From overtourism to undertourism… and back? The struggle to manage tourism regrowth in post-pandemic Amsterdam

De la saturación turística al subturismo… ¿y de vuelta? Esfuerzos por gestionar el recrecimiento turístico en el Ámsterdam de la postpandemia

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Abstract

Amsterdam is one of many cities that has struggled with problems of overtourism in recent years. These problems include nuisance, crowdedness, rising housing prices and economic dependence on tourism. City administrators were aware of these issues and took a variety of measures before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as placing restrictions on tourism rental (Airbnb) and setting up campaigns to tackle problem behaviour of tourists. Yet when COVID-19 halted the stream of tourists visiting Amsterdam, this created a unique opportunity to make more drastic changes, which the administration has addressed by proposing a new series of measures to proactively help contain tourism regrowth in the post-pandemic period. In this article we critically analyze these strategies to ascertain the extent to which they appear able to address the various issues of pre-pandemic overtourism to which they are aimed. Our analysis demonstrate that while trajectories already started before the pandemic are now being augmented and given more priority and some new strategies to further curb tourism growth are also being implemented, overall Amsterdam remains dominated by a growth-oriented approach to tourism planning.

Key words: COVID-19; degrowth; urban tourism.

Resumen

Ámsterdam es una de las muchas ciudades en las que se han combatido los problemas del exceso de turismo en los últimos años. Estos problemas incluyen molestias, hacinamiento, aumento de los precios de la vivienda y dependencia económica del turismo. Los administradores de la ciudad, conscientes de estos problemas, tomaron medidas antes del inicio de la pandemia de COVID-19, como imponer restricciones a los alquileres turísticos (Airbnb) y desplegar campañas para abordar los problemas de mal comportamiento de los turistas. Sin embargo, cuando el COVID-19 detuvo el flujo de turistas que visitaban Ámsterdam, se creó una oportunidad única para realizar cambios más drásticos, que la administración ha abordado al proponer una nueva serie de medidas para ayudar de manera proactiva a contener el rebrote del turismo en el período posterior a la pandemia. En este artículo analizamos críticamente estas estrategias para determinar en qué medida parecen capaces de abordar los diversos problemas del turismo excesivo previo a la pandemia a los que están dirigidas. Nuestro análisis demuestra que, si bien las tendencias de antes de la pandemia están aumentando y se les da más prioridad, también se están implementando algunas estrategias nuevas para frenar aún más el crecimiento del turismo. En general, Ámsterdam sigue dominada por un enfoque de la planificación turística orientado al crecimiento.

Palabras clave: COVID-19; decrecimiento; turismo urbano.

1 Introduction

Amsterdam is one of many cities that has struggled with problems of "overtourism" in recent years. These problems include nuisance, overcrowding, rising housing prices and economic dependency on tourism. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, city administrators were aware of these issues and took a variety of measures, such as placing restrictions on tourism rentals and campaigning to tackle problem behaviour by tourists. Then COVID-19-related travel restrictions brought Amsterdam tourism to a screeching halt. The scope of the pandemic and its ongoing uncertainty have caused serious economic damage to the city. As over 80% of Amsterdam's visitors are foreign, the halt on international travel has disproportionally affected the city in comparison to other Dutch destinations (City of Amsterdam, 2020). It is estimated that Amsterdam lost at least 8 billion euros from the tourism sector in 2020, as compared to a total revenue of 18.6 billion euros in 2019 (RTL Z, 2021). Yet as travel restrictions are progressively lifted, tourism is once more on the rise in Amsterdam as elsewhere. Indeed, as in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, tourism development is looked to as a significant strategy for economic recovery more generally in the city (Blanco-Romero et al., 2019). It is clear, however, that without concerted intervention to prevent it, problems of overtourism will return with the tourists. This article explores the strategies currently proposed or implemented by stakeholders of Amsterdam's tourism sector to prevent the return of "overtourism" and its discontents in the post-pandemic era. Our analysis demonstrate that trajectories already started before the pandemic are now being augmented and given more priority, while new strategies to further curb tourism growth are also being implemented, the main one being an ordinance that ostensibly restricts the number of Amsterdam visitors to 20 million annually. Furthermore, decentralisation of tourism governance has led to a more distributed responsibility for sustainable tourism development among the municipality, private sector and city residents than previously. Overall, however, Amsterdam remains dominated by a growth-oriented approach to tourism planning.

We begin by outlining existing research concerning overtourism, following which we introduce the conceptual framework guiding our analysis. We then present our findings concerning the contrast between Amsterdam stakeholders' approaches to addressing tourism pre- and post-pandemic. Subsequently, we demonstrate how analysis in terms of our conceptual framework helps to illuminate dynamics highlighted in this discussion. We finish by explaining the implications of our analysis in terms of understanding and addressing issues of overtourism, both in Amsterdam and elsewhere.

2 Theoretical framework

Overtourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as "the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way" (UNWTO, 2018, p. 4). In the years leading up to the COVID pandemic, attention to overtourism in both popular and scholarly media had grown rapidly. Initial scholarly work mostly dealt with the history and characteristics of the concept (Koens et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019) as well as through empirical case studies of how overtourism is experienced and managed in Europe and beyond (Dodds & Butler, 2019; Namberger et al., 2019; Seraphin et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2019). More recently, contributions began to expand conceptual thinking on overtourism in relation to tourism's role in society more generally (Gössling et al., 2020; Koens et al., 2019; Mihalic, 2020; Milano et al., 2019).

All of this changed with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, as virtually the entire globe went into simultaneous lockdown, resulting in stringent travel restrictions to nearly every tourism destination worldwide. Consequently, preoccupation with overtourism was quickly replaced by complaints about "undertourism", previously a marginal focus of discussion (Buckley, 2019), as destinations now struggled to deal with the economic consequences of the sudden loss of tourism revenue on which they had come to depend. This led some to suggest that overtourism was now no longer a concern, and even to deride those who had previously critiqued and resisted it for "getting what they wished for" and then suffering the consequences of this outcome (Hall et al., 2020). Many in and beyond the tourism industry advocated use of the crisis to transform tourism to prevent the return of overtourism once the pandemic ends. Yet it was not long before a counter narrative arose instead urging quick economic recovery and tourism re-growth instead (Butcher, 2021; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020). This echoed the dominant response to the 2008 economic crisis when tourism growth was actively encouraged as a means to restimulate local economies (Koens et al., 2018; Milano et al., 2019; Russo & Scarnato, 2018). For the UNWTO, tourism growth has therefore long been seen as indisputability positive, with then Secretary General Taleb Rifai explaining in 2017: "Growing numbers are not the enemy. Growth is the eternal story of mankind. Tourism growth can and should lead to economic prosperity, jobs and resources" (Rifai, 2017). This was followed by publication of a manual for addressing overtourism in impacted cities throughout Europe that reiterated this stance by focusing on managing rather than questioning growth and outlining a range of potential policy measures to mitigate negative impacts whilst trying to enhance capacity (UNWTO, 2018).

