Destinations versus living environments: the clash over concurrent claims among different interest groups in cities

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In recent years, overtourism has become a major issue, especially in some well-known cities. After all, besides being destinations for urban tourists, cities also provide a living environment for the residents of those cities. Based on findings from German cities, this article places special emphasis on the question of the extent to which it is possible to identify and develop proactive, comprehensive approaches to integrating residents' sentiments about tourism and its growth. Findings generated in focus group interviews conducted in Munich showed that there was little interest or willingness among the population to express minor irritations and feelings of unease or discomfort. The local population only expresses its problems and complaints once a certain threshold is crossed. By the time the local population has voiced its concerns about perceived visitor pressures and the negative effects of tourism, it is too late to implement pre-emptive approaches. For this reason, it is crucial to develop early-warning, low-threshold approaches which ensure that the local population's sentiments are heard before they become in the subject of local government discourse – often transformed into the hostile rejection of tourists. At the same time, it may also be necessary to integrate local residents into decision-making processes to dampen "overtourism perception syndrome".
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Introduction

In recent years, overtourism has become a major issue in some areas (McKinsey & Company 2017, Postma and Schmücker 2017, UNWTO 2018), especially in cities known for urban tourism. Barcelona, Dubrovnik and Venice (Gonzales, 2018, Brenner, 2019) are three urban destinations which represent the "tip of the iceberg". These three destinations saw not only the most intense manifestation of citizen protest against the number of visitors (which residents have perceived to be far too high), but also some of the most intense me-

dia coverage (Christ, 2017). Besides being destinations for urban tourists, cities also serve as an environment for those who live there.

Residents' leisure activities and visitors' activities may create synergies, since members of both groups make use of similar recreation services. In gentrified residential areas in particular, recreation services directed primarily at the "hipster" urban population attract "new urban tourists". However, tourist demand may result in the establishment of additional retail outlets, eateries or cultural opportunities; while these enrich residents' options, the local population may consider these additions to be a nuisance, penetrating their living environment. Moreover, if the presence of visitors as such begins to be perceived as disturbing, local populations begin to develop a deep scepticism about these growing numbers, manifested in slogans like "*Tourists go home!"* or "*Your tourism kills my neighbourhood!"* (Christ, 2017).

The conflicts between visitors and residents can be interpreted by referring to two different – and somewhat antagonistic – perspectives from which a spatial context is seen: Visitors' use of an urban environment follows an economic perspective that conceptualises this space as "a destination". A destination is marketed as an economic product with the intention of creating revenue and jobs. In contrast, residents primarily view their "habitat" from a sociocultural angle. From the residents' perspective, this spatial entity (which might be a region, a city, or even just a neighbourhood) is seen as their living space – i.e. their living environment.

The aim of this contribution is to reflect on the two different rationales surrounding "destinations" and "living environments". Our main intention is to analyse the options and possibilities of reconciling those two partially antagonistic approaches and thus reducing the conflict between residents and visitors. One of the crucial questions is which approaches might be effective in encouraging a balanced setting where the interests of both guests and residents are equally met. Based on findings in German cities, this article places special emphasis on the question of the extent to which it is possible to identify and develop these types of proactive, comprehensive approaches to better integrate residents' opinions.

Destinations as marketable products versus their perception as living environments

For decades, the dominating focus in the tourism industry as well as in tourism science on travel areas has been dominated by mere economic perspectives. This means that the targets of tourist visits were regarded mainly as products to be marketed. As the famous definition of a "destination" by Bieger & Beritelli (2013, 54) puts it:

"A geographic space (town, region, hamlet) that the respective guest (or guest segment) selects as a stopping place. It contains all the facilities necessary for a stay, i.e. for accommodation, meals and entertainment/activities. It is the competitive unit of incoming tourism that has to be managed as a strategic business unit" (Translated from German by the authors).

Bieger & Beritelli (2013) regarded destinations as spatial entities that could be marketed to potential visitors or guests as a product. The condition that has to be satisfied to become a product is that potential guests regard this spatial entity as supplying what they desire in a stay. As such, it is the perceptions of potential visitors that dominate in the conception of a destination. In the definition of a destination, the perception of the local population is ignored.

