UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING VISITOR PRESSURE IN URBAN TOURISM

A study to into the nature of and tools used to manage visitor pressure in six major European cities

Dr. Ko Koens & Professor Albert Postma

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING VISITOR PRESSURE IN URBAN TOURISM

A study to into the nature of and tools used to manage visitor pressure in six major
European cities

1. Introduction

1.1 The need to deal with visitor pressure

Cities are increasingly visited by business and leisure tourists. The income from these visitors, both domestic and foreign, bring significant economic benefits and support the wider social and cultural development of the city and its surroundings. Nevertheless, in recent years media has started to report on a negative attitude among the local population to visitors, due to issues with overcrowding, noise and other nuisances supposedly caused by tourists. Such a negative attitude can decrease the overall hospitality of residents towards visitors and make the city a less interesting proposition for visitors. Either way these developments hinder the development of tourism in these cities, limiting growth opportunities and potentially causing disruption as protest becomes more vocal. Although it is very difficult to ascertain how and when visitor pressure becomes too high, preventing this phenomenon is essential to ensure a long-term sustainable development of city tourism. The danger of visitor 'overkill' was already recognised in 1979 by Rosenow and Pulsipher (1979). They attributed such overkill to three main factors:

1. Too many visitors, possibly aggravated by seasonality – in this case it is the absolute numbers of visitors that are seen as disturbing. This can be a perception of overcrowding in parts of the city, or the feeling that there are no pleasant spaces in the city anymore where residents can shy away from visitors.

2. Too much adverse visitor impact - here the impact of visitors is perceived negatively. This can be congestion on the roads due to buses stopping near attractions or road users who do not know the, often informal, traffic rules and thus create dangerous situations. It also entails issues like noise disturbance, rowdiness and other disturbances visitors are perceived to cause (even when it may be locals causing the disturbance.

3. Too much physical impact of the visitor economy - the physical impact of industries aimed at visitors also can cause agitation. This includes, for example, the over-proliferation of hotels or retail aimed at visitors.

In order to deal with the pressures of tourist visitation and resident complaints, it is necessary to develop urban visitation and tourism sustainably by finding new and better ways of managing the increasing visitor pressure. If visitor streams are more adequately managed, pressure can be relieved in the most visited areas, cities will be able to provide tourists with a better hospitality experience and visitation can assist development and gentrification of economically deprived regions. To achieve this, more insight on how to handle this phenomena is urgently needed.

This report was written in order to help cities cope with this issue. It provides an overview of the issues related to visitor pressure, ways of managing visitor pressure and potential scenarios of city tourism development. It is based on research in six major European cities; Amsterdam, Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Munich.

The report aims to fulfil two main objectives. 1) Recognise the extent to which visitor pressure can be observed in the six participating cities through an investigation of the perceptions of host communities towards the visitor pressure; 2) Identify different ways of managing visitor pressure and examine to what extent they can be meaningfully applied to a European urban tourism context.

1.1. Methodology

The report is based on a combination of desk research, interviews, and a survey. Desk research, consisting of academic and professional literature, advisory reports and newspaper articles provide the background to the report.

The perception of residents to visitor pressure in the six cities was investigated using the critical incident technique as developed by Postma in his PhD thesis titled "critical encounters in the development of tourism" (Postma, 2013). Using short qualitative interviews and a larger, representative *quantitative survey* among 2638 residents. This led to the identification of patterns, which could be mapped to facilitate an assessment of the resident's critical encounters, emotional response, behavioural response, loyalty towards tourism and the background variables

The questionnaire was constructed and translated into Danish, Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Dutch and German. The questionnaire contained questions related to 1) personal characteristics; 2) attachment to the city; 3) positive critical encounters; 4) negative critical encounters; 5) behavioural response to these encounters; 6) attitude towards future tourism development in the city and in the respondents' neighbourhood; 7) Support for strategies to deal with tourism development. The questionnaire was distributed online to a representative panel of residents in the six city centres.