Others, however, insist that redressing overtourism may actually require questioning and restraining tourism growth as a whole. In this spirit, an increasing number of academics have begun to argue that "degrowth", a process of planned economic contraction aimed to reduce overall resource throughput (Kallis, 2018), is required to effectively address the overtourism dilemma (Andriotis, 2018; Blanco-Romero et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2019; Milano & Koens, 2022). This has inspired exploration of a range of cases around the world that can be viewed as the seeds or at least theoretical underpinnings of tourism degrowth and the challenges of attaining degrowth in practice (Milano et. al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020). One strain of this literature focuses on the ways that tourism stakeholders emphasise the importance of tourism growth and how they seek to pre-empt discussion of the need and potential for touristic degrowth (Dredge & Jamal, 2015; Pasquinelli & Trunfio, 2020; Torkington et al., 2020). Examples of this include the previously referenced statement by Taleb Rifal, but also can be observed in the mounting advocacy for an ostensive "right to travel" by the UNWTO and others (Gascón, 2019).

To understand how the discourses of pro-growth and degrowth are reflected in tourism management policy, this thesis adopts the framework developed by Blanco-Romero et al. (2019), depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. The 6 Ds and 6 D-Ds of Pro-growth and Degrowth Discourses

PRO-GROWTH DISCOURSE	DEGROWTH DISCOURSE
Deseasonalisation	Decommodification
Decongestion	Disparity reduction & collectivisation
Deluxe tourism	Dignifying working conditions
Discredit contestation	Deconsumerism
Decentralisation	Detailed spatial planning
Diversification	Detouristification & retouristification

Source: Blanco-Romero et al. (2019)

The six "Ds" of the pro-growth discourse are the policy strategies used to promote growth while also attempting to mitigate its negative effects. These six Ds are derived from the previous typology of Milano (2018), who proposed five Ds as strategies to manage overcrowding in tourism destinations. Deaseasonalisation is especially relevant for destinations with a clear touristic season, such as when the climate is most pleasant or when particular events take place, as the aim is to

spread out this peak in tourist numbers more evenly over time to decrease overcrowding at any given point in time. Decongestion is the spreading of tourist numbers not in time but rather in space to diminish overcrowding in certain locations, often the "hotspots" of a destination. Deluxe tourism is about attracting more "high-quality" tourists to a destination to improve the per capita economic revenue coming from tourism. Diversification is the increase in variety of activities, products and tourist experiences. Decentralisation entails the transfer of control and responsibility for certain activities from the government only to also including non-governmental actors, specifically private firms and civil society organisations (Milano, 2018). Finally, discredit contestation has been added by Blanco-Romero et al. (2019) to the 6-Ds framework used here, referring to the common practice of endeavouring to discredit views and arguments that oppose a pro-growth tourism strategy.

Secondly, Blanco-Romero and colleagues (2019) formulated six alternate "D-Ds" from the perspective of degrowth to explain how this paradigm can be potentially implemented to pursue a fairer, more sustainable tourism sector transcending the demand for continual growth. Decommodification is the process of removing something from the market, so that it has no market value. This links to deconsumerism, which is the process of taking focus away from the purchasing of goods and services as the basis of a touristic encounter. Disparity reduction and collectivisation is about curbing inequality in who benefits from tourism and who does not through collective appropriation and redistribution of generated revenue. Dignifying working conditions entails the improvement of the work situation of those employed in the tourism sector. This can take the form of a better income, but also a safer work environment, more regular working hours or being treated more respectfully. Detailed spatial planning is the large-scale coordination of spatial planning, considering the coherence between different processes that take place within the area (e.g., tourism and real estate development), and how that area is intertwined with other spaces around it. Finally, detouristification and retouristification can be described as the reconstruction of a destination's overarching tourism sector to emphasize different forms of activity beyond commercial services to foreign visitors.

To conclude, the elements of this degrowth paradigm are posed as antithetical to common strategies employed in the pro-growth paradigm. Basic beliefs about the (un)sustainability of growth are challenged, so that the problem of overtourism can potentially be tackled more fundamentally and rigorously. Hence, the contrast between these two approaches offers a useful perspective for studying Amsterdam's current plans to recover their tourism sector.

3 Materials and methods

Data for this analysis are based on two different periods of field research conducted by the first and third authors, respectively. Research was undertaken both before and after onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. To assess perspectives concerning tourism development among Amsterdam municipal administrators pre-COVID, between June and August 2018 twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with civil servants from departments within the municipality of Amsterdam and the wider metropolitan region that directly relate to tourism management (see Table 2). In addition, participant observation was carried out at a "tourism workshop" comprising fifteen civil servants, where the focus was on producing concrete actions to address current and future tourism growth. To contextualise the primary empirical materials, we also used the database LexisNexis to identify and analyse newspaper articles published on the topic of tourism in Amsterdam between 1993 and 2018 in local and national outlets and we studied relevant policy documents produced by the municipality as well as the electoral programmes of a selection of the largest political parties in Amsterdam that have included tourism within their planning.

Using this pre-COVID research as a baseline, further research was conducted between July and September 2021, with follow-up in October 2022. This entailed two interrelated qualitative methods of data collection. First, desk research was used to analyze of (non-)governmental documents and policy papers regarding the issue of overtourism in Amsterdam. The second method entailed interviewing different stakeholders of Amsterdam's tourism sector. In total, thirteen interviews were conducted. At first, specific individuals were selected based on research concerning the people most centrally involved in the Amsterdam tourism sector. From there, snowball sampling was applied until no new, relevant potential interviewees were brought forward. Then non-verbatim transcriptions were made of all thirteen interviews. To code the interview transcripts, the computer program QDA Miner Lite was used.

The following table provides a full list of those interviewed in both research periods, labeled by numbers also referenced in the results section below:

Table 2. Interviews pre- and post-COVID

Number	Function	Number	Function
Pre-COVID		Post-COVID	
1	Cultural institution	13	*Community-based rental platform*
2	Cultural institution	14	Representative of a think tank
3	Business organisation	15	Civil servant
4	Business organisation	16	Civil servant
5	City council	17	Civil servant
6	City council	18	Civil servant
7	Economist	19	Civil servant
8	Civil servant	20	Civil servant
9	Civil servant	21	Civil servant
10	DMO	22	Civil servant
11	City planner	23	Civil servant
12	Hotel sector	24	Civil servant
		25	Civil servant

Source: authors' own elaboration

In the following, we outline the results of the comparative analysis developed in this way. We begin by describing the pre-COVID policy climate.

4 The tourism boom and its siscontents, pre-COVID

City marketing policies in Amsterdam can be traced back to the 1990s, aiming "to boost the local economy by attracting tourists and foreign investment in luxury hotel chains and other tourism-related services" (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017; cf. Gerritsma & Vork, 2017). In 2004, the "I amsterdam" city marketing campaign was launched, led by the municipal councilor for economic affairs at the time, in close collaboration with urban and regional companies. The campaign was legitimised by the idea that the "position of Amsterdam in the world is under pressure and that this could have serious economic consequences. Because competition between cities in Europe is becoming stronger, cities across the continent are more effectively emphasising their strong features to attract visitors, companies and new residents than ever before" (Berenschot, 2004, p. 14). To ensure the continued growth of tourism, both right- and left-wing parties advocated for less regulation to enable tourism expansion (Van Kampen, 2014). These actions were not without success. Not only was tourism one of the few industries in Amsterdam that grow continuously after the 2008 economic crisis, but as of 2018 it became the fifth most visited European city. Both the campaign and deregulation contributed to the arrival of more than 20 million visitors in 2019

(TourMIS, 2020). In the same post-crisis period, the number of hotel rooms increased by 30%, with the tourism industry growing to provide more than 61 000 jobs (TourMIS, 2020).

Until 2014, the tourism boom and the prevailing optimism that legitimised was rarely criticised (Milikowski, 2018). What dominated was a clear impetus to push tourism growth (Koens et al., 2018). "Everyone in the world should have seen Amsterdam in their life once", a well-known politician proclaimed in 2014 (D66Amsterdam, 2014). In the two years after this statement, however, public attitudes towards tourism shifted dramatically. The 3rd of May, 2014, is seen as a key turning point in this shift, when a combination of events (multiple activities, good weather, roadworks) made the Dam square in the centre of the city largely inaccessible, leading to a massive outcry in the local newspaper the following day (van Raamsdonk, 2019).

A few years later, tourism was formally recognised as a problem in the media (Welles, 2018; Amsterdam in Progress, 2018; Berentsen & Rouwendal, 2018) and by among others Amsterdam's then mayor, provoking most political parties to instead advocate for more regulation and limitation of tourism expansion (Milikowski & Naafs, 2017). Overcrowding was now perceived as a significant issue, mainly in the historical city centre (City of Amsterdam, 2016; Pinkster & Boterman, 2017). "The higher numbers of visitors combined with the increased use of the public space by residents has resulted in perceived over-crowding, noise pollution, a decreased visitor experience and alienated residents (…). These changes in the city set the stage for a rather intense societal debate on the pressure on the city" (Neugebauer, 2019).

4.1 A balanced city

As a result of this growing discontent with tourism, the municipality of Amsterdam set up a small team of civil servants under direct authority of the city council in 2017, with the aim to propose a series of measures to ensure the city's liveability (City of Amsterdam, 2017). This team developed a plan called "Stad in Balans" (City in Balance) aiming to address the negative impacts of tourism growth by stimulating quality and diversity in retail and facilities, reducing nuisance to local residents and creating more space on streets in busy areas, among other measures (City of Amsterdam, 2017). Experimental solutions were also designed and implemented to tackle the problem in collaboration with stakeholders in the wider Amsterdam Metropolitan Region, such as the distribution of tourist to currently less touristic areas in and even beyond Amsterdam itself (Couzy, 2018; Koens et al., 2018; Boisen, 2018).

The "Stad in Balans" campaign was based in the economic department of the municipality where the emphasis has historically been on stimulating economic growth. The programme did not

diverge from this. It aimed to balance tourism with other demands on the city, rather than endeavouring to reduce tourism in the city and hence it contributed to a pro-growth agenda. A civil servant who switched from spatial planning to the economics told us that in the spatial planning department he was accustomed to look "with a broader view" (#12), while in the economics department "the focus is especially on employment opportunities. And economic vitality... I am very much surrounded by colleagues who are foremost talking about employment opportunities" (#12). As none of the policies of the city in Balance aimed to halt tourism growth, soon people started to condemn this ameliorative approach in concluding (as it turned out quite presciently) that "only a major crisis can inhibit tourism" (Couzy, 2018). The municipal elections of 2018 showed that an increasing number of politicians on all sides of the political spectrum agreed that the city suffers from rapid population growth, increasing tourism and too much foreign property ownership and investment leading to unaffordable housing and gentrification (Stroet, 2017). Many felt, indeed, that due to increasing tourism Amsterdam had become tantamount to a theme park (Milikowski, 2018; Kruyswijk, 2018).

4.2 Addressing tourism growth at the Amsterdam municipality

Several different perspectives were prevalent among the civil servants we interviewed to address perceived problems of tourism growth. A majority of respondents (80%) saw geographical distribution of tourism over the city and its surroundings as the main solution to handle the emerging amounts of incoming tourists. This is very much in line with the solution that was most prominent in policy reports at the time (City of Amsterdam, 2016; 2017), and indeed it became one of the key strategies for managing tourism for the Netherlands as a whole (NBTC, 2019).

Those in favour of distributing tourists emphasized the potential of this to alleviate pressure on the city of Amsterdam and to economically develop the areas surrounding Amsterdam as well. Some interviewees (20%), however, were more sceptical about distributing tourists: "Distributing tourists is like sticking plasters... Economic growth and the decrease of peak rush are good. But you just don't solve the problem" (#19). To curb the incoming tourist flows by means of distribution was seen as a form of symptom control that did not address the root causes of the tourism boom itself. And for some it was seen as utterly nonsense: "How can we go on? Look, I don't believe in 'the distribution-narrative' of Zandvoort, Amsterdam Beach and Muiderslot, Amsterdam Castle, and to see Amsterdam and visit Holland or I don't know what kind of nonsense. I hope I'm wrong..." (#18) More sceptical interviewees commonly emphasized that all tourists want to see the city centre and will always come back there. As one explained, "I hear a lot of colleagues say: we'll distribute

the tourists. I don't believe in that, I totally don't. Because yes you can lure the tourist to somewhere else, but they come here to see Amsterdam" (#17).

Some respondents viewed the city as facing the negative consequences of powerful commercial interests and lack of governmental regulation: "The financial pressure on a very small city as Amsterdam of course, yes your urban fabric gets destroyed by big capital" (#21). Negative consequences of social and economic gentrification were thereby identified as associated problems.

A few people also mentioned degrowth as an option to tackle tourism related problems: "growth should be controlled and requires an integral approach... distribution of tourists doesn't work" (#14). Encouraging commercial companies and "big capital" to self-regulate will not provide a solution, this interviewee asserted: "They are not going to regulate themselves, so you shouldn't expect too much of that" (#14). Another argued that "with tourism the question is: do you want to press the 'volume button[1]'." (#21) According to this interviewee, most planners took the phenomenon of tourism growth too much for granted and as a principle to work towards: "Like, [they believe] you can't really press the volume button so we have to talk about in which ways we can order and regulate it." (#21)

4.3 Legitimising the growth agenda

The suggestion to limit growth was often dismissed as a possibility outright, even when interviewees accepted that the increase in tourism numbers could impair the city's liveability. One interviewee argued that the municipality had committed to an impossible task of managing tourism growth, but that they were trying to fail in the best possible way. Within this camp there was a strong reluctance to entertain notions of restriction, let alone touristic degrowth. More than once reference was made again to the "volume button": "I think actually that we are not capable to regulate the volume, that's very difficult. (…) So, it's not that we can just turn very simple buttons to decrease the volume". (#17)

Such scepticism concerning the possibility of a degrowth agenda also became explicit when the future of Schiphol Airport was discussed, by arguing that: "You can't build a fence around Amsterdam. You can't say to these charter flights that they're not allowed to come here anymore." (#15) A number of interviewees actually ridiculed the concept of limiting tourism growth by

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1 Meaning reducing the number of tourists.

providing exaggerated statements of what such measure would constitute. "You can't say yes, let's build a big fence around Amsterdam and you can only enter if you live there. (…) if you would do that, I would think that's so wrong. To limit tourism in other ways? Shoot every tourist?" (#22) Another interviewee said something similar: "Should we lock them all on Pampus [An old fortress island located near Amsterdam]? Or put a fence around the Haarlemmermeer [The municipality in which nearby Schiphol Airport is located] (…) and let them run around there?" (#25) As is clear from the preceding, "the fence" metaphor was also often used to legitimise the dominant tourism policy of distributing the tourists.