On the other hand, residents see their city or neighbourhood not as a commodifiable product, but as their own living environment. They tend to be quite sensitive to any changes in their surroundings. As early as the 1970s, the phenomenon of inhabitants tending to

oppose change was described as the NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) phenomenon (Badger, 2018). Whether it concerns new building projects, infrastructure projects, industrial development or even wind power plants, almost any change in familiar and long-established settings is likely to provoke protests. Even if negative impacts and effects usually (and unsurprisingly) form the core of such disputes, the discussion is frequently quite emotional, and hinges on perceived effects. Sometimes the objective impacts and effects are exaggerated, and protests might be triggered by a general feeling of unease (Borell and Westermark, 2018). To a certain extent, it can even be assumed that the fact that an accustomed and familiar setting is set to change would induce insecurity and counter-actions quite independent of any real effects. This means that dealing with the effects of changes in a spatial setting is not only about providing facts and arguments, but also to a great extent about managing the psychological concerns and sensitivities of individuals in a given community.

In rural areas, local demand is often too low to ensure supply of leisure-related services. Only an additional demand from visitors can make the supply of cultural amenities, outdoor leisure activities, gastronomy or even public transport profitable. In rural destinations, therefore, the local population benefits from additional demand, which ensures that cultural events, swimming pools and public transport options can be supplied (Gronau and Kagermeier 2015: 241). On the other hand, in metropolitan areas, local demand is already sufficient to ensure a variety of leisure activities This means that the additional demand from visitors is not usually perceived; in turn, this additional demand is not communicated as an added value for residents – which the UN's World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has suggested as a possible management strategy against overtourism (UNWTO 2018: 49). In light of the huge numbers of locals who frequent restaurants, historic sites and cultural events, additional demand from tourists might even be seen as competitive. Visitors may thus be perceived as an additional demand factor that constrains the use of leisure opportunities by residents.

At the same time, the relative importance of leisure and tourism in the regional economy is usually less important in metropolitan areas. In light of the multitude of other economic activities, the tourism sector has less impact on the labour market and value creation at the regional level. This means that, in urban settings, the local population is less likely to perceive tourism activities as relevant for regional revenue. In rural areas, tourism is often one of the most important economic activities, and thus the local population is more aware of its economic relevance. This might be one of the reasons why oppositional tendencies vis-à-vis tourism are more often found in urban destinations.

Apart from traditional cultural-oriented visitors, recent years have seen a higher than average increase in party tourists. Younger visitors in particular are attracted by the bars and clubs of larger cities. Fostered by the availability of low-cost flights since the liberalisation of air travel, the accessibility of many European cities has increased dramatically since the 1990s (Goodwin, 2017: 5). The negative impacts of "stag" and "hen" parties, with young men and women revelling loudly late in the evening or even early in the morning in the streets of inner-city residential neighbourhoods and leaving waste from their late-night carousing is one of the aspects that creates hostile attitudes among local residents (Nibbrig *et al.,* 2015, McGuire, 2018).

Visitor behaviour as a starting point for management approaches

In light of the negative impact of tourism behaviour – especially during their night-time activities – the UNWTO proposed a management strategy to reduce those negative impacts by targeting visitors directly (UNWTO 2018: 49). Communicating and engaging visitors is a way to sensitise them to the negative impact their behaviour has on the local population.

Persuasion measures focusing on (potential) visitors of destinations are nothing new. To sensitise visitors to destinations in the Global South, a German NGO, the "Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung" (Study Group for Tourism and Development; 2020) publishes so-called "Sympathie-Magazines" and provides them to individual travellers as well as to tour operators. The idea behind the NGO's publications is that giving visitors a better understanding of the culture in the destination might lead to more responsible and respectful behaviour. However, there has not been any representative and comprehensive evaluations, they have only a very limited reach, and they are noticed only by a few travellers.

In 2015, pantomime artists were deployed as a "soft" tool to attempt to reduce the nuisance of party tourism in Berlin and the noise originating from late-night outdoor activities (BerlinOnline Stadtportal 2015a, 2015b). They approached patrons of outdoor restaurants and bars, using pantomime gestures to plead with them to keep the noise down. But this innovative approach had only a limited effect. After a few months, the pilot project was abandoned due to its lack of effectiveness (Fink, 2015).

These two examples might indicate that is not easy to address visitors and bring them to understand the effects of their behaviour. As has already been concluded many times concerning the environmental impacts of tourism behaviour – such as the role of air travel in climate change (Kagermeier 2020, p. 180 et seq.) or CSR-oriented approaches (Kagermeier, 2016) – the willingness of tourists to integrate altruistic motives into their travel behaviour seems quite limited. The main interest of tourists is their personal travel experience and personal pleasure (Schmücker *et al.,* 2019: 8), and the gap between attitudes and behaviours has been already identified many times in more ecologically oriented studies (Schmücker *et al.,* 2019: 13). Appeals to voluntary approaches to addressing tourists seems – in light of the limited effects in other fields – based more on wishful thinking than on sound perspectives. To reconcile the interests of visitors and residents, other concepts and approaches have to be elaborated and developed.

In search of the social carrying capacity

So if it is not possible to place much hope in visitors adapting their behaviour (as well as their travel patterns) to avoid aggravating the local population, the local population itself comes into the focus of the analysis. If the aim is to reconcile the needs of visitors with the interests of residents, the limits of residents' tolerance and acceptance become crucial. However, the tricky point is that there are no unique, easily measurable limits on what residents would be ready to tolerate from "disruptive" visitors. One often-mentioned indicator for possible impacts of tourism on residents is "tourism intensity." Tourism intensity is calculated by the number of overnight stays (per year) divided by the number of inhabitants.

The three most important urban tourism destinations in Germany – Berlin, Munich and Hamburg – have about the same tourism intensity: around 10 overnight stays per inhabitant (Kagermeier and Erdmenger, 2019: 69). However, for about the last ten years, journalists

and scholars have noted a rather hostile perception of tourists in Berlin (Spiegel Online 2011), with intense media coverage on the negative impacts of tourism (Nibbrig *et al.,* 2015, Sommer and Helbrecht, 2017). In Hamburg, there are also initial indications that the limit of social acceptance among residents has been reached (Lanz 2018). In Munich, there is still a mostly positive view on the rising number of tourists, as reflected in local media (Hoben, 2018) and in the annual reports of the city council (Landeshauptstadt München 2018). Previous survey research we conducted in 2018 showed that none of the inhabitants in interviews said the number of visitors is "much too much" (Kagermeier and Erdmenger, 2019: 76). This means that the absolute tourism intensity does not really seem to be an appropriate tool to measure the pressure perceived by the local population.

Visitor structure as an influencing factor

Comparing the visitor characteristics of Berlin, Munich and Hamburg shows that Berlin is to a greater extent oriented towards younger tourists in search of nightlife. Munich and Hamburg focus much more on traditional culturally oriented urban tourists. As such, the type of tourists – with their different "disturbance potential" – that predominate in a given destination is likely to play a role when it comes to acceptance among local residents. The situation in Amsterdam, for example, also suggests that the predominance of party-oriented visitors leads to a lower level of acceptance. In Amsterdam, the actual tourism intensity is only slightly higher than in the three biggest destinations in Germany (Kagermeier and Erdmenger 2019: 69). But the city's focus on specific nightlife-oriented target groups has led to protest from inhabitants and limitations on the party tourism sector (Slegers, 2017; Kirchner, 2018; McGuire, 2018; Spiegel Online, 2018).

Visitor growth rate as an influencing factor

Apart from the visitor structure, the growth rate of visitor figures seems to play an important role as well. In 2018 and 2019 some qualitative face-to-face expert interview have been conducted in Munich with several representatives of the local DMO, the political parties, the chamber of commerce and the city marketing organisation "City Partner" as well as members of citizens' initiatives and researchers at the university in Munich. The representative of the city marketing organisation expressed the assumption that local residents had become accustomed to the presence of visitors in their town and thus to a certain extent had "learned" to cope with it (c.f. Kagermeier and Erdmenger, 2019: 86 for the original quotation in German). On the other hand, the visitor growth rate in Berlin has been much more dynamic due to Berlin's historic situation in the second half of the 20th century. In the 25 years after reunification, the number of overnight visitors quadrupled between 1992 and 2017 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2018, 1_2). This has been perceived by the local population as a somewhat disruptive development. Over the same period, the number of arrivals in Germany as a whole only doubled (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2020, 1_2). Like most major German cities, Munich witnessed a disproportionate increase as well. But at about 160% (München Tourismus 2018), the growth in Munich has been more organic than in Berlin. The idea that the growth rate might have an influence on the perception of tourism by the local residents is corroborated by the fact that one of the key hotspots in the overtourism discussion – Barcelona – had in the last 25 years a growth rate equivalent to that of Berlin (Gebhardt, 2017: 233).