To find which kind of solutions and management strategies are used, or could be used, 36 in-depth semi-structured interviews were held with policymakers and representatives from industry and resident organisations in all cities. Interviews were held in the native tongue of the interviewee, with the exception of the interviews in Copenhagen, which were held in English. Analysis was done in three steps. First, the interviewer provided an initial analysis of each interviewee and sought similar themes among interviews. Next findings from all interviews were brought together and analysed again to create further understanding. These findings were then discussed with representatives of the participating cities to come up with clearer insights.

2. Perceptions of visitor pressure among residents

2.1. Critical incidents with regards to tourism

The first section of this report deals with the perception of visitor pressure among residents. To appreciate how residents perceive tourism, a total of 2638 residents were surveyed in the six cities. Their attitude towards multiple aspects of tourism was measured, and they were also asked about critical encounters with tourism in the past 3 years.

Critical encounters relate to respondents' personal experiences during the past 3 years with tourism. A distinction was made between direct encounters, indirect encounters and stakeholder encounters (Postma, 2013) (Table 2.4). Direct encounters, which show the direct manifestation of tourism in the living environment of the respondents, either *spatially (1)*; *economically (2), socially (3).* Indirect encounters illustrate how tourism intervenes with the *person's life or family life indirectly (4).* Finally, s*takeholder encounters (5)* deal with the way key stakeholders are encountered. Below a further indication is given of the different types of encounters.

Table 2.4 Critical incident encounters

Type of encounter	Positive	Negative
Direct spatial encounters	more shops, restoration of traditional architecture	obstruction of sidewalks, pollution/littering/noise
Direct economic encounters	increase of price level real estate, more jobs	increase of price level private or rental houses, increase of seasonal/migrant workers
Direct social encounters	increased liveliness, greater international touch	change or loss of culture/lifestyle, misbehaviour of visitors
Indirect personal/family encounters	better job, improvement of family's housing conditions	waiting times in shops/facilities, violation of safety
Stakeholder encounters	-[1]	attitude of local government, attitude of tour guides

[1]*Stakeholder encounters were measured only on a negative scale,*

Figure 2.1 shows the balance of these critical encounter categories, i.c. the costs versus the benefits.