Next to seeing tourism as an insuperable force majeure, tourism growth was also frequently legitimised by emphasising its importance for economic progress. Too much regulation, in the form of "reducing Airbnb, coffeeshops, groups in the Red-Light District, prostitution" (#25), was seen as a risk. As one interviewee explained: "If you're going to exclude and isolate that, then the economic story is that it isn't good" (#25). The possibility of a trade war and/or bank crisis were the main arguments used to support this viewpoint: "You'll cut yourself in your finger with that in a new situation. Suppose that we'll get a crisis and would need tourism?" (#25)

Some interviewees expressed particular concern that the core values of Amsterdam as an historically open, liberal city are threatened by too much regulation. Different measures and actions undertaken to regulate tourism, such as increasing the tourist tax, were identified as examples of how Amsterdam's core values could be compromised. As one interviewee said: "The core values of Amsterdam are always liberal and everything is allowed here. (…) We think we are still the city of freedom, but it is freedom within regulation" (#25). The restrictions could lead to a more intolerant city. Other interviewees feared more restrictive policies and more strict policing, as this would also impact on residents' movements and actions, which could cause an uproar and encourage the perception of an overbearing government.

By this time, hundreds of local and national newspapers, TV programmes and surveys had reported on the discontent among Amsterdam residents towards the presence of tourism masses and related problems in the city centre. Yet many interviewees who advocated tourism as a catalyst of economic progress believed that such people did not represent the majority, but were rather a minority who had got into the habit of complaining, or even whining, about tourism development. Rather than using this input to develop alternative options, the complaints were framed as holding back progress in the city: "Based on a few people who experience these implications, you are going to

prescribe a general policy whereby for the rest of the city it's impossible to further develop?" (#18).

5 The "post-COVID" shift

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a clear message sent by a wide variety of tourism stakeholders: the city does not want to go back to the pre-pandemic situation, but instead to a more balanced "neighbourhood" economy, meaning that local entrepreneurs in a neighbourhood target a variety of audiences, consisting of both residents of MRA and tourists (City of Amsterdam, 2019). This shift was already presumed by the municipality before COVID-19, but was emphasized as especially important since the pandemic. A strong neighbourhood economy is said to contribute to the liveability, employment opportunities, safety, identity and social cohesion of that area (City of Amsterdam, 2019). To stimulate these economies, the municipality uses several tools. For instance, to exercise some control over rental prices of municipal retail premises, these are sold to two real estate companies that agree to the diversity policy ando related conditions in the sales contract (City of Amsterdam, 2019). Furthermore, the municipality has put a stop to new touristic stores since October 2017, meaning stores that focus on tourists and day trippers, that sell food for direct consumption, as well as hybrid food stores, for example ticket shops and bike rentals (City of Amsterdam, 2019).

Moreover, there is widespread agreement that the matter is urgent, requiring policy and action now, to get ahead of the recovery of tourism as the pandemic recedes (amsterdam&partners, 2020; Kleijn, 2021). To do so, a common emphasis is on the desire to change the reputation of Amsterdam among tourists of being a "free for all" city. To achieve this, there should be a shift towards the so-called "valuable visitor", who primarily visits Amsterdam for its culture, but also to have a culinary experience, visit attractions, shop, etcetera, and stay in luxury hotels (amsterdam&partners, 2020, n.d.).

To target such "valuable" tourists in the recovery of the tourism sector since COVID-19, the "Inspiration and Activation Campaign" has been designed. With the use of online content, such as social media ads and banners, this campaign strives to shine light on both the well-known and less well-known highlights of the city, for example on the topics of gastronomy, art, and accommodation (amsterdam&partners, 2020; n.d.). This content aims primarily to attract the valuable visitors, and secondly to provide a guide to the different cultural experiences the city has to offer (amsterdam&partners, n.d.). This campaign also reflects a second focal point of the city's strategy: the spatial spreading of tourists. amsterdam&partners (2020) suggests this could happen

by spreading attractions, creating new attractions outside of the city centre, or by improving the guiding of tourists to such attractions. To do so, data collection and analysis of the online searches and bookings of both "nuisance" (the most frequently invoked prototype of this is young men from the UK or Italy involved in stag parties) and "valuable" visitors, which can be used to improve communication, marketing and crowd management, was suggested by amsterdam&partners (2020).

One particularly important aspect of the visitor economy highlighted by interviewees is the city's nightlife. amsterdam&partners (2020) also suggests the nightlife in the city should be managed more proactively by businesses, the police, and the municipality to diminish the nuisance. In turn, the municipality established a policy document called "Future of the Night" that looks to find a balance between liveability and enjoyment of the nightlife of Amsterdam (City of Amsterdam, 2021). Because of the overcrowding and nuisance that had been increasing for years, this diminished the tolerance for the entertainment sector. Yet before the pandemic, this sector attracted 1.5 million foreign tourists each year, for events such as Amsterdam Pride and Sail, and for the reputation of hosting great music festivals such as Milkshake, linked to the reputation of being an inclusive, welcoming city (City of Amsterdam, 2021). Visitors spend about € 1.25 billion on their trips for these events, creating employment opportunities in a variety of sectors, so these events are of major economic importance to the city. In turn, festivals and events were seen by informants to have a societal value as they contribute to connections among people, and hence to a tolerant and inclusive society. However, such events and parties also caused issues related to safety, littering, and the city's livability, so the municipality aims to diminish these issues in collaboration with residents, entrepreneurs, visitors, and police. In the case of safety, for instance, women and lgbtiq+ people are especially vulnerable, which has led to the #jijstaatnietalleen (you are not alone) campaign and the implementation of nightlife hosts to safeguard the ambiance at Rembrandtplein (City of Amsterdam, 2021).

On the day-to-day level, if issues cannot be (completely) prevented, for instance through campaigns and interventions to inform residents and visitors about the rules, law enforcement is considered necessary to punish those who break the rules and cause nuisance (City of Amsterdam, 2020). The municipality of Amsterdam defines their law enforcement as programmatic, information-based, and proactive. In every part of the city, priority is given to enforcing the public order and safety, controlling for misbehaviour such as urinating in public, sleeping on the streets, intimidation, vandalism, noise disturbance, and so forth. A second aspect of importance here is nuisance from the hospitality sector, including coffeeshops, such as people smoking outside of a bar, causing

noise disturbance for surrounding residents. Third, there is a specific focus on the nuisance and safety on the water, such as excursion boats and other tourist activities on the canals. This relates mostly to speed limits, noise, port dues, group sizes, and such. Finally, one focus is on the commodification of the public space, including guided tours and offering services, which create disturbance, and hence is controlled by law enforcement (City of Amsterdam, 2020).

5.1 Attracting "valuable visitors"

When discussing nuisance, the area most often mentioned by interviewees is the Red Light District. Interviewees from both the public and private sector argued that this area has contributed to Amsterdam's reputation of being free and welcoming to all, but in a negative way, by attracting the "wrong" tourists. The issue is that in a small geographical space, there is "prostitution, cheap accommodation, coffeeshops, touristic stores such as erotic shops, and cheap, tourist-focused bars and food corners. A toxic combination" (#11). This also affects the city's ambiance: "with weed leaves at every street corner and on all sorts of packaging, makes it seem like you are walking in some sort of drugs city" (#20). Furthermore, the misbehaviour of some tourists in this area, such as shouting, stimulates others to misbehave as well because of people's herd mentality. All of this combined "creates a certain demand, which is difficult to control" (#22).

The municipality thus aims to repel those tourists "who only visit Amsterdam to drink and to smoke weed, who only stay at the Red Light District, who sleep in their car or who throw up in the streets" (#22). One tool suggested by municipal employees for this is the spreading of coffeeshops, in other words, more intensive spatial planning focused on dissolving the breeding ground of problems, possibly in combination with decreasing the total number of coffeeshops in the city. Proponents of this idea stated that a more diverse functional area leads to less nuisance. Finally, four interviewees indicated that the (further) legalization of marijuana in the United States and Europe could help in deterring the "wrong" tourists, as "people need a different reason to travel to Amsterdam, because they already have those coffeeshops at home" (#13). Yet this is out of the hands of the Amsterdam municipality. Besides these measures specifically aimed at coffeeshops, the municipality has implemented, for instance, clever lighting to limit noise disturbance in certain places.

Instead of the "party and drugs" tourists, the city wants to attract "valuable", or respectful, visitors "who come to enjoy our beautiful city, to shop and go to restaurants and such, without bothering the residents" (#20). One interviewee from the city's DMO insisted that the term is not to be confused with "quality tourist", which carries the connotation of someone with a fat wallet and an

appetite for luxury. On the contrary, they argued that for instance backpackers are just as welcome, as long as they behave respectfully in the city and towards its residents:

> "A student coming to Amsterdam without any money, eating his peanut butter sandwich in the park and enjoying the city, is just as welcome as someone who stays in a five-star hotel, as long as they clean up their mess after them, have friendly contact with the residents, do not cause nuisance, and preferably add to the social cohesion. If they spend some money in the city, that is a plus, but not the most important factor". (#22)

All thirteen interviewees expressed similar opinions, arguing that gentrification of the tourism sector should be avoided, so that the city does not become enjoyable for "just the bored, rich Americans", but instead that everyone feels welcome in Amsterdam, regardless of their origin or budget. Particularly, representatives of cultural institutions (e.g., museums, art galleries) emphasized their aversion to the term "quality tourist", indicating that anyone who enjoys art and culture is welcome, rich or poor, party animal or plain Jane.

To attract valuable visitors, four interviewees indicated the necessity of providing and promoting the appropriate services and facilities. These include, for instance, cultural institutions such as museums and culinary restaurant experiences that are aimed at making Amsterdam a "food capital", gay-friendly facilities to promote Amsterdam as a "gay capital", but also a boosting nightlife on the example of Berlin to give a positive direction to the city's image of freedom. Furthermore, these same interviewees asserted that the city's authenticity and culture should be emphasized to make its uniqueness a reason to visit. From their perspective, therefore, the task for governmental, private sector, and civil society actors is to create new icons and stories that show the "real", "authentic" Amsterdam. Amsterdam's new image is intended to be fully developed by 2025, when the city celebrates its 750th anniversary. It was explained by one interviewee that data profiles of visitors are used to identify the strong and weaker points in Amsterdam's marketing plans and make appropriate changes. Related to this, a popular argument was that the facilities that Amsterdam offers should be interesting to the residents and if they are, they are also interesting to tourists. The importance of facilities shared by both residents and tourists will be elaborated on further below.

One specific group of valuable visitors being actively targeted is businesspeople for both congress and business travel. Three interviewees indicate that for the city's renewed image to attract congress visitors, it also needs to include culture, culinary and nightlife opportunities. It was said that those visitors usually "stay for a few days, go to a concert, go out for dinner, visit a museum if they have an extra day, so they are respectful visitors that we increasingly want to attract and for which we

have to put in the work". To attract these visitors, the organisations of such congresses need to be attracted, preferably for a longer period of time, and to do so, the city needs to be attractive for that target group. Besides the economic importance of this sector for the city, these interviewees stated that also the social and environmental impact congresses have on Amsterdam should be considered. Yet an interviewee from a rental platform also acknowledged the potential impact of COVID-19 on this sector: "businessmen will travel very differently, and a lot less, which used to be 30% of the tourism sector of Amsterdam" (#25). One example they gave was that probably fewer people will move to Amsterdam to work for companies that also allow employees to only work online. Yet, there was also confidence that the sector will partially restore: "online networking simply does not work well and that is an important function of congresses" (#20). One suggestion was that the transmission of knowledge will likely be online, but the meetings and events will be offline.

5.2 Spreading the problem

Although the charming, 17th-century ring of canals is unique in its beauty, the historical city centre's spatial planning also poses some problems related to crowdedness in the public space. Yet the extent of this problem is debated; as one interview stated, "Amsterdam is not as crowded as London or Paris if you are discussing mass crowds in a certain place. Also, it is not as crowded as it was in the 1950s in Amsterdam" (#15). Furthermore, it was said that extreme events of crowdedness at one point in time are exaggerated in how often they occur, contributing to the negative perception on this issue. Yet all interviewees agreed that Amsterdam struggles with its public space, with common examples provided including narrow roads and little space for cycle parking. One tool to tackle this is spreading via promotion of sites outside of the city, such as Volendam, Zandvoort (rebranded "Amsterdam beach") and Muiderslot (now "Amsterdam castle"). Yet such spreading is only effective in the case of repeat visits, so people coming to Amsterdam for the second, third, fourth time. However, people coming to visit for the first time and staying for two or three days still want to see the highlights, which are in the city centre: "You will go to the Red Light District, the Anne Frank House, the Museum Square, and then you are already out of time" (#19). Also, the shift to more online activities since the outbreak of COVID-19 is said not to decrease the popularity of Amsterdam's hotspots in the long run. A representative of a museum stated: "You can use the online domain in a lot of ways before a visit. However, you cannot replace a physical visit. I do not think that is desirable either" (#14).

Consequently, an interviewed city planner advocated the spreading of tourists within the city by creating new attractions outside of the centre, referred to as "place making" (#23). Especially the

city parts West and East have grown in popularity, they mentioned, partially with the help of hotels in these parts that promote the highlights there. If people stay in hotels outside of the city centre, and attractions in that area are promoted properly, people spend at least some part of the day there, and hence the city centre becomes less crowded. One example the city planner gave is the Javastraat, a street in the East in a neighbourhood historically dominated by residents of East Indian ethnicity:

> "Because the pressure on the city centre continued to grow, shops and residents started for looking for a place in the Javastraat. That changes the facilities, so modern bars and stores arrived but also many ethnic stores remained. [...] Now that is an interesting, authentic spot in Amsterdam for both residents and tourists". (#23)

Because certain shops and services move out of the city centre by themselves when the rents become too high, spreading of "authentic experiences" is also partially an automatic process. However, this mainly affects residents and not tourists. As a civil servant explained: "Residents go to other parts of the city because of the nice restaurants and stores there, they do not come to the city centre anymore, but tourists do not know about those facilities, so they stay in the city centre" (#20). Hence, the municipality aims to improve communication about such facilities with tourists. One tool mentioned by an interviewee from the city's DMO is the "inspiration-activation" campaign, which is focused on highlighting certain attractions and drawing in certain groups of people. This especially targets holiday tourists, as congress visitors more often already stay outside of the city centre (e.g. around RAI in the south), so they are more inclined to explore other parts of the city. This method of spreading could give the city multiple centres, rather than just the historical city centre, creating a more comfortable, enjoyable city for all those who move around there.

