Challenges to reconciling the interests of residents with those of visitors

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0 Introduction

In recent decades, the focus of destination management organisations (DMOs) and tourism policy in general has been primarily oriented to the needs and interest of potential visitors. In light of the unease and discontent among residents of the many cities that have become highly popular with tourists, and of manifold protests against the perceived negative effects of increasing tourism, the overtourism debate could signify the need for a paradigmatic change in approaches to tourism policy. Residents' needs must be accorded the same level of attention that visitors' interests have received in recent decades. Since it seems unfeasible to change the behaviour and travel patterns of tourists, scholars and policymakers must find other ways of reconciling the – often divergent – interests of visitors and residents.

Since neither individual tourists nor the tourism industry in general seem to have a particular interest in the social carrying capacity of a destination, it is up to municipal and regional DMOs to identify, consider 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 means that the role of DMOs will become much more complicated and extensive.

However, such a development requires a comprehensive, paradigmatic change in the roles of local and regional DMOs. That said, there are no simple ways to consider the needs of residents. Accepting that economic perspectives are subordinate to residents' self-definition of their well-being is a major challenge for destination governance stakeholders and tourism research.

The aim of this chapter is to reflect on the two different rationalities of the concepts of "destination" and "living space". The intention is to analyse the options and possibilities to reconcile these two partially antagonistic approaches, reducing the conflict between residents and visitors. One of the crucial issues is to determine which approaches can be taken to bring about a balanced setting in which the interests of guests and residents are equally considered. Special emphasis is placed on the extent to which it is possible to identify and develop proactive, comprehensive approaches to better integrate residents' opinions.

1 Discourse on the carrying capacity of a destination

We still have clear memories of the media discourse that started in 2017 and came to halt when the Covid-19 lockdowns put an intermediate end to all debates and manifestations. An unease that had been simmering among residents boiled over, initially in three Mediterranean cruise ship destinations – Barcelona, Dubrovnik and Venice. Pre-Covid, the media had been full of reports of masses of tourists whose sheer numbers had inundated the historic icons of (mainly urban) destinations. Misbehaving party tourists encountered upset and furious local inhabitants, creating the image that those "bloody tourists" were destroying liveable urban communities.

Until then, the carrying capacity of a destination had usually only been addressed in nature reserves from the perspective of vulnerable protected areas, involving a physical carrying capacity. Now it became a buzz word, with the newly coined term "social carrying capacity".

Tourism intensity (operationalised as the number of overnight stays per resident and year) was used as an indicator to compare cities and regions affected by overtourism. The tourism intensity of affected cities (cf. Fig. 1) shows that the sheer number of visitors to Dubrovnik and Venice is a striking indicator of a physical carrying capacity being exceeded, resulting in overcrowding. Barcelona has a similar number of tourists as the three largest urban tourism destinations in Germany – Berlin, Munich and Hamburg. The manifestations and protests against visitors,

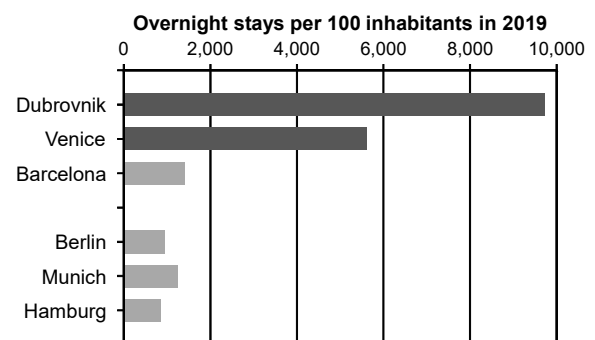**Overnight stays per 100 inhabitants in 2019**

Fig. 1: Tourism intensity in Dubrovnik, Venice and Barcelona as well as Berlin, Munich and Hamburg (overnight stays per 100 inhabitants) 2019;
Source: Kagermeier 2012, p.5

who are regarded as intruders in the living environment of Barcelona's inhabitants, are mirrored by similar tendencies in Berlin. However, Munich and Hamburg, which have about the same tourism intensity, have not yet experienced any widespread unease (cf. Kagermeier and Erdmenger 2019). Despite having almost the same tourism intensity, i.e. exposure to the stimulus of visitors in the city, cities experience very different responses: in Berlin and Barcelona, there have been major protests since 2011, whereas in Munich and Hamburg there have been very few indications of a perception of pressure. This means that the simple indicator of overnight stays per habitant is insufficient to capture this effect. We must therefore take a closer look at how overtourism can be characterised. Koens and Postma (2017, p.9) distinguished three aspects that could lead to the perception of overtourism:

1) A physical carrying capacity limit (*crowding*): there are simply too many visitors in a given space, corresponding with the perception of overcrowding.

