism and promote balanced tourism practices. Spreading tourists across different areas and times has emerged as a widely mentioned approach to alleviate congestion and provide a more balanced tourism experience. Suggestions include promoting alternative locations, offering diverse activities and attractions, and encouraging visitors to explore nearby areas. Stakeholders also emphasize addressing traffic congestion and boat rental issues through measures such as developing apps, alternative sailing routes, and improving communication. In addition, stakeholders highlight the significance of creating deeper connections, fostering a sense of belonging, and developing meaningful experiences for visitors. They believe that by attracting a different type of tourist interested in experiencing the nature and culture of the area, the overall visitor experience can be enhanced and the impacts of overtourism mitigated. Some stakeholders also propose the implementation of fees to compensate the community and nature for the negative effects of tourism, though further examination is needed to assess feasibility and potential impact on visitor numbers.

However, the challenges of achieving consensus among stakeholders and implementing these solutions need to be addressed to ensure the recovery of tourism in Giethoorn. The varying perspectives and interests of stakeholders highlight the importance of continued dialogue and collaboration. Creating a shared vision for the future of tourism in the region and promoting practices that benefit the community, environment, and visitor experience is crucial. Active involvement of all stakeholders and consideration of their perspectives can lead to a more inclusive tourism sector that balances the needs of the local community, preserves the natural and cultural heritage, and provides a positive and authentic experience for visitors.

7.2 Future research

Based on the findings and earlier discission in this thesis, I would like to suggest possible future research directions that could be insightful. To begin, the current analysis was based on 9 interviews. Expanding the scope to include a larger and more diverse interview pool would enhance the potential for generalizing the findings. Furthermore, it is essential to extend this research to multiple locations. Exploring this topic in analogous Dutch destinations would provide a comprehensive comparative analysis, enriching the understanding of parallels and distinctions from the Giethoorn context. Additionally, investigating international destinations with distinct geographical, cultural, and tourism attributes would offer a global perspective on stakeholder perceptions prior to, during, and post the pandemic. This is particularly valuable given the limited existing literature focusing on this precise timeframe of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, while this study primarily delved into the viewpoints of Giethoorn's stakeholders, including business proprietors, residents, and governmental bodies, an illuminating dimension would involve incorporating the perspective of tourists. By examining their perceptions of the tourism situation before, during, and after the pandemic, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the holistic impact.

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Appendix A – Interview guide

The interviews will take place in Dutch as this would be give the residents in the research site the chance to express themselves in their own language. Therefore, the interview questions are prepared in Dutch and the results the interviews will be transcribed in English.

Introductie

Dank u dat u tijd hebt vrijgemaakt om vandaag samen te zitten voor dit interview. Ik ben een masterstudent aan de Universiteit van Wageningen. Voor mijn scriptie onderzoek ik de gevolgen van overtoerisme in Giethoorn en het effect van de pandemie op de maatregelen voor duurzaam toerisme. Het interview zal ongeveer 30 tot 40 minuten duren. Al uw antwoorden zullen anoniem worden gebruikt. Zijn er nog vragen voordat we met het interview beginnen? Heb ik uw toestemming om het interview op te nemen voor de transcriptie? Bedankt.

Interview vragen

Thema 1: Achtergrondinformatie

1. Waar woont u en wat is uw beroep?
2. Hoe is uw werk of leven gerelateerd aan het toerisme in Giethoorn?

Thema 2: Overtoerisme

3. Wat is uw mening over toerisme vóór de Covid-19-pandemie (positief, negatief)?
4. Bent u bekend met de term overtoerisme? Wat betekent het voor u?
5. Heeft het toerisme in Giethoorn naar uw weten problemen veroorzaakt?
6. Zo ja, zijn er maatregelen genomen om deze problemen aan te pakken?
7. Hoe hebben deze maatregelen het aantal toeristen dat Giethoorn bezoekt beïnvloed en wat denkt u dat hun impact is geweest op het verminderen van overtoerisme?
8. Zijn er nieuwe toerismetrends ontstaan in Giethoorn sinds de pandemie en hoe beïnvloeden deze trends de toerisme-industrie van het dorp?

Thema 3: Perceptie van inwoners over toerisme

9. Is uw perspectief op toerisme in Giethoorn veranderd sinds de Covid-19-pandemie?

Thema 4: Maatregelen voor duurzaam toerisme

10. Welke nieuwe maatregelen zijn er genomen na de Covid-19-pandemie?
11. Hoe denken de inwoners van Giethoorn over deze toerismemaatregelen?
12. Naar uw mening, welke aanvullende maatregelen kunnen worden genomen om duurzaam toerisme in Giethoorn te bevorderen, en hoe haalbaar zijn deze maatregelen?
13. Wat zijn enkele van de grootste uitdagingen die moeten worden aangepakt om de implementatie van deze aanvullende maatregelen te vergemakkelijken?

Afsluit (Tenny, Brannan, & Brannan, 2022)

Bedankt voor uw tijd.

Is er iets waarvan u denkt dat ik het zou moeten weten maar dat ik niet heb gevraagd?

Is er iemand anders met wie ik zou moeten praten over deze kwesties?