5.3 Not another cheese shop

The pandemic has also put emphasis on the city's dependence of tourists, especially in the city centre. Although the vulnerability of such a visitor economy was already recognized in "City in Balance", when tourists was suddenly absent, a sense of urgency to tackle this issue arose. In fact, as over 80% of its visitors are foreign, the halt on international travel has disproportionally affected Amsterdam in comparison to other Dutch destinations (City of Amsterdam, 2020). This has put new emphasis on the existing plan to move away from a monoculture of touristic facilities in the city centre, and instead provide a more diverse array of shops and services that are interesting to the residents of Amsterdam (amsterdam&partners, 2020). This is also referred to as a shift away from the visitor economy towards a neighbourhood economy. In turn, this should attract visitors who

appreciate Amsterdam for its unique character, and add value to the city themselves (amsterdam&partners, 2020). Moving away from the existing monoculture is said to require redesigning the city centre, with a particular focus on areas such as the Red Light District, and implementing stricter measures for permit procedures (amsterdam&partners, 2020).

A major public intervention on this level was the halt to touristic shops (City of Amsterdam, 2021). For instance, shops selling souvenirs, Nutella waffles and 'ready to fly'-packaged cheese outplaced resident-focused stores because of rising rental prices. Government intervention was necessary to put a halt to the growing number of such shop as "money does not bring out the best in people" (#6), and to support social entrepreneurship instead. This led to a cat-and-mouse game between government and creative entrepreneurs that work to avoid the 'touristic shop' label, as there is little ground for an objective line between tourist and non-tourist shops. Yet, a municipal official claimed that entrepreneurs should take responsibility for the impact they have on long-term future of the city that their business plan depends on, for the city's sake as well as their own.

5.4 Confronting tourism growth

A more drastic proposed measure to decrease the number of tourists coming to the city was to limit the number of transportation opportunities from and to Amsterdam. Regarding accessibility, Schiphol Airport was a much-discussed topic. Budget flights as cheap as €30 for a two-way trip are said to heavily influence both the number and type of tourists coming to the city, in a negative way. Furthermore, all interviewees argued that the current price for air travel does not reflect its severe environmental impact. The first and most-often mentioned strategy to counter this is to increase the price of a plane ticket by implementing a flight tax. Second, the number of flights arriving at and departing from Schiphol Airport could be decreased through influencing the slot coordination (the management of an airport's capacity). Third, the opening of a new Lelystad Airport could help spread the pressure on the region around Schiphol Airport, although opinions on this initiative varied and were nuanced carefully, as one interviewee mentioned it was a sensitive topic in the city council. However, the responsibility and opportunity to make such changes lies in the hands of the national government rather than the municipality. The slot coordination actually falls under European law, but the Dutch government is working to increase their control over this. Still, interviewees stressed the necessity for the municipality of Amsterdam to actively lobby the national government for a flight tax and a halt to the growth of Schiphol Airport, making sure that the voice of the city is heard.

A popular alternative to air travel was railway travel. London served as an example for how this could improve transportation from and to Amsterdam: "If you fly to London, you land in a remote area and have to travel some distance by subway or bus, which is quite inconvenient. If you take the Eurostar, you travel very comfortably and you can just remain seated until you arrive at the very heart of London" (#18). However, this same interviewee also said that ProRail claims such trajectories are difficult and can take years to realize. Furthermore, Amsterdam is accessible via road and water, for example by tour bus, cruise boat or party boat, where there are still many improvements to be made in environmental sustainability.

Because the city has so many means of access, an interviewee from the hotel sector argued that the high number of tourists is not surprising, or controllable for that matter: "We cannot prevent people from coming, there is freedom of movement, we have Schiphol Airport and train stations and such, we cannot change anything about that" (#22). Still, the pandemic has also been seen as an opportunity to implement more sustainable technology and economy, as the technology now used will only increase in cost in the future. This is said to be supported by the target audience: "I believe that many people will want to travel differently, stay closer to home, and understand that they can make a difference" (#25). All these measures together should prevent the matter of crowdedness from worsening: "Nobody wants Amsterdam to become like Venice" (#19).

A notable event in 2021 was introduction of the ordinance 'Tourism in Balance' that limits the amount of yearly overnight stays in Amsterdam to 20 million, with a threshold of 18 million, meaning that action should be taken to prevent a crossing of that limit. The interviewed economist and member of the city council expressed their support for this measure, stating that putting a quantitative limit on tourism should help diminish the crowdedness and nuisance in the city, rather than just focusing on attracting valuable visitors. They argued that the acceptance of this ordinance was a unique event in Amsterdam, demonstrating that drastic measures need to be — and are being — taken. They also criticized the measures already taken to tackle overtourism: "The growth in tourist numbers from 20 to 22 million, you will not deal with through spreading. Maybe it helps a little, but it is not a sufficient solution" (#19). On the other hand, some expressed dissatisfaction with this ordinance:

> "Our first reaction was: sure, the election campaigns have started. There were 30.000 people supporting this initiative, and it has been re-written a number of times to make it at least a little doable on a juridical level. Do we have to take that seriously?" (#16)

An interviewee from the hotel sector shared this opinion and stated that they do not support the idea of setting a maximum to the number of tourists, claiming that this is very unwelcoming and most of all undoable: "Are you going to close the gates?" (#24).

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

This links closely to the topic of the tourist tax in Amsterdam. An interviewed city planner stated that heightening the tourist tax would benefit the city: "There are more people using the city's sanitation for instance, so they have to pay a certain amount for that as well" (#23). Especially one interviewed economist claimed that a number of 30% would be fair, claiming that hotels have made enormous profits since the hotel stop, so they should repay the city and its residents with that money. However, opinions were mixed about the effectiveness of such a heightening on bringing down the number of tourists:

> "We have already heightened the tourist tax because research has shown that in combination with the fixed fee per night, that is the most effective tool you have as a municipality". (#18)

> "The tourist tax is a difficult topic of debate because there have been many experiments with it, but nobody really knows what works and what does not as of yet". (#22)

> "We do not believe that increasing the tourist tax works to regulate the visitor number. The increases made in recent years have not shown any association between the two". (#16)

Yet even if the hotel stop and tourist tax are effective, critics argued that tourists will still come to Amsterdam, simply staying in hotels in the MRA and coming to the city during daytime — so-called day trippers. These also include people coming by bus, plane or boat for just one day (or night), and Dutch visitors coming to Amsterdam without an overnight stay, which are especially important to consider since the outbreak of COVID-19. In fact, the municipality actively attracted Dutch visitors during the pandemic to help its businesses and institutions during the economically difficult time. Yet critics argued that day trippers contribute little to the city in economic or social terms, and hence advocated the taxing of for instance museum tickets to target these people. Through such

taxes, day trippers could still contribute to the city and pay for the facilities they use, such as the city's cleaning costs. However, a downside then is that city residents also pay the tax if they visit a museum. A potentially more positive way to implement this idea is to provide a discount for certain facilities for visitors who stay in a hotel in Amsterdam. Not all interviewees agreed that a hotel stop would be outweighed by an increase in day trippers, however: "That effect will never be 100%. There will never be as many people staying in the MRA as in the city itself" (#19). In fact, this interviewee asserted that this argument was mainly made by hotels, who try to pin the problems on the day trippers from whom they receive no benefit.