2) Direct negative effects of tourists (*encounter*): an excessively adverse visitor impact is perceived. Examples include congested infrastructure, noise, disturbance and irritation.

3) Indirect effects (*livelihood*): perceived structural change due to the tourism economy, as well as competition for use of resources (retail or the housing market aimed at tourists).

Of the 11 recommendations proposed by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO et al. 2018, p.27 et seqq.) to tackle the challenge of the overtourism phenomenon, four are associated with the crowding effect:

1) Dispersal of visitors within the city and beyond (*crowding*)
2) Time-based dispersal of visitors (*crowding*)
3) Stimulation of new itineraries and attractions (*crowding*)
4) Review and adaptation of regulation (*crowding*).

The categories of impact (direct negative effects) and encounter (indirect negative effects) each encompass two proposed management approaches:

5) Enhance visitor segmentation *(encounter)*
6) Ensure that local communities benefit from tourism *(livelihood)*
7) Create city experiences for both residents and visitors *(livelihood)*
8) Improve city infrastructure and facilities *(encounter).*

Most of the management propositions can therefore be seen as end-of-pipe approaches with an orientation towards the effects and symptoms of visitor presence. Only the last three propositions aim at understanding the process of the causes and development of negative perceptions and feelings, as well as corresponding communication approaches:

9) Communicate and engage with local stakeholders
10) Communicate and engage with visitors
11) Set monitoring and response measures.

Inhabitants are considered as local stakeholders, albeit only at a rather general and superficial level: "organise local discussion platforms for residents" (UNWTO 2018, p.39). In a nutshell, focusing only on the number of visitors expressed in the indicator of tourism intensity seems to fall short of the mark, given that similar values of tourism intensity result in quite different responses by local populations.

2 The key factors of vulnerability and resilience

To get a more comprehensive understanding of local inhabitants' responses to the stimulus of tourism intensity, we refer to the concept of vulnerability.

According to Tuner (2003), the level of vulnerability (in this case, that of local inhabitants) is influenced by three dimensions:

1) Exposure
2) Sensitivity (tolerance) and
3) Resilience (cf. Fig. 2)

These dimensions are interrelated and influence each other.

Resilience is driven by

a) the capacity to respond to an impact
b) the capacity to cope with a specific situation/hazard and
c) the capacity to adapt and adjust to a specific situation/hazard.

According to this model, a similar stimulus (exposure) may induce different extreme perceptions and implications. A low level of tolerance (sensitivity) among a city's local population may result in one city considering tourism intensity to be more serious than that in another city with the same level of tourism intensity that is less sensitive. The level of tolerance is influenced by the level of resilience in a community. As a simple example, a given sea rise level due to climate change affects

Fig. 2: *The concept of vulnerability according to Tuner et al. (2003, p.8077) with the three dimensions of exposure, sensitivity and resilience*

inhabitants in the coastal regions of Bangladesh or Indonesia much more severely than it does inhabitants of the Netherlands. The latter has the necessary means to cope and adapt by raising dykes, meaning that the country is more resilient to the same stimulus.

The emphasis on direct exposure reduction in the UNWTO management measures focuses mainly on direct exposure of inhabitants to visitors. It may therefore be necessary to take a more comprehensive look at the specific conditions of an urban society in order to understand the different responses of host communities.

Comparing Berlin and Munich, it can be said that Berlin has undergone intense transformation over the past three decades. As a result, there has been an enormous inflow of new inhabitants who compete alongside longer-term residents on the housing market. At the same time, the housing market in both parts of the city (East and West) was marked by a relative surplus of accommodation with comparatively low levels of rent until the end of the 20th century. Since the turn of the century, intense gentrification and investments by external corporations have caused a drastic and rapid rise in real estate prices, reducing the amount of affordable housing. In the low-cost market segment, housing market demand began to outstrip supply. This situation was aggravated by the fact that the city council sold much of its former social housing to external investors, generating another wave of rent hikes. Munich is accustomed to a quite high, albeit more stable, level of rent prices. Hence the pressure, stress and tensions felt by the local population are much higher in Berlin, owing to the short-term changes that influence their sensitivity to other irritating factors such as a large number of visitors.

Findings in Munich showed that the local population still saw sufficient opportunities to avoid encountering tourists if they wanted to, given that the tourist bubble in Munich is largely limited to the city centre. The locals therefore have other places to frequent as a mechanism of responding to or coping with the large number of visitors. Moreover, the main target group of urban tourism to Munich are relatively traditional cultural tourists who blend in quite easily with the local population (cf. Kagermeier and Erdmenger 2019). Target groups in Berlin are characterised to a greater extent by party tourists seeking
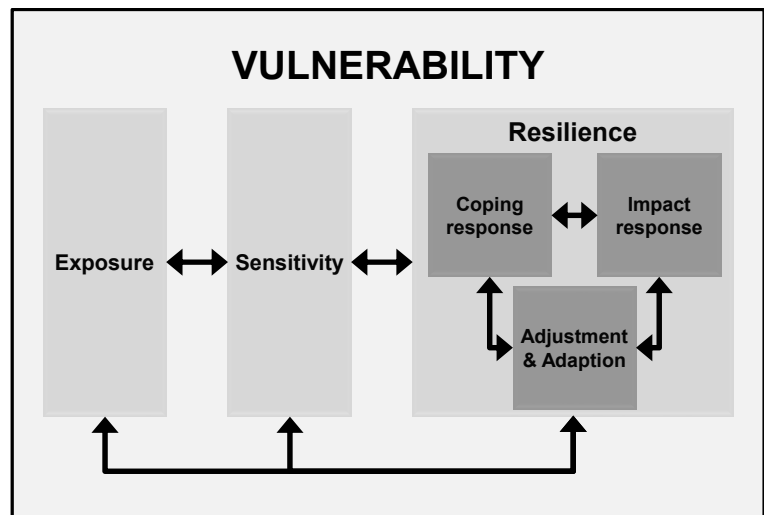
unique nightlife experiences in the gentrifying districts of Kreuzberg, Neukölln, Friedrichshain and Prenzlauer Berg. The intrusion of visitors into residential districts not only intensifies the impact of their presence, but also deprives local inhabitants of opportunities to avoid encounters if they feel disturbed by the presence of visitors. Hence the local population in Munich can be characterised as being more resilient than Berlin residents.

In its first three management approaches, the UNWTO proposes dispersing visitors throughout the city, trying to establish new itineraries, and spreading tourism throughout the year. These measures could be counterproductive because they might lead to the opposite effect: they might deprive the local population of the coping and adjustment options needed in their residential districts to avoid direct encounters with visitors. Reducing the length of quiet periods, when fewer tourists visit the city, could put an end to the rest periods that the local population need to recover and take a deep breath.

Since resilience influences the local population's sensitivity, a mono-dimensional focus on mere tourism impact falls short of the mark. To tackle overtourism, we must take the entire environmental framework into account.

3 Traditional destination marketing and management (DMM)

In recent decades, traditional DMM approaches were mainly designed to promote economic growth of the tourism segment in the regional economy. The main focus was therefore on stakeholders who were directly involved in the economic results of the tourism market. This is mirrored in the rather well-known definition of a destination provided by Bieger and Beritelli (2013, p.54):[1]

"*Geographical area (place, region, hamlet) that the respective **guest** (or a **guest segment**) selects as a travel destination. It contains all the **accommodation, food, entertainment/activities** necessary for a stay.*
It is therefore the competitive unit in incoming tourism, which must be managed as a strategic business unit."
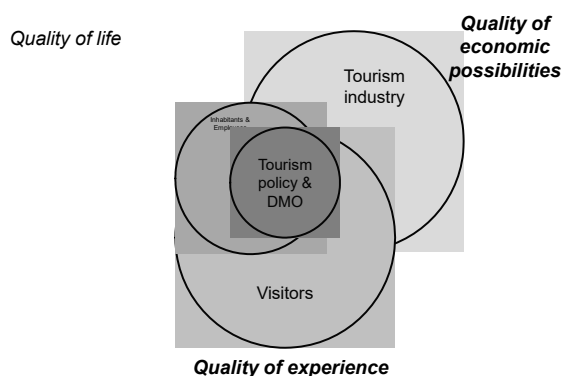

Fig. 3 Stakeholder relevance in traditional DMM approaches (Source: modified following Koens and Postma 2017, p.30)

Bieger and Beritelli viewed travel destinations as spatial entities that could be marketed to potential visitors or guests as a product. The condition for becoming a product is the ability for potential guests to see this spatial unit as what they want and need for their stay. Thus, the perceptions of potential visitors dominate the design of a travel destination. This traditional understanding of a destination focuses on the demand and supply sides. The

[1] Original quotation: "Geographischer Raum (Ort, Region, Weiler), den der jeweilige Gast (oder ein Gästesegment) als Reiseziel auswählt. Sie enthält sämtliche für einen Aufenthalt notwendigen Einrichtungen für Beherbergung, Verpflegung, Unterhaltung/Beschäftigung. Sie ist damit die Wettbewerbseinheit im Incoming Tourismus, die als strategische Geschäftseinheit geführt werden muss". Translation by the author.

perception of the local population is neglected and ignored. As such, the inhabitants of host communities are more or less excluded from this understanding, given that they are only a minor aspect in the (economic) success and performance of a destination (cf. Fig. 3).

In recent decades, traditional marketing and management approaches for destinations were mainly growth-oriented (partly mirroring the general socio-economic and political paradigm), treating destinations as marketable products. Another major focus was on improving quality, which was regarded as a key competitive factor. Identifying and addressing promising target groups was the main concern, implying the commodification of the destination as a consumable product. Until now, then, the DMOs and the tourism policy have mainly focused on potential visitors and stakeholders in the tourism industry.

There was little awareness among those involved in the tourism industry – and certainly among the majority of tourism researchers – that a city is also a living space with limitations. Not only the material cultural heritage of tourist destinations (e.g. monuments, museums and beer gardens), but also the immaterial cultural elements (e.g. festivals and parades), which make up the living environment of the local population, were mainly seen as a local backdrop to increase a destination's attractiveness and hence marketability. In contrast, little attention was paid to protecting the privacy of residents in their living environment.

Conflicts between visitors and residents can be interpreted by referring to two different – and sometimes antagonistic – perspectives from which a spatial context is viewed: the use of an urban environment by visitors follows an experiential perspective that conceives this space as a "destination". From the point of view of tourism providers, this customer perspective corresponds to the commodification of a spatial unit and its consideration as a destination. The aim of the economic perspective is to market a destination as an economic product in order to generate income and jobs.

In contrast, residents view their "living space" primarily from a socio-cultural perspective. From the residents' point of view, this spatial unit (which can be a region, a city or simply a neighbourhood) is their living space, i.e. their living environment.

The overtourism debate and the challenge to find new comprehensive approaches to address and cope with visitor pressure and its negative effects represent a new paradigm for DMOs and tourism policy. Inhabitants' interests and their need to ensure their quality of life must be taken into account to the same extent as the interests of the tourism industry and visitors (cf. Fig. 4). Balancing diverging perspectives and interests not only means reaching compromises, but also taking into account the different rationalities behind the perspectives and perceptions.
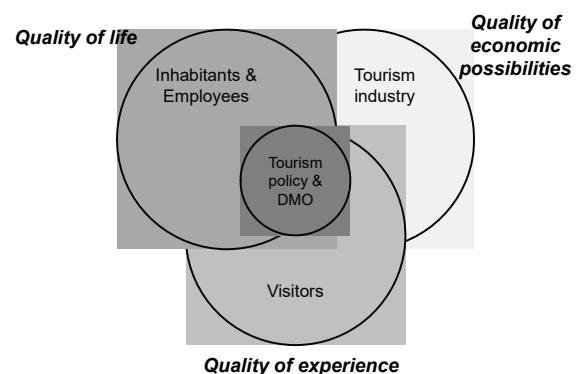
Fig. 4: Stakeholder relevance for managing visitor pressure (Source: Koens and Postma 2017, p.30)

Abolishing tourism is not an option for economic reasons – and also in view of the continued demand and need for holidays. Since neither individual tourists nor the tourism industry seem to be serious about focusing on the social sustainability of destinations, it is up to the municipal and regional DMOs to identify, consider and respect the interests of the local population in their sphere of influence, just as they have campaigned for tourism interests in the past. Indeed, this means that the role of DMOs must become much more complex and extensive. This is all the more difficult because it is not just about dealing with the symptoms visible on the surface, as the UNