6 Overcrowded Amsterdam: Striving for a Balance Between Trade, Tolerance and Tourism

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6.1 Introduction

Amsterdam is known worldwide for its historical beauty, liberal lifestyle and tolerant atmosphere. With 860,000 residents (fewer than 90,000 living in the inner city), Amsterdam received 8.3 million hotel guests in 2017 and is urgently searching for ways to better manage its immense popularity. Its reputation is not a coincidence, but the result of the evolution of Amsterdam from a small urban trading centre into a prominent tourism city and destination, and that evolution forms the basis of this chapter.

Overcrowding is one of the core issues affecting the city, and is not only caused by tourists. The city itself is rapidly expanding in terms of receiving more (temporary) inhabitants, commuters and Dutch day visitors. In such a context, the (perceived) overcrowding is clearly linked to urban mobility issues and is partly caused by tourists and touring vehicles. The number of (e)bikes (electronic bikes), scooters and the 'loose' traffic habits of locals themselves are also compounding the problem. Urban leisure lifestyles have changed in recent decades and have exacerbated the pressure on public spaces and parks, leading to overcrowding of (semi-) public spaces, increased littering and noise. This chapter uses the term 'overcrowding' rather than 'overtourism', as I feel it better reflects the root cause in the Amsterdam context. Overcrowding is described here as the process and results of an intensified use of (semi-) public space, which are perceived as disruptive forces by multiple stakeholders.

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6.2   Research Context and Methodology

In this chapter I intend to provide meaningful insights into how societal and economic changes have influenced the policies of public and private (tourism) sectors, city marketeer practices, resident attitudes and, more recently, the trends that have led to the development of citizen-led initiatives in Amsterdam. Achieving a balance between trade and tolerance has been a recurring mantra for the city since its inception, and particularly now that tourism has become an additional important aspect. To set the scene, a brief history of Amsterdam is provided, with a specific focus on the period from the 1990s to the end of 2018.

In the 1990s, urban areas started to change and increasingly transformed into leisure and tourism places.

> Since the early 1990s, European towns and cities have shown an increased interest in developing cultural tourism strategies as a wheel for urban economic growth. These policies have often helped revive waning urban centres, bringing life to declining local communities and economies. Decentralization has favoured this process significantly by allowing urban governments to promote local tourism (Riganti and Nijkamp, 2008, p. 28).

Later, Ashworth and Page stated that 'Tourism impacts upon cities in general is almost certainly overestimated and extrapolated from a few well-known and often over-publicised cases (Venice's Lagoon city or the tourist "islands" of world cities such as London or Paris). It is salutary to remember that even in such world-class premier tourism centres as these, only a small fraction of the city's physical extent, facilities and services and indeed residents are actually affected by tourism to any significant degree' (Ashworth and Page, 2011, p. 9). Needless to say, the impact of tourism in cities has intensified in many respects and is generating major challenges for urban planning and management.

In this chapter, findings emerging from both desk and field research are presented, highlighting the complexities of Amsterdam's evolutionary past, present and future challenges. This chapter employs what for the most part should be described as content analysis of industry and government documents and mainstream media, alongside a socio-historical analysis of relevant literature regarding the city's trajectory of development.

In addition, primary data was collected through written interviews with five key tourism and urban experts and key informants over the summer of 2018. These included Professor Dr A. Lombarts, who wrote her PhD on the city marketing of Amsterdam; J. Vork, former international marketing director of the Dutch National Tourism Office and researcher at Inholland University; C. van Ette, Manager City Marketing at the Economics Affairs Department of the municipality of Amsterdam; Ir. S. Hodes, tourism expert and founder of Amsterdam in Progress; and A. Dekker, urban sociologist and planner, and also founder of The Placemakers.

6.3   The Evolution of Amsterdam as a Tourism Destination

6.3.1   A brief history of Amsterdam

Amsterdam is the capital of the Netherlands, a small country with 17.2 million inhabitants and which is part of the European Union (CBS, 2018). It lies at the end of several main European rivers and has been at the junction of international trade for centuries. Since the beginning of its existence, Amsterdam has been receiving visitors from many different countries, not only for trading reasons, but also for its renowned (relative) tolerance towards others and their beliefs. Amsterdam received its city rights around 1300 when its economy was underlined by beer and herring production. It had exclusive rights to trade beer from Hamburg, Germany, which allowed Amsterdam to strengthen its position. In the following centuries, Amsterdam became a stockpiling hub for various products from Southern Europe and the Far East. The city grew to over 30,000 residents in 1580. Residual rights from the Middle Ages and transport interests stimulated a certain freedom and tolerance, which finds its roots in the Prince of Orange's statement of the 16th century: 'I can't condone that princes want to reign over the conscience of their subjects and restrict their freedom of faith and religion'. The 17th century deserves special attention, since it established the foundation of some of Amsterdam's main tourist attractions. This so-called 'golden century' stands for the glorious era of the Republic and in particular Amsterdam (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018a; Holland Toerisme, 2018). It is said that wealth, power, art and tolerance flourished in the city. Amsterdam was rich and aesthetics was given free reign, which allowed for the creation of the world-famous churches and canal structure, both of which have been under UNESCO's protection since 2010. The golden century attracted many entrepreneurs, and also produced artists such as Rembrandt, Hals and Vermeer, leading to a veritable explosion in art production and trade. Philosophers and free thinkers like Spinoza and Descartes found their home in Amsterdam. The city's freedom and tolerance also made it an ideal refuge for groups subject to religious persecution. After economic decline in the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution in the Netherlands started quite late in the 19th century, around 1870. This was the starting point of a new period of affluence. Trade intensified with (colonized) countries such as Indonesia (for its spices) and South Africa (for its diamonds). To this day, diamond-processing factories are still present in the city and are responsible for attracting many tourists (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018a; Iamsterdam, 2018).

The first half of the 20th century was dominated by a period of further economic decline and the onset of the Second World War. Amsterdam was occupied by Germany for 5 years (1940–1945) and many of its residents were forced into hiding. These included the Jewish family of Anne Frank who wrote her diaries in the back of a canal house, now a tourism 'must see' (Hartmann, 2001). The extreme persecution of Jews, homosexuals, communists and gypsies, and the famine in 1944, led to depopulation of around 10%

of all Amsterdam's residents. An enduring acknowledgement of the events during the Second World War is seen in the official commemoration and celebration of freedom for all, which takes place annually at Dam Square on the 4th and 5th of May (The National Committee for 4 and 5 May, 2018).

The 21st century saw the arrival of the global financial crisis in 2008, followed by fecund economic conditions from 2014–2015, which saw a considerable economic boost relatively stronger in Amsterdam than in the rest of the country. As a consequence, housing prices increased dramatically and the image of Amsterdam as a 'city for all' seems to be fading, given the current housing affordability crisis (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018a).

6.3.2   How tourism in Amsterdam started and how tolerance played a role

The canals have attracted visitors from abroad since they were created (Ons Amsterdam, 2013). However, it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the tourism sector came into being. With the arrival of trains and steamships, it became easier to travel. The first official canal cruise took place on 3 April 1914. Amsterdam opened its first Tourism and Traffic office in the same year, and received 140,000 visitors. This number grew during subsequent decades. By 1956, 37 cruise ships were transporting 1.5 million visitors a year (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018a).

During the 1960s, there was a need to expand the city to preserve its role as a centre of production. Meanwhile, another vision for the city emerged: as a place to dwell, to meet and share new ideas. This came to be known as the anti-hierarchical revolution, with the upsurge of youth culture making the city world famous for questioning existing local power dynamics and attracting like-minded travellers – particularly backpackers and hippies, referred to as 'Dam Square-sleepers', causing some level of disturbance as they slept in parks and squares (this was later forbidden, in 1970).

Amsterdam's 1960s and 1970s saw many different groups fighting for their rights and freedom to engage in liberal lifestyles. This was not only true for women and youngsters, but also marked the beginning of the gay rights movement, leading to the beginning of gay tourism making Amsterdam renowned as the gay capital of Europe. As other 'gay cities' emerged, Amsterdam could no longer rest on its laurels as the prime gay destination. Indeed, Amsterdam still attracts numerous lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) tourists, and among them is a loyal group of (mainly older, male) gay tourists (Hodes *et al.*, 2005). The annual Canal Parade, formerly known as Gay Pride and rebranded Amsterdam Pride in 2017, is held at the peak of the summer season and can count on hundreds of thousands of spectators (Fig. 6.1), mainly from the Netherlands (Decisio, 2017).

Amsterdam is also world famous for its liberal thoughts and practices concerning drugs and prostitution. The red light district is a case in point and has been extensively described in other studies (Dahles, 1998; Hubbard and Whowell, 2008; Chapuis, 2016). Tourist representations of the city of Amsterdam had been capitalizing on the city's glorious past, the reputation

Fig. 6.1. Amsterdam Pride, 2017.

Source: S. van Straaten.

of tolerance and liberalism, the red-light district and the gay scene. In the 1980s and 1990s, city marketing efforts abandoned the heterogeneous image, pushing for 'a polished image of the city as the national landmark of the Netherlands' (Dahles, 1998, p. 55). Tourism evolution in Amsterdam has been studied by other tourism scholars examining a heritage city (Van der Borg *et al.*, 1996), the image and tourist representations of the city (Dahles, 1996, 1998) and the environmental pressure of inbound tourism (Peeters and Schouten, 2006).

6.3.3   From promoting to branding Amsterdam

Amsterdam's deliberate city marketing policies first appeared in the 1990s to boost the local economy by attracting tourists and foreign investment in luxury hotel chains and other tourism-related services (Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2007). At the end of the 1990s, the annual report of the Amsterdam Tourism and Traffic Office (VVV, 1998) gave a positive evaluation of Amsterdam's tourism industry, as it attracted a record number of tourists and day trippers and led to a clear increase in tourism revenues and employment opportunities. With 4.2 million overnight tourists and approximately 16 million day trippers, the hotels, shops, restaurants and attractions had little to complain about. There was a total revenue of almost 4 billion Guilders (EUR1.8 billion). Of the top five most-visited attractions, canal cruises led with 2.6 million visitors; the diamond factories were fifth, with approximately 1 million visitors annually (VVV, 1998).

The Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office signalled that weekends were becoming more crowded and that the distinction between high and low seasons was disappearing; the latter met one of the main objectives of its Strategy Plans (1993–1997). What followed was a new Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office Business Plan (1998–2000), which outlined an ambitious set of objectives aimed at

1.   Maintaining Amsterdam's fourth place in the list of Europe's most-visited cities.
2.   A 4% annual growth in tourism to Amsterdam.
3.   Attracting more affluent tourists.
4.   An estimated increase of 4.25 billion guilders (almost EUR2 billion) in revenue.
5.   An increase of 42,000 jobs (compared with 35,000 in 1997) within the tourism industry in Amsterdam.

The Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office saw a bright future for Amsterdam as a tourism city and prosperous destination. It proactively identified a long list of how to expand the city tourism portfolio, for example by building a mega-recreational sports centre/iconic attraction; improving the infrastructure to enable ships and (touring) cars to access the city; and improving hospitality in the city. In the Business Plan, just one sentence was dedicated to the role of local residents: it said that the Amsterdam Travel and Tourism

Office should keep a keen eye on the interests of the Amsterdammers as, without their cooperation, they would be facing a worrying future (VVV, 1998).

The Travel and Tourism Office of Amsterdam and the Dutch Tourism Office started collaborating on the branding of the city in 1993 (Digibron, 1995) by promoting the city internationally as 'Amsterdam, City at the Water' and 'Amsterdam World City'. Over the years, Amsterdam city marketing increasingly focused on the city's cultural heritage to appeal to more affluent visitors and to 'replace the low budget tourists visiting the city for its liberal reputation with respect to drugs and prostitution' (Pinkster and Boterman, 2017, p. 458).

During the first 15 years of the 21st century, the idea that Amsterdam deserved promotion no longer prevailed, and was substituted by the notion that it *needed* to be promoted actively (inter)nationally owing to the economic crises. Internationally, city marketeers were thought to be 'indispensable' in coming up with all kinds of brands. Lombarts (2011) describes how Amsterdam was also confronted by increased competition and the need to address this. Well-known destination brands including Berlin (Be Berlin), Madrid (**Mad**rid about you) and New York (I ❤ NY) were the precursors of **I am**sterdam in 2004, an iconic 24-m-long sculpture (Fig. 6.2) placed in front of the city's Rijksmuseum and one of the most photographed spots in the city.

The Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office, rebranded the Amsterdam Tourism and Convention Board (ATCB), has continued with expansion plans

Fig. 6.2. **I am**sterdam at the Museum Square.

Source: the Author.

and composed a list of ten objectives in its report *Amsterdam Top*, *Utilizing Chances 2005–2008* (ATCB Amsterdam Toerisme en Congres Bureau, 2004). The first three goals were aimed at

1. Increasing the total number of overnight stays by 2008 by 8%
2. Actively acquiring non-corporate congresses, to regain Amsterdam's position in the top ten international conference cities (Union of International Associations (UIA) ranking list (ATCB Amsterdam Toerisme en Congres Bureau, 2004)).
3. Developing and implementing theme years in branch promotion, in conjunction with the city marketing plan.

In its Basic Economy Program 2007–2010 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2007a) and 2007–2010 Hotel Policy Memorandum (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2007b), the municipality stated that more hotels, distributed beyond the city centre, were needed. The municipality was expecting a 4% growth in overnight visitations annually until 2015, requiring an additional 9000 hotel rooms. The memorandum stated that there was insufficient capacity during peak periods and that the position of Amsterdam as a business city, tourism city and convention city was at stake. Lombarts (2011) showed that there was little evidence of collaboration between promotion parties, the municipality and entrepreneurs. 'Entrepreneurs felt hindered in their wishes to establish new tourism venues. With the arrival of the shared network Amsterdam Partners, interests were converged better' (P.R. Lombarts, Amsterdam, 2018, personal communication).

An absolute visitor peak was registered in 2013, also called the 'jubilant year', when Amsterdam celebrated the 400th anniversary of the canals and the re-opening of the Rijksmuseum (famous for its collection of paintings by old Dutch masters such as Rembrandt). Many special city marketing activities were designed around these festivities to attract as many visitors as possible (Parool, 2013). The municipality decided to increase the tourism tax for the second time in a row to 5%, as part of austerity measures to counter the economic crisis (2008–2014) and to cover city costs for marketing tourism.

6.3.4   The urge for urban governance

After the jubilant year in 2013, the number of visitors to Amsterdam increased rapidly. Amsterdam grew, in terms of its local population, numbers of businesses and overall visitation. In 2014 there were 12.5 million hotel stays, compared with fewer than 8 million in 2000 (OIS het Amsterdamse Bureau voor Onderzoek en Statistiek, 2002). There was a rise of 11.3% in hotel stays as compared with 2013, and in 2015 the increase continued (+3.6% over the first 8 months) (Amsterdam Marketing, 2015). To the users of the city these 'record figures' became a mixed blessing and, owing to the limited space in the city, they led to increased pressure and competition between various groups of city users.

These developments compelled the municipality to more actively govern and address this issue. On 21 October 2014, the college of the Mayor and Aldermen initiated a 'City in Balance' programme. On 26 May 2015, an initial document was published in which ambitions, visions and strategy were described (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015) with the first results published on 5 January 2016 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2016). Four main actions were identified: (i) to connect the dots within the role of the municipality itself, with the programme having a coordinating role in emphasizing the urgency and requesting attention from many different policy domains that touched on the theme of 'balances'; (ii) given the accelerating pace of change within the city and the preparation required for the execution of robust choices, a strategy based on 16 targets was devised; (iii) the programme organized city talks with many different stakeholders in the city: it collated complaints and solutions, organized networks around various themes and sought to clarify findings from previous research; (iv) to develop a monitoring programme, for which data was collected and for which further (international comparative) research has been carried out. An additional fifth task was to arrange sufficient financial resources, mainly for the targets (experiments) mentioned in the second point above. In the 2016 budget, EUR1 million was budgeted to address this. Some dilemmas were raised, too, one of which was related to the complexity of 'addressing illegal holiday rentals in relation to the hotel policy'. Based on the new coalition agreement from Spring 2018 new plans will beelaborated for a new equilibrium between liveability and hospitality. (P.R. van Ette, Amsterdam, 2018, personal communication).

Peer-to-peer platforms like Airbnb and Booking.com clearly created unprecedented dynamics and led to new, complex dilemmas with respect to the relationship between trade, tolerance and tourists. On 17 December 2014, two aldermen of the municipality of Amsterdam signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the director of Airbnb Ireland (Binnenlandsbestuur, 2014) to ensure that the rental of homes and houseboats to tourists by third parties, such as these platforms, took place in a responsible manner. The MOU led to the implementation of two 'notices': Tourism Rental of Homes (holiday rental) in Amsterdam (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2013) and Room for Guests, an elaboration on the notice on tourism rental of homes (holiday rental) (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2014). The conditions, valid until at least 2019, are that (i) the host needs to be the main occupant and has to be registered at that particular address in the administration of the municipality of Amsterdam; (ii) holiday rental is for a maximum of 60 nights per year; (iii) tourism taxes are paid; (iv) there is a maximum of four guests per night; (v) the rental home meets the fire safety requirements; and (vi) guests are not allowed to cause any nuisance. Overall enforcement of the conditions is undertaken by digital detection methods (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2017).

In 2015, there were 14,956 accommodation listings that were rented at least once through Airbnb. In 2016, there were 25,721 and of all accommodations, one of three (35%) was offered by hosts who had more than one home, which may imply that a part of the total offer is being run by professional owners (NOS, 2017). The implications of such platforms in cities are

widespread and work deeply as agents of change in urban areas. According to Ioannides *et al*. (2018), Airbnb is considered an instigator of 'tourism bubble' expansion. On 10 January 2018 the local council decided to change the maximum accommodation time allowed from 60 nights to 30 nights from 2019, and is even deliberating a policy of prohibiting holiday rental for homeowners in specific areas of the city centre. However, at the time of writing in August 2018, the new housing ordinance had not been assessed (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018a).

Tourism visitation data for 2017 and for the first half of 2018 have been called 'explosive' in different media. In 2017, hotels in Amsterdam had 8.3 million guests, an increase of 900,000 from 2016 (+14%). Visitors stayed 1.9 nights on average, representing 15.9 million overnights. Both the overnights of foreign (+14%) and Dutch guests (+12%) increased. The Central Bureau of Statistics estimated a 9% growth for 2018 (Almeida García *et al*., 2015). The new local council made its first coalition accord in May 2018: A New Spring, A New Sound (GroenLinks, 2018). In its introduction, nothing was explicitly stated about Amsterdam as a tourism destination. Instead, Amsterdam was presented as a city that needed to maintain and develop itself as just, free, sustainable, connected and democratic. Not until page 50 did it state: 'In the first place, Amsterdam is a place to live and work, Amsterdam as a tourism destination comes second …. For 2019 we will raise the tourism tax to 7%' (GroenLinks, 2018). Furthermore, priorities were placed on logistics, enforcement, cleaning the city and the use of technology in crowd control. The former office of Amsterdam Tourism, Amsterdam Marketing, was to be transformed into a knowledge centre and its name changed. Alderman Mr Kock, a member of the Economic Affairs department of Amsterdam municipality, stated:

> Amsterdam is a city, Amsterdam is not a zoo … we can't put a fence around the city. So, what we have to do is take action that limits and controls misbehavior, and to spread the tourists as much as we can … as well as try to attract the right type of tourists who add value (Kock, 2018).

Alderman Kock was also a member of the former local council and was presenting a rather (neo)liberal perspective. From Spring 2018 the relatively left-wing party GroenLink wanted to take action as soon as possible, and in a literal way, by removing the **I am**sterdam installation from the Museum Square. This took place on 3 December 2018, when the **I am**sterdam installation was 'dismantled amid claims that they were encouraging mass tourism' (Adams, 2018). The event attracted global attention; however, the installation was not to be removed from the city. Plans were made to erect it at Westerpark, a few kilometres away.

6.4   Residents of Amsterdam and Their Attitudes Towards Tourism and Tourists

6.4.1   Research context

In 1997 the Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office stated that the cooperation of residents might be crucial to avoid a community backlash (Pearce, 1994; VVV, 1998). However, at that time, no research had been carried out among Amsterdammers on their perspectives of tourism development. Back in 1998, I wanted to get a better understanding of the interaction of the host community versus guests in modern cities. During my studies in urban sociology, I came across the work of Georg Simmel, who wrote a famous essay: 'The metropolis and mental life' (Simmel, 1903). Simmel described the 'matter of fact attitude' of city dwellers and stated that they had to protect themselves against the overwhelming amount of external and unpredictable impulses they encountered. Simmel also wrote about their mental attitude towards strangers, which he thought was characterized by a distanced way of coping with the 'other'. In comparison with small communities, city dwellers only know or recognize the other in a fragmented way, by categorizing them. Goffman (1956) and Lofland (1973) elaborated on this and wrote about 'a world of strangers' and the daily interactions of people in public spaces. Their work was operationalized in my first research (Gerritsma, 1999), which focused on four main themes: feelings of pride, direct living space, public space and events.

Years later, I was able to undertake comparative research with the help of students and colleagues, which led to several reports and publications (Chan, 2008; Bunink *et al.*, 2016; Badouri, 2017; Gerritsma and Vork, 2017a). The aim of these studies was to provide our commissioning clients, Amsterdam Marketing and the municipality of Amsterdam, with research insights and concrete design solutions. These studies were undertaken in the centre as well as in other parts of the city. The theoretical framework employed in 1998 was enriched by various theories like the irritation index (Doxey, 1975), the tricomponent attitude model (Solomon, 2013), the tourism life cycle model (Cooper *et al.*, 2008), social exchange theory (Homans, 1958), principles of placemaking (PPS, 2016) and inclusive social design (Collin *et al.*, 2018).

Some key findings emerged from these studies, summarized here as (i) background characteristics; (ii) pride and irritation; and (iii) the will to have a social exchange with tourists. The focus in this chapter will be on the sociocultural impact, intended as 'interactions [that] take place between local residents and tourists which may result in new social and cultural opportunities or, on the contrary, generate feelings of distress, pressure, congestion, etc. at different moments in the life of residents, threatening their cultural identity and social reality' (Almeida García *et al.*, 2015, p. 35).

Background characteristics: within the current public debate in Amsterdam, residents tend to be described as one uniform group, having a similar response to the so-called 'tourism tsunami' in Amsterdam (Volkskrant,

2017). However, when taking a closer look, background characteristics do seem to influence residents' attitudes towards tourists and tourism practices. Homeowners (53%) are significantly more against special tourism tours in Amsterdam than those who rent a house (40%), $P = 0544$ (Gerritsma, 1999).

> Respondents who themselves have regularly undertaken city trips abroad have more positive feelings than those who have not. This applies to their own neighbourhood, the city centre, events and to Airbnb. Inc. No such difference is found when it comes to negative feelings (irritation) … single persons and cohabiting persons with children are more often irritated by tourism in the neighbourhood, in the city centre and by events than single persons and cohabiting persons without children (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017a, p. 92).

The place of residence within the relatively small city of Amsterdam turned out to be significant (Fig. 6.3). Residents of the northern district (a comparatively new tourist destination) are barely irritated by tourists in their neighbourhood (33%), compared with residents living in the western part of the city (which receives more visits), where 18% are barely irritated.

Pride and irritation: the research population of 1998 consisted of 75 respondents, all living in the historic centre. Of these, 76% (strongly) agreed with the statement: 'It gives me a sense of pride that my neighbourhood is attractive to tourists' against 11% who disagreed (nobody strongly disagreed). Of the 75 respondents, 30% said that the appreciation of tourists makes them appreciate their neighbourhood as well (Gerritsma, 1999).

In a 2008 comparative study (Raaf, 2008), 157 questionnaires were collected from respondents in the city centre; 76% (strongly) agreed with the statement that their feeling of pride increased on knowing that tourists like to visit the city centre. The percentage who strongly agreed dropped, with 2% and 8% disagreeing. Strikingly, nobody strongly disagreed. During
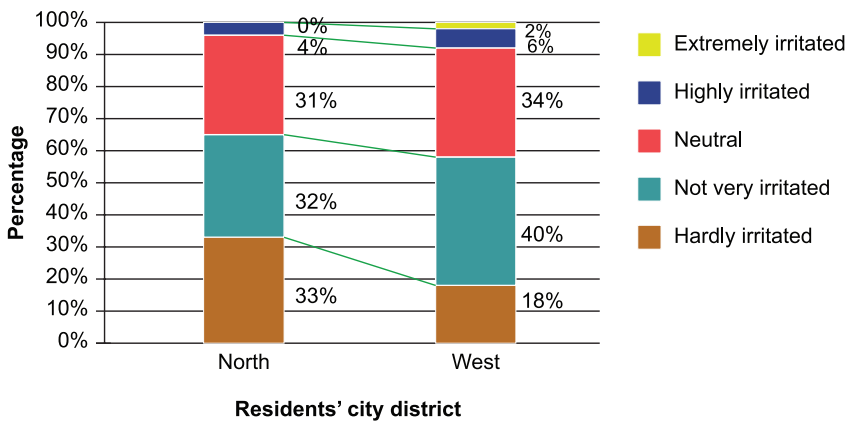

Fig. 6.3. Irritation in own neighbourhood: north versus west two-tailed t-test significance
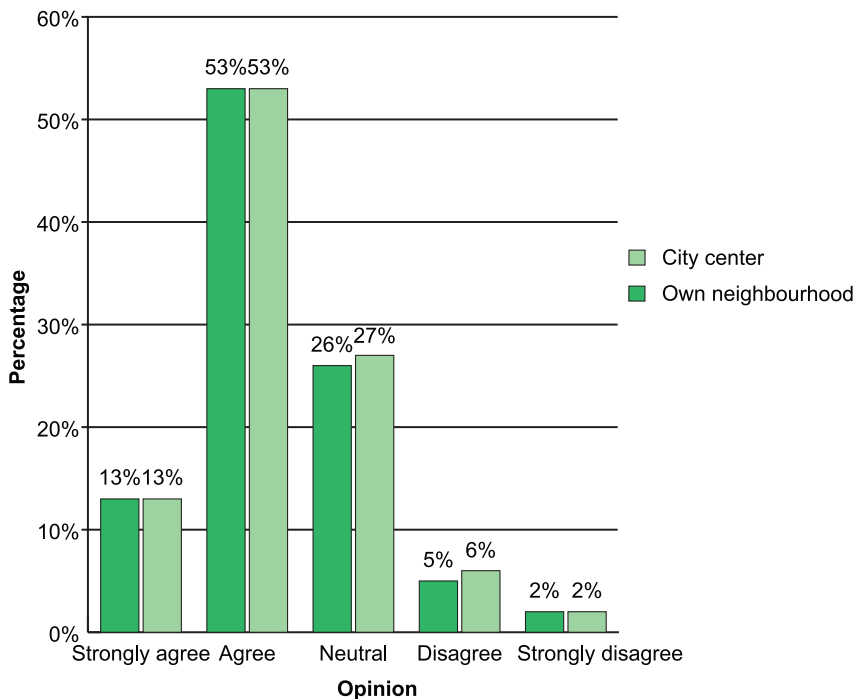Source: Gerritsma and Vork (2017b).

Fig. 6.4. Sense of pride in one's own neighbourhood as compared with the city centre.

Source: Gerritsma and Vork (2017a).

interviews a more critical and divided attitude towards tourists was revealed (Raaf, 2008).

In 2015 another comparative study was carried out among 248 residents in the northern area and western part of the city (that is, outside the touristic centre). Despite increased criticism about rising tourism visitation, 66% agreed or agreed strongly with the statement that the attractiveness of their neighbourhood to tourists gave them a sense of pride (Fig. 6.4). If specific forms of tourism are examined, then 62% were proud of the quantity of events in Amsterdam, but only 32% were proud of Airbnb-related tourism (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017b).

The majority had positive feelings about tourism in their own neighbourhood and the city centre. The picture changed somewhat when we look at the level of irritation (Fig. 6.5). Fewer than 6% were highly or extremely irritated by tourists in their own neighbourhood, but 27% were highly or extremely irritated by tourists in the city centre. Events were perceived by 17% as highly or extremely irritating, while the figure for Airbnb was 12%.

Respondents irritated by tourism were asked which types of nuisances were perceived. Overcrowding was the most frequently cited (46%), both with regard to their own neighbourhood and the city centre. In their own neighbourhood, excessive noise came second at 24%, followed by littering (22%) and lack of safety (8%). In the city centre, littering came in second
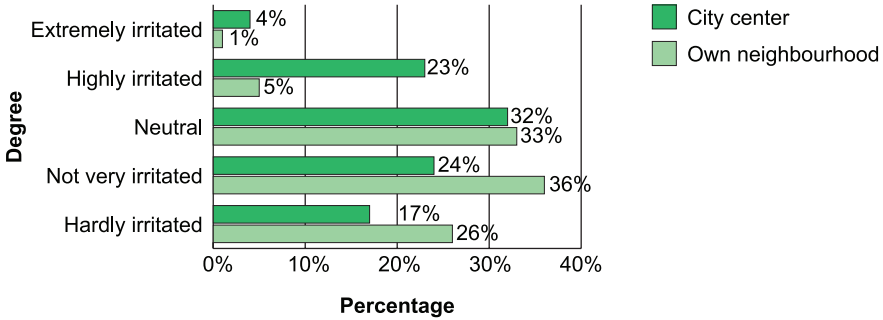
Fig. 6.5. Irritation: in own neighbourhood versus city centre.

Source: Gerritsma and Vork (2017a).

place at 21% and excessive noise came third (19%), followed by lack of safety (14%). Figure 6.6 shows the diversity of places where residents were irritated by tourists.

The research department of the municipality also carried out research into overcrowding in the city and its 2012 research 'Bustle in the city' (OIS Amsterdam, 2013) was based upon the 2001 research report 'Busy in the city'. More than 3000 inhabitants, entrepreneurs and visitors participated in this study. There were 727 inhabitants from the centre and 521 from other parts of Amsterdam.

Most inhabitants considered that the bustle of tourists enlivened the city (65% from the centre and 63% from the other parts of the city) and 8% considered the centre to be too busy or annoyingly busy. 40% of inhabitants had the impression that Amsterdam had become more crowded than 2 years before,
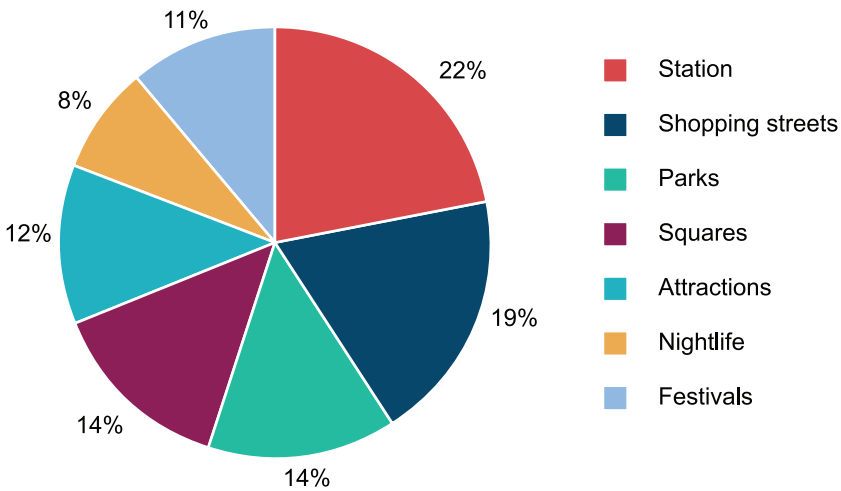

Fig. 6.6. Where are people irritated by tourists in the city centre?

Source: Gerritsma and Vork (2017a).

and 55% thought that this was caused by tourists and day trippers. The further the inhabitants lived from the centre, the less negative they were about the increased crowding (OIS Amsterdam, 2013).

In 2015, the Municipality of Amsterdam and the Dutch World Heritage Agency commissioned extra qualitative research to supplement the 2012 'Bustle in the city' study. Research was carried out via two focus groups consisting of city-centre residents. The study revealed a clear degree of urgency in stating that 'residents in parts of the buffer zone wish to relocate and businesses are reporting reduced turnover because there are fewer local residents. This may also influence leisure activities in the city centre: visitors chiefly come to enjoy 'the atmosphere', which to a great extent is determined by residents' (Westenberg Research, 2015, p. 2).

Overcrowding is experienced chiefly in specific circumstances and influences the balance between living, working and undertaking leisure activities in the city centre. The Westenberg Research report concluded that 'residents feel powerless if they do not feel supported when they themselves try to do something about the nuisance caused by overcrowding; they blame this on the limited power of the municipality and the political sector' (Westenberg Research, 2015, p. 1).

The will to have a social exchange with tourists: the interaction of hosts and guests can be considered as a process of negotiation and is well described in Smith and Brent (2001) and Reisinger (2015). In 2016, the Urban Leisure & Tourism Laboratory decided to go beyond the topic of attitude and wanted to know more about the willingness of residents to have actual exchanges with tourists. Social exchange theory (Homans, 1958) was applied as it proposes that social behaviour is the result of an exchange process. The purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs: 'Social behaviour is an exchange of goods, material goods but also non-material ones, such as the symbols of approval or prestige' (Homans, 1958, p. 606).

In conjunction with Leisure Management students of Inholland University of Applied Sciences, data from 108 residents of the popular Jordaan Quarter were collected (Badouri, 2017). Respondents turned out to be fairly willing to have an exchange with tourists: 85% very often or regularly showed tourists the way around; 55% very often to regularly had a chat with tourists; and 2% always or regularly (18%) ignored tourists. Fewer than 15% regularly met tourists through Airbnb (3% always and 75% never). More than 20% were willing to have a drink or go out with tourists (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017b).

The results showed that almost half of all respondents (45%) would have liked to have an interaction with tourists to amuse themselves; 25% wanted to get to know new people; and almost 24% (one of four) had a social exchange to contribute to social cohesion in the neighbourhood or to expand their business network (23%). There was also a wish to learn from others, as 23% wanted to learn from tourists or to teach tourists something (18%) (Gerritsma and Vork, 2017a).

Table 6.1. City questionnaire among residents of Amsterdam. (From Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018b, c.)

Amsterdam	Bustle is part of city life	I am happy to live in Amsterdam	I am proud of Amsterdam	If possible, I would like to stay in Amsterdam for the next 5–10 years
2017	7.25	8.14	7.74	8.02
2016	7.46	7.95	7.88	7.93

6.4.2   Latest poll among residents

In 2018 the results of large-scale research carried out in 2017 among 3883 inhabitants of Amsterdam were published. The'City Questionnaire: Bustle and Balance – second measurement' (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2018b, c) had been commissioned by the City in Balance programme as a follow up to research from 2016. The research touched on many different aspects on the perceived 'overcrowding'. Some notable findings on a scale of 1–10 were found to be quite similar in 2016 and 2017 (Table 6.1). Most respondents gave a (very) positive answer on the statements. A 'busy' city life was considered part of the deal (7.25); most people were very happy to live in Amsterdam (8.14); were proud of it (7.74); and most residents would like to stay in Amsterdam (8.02).

Although most residents envisaged themselves staying in Amsterdam, they did recognize overcrowding. In 2017, 55% thought Amsterdam was 'very crowded', and 41% thought it was 'crowded'. Opinions varied in different parts of the city, although the city centre was perceived as the busiest part of Amsterdam. In response to the question: 'Do you think the municipality does enough to manage overcrowding?' 73% thought that the municipality did 'absolutely nothing' or not enough, and 27% thought that the municipality did (more) than enough.

The research findings in the Amsterdam case accorded with the World Travel & Tourism Council's (2017) overcrowding heatmap of 68 cities. In its initial diagnosis it placed Amsterdam, together with six other cities, in the highest quintile when overcrowding resulted in alienation among local residents (McKinsey & Company and WTTC, 2017). This encouraged further reflection on the future, and on new ways of managing the complex question of overcrowding in Amsterdam.

6.5   Discussion: Whose City Is It?

6.5.1   The Amsterdam approach

Ashworth and Page (2011, p. 13) point out that 'local place-managers seek to enhance the heterogeneous distinctiveness of diverse local place-identities using approaches and methods gleaned from global practice, resulting in homogenous outcomes. The answer to the increasingly posed question, "whose city is it, the world tourist or the local resident?" is both to some indeterminate extent'.

Similar questions are being raised in Amsterdam. In conjunction with the 'jubilant year' of 2013, new ways of city-making have emerged. These have proved effective in managing the new urban dynamics and are now referred to as the 'Amsterdam Approach.'

> The notion of co-creation as a means to address complex urban challenges is here to stay. There is increasing awareness of the fact that a collaborative approach to city-making, which considers knowledge institutions, businesses, start-ups, SMEs, welfare organizations, social innovators and the government to be equal partners, enhances social innovation for a more successful, sustainable and inclusive city. The organization of a level playing field in which these stakeholders can truly work together is the greatest task ahead for many cities (Wemakethe.city, 2018).

In this context, residents of Amsterdam are considered as stakeholders and involved in many different projects. Such a holistic collaborative approach has not been 'born' yet; however, some counter voices need our attention. A few initiatives in Amsterdam are approaching things differently within the tourism context: Wij Amsterdam (We Amsterdam), Amsterdam in Progress, Fairbnb and Bloody Tourists.

6.5.2   Counter voices

Wij Amsterdam is a platform of 23 city centre neighbourhood organizations, which authored a manifest published in 2016. This stated: 'We strive for a recovery of an equilibrium between living, working and recreation in Amsterdam. Wij Amsterdam contributes to fostering a sustainable and above all liveable city centre of Amsterdam and adjacent neighbourhoods with similar problems.' To achieve their mission, they exchange knowledge, join forces when possible and form a lobby to influence policy makers. They are lobbying for a resident impact report and underline that 'the perspective of residents isn't systematically taken into account enough' (Wij Amsterdam, 2018). Their advisor is Stephen Hodes, who is also the founder of the initiative *Amsterdam in Progress* (AiP), which was initiated because 'neither the city government nor the tourism industry in Amsterdam saw the need to develop a sustainable policy with regard to tourism to and in the city. Neither parties recognized the sense of urgency. They did not see the need to take action.' (P.R. Hodes, Amsterdam, 2018, personal communication). Hodes has

been active in the public debate about Amsterdam and tourism since 2015 and he formalized AiP as a not-for-profit foundation in 2017. AiP is an independent think tank that addresses overtourism and the resulting disbalance that it causes and threatens to cause in Amsterdam. AiP is geared towards identifying challenges that the city needs to address and to proposing possible solutions for these challenges. Hodes explains: 'By independent we mean that AiP does not represent any particular sector, group or specific interest. We look at each challenge from the viewpoint of the city and those who use the city – the inhabitants, businesses and those who work in the city and the visitors. We try to encourage a dialogue between all those involved' (P.R. Hodes, Amsterdam, 2018, personal communication).

Their communications and proposed solutions are geared towards the city council, civil servants, politicians (local and national), media (local, national and international), those living in the city and the travel trade/tourism industry. The only group they do not focus on are the visitors themselves (Amsterdam in Progress, 2017). Amsterdam in Progress analysed all the programmes of the political parties that participated in the municipal elections in March 2018. Through a balance index they showed voters how parties would like to deal with tourism in Amsterdam. AiP claimed to have given input to the coalition agreement and to 'have managed to supply the new city government with sufficient arguments not to move the Passenger Terminal for cruise ships to the west of the harbour, whereby the number of cruise ships and passengers will at least have doubled' (P.R. Hodes, Amsterdam, 2018, personal communication).

Fairbnb is a new market entry in Amsterdam. It aims to come up with a smart and fair solution for community-powered tourism. Its manifesto (Fairbnb, 2018) declares that:

> Fairbnb is first and foremost a community of activists, coders, researchers and designers that aims to address this challenge by putting the 'share' back into the sharing economy. We want to offer a community-centred alternative that prioritizes people over profit and facilitates authentic, sustainable and intimate travel experiences. We are creating an online platform that allows hosts and guests to connect for meaningful travel and cultural exchange, while minimizing the cost to communities.

Fairbnb's founding members come from several European countries and planned to launch their first pilots in Amsterdam, Barcelona and Venice in May 2019. The first hosts have signed up and will start forming local nodes. The Urban Leisure & Tourism Laboratory is part of Fairbnb's local network and research team and is currently co-designing a fair code of conduct for hosts.

Another initiative is Bloody Tourists, which was developed in 2015 by Placemakers, an interdisciplinary and creative team for urban activation.

> With 'Bloody Tourists' Placemakers offers an alternative to large scale policy responses to the growing influx of tourists in the city of Amsterdam. Placemakers tests small interventions to be collected in a toolkit, aimed at stressing commonalities among tourists and locals, at changing attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours, and at promoting meaningful interaction and reciprocity (Placemakers, 2018).

There were four interventions between 2015 and 2018 in collaboration with *Benches Collective*, which 'creates unexpected encounters on the side walk' (Bankjes Collectief, 2018). In 2016, passers-by were handed a glass tumbler; a local person would also be given one. The two were asked to talk to each other, inspired by questions placed in these tumblers. One of the founders, Anna Dekker, elucidates:

> Although small, we offer a strong counter voice. The aspect of mixing the ordinary with the extraordinary, I believe, instigates reflection for every single passer-by, local and tourist, on the topics we present. … For each participant but also for us, the most valuable result is that we find 'agency' in this complex matter! (P.R. Dekker, Amsterdam, 2018, personal communication).

In answer to the question Ashworth and Page (2011) raised, I conclude that the Amsterdam Approach needs to be emulated in the tourism context: all stakeholders should play a role in coming up with solutions to overcrowding.

6.6 Conclusion

Amsterdam can look back at a long history of trade and tolerance, and economic benefits tended to prevail while the city developed into a tourism destination. At the same time, there have always been waves of new stakeholders coming into the city and counter groups that have stirred up governing powers. Cities have always been the terrain of struggle, as different agents contest their role as power(full/less) agents and their position and influence in the shaping of the city.

This chapter may have some limitations as it primarily employs content analysis of grey literature – i.e. industry and government documents and mainstream media – alongside a socio-historical analysis of relevant literature on the city's trajectory of development. However, with the support of primary data, it was possible to use valuable data collected through interviews with five tourism and urban experts to corroborate some of the reflections offered.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the Amsterdam Travel and Tourism Office, tourism businesses and local council were (very) eager to promote the city as a brand and believed that adjusting the city for visitors automatically had a positive influence on the local residents as well. The perspective of residents was hardly mentioned when new policies were being prepared, even in 2018 when a new local council was established. As the numbers of tourists and day trippers have been increasing, counter voices have arisen as well. The Amsterdam Approach and these counter voices have highlighted the importance of facilitating an inclusive co-creation process involving as many stakeholders as possible, as a valuable way to seek solutions in dealing with the (perceived) overcrowding in the city of Amsterdam.

The Urban Leisure & Tourism Laboratory of Inholland University of Applied Sciences is involved in the co-creation process and will continue to measure the impact of some of these solutions during the coming years.

Through action and design research it aims to contribute to the development of inclusive and sustainable models of places and practices, working with partners ranging from the municipality to local entrepreneurs, visitors and residents (Tourismlab, 2019). I hope this chapter provides some insights and inspiration about how different stakeholders in Amsterdam are playing a role in the quest to manage the complex process of overcrowding and the unfolding tourism phenomenon.

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