5.5 The Airbnb dilemma

Besides the hotel sector, the tourist rental sector plays an important role in the availability of accommodation in Amsterdam. The original idea behind Airbnb[2] is quite romantic, a representative of the city's DMO explained. It was about a home swap between two parties, visiting the other's place for a holiday. They also said that if Airbnb was still a small-scale platform for such swaps, this would not be an issue. Yet in ten to fifteen years a lot has changed; commercial investors have become involved and people see it as their right to rent out their homes. This had led to several problems. When touching upon these, the main argument was that "a house is for living in" (#17). Tourist rental was said to drive up housing prices and extract properties from the housing market. Because people became able to make money with their home, the option to rent out (part of) a house for some time actually became a selling point: "Advertisements on Funda [a popular house listing site] said 'This house has a nice room for the use of a B&B', which drove up the asking price" (17). Furthermore, property investors could buy houses to then rent out for outrageous prices, supposedly supported by the Dutch government:

> "Policy in 2015 recommended the Dutch housing market to foreign investors by letting go of the rental regulation so that rental prices could further be increased. Hence, the current housing crisis touches upon Airbnb and tourist rental, but it is a lot more complex than just that". (#17)

One specific investment company mentioned by two interviewees from the private sector was Blackstone, which was said to have bought 1700 Dutch houses, most of these in Amsterdam, 300 of which are currently not occupied, hence extracting much-needed living space from society. One

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2 Interviewees generally referred to the tourism rental sector simply as Airbnb, so here we follow in using Airbnb as umbrella term for this sector. However, more platforms exist that contribute to the problems associated with short-term tourist rental.

interviewee argued that COVID-19 proved the effect of Airbnb on rental prices, because when properties remained unoccupied by tourists, the demand went down and so did the prices. As a result, the common view was that commercialisation of homes drives up purchase/rental prices and outplaces many of Amsterdam's residents, such as young people who grew up in the city but who now cannot afford to live there anymore. Furthermore, there is also a social element to tourist rental as the community feeling is disturbed:

> "The police once explained that if you have many visitors in an area with much tourist rental apartments, that negatively impacts the social security. Not that those tourists are criminals, but the eyes and ears in a neighbourhood disappear. They constantly change". (#17)

Additionally, it was argued that Airbnb and similar platforms pose unfair competition to the hotel sector: "Airbnb is basically a hotel without caretaker, which often goes together with nuisance". An interviewee from the hotel sector explained that unlike Airbnb hotels have to take into account food safety, fire safety, music copyright fees, waste charges, and much more. Furthermore, the hotel sector contributes to social sustainability on different levels, such as employing people with a disadvantage on the labour market, and opening up space for the homeless and schools during the pandemic. This view was supported by the statement that Airbnb does not want to cooperate with the agenda of the municipality, so that working together towards sustainable goals becomes impossible. One interviewee also argued that the profit of Airbnb goes to foreign tax havens, not to the benefit of Amsterdam. Hence, all interviewees agreed that Airbnb — and tourist rental more generally —must be constrained. One method of doing so is argued by amsterdam&partners (2020), wanting to steer towards a ban on tourist rental accommodations that are not registered. Their main aim is to free up houses for people to actually live in and to stimulate the social cohesion and cultural diversity of neighbourhoods.

6 The influence of COVID-19 on the Overtourism Debate

When comparing perspectives and initiatives concerning overtourism and its solutions in the pre- and "post-"COVID periods, several aspects stand out. First of all, the similarities between these two periods stem from the fact that the problem of overtourism was already recognized before the pandemic. Moreover, the need to consider "people, profit, planet" together to establish a more sustainable tourism sector also existed before COVID-19. For instance, debate concerning how to tackle nuisance in the city centre, such as via the proposal for an i-criterium in coffeeshops, or through renewing the area's spatial planning, already occurred. This relates to the aim to find a

more appropriate balance in retaining Amsterdam's reputation of freedom while not devolving into "free-for-all" havoc. Hence, both periods are characterised by efforts to renew the city's overall image and approach to managing tourism. Additionally, the vulnerability of the visitor economy and potential loss of the city's historic identity were already recognized. Again, here the focal point has always been the city centre as the tourism monoculture is most prominent in that area. In both periods, the stop on tourist stores in the city centre was acknowledged as an important measure in tackling these issues. In both periods, it was argued that facilities should be more focused on Amsterdam's residents, which in turn would actually be more interesting to valuable visitors as well.

Issues of crowdedness are also acknowledged in both periods. For instance, a permit system for commercial activities in public space, such as guided tours, already existed to moderate such phenomena. Also spreading —both within and outside of the city— had already been implemented to release some pressure from the city centre. Furthermore, a hotel stop had been enforced before COVID-19, while the tourist tax had already been increased, both in an attempt to decrease the number of tourists coming to Amsterdam yearly. Finally, in both periods it was argued that the municipality of Amsterdam should lobby for a flight tax and against the growth of Schiphol Airport, while also encouraging more sustainable travel options such as train travel instead.

Regarding governance structures, both periods have a strong focus on regulatory policy instruments, such as permit procedures and law enforcement. Furthermore, in both periods' communication strategies in the form of campaigns have been implemented to influence tourists' behaviour, mostly with the aim of diminishing nuisance. Besides such effort by the local government, emphasis in both periods has also been placed on social entrepreneurship, the use of BIZ's, and citizen consultancy, demonstrating attention to decentralisation of responsibility to tackle issues of overtourism both pre- and post-pandemic.

Concerning differences between these two periods, on the other hand, several issues that were already recognized in pre-pandemic period have received significantly more attention since. One of them is Airbnb. As previously discussed, the problematic effects of tourist rental on the housing market and the social cohesion of neighbourhoods in Amsterdam were known before COVID-19, in accordance with existing research (see Fletcher et al., 2019), and regulations were already implemented to constrain this sector. Yet since the pandemic, more actors have actively expressed their objection to, and greater efforts have been made to ban, tourist rentals from parts of the city. The same is true for the intention to change the image of Amsterdam from a sex and drugs-city to a culture-city. Although the necessity for such a change was expressed prior to COVID-19, it has

since been stressed by many, and more resources have been devoted to make this change happen. Particularly the attraction of congresses and other forms of business travel has received more attention since the pandemic. Diversification of Amsterdam's crowd has also received more emphasis since the outbreak of COVID-19, with growth in tourism numbers now increasingly subordinate to inclusion of a greater range of people to both live in and visit the city. Still, the emphasis remains on creating a sense of deluxe tourism in relation to cultural attractions when it comes to attracting "valuable" visitors.

Furthermore, while the potential balloon effect of the hotel stop that was implemented before COVID-19 (in terms of tourists simply relocating to surrounding municipalities) was already recognized, consideration of day trippers as also being problematic has been emphasized by more actors since the pandemic. This is related to the increased number of Dutch visitors during the pandemic, who come to Amsterdam during the day but do not stay overnight. This has been encouraged by the municipality for economic reasons. Yet day trippers' overall contribution to crowdedness and touristic facilities, while contributing relatively little to Amsterdam's economy, has now been highlighted more, and the potential for taxation of these day trippers has been newly introduced. Increased attention has also been devoted to establishment of an MRA-wide accommodation plan in order to improve the effectiveness of the hotel stop in relation to this issue. The same is true for the option to further heighten the general tourist tax. This can be linked to the hotel stop especially since economists have argued that this stop has significantly increased accommodation prices, in that demand keeps growing while the supply has stagnated, and hence that a higher tourist tax would consequently be justified (Van Dijk & Badir, 2019). Increases have already been made in 2019 and 2020, but still an interviewed economist pleaded for another increase to benefit the city and perhaps decrease tourism numbers in the long run. Perhaps the most notable change in policy regarding the decrease in tourism number has been the ordinance of a maximum of 20 million overnight stays per year, which signifies a quantitative emphasis on the current problems.

7 Discussion

As the COVID pandemic recedes into the rearview mirror in many (though certainly still not all) places, this analysis has found some interesting trends in the changing approach on tourism policy in Amsterdam since its outbreak in March 2020. To offer further insight, in the following we analyze these changes in terms of Blanco-Romero et al.'s (2019) framework contrasting pro-growth and degrowth perspectives in order to assess the extent to which current policy preserves or departs

from the pro-growth focus prevailing before the pandemic. Table 2 presents an overview of the themes considered consistent with a pro-growth approach, while Table 3 does the same for the degrowth strategy.

Table 3. Pro-growth Measures in Amsterdam Post-COVID

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

Source: authors'own elaboration

Table 4. Degrowth Measures in Amsterdam Post-COVID

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

Source: authors'own elaboration

As shown in these tables, there are only two D and one D-D principle not prominent in current policy measures, namely deseasonalisation and discrediting contestation, on the one hand, and dignifying working conditions, on the other. Regarding the latter, prostitution policies that endeavour to compel visitors treat the people working in the Red Light District with more respect

are an interesting development, but these did not come back in any of the interviews, nor were they much discussed in the policy documents, and because of that, this D-D principle is not considered a significant focus of attention in current discussions. Deseasonalisation, while occurring de facto to some degree in terms of increased tourism arrivals to the city throughout the year, is not an explicit policy pursued by the municipality. Likewise, the tactics employed to discredit opposition to tourism growth among city residents seen before the pandemic have largely fallen away in current debates (notwithstanding some residual rhetoric concerning the framing of tourists as scapegoats for larger problems or emphasis on tourism's beneficial aspects to counter critique). On the other hand, measures pursuing decongestion, deluxe tourism, decentralisation, and diversification, from a pro-growth perspective, and as well as decommodification, deconsumerism, detailed spatial planning and detouristification, in line with more degrowth oriented approaches, are all present to some degree in current discussions. These findings suggest that the local government is constrained from making more dramatic changes in the city's approach on tourism by dominant economic interests. Measures are being taken to increase the sector's sustainability, principally in social and economic terms, but these do not address the fundamental issues related to continuous growth. For instance, the spreading of tourists intends to alleviate pressure on the city centre, but it does not challenge the status quo of trying to continuously attract more tourists. Similarly, diversifying the supply of goods and services, attracting valuable visitors and promoting social entrepreneurship do not confront the mainstream economic interests and approaches historically driving tourism sector development. In this sense, Amsterdam is still largely dominated by a growth-oriented approach to tourism planning.

However, some (potential) elements of a more degrowth-oriented approach are also present. Moves have been made, for instance, towards the decommodification of housing and public space, and towards enacting deconsumerism of the city more generally. This means that monetary resources have become prioritized less over the interests of Amsterdam residents than previously. Also, revenue from the accommodation sector is said to benefit of the city more collectively since the heightening of the tourist tax, something that the proposed day tripper tax might further augment. The push for renewed spatial planning of the city centre acknowledges that many problems related to tourism are intertwined with one another, such that one overarching large-scale strategy encompassing the wider city and region is required to deal with them. The process of city reimaging and the tourism cap ordinance are also indicators of de- and retouristification to some degree as they challenge both the qualitative and quantitative fundaments of pre-COVID tourism management focused on attracting as many tourists of all types as possible. Although these

degrowth-oriented measures remain overshadowed by pro-growth elements of current policies, they do indicate a movement in the direction of degrowth not present at all in pre-pandemic planning.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, both pro-growth and degrowth approaches are reflected (albeit unevenly) in current discussions concerning the future development of Amsterdam's tourism sector. The dominant consensus is that the situation prior to COVID-19 is undesirable and hence that serious measures should be taken to prevent returning back to that state as tourist numbers swell once more. The pandemic has increased the mutual agreement of disparate stakeholders around this position. Strategies aligning with both pro-growth and degrowth approaches are used to reach that goal, but particularly the tourism cap ordinance put into place in 2021 is a notable, unique event that perhaps steers the debate more in the direction of degrowth (to the extent that it is actually enacted, of course). If implemented and enforced, such a policy intervention is likely to be more effective in addressing root issues than initiatives such as social entrepreneurship and the use of smart technologies for spreading (Milano et al., 2019).

At time of writing, it remains too early to tell precisely what impact the newly introduced policies will have on issues of overtourism and its perception within the city. In 2022, Amsterdam tourism has already begun to bounce back towards pre-COVID levels but remained somewhat depressed, with 17 million visitors recorded in contrast to the 22 million registered in 2019 (City of Amsterdam). This means that the tourism cap ordinance has not yet needed to be mobilized. However, authorities forecast a further increase in tourism when final numbers are counted for 2023 to around 20 million (City of Amsterdam, 2023), in which case the cap ordinance would indeed take effect and (as yet undefined) measures to enforce it would need to be introduced. Further research will therefore be needed to investigate this outcome and assess the extent to which it may or may not alter the current balance between pro-growth and degrowth strategies employed in the city's future tourism management.

In closing, our study has shown that analysis in terms of the contrasting principles defining pro-growth and degrowth approaches affords a nuanced understanding of the extent to which dominant policies and practices have altered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic "reset". In developing this analysis, we have therefore contributed to the literature addressing overtourism and its responses by moving beyond simply employing the framework as a diagnostic of existing policies to using it to understand the extent to which policies are changing, and in which direction, as the

global tourism industry prepares for a return to post-pandemic "normalcy". We hope that this example will prove productive for researchers investigating these same dynamics in other contexts, with the aim to develop a comparative perspective for how different destinations throughout the world are positioning themselves in relation to the common spectre of a return of overtourism and its discontents.

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