Figure 2.1 Positive and negative critical encounters by category

Critical encounters across all six cities, by domain
(1=neutral to 5=very positive/negative)
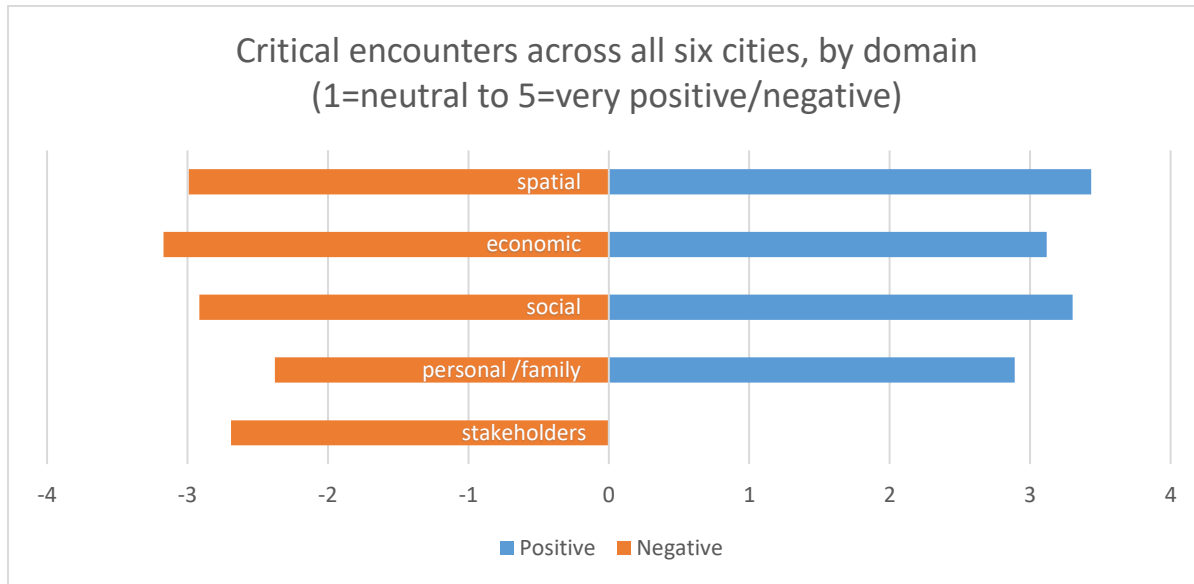
The graph in this figure shows respondents are most negative about economic and spatial encounters and most positive about spatial and social issues. Overall the positive experiences outweigh the negative experiences. The gross effect is that respondents feel a little more positive about spatial, social and personal encounters and a little bit more negative about economic impacts. Again though, this figure highlights how residents also see the benefits of tourism encounters, even when they recognised their disadvantages too.
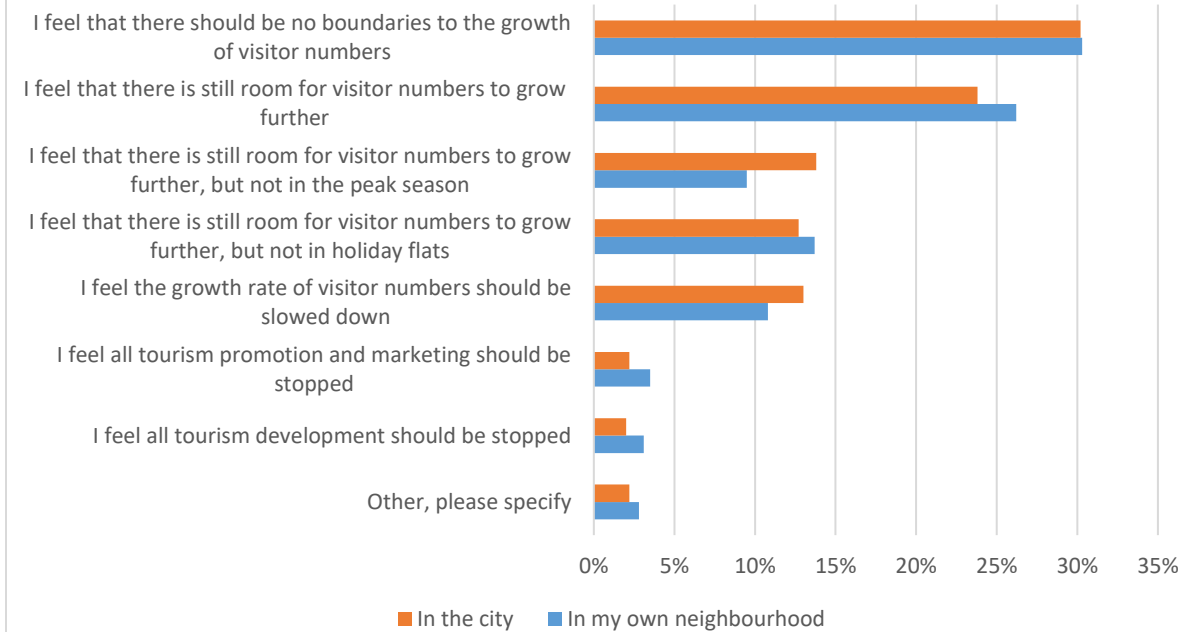
2.2. Attitudes towards tourism

Critical encounters, in particular the trade-off between positive and negative critical encounters, and the perceived impact on people's life also impact upon the attitude toward tourism. The attitude towards the growth of the number of visitors is illustrated in figure 3.4. Here the attitude towards growth of visitor numbers to the city as a whole is compared with the attitude towards growth in the respondents' own neighbourhood. The graph shows a scale from unconditional growth to a halt on the growth of visitor numbers.