Perceptions of the housing market and privacy as influencing factors

Over the last ten years, staying at private homes has become widespread, especially in major cities. Under the rubric of the "sharing economy", the creation of internet-based platforms has facilitated and fostered renting out individual homes to visitors. Sharing a private home with visitors is by no means a new phenomenon, and estimates have indicated that – even before the era of AirBnB – the so-called "VFR" segment (Visiting Friends and Relatives) in major cities had almost the same volume as overnight stays in commercial accommodation (Stors and Kagermeier, 2015: 91). AirBnB has become the most common platform for sharing accommodation in private residences. Even if the motives for renting out private apartments to visitors have been quite heterogeneous and the majority of AirBnB hosts rent out their homes during periods they do not need it themselves – according to the notion of "idle capacity" in the sharing economy concept (Botsman and Rogers, 2011: 83, Stors and Kagermeier, 2017: 199), the original idea has been hijacked and to a certain extent abused by semi-commercial activities. As short-term rent-outs are more profitable – especially in major cities – a significant portion of AirBnB offers are apartments which have been diverted from the regular housing market. This has especially been the case in residential neighbourhoods around the historical areas of the city, which were already under pressure from gentrification processes (Stors and Kagermeier, 2017: 198 et seq.). This transformation of previously long-term rental apartments to AirBnB apartments has led to protests among residents.

Focus-group interviews we conducted in 2019 in Munich revealed that, in addition to the direct effects on the rental and purchase prices of real estate, irritation about visitors arises simply from the fact that they are entering residents' immediate surroundings by staying in private homes. It is not only the objective impact on the housing market, but the subjective perception of residents who become uncomfortable at the prospect of confronting strangers in their building. Encountering unknown visitors in the stairwells or having people partying in the flat next door is considered an intrusion into their own private sphere.

Acceptance of intense tourism among local people is also affected by the presence of visitors in private buildings. This can be interpreted as cutting off a vital coping mechanism to deal with visitor pressure by avoiding places where tourists usually tend to gather. The focus-group interviews showed – as did interviews with tourism professionals in 2018 (Kagermeier and Erdmenger, 2019: 87) – that it is essential for inhabitants to have some private refuge where they can avoid incessant contact with tourists. The residents interviewed in Munich were not particularly bothered about encountering tourists in public spaces in the city centre and at tourism hotspots – as long as they had the possibility to avoid contact by just staying clear of places where tourists tend to congregate.

Challenges to reconciling the interests of residents with those of visitors

Over the last few decades, the focus of DMOs and tourism policy in general has been primarily oriented to the needs and interest of potential visitors. In light of the unease among residents in the many cities that are targets of increasing tourism demand, and of manifold protests against the perceived negative effects of rising tourism numbers, the overtourism discussion might signify the need for a paradigmatic change in approaches to tourism policy. Residents' needs must be given the same attention as visitors' interests have been given in recent decades. As this article has argued, changing the behaviour and the travel pattern of

tourists does not seem to be a feasible approach; therefore, scholars and policymakers must find other ways of reconciling the – often divergent – interests of visitors and residents.

Of course, in those cases like Venice or Dubrovnik where the sheer number of visitors exceeds the physical carrying capacity, or in cases like Barcelona and Amsterdam where heated protests have already been taking place, a strategy to limit and reduce the number of tourists is necessary. But the focus of this article has been more on cities that have been exposed to a certain amount of pressure, but where neither the physical nor the social carrying capacity has yet been exceeded. Since tourism is an important economic factor in many cities and regions, simply capping and reducing tourism demand is probably not feasible. That means the crucial question is how to reconcile diverging interests and thus reach an economically and socially sustainable level of tourism.

Since neither individual tourists nor the tourism industry in general seem seriously focused on the social carrying capacity in destinations, it is up to municipal and regional DMOs to identify, take into account, and respect the interests of the local population as their proper constituency, just as they have been advocates for tourism interests in the past. This indeed means that the role of DMOs will become much more complicated and comprehensive. Moreover, it is anything but easy to integrate the local population, as multiple experiences from participative approaches in other NIMBY situations have shown. As long as the local population is not deeply, directly concerned or affected, residents' willingness and readiness to participate in the civil society discourse is not usually very widespread. Protests often only arise when residents are directly affected and a certain tipping point has been reached. As long as the situation is still bearable, there are usually only a few early warning signs.

Findings generated in focus-group interviews conducted in Munich have showed that there was little interest or willingness among the population to express minor irritation, or feelings of unease or discomfort. The local population would only express its problems and complaints once a certain threshold was crossed. Once the local population voiced its concerns about perceived visitor pressures and the negative effects of tourism, it was too late to implement pre-emptive approaches.

Early warning, low-threshold approaches must therefore be developed to ensure that the local population's sentiments are heard before they become the subject of local governance discourse – often transformed into the hostile rejection of tourists. Two ways of interaction with residents seem to be necessary: 1) identification of residents' (subjective) perceptions and attitudes and 2) open and frequent communication with residents.

Keeping a finger on the pulse of residents

As part of the qualitative research in Munich a focus group meeting with five citizens from different quarters had been arranged in September 2019 (unfortunately due to COVID-19 until now no further meetings could take place). The focus group discussion meeting took two hours and was recorded for video as well as for audio. It was then transcribed and coded with MAXQDA. It showed that the DMO and the municipality could not be certain that residents would willingly participate in formal settings of public participation as long as they find the situation still bearable. This means that it is necessary to find and apply other methods of assessing residents' state of mind concerning tourism's impacts in their city. First, it is necessary to conduct systematic quantitative surveys among the local population about their perceptions of tourists and possible points of contention arising from tourism. As our previous research with

the case study of Munich has shown, such surveys might serve as an initial early-warning tool (Kagermeier and Erdmenger, 2019) that would help local policymakers to identify possible future conflicts. However, simple quantitative surveys seem to fall far short of detecting and discovering evolving potential conflicts. As a result, it seems that more comprehensive activities will be necessary to keep in touch with attitudes among local civic society. Participation from representatives of DMOs or city councils at meetings of local NGOs, civic associations and interest groups might be one way to keep a finger on the pulse of these organisations' discourses and thus identify the first grumbles of displeasure at an early stage. Systematic monitoring of letters to the editor in local newspapers or online platforms could be another way to identify emerging unease at an early stage before it transforms into widespread protest.

Up until now, advance warnings have never been systematically documented and analysed – or even really taken into account, for that matter. To prevent "overtourism perception syndrome", such early warning signs have to be taken seriously, and local decision-makers need to take according measures to reduce residents' frustrations – sometimes even at the expense of visitors' interests. At the same time, it should also be possible to communicate information about specific hideaways for the local population to ensure that they have opportunities to retreat from tourism and that they have coping methods for high visitor frequency.

Trying to foster a holistic community discourse

Staying in touch with residents simultaneously offers local officials the opportunity to advocate for tourism activities. As it has been shown, the social carrying capacity is not a fixed threshold, but instead depends on the tolerance on the part of the local community.

But again, it is not simple to address the local population with the intention of fostering positive opinions about tourism in a city. The UNWTO's proposal to focus on the positive economic effects of tourism activities (UNWTO 2018: 49) seems to be too short-sighted and excessively reliant on purely "rational" aspects. Local residents in Berlin protested against tourism even when they were aware of its important role for the labour market and the local economy. The subjective feeling of being displaced or uncomfortable in one's own neighbourhood exceeds any cognitive knowledge of positive economic effects (VisitBerlin 2017: 10). If a DMO attempts to proactively communicate with the local population in an effort to increase residents' acceptance of the challenge of intensive tourism frequency, it will have to find more subtle themes for communication. As examples from Munich suggest, a more sophisticated, indirect way may be to focus on local pride and residents' identification with the city. Fostering identification with locals' "home town" could be seen as an indirect way of fostering social capital as well (Erdmenger, 2019). This in turn would entail integrating tourism acceptance into a comprehensive and holistic communication discourse, with reference to the well-being and social climate in a town or a region as a whole.

As this article has made clear, it is crucial to search for ways to reconcile the interests and needs of residents with the promotion of tourism activities as an important economic aspect of local and regional economies. However, this would entail a comprehensive, paradigmatic change in the roles that local and regional DMOs have played up to this point. Moreover, there are no simple ways to take into account the needs of residents. Systematic monitoring of residents' attitudes, a willingness to take their concerns seriously, the development of intelligent ways of interaction and communication with residents, and most of all the acceptance that economic perspectives are subordinate to residents' self-definition of their well-being are

all huge challenges for destination governance stakeholders and tourism research. This brief article may be nothing but a first rumination about which direction future actions and research activities should be heading towards.

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