Figure 3.4 Attitude towards further growth of tourism

Attitude towards further growth of visitor number in the city and in the respondents' neighbourhood

(2638 respondents evenly distributed over the city centres of Copenhagen, Lisbon, Barcelona, Munich, Amsterdam and Berlin)

Categories (top to bottom):
- I feel that there should be no boundaries to the growth of visitor numbers
- I feel that there is still room for visitor numbers to grow further
- I feel that there is still room for visitor numbers to grow further, but not in the peak season
- I feel that there is still room for visitor numbers to grow further, but not in holiday flats
- I feel the growth rate of visitor numbers should be slowed down
- I feel all tourism promotion and marketing should be stopped
- I feel all tourism development should be stopped
- Other, please specify

Legend: ■ In the city ■ In my own neighbourhood

The largest group of respondents feels that it is not necessary to put boundaries on the growth of visitors. In fact, most respondents feel that there is room for unconditional further. Given that around a further quarter also sees room for further throughout the year, this means that over 50% of respondents have a positive outlook on the growth of tourism. On the other hand a significant proportion thinks that further growth is possible only when this is outside the peak season, while another group emphasises that growth in holiday flats (such as AirBnB, homeaway etc.) needs to be restricted. Another significant group of respondents states that the growth should be slowed down anyhow. These results further outline the complexity of the perceptions of visitor pressure. While over half of all residents do not see a particular issue with further growth of tourism, there is a significant minority, for whom tourism growth is an issue. However, this group is not unified on where the emphasis of tourism growth or lack thereof should lie on, but has reservations. To engage with such residents and better understand their issues, it can be useful to gain cooperation from other government departments (e.g. those dealing with housing, real estate), as the issue with visitor pressure issue appears to transcend tourism alone.

3. Strategies for managing visitor pressure

In this section the measures and tools for managing visitor pressure are discussed. These arose from the interviews with policymakers and a careful reading of previous academic literature (i.e. Bellini, N., & Pasquinelli; LAgroup, & RBOI.,1997; Postma, 2013) and policy documents of dealing with tourism in an urban context. Initial outlines of the measures and tools were discussed during two workshops with representative researchers from the participating cities. These sessions were useful as they helped verify the measures and tools that were found, but they also helped to get clear differences between measures and tools.

Some measures and tools are well-known and already applied in different places. However, there are also other measures, which are less well-known and have received less attention among policymakers and media. A total of 65 ways/methods of managing visitor pressure have been identified. To provide structure and clarification, these methods have been grouped into 10 overarching strategies:

1. Spreading visitors around the city and beyond
2. Time-based rerouting
3. Creating itineraries
4. Regulation
5. Visitor segmentation
6. Make residents benefit from the visitor economy
7. Create city experiences that benefit both visitors and local residents
8. Improve city infrastructure and facilities
9. Communicating with and involving visitors
10. Communicating with and involving local stakeholders

3.1.   Characteristics of different management strategies

The overarching strategies provide a wide variety of different ways to deal with visitor pressure. In table 3.1 they are contrasted on their spatial requirement, the main target group they can have an impact on, the main stakeholders that need to be involved when trying to get things done and the time scale. It is important to note that these characteristics are generalisations and that there are differences between methods within the management strategies. However, the table does highlight how not all strategies are possible in all places and/or may not work for certain actors and issues.

Table 3.1: Characteristics of management strategies

	Spatial requirements	Main target group (visitors vs. local)	Main stakeholders involvement	Time scale
Spreading tourists	Underdeveloped areas in or nearby city that have potential to attract visitors	Specific visitor groups; with leisure visitors mainly repeat and longer-stayers	Industry, DMOs and wider policy stakeholders	Long-term (5-10 years)
Time-based rerouting	No specific requirements – for dynamic re-routing a relatively close proximity of attractions is useful	Focus on leisure and business visitors rather than local users	Focus on industry stakeholders, but also policymakers	Initial changes can
Regulation	No clear requirements	All users of the city	Predominantly wider policy stakeholders as well as industry actors	Long-term (5-10 years)
Creating itineraries	Multiple attractions within relatively close proximity	Focus on leisure visitors	Predominantly industry stakeholders and DMOs	Dependent on scale of interventions, both short-term and long-term
Visitor segmentation	No specific requirements	Predominantly business and leisure visitors	DMOs in combination with policy stakeholders and industry	Short-term actions possible, effect only visible after several years
Make residents benefit	No specific requirements	Local stakeholders and visitors	Policy stakeholders, DMOs, the wider industry and residents	Both short-term and long-term
Create city experiences for residents and visitors	Space to create experiences and accommodate residents and visitors	All users of the city	Policy stakeholders, DMOs, the wider industry, residents and visitors	Mid to long-term
Communicating with and involving local stakeholders	No specific requirements	Local stakeholders	Policy stakeholders, DMOs, the wider industry and residents	Short-term actions possible, effects not directly visible
Communicating with and involving visitors	No specific requirements	All visitors	DMOs, policy stakeholders, industry and visitors	Short-term actions possible
Improve wider city infrastructure and facilities	Space for improvement and/or development of infrastructure and facilities in or nearby city	All users of the city	Wider policy stakeholders, particularly in infrastructure and logistics, politicians, DMOs and industry	Long-term

3.2. Residents' attitude towards the management strategies

Respondents were also asked for their opinion about visitor management strategies (figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Residents' attitude towards visitor management strategies (all cities)
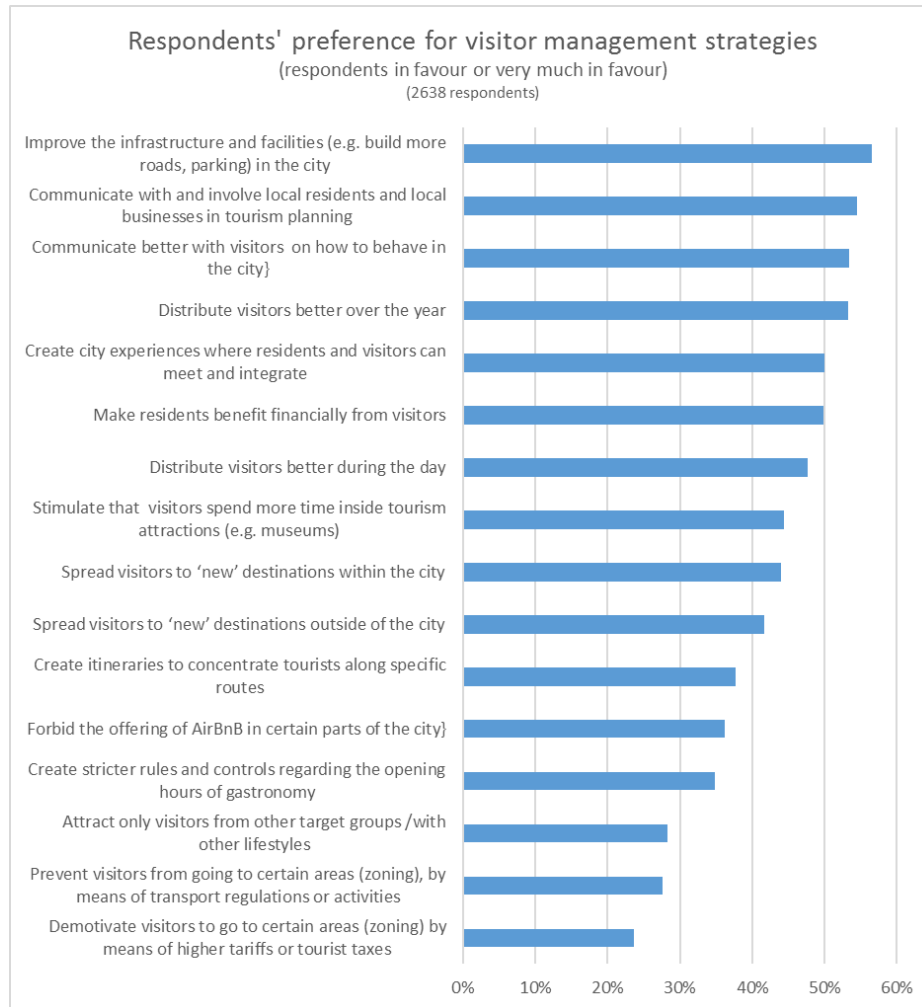
Respondents prefer the improvement of wider infrastructure and facilities. Such management strategies may not always be easy to pursue, as they do not relate exclusively to tourism and will require cooperation with multiple government departments and other stakeholders. Other popular strategies are improved communication with visitors to try to get them to behave better in the cities, as well as a greater involvement of residents in local planning. A better distribution over the year is also deemed important. This means that the top four listed strategies are directed at four key perspectives: time, space, planners and visitors. Regulatory management strategies are, on the whole, seen as less desirable, as all of them are viewed as favourable by less than 40% of the respondents.

# 4. Visitor pressure scenarios for 2025

In the previous chapter various strategies were discussed for managing visitor pressure. Whether such strategies will fit within the context of the cities of the future is not clear, because city tourism will be affected by a highly dynamic societal environment. To be future proof, strategies for managing visitor pressure should take anticipate the changes ahead.

However, the direction to which such developments or the impacts thereof will unfold is not always clear, leave alone the way we could anticipate this with proper strategies. One way of approaching this challenge is to work with strategic foresight. With strategic foresight the tourism environment is mapped and analysed by the stakeholders involved. For this project a workshop was organized with representatives from the participating cities of Lisbon, Barcelona, Berlin, Copenhagen and Amsterdam, and a representative of ETOA. This resulted in four different scenarios for the sustainable development of urban tourism in Western European cities. Each scenario describes the urban context tourism will be faced with. The scenarios are labelled: The central city, the networked city, the atomic city, and the dispersed city (figure 4.1).

*Figure 4.1 Four scenarios for the development of city tourism*
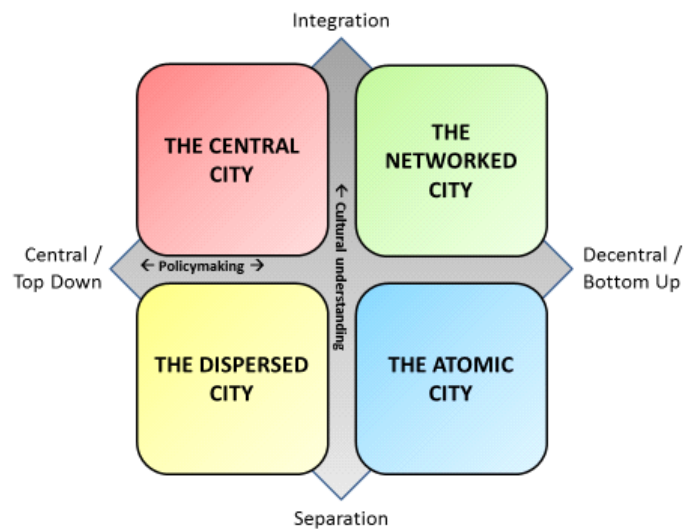
Scenario 1. The Central City
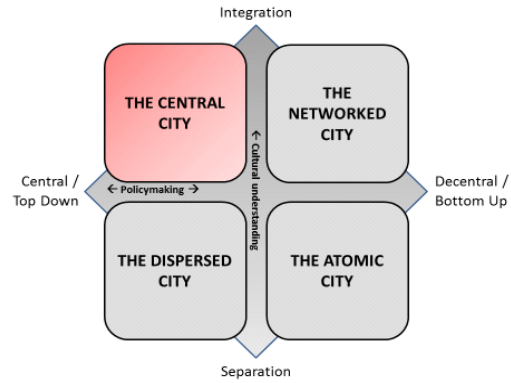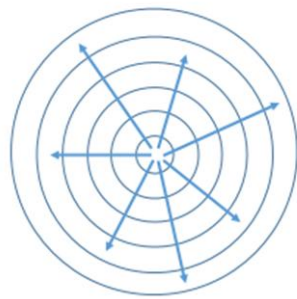
The central city is a city in which policymaking and planning is regulated centrally and top down and policy is driven from a single vision. The centralistic authorities provide the city with strict rules and regulations and with centrally managed and organised transport, which also applies to tourism and transport. Because the civil society accepts and supports the management and organisation structure of the city, there are no conflicts between different parties. Tourism to the city is primarily regarded as an economic pillar of the economy. It is used to generate income and jobs. Tourism has a strong commercial drive and market orientation.

Scenario 2. The Networked City
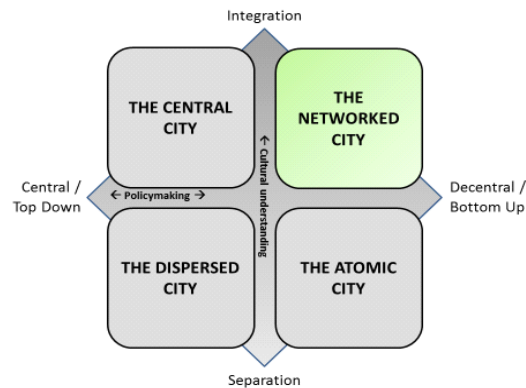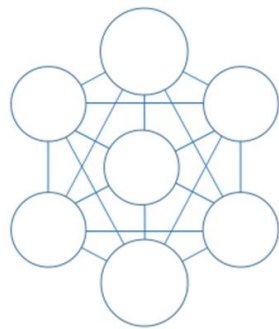
The networked city is an urban system in which multiple cultural nodes are strongly interconnected. In each node policymaking and planning is regulated locally and bottom-up. There is a strong influence of local residents and local business on policy and planning in their own environment. Districts governments play a coordinating role between the different actors within the district, and upwards between the districts and both within and across the nodes actors try to cooperate. This creates both synergy at the level of the districts and across the urban system and a cooperative, atmosphere, although it is difficult to implement radical solutions.

Scenario 3. The Atomic City
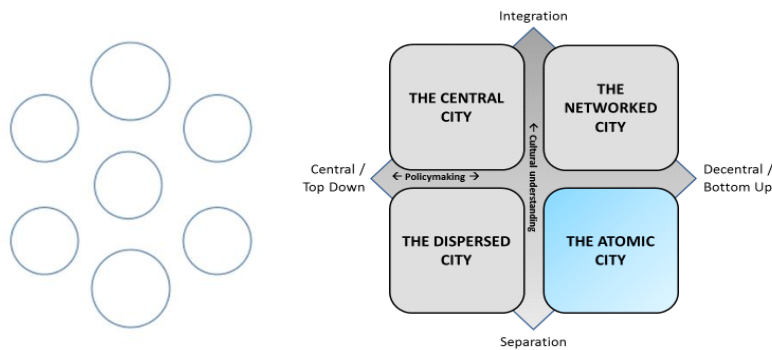
The atomic city represents an urban system with multiple cultural that do exist side by side without any interdependency. In each node policymaking and planning is regulated locally and bottom-up. There is a strong influence of local residents and local business on policy and planning in their own environment. There is a fierce competition between the nodes and there and no co-ordination across the cultural nodes in the city. Tourism strategies are initiated by local parties at district level, with no coordination to benefit the whole city. This results in a fragmented and incoherent image of the city among (aspirant) visitors and incoherent tourist infrastructure.

Scenario 4. The Dispersed City
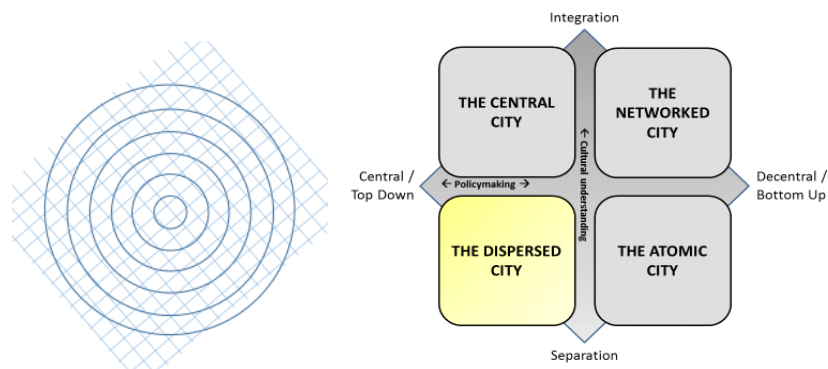
The dispersed city shows a lack of central policy, plans and rules and regulations. This causes a situation of situation, where civil society feels uncontrolled and unbridled, and many different entities within society try to take control in order to ensure their own benefits. The society is very individualistic and competitive. There are continuous power struggles and only the strong tend to survive. The main priority is in safety and security. In this scenario tourism is completely overlooked and there is no strategic thinking with regard to tourism and transport whatsoever. Tourism is undeveloped. There is a lack of hospitality due to fear for 'strangers'. This also hampers creativity and innovation.

5. Conclusions

Looking at the overall perception of visitor pressure among residents it becomes clear that the picture is more positive than one may be expected to believe, based on certain media reports. It is important to recognise that communities are not homogenous the perception of tourism differs between and within different groups. With regards to positive impacts the main benefits are the positive atmosphere and possibilities that tourism brings, not just economically, but also socially through a more international vibe in a city. When it comes to negatives, residents highlight how they perceive the rising costs of living in different ways as key issues.

Ten different strategies and 65 methods of managing visitor pressure have been recognised that can help mitigate the issue, or provide opportunities for increasing visitor *and* resident experience. When residents are asked about these strategies, they indicate to have a preference for a positive approach to the management of visitor pressure, rather than a more repressive approach. Smart solutions should take into account the *relations* between *hosts* and *guests* in the city.

As mentioned earlier, in all cities visitor activities take place in a specific local context, often in alignment with other social and economic activities that take place there. It is also paramount to take into consideration the interests of all the stakeholders involved to ensure a sustainable tourism growth. This means that there is not one way of managing visitor pressure. What works in one context, may be unsuitable for another. The methods and strategies in this report provide insights into potential things that cities can do and how they can work. The key is to find a way to harmonise tourism development and potential growth within the local surroundings. This will require interaction and discussion not just within tourism departments. Instead it means that policymakers of most departments and industry actors need to take joint responsibility and engage with the wider tourism development, but also engage in a continuous dialogue with all stakeholders on this matter (industry, residents, policymakers and tourists). The issue of visitor pressure is simply too complex a problem to be solved by a selected number of stakeholders (e.g. just policymakers and/or industry) and thus all stakeholders (including residents, visitors, representative NGOs) need to be involved. Findings from the current research are useful to shed light on the complexity and can assist different stakeholders to deal with the issue.

To assist stakeholders to make choices with regards to the management strategies, a scenarioplanning model can help. Still, this will also always depend on the nature of visitor pressure in a city, as well as the characteristics of the city and continuous dialogue with all stakeholders is key. Cities are advised to carefully consider these, before choosing certain management strategies. The concept of scenario planning, in combination with city characteristics is being further developed at the moment; with the aim to create an easy-to-use toolset in a digital

environment that will assist policymakers to engage with other stakeholders in deep reflections on how to deal with visitor pressure.

References

Bellini, N., & Pasquinelli, C. (Eds.). (2016). Tourism in the City: Towards an Integrative Agenda on Urban Tourism. Heidelber: Springer.

LAgroup, & RBOI. (1997). *Handboek visitor management*. Amsterdam.

Postma, A. (2013). *'When the tourists flew in': critical encounters in the development of tourism*.

Rosenow, J. E., & Pulsipher, G. L. (1979). Tourism the good, the bad, and the ugly., 264pp.

Russo, A. P. (2002). Cultural Clusters and Tourism Development: the Challenge of Venice. In D. A. Jelincic (Ed.), *Culture: A Driving Force for Urban Tourism-Application of Experiences to Countries in Transition* (pp. 27–45). Zagreb: Insitute for International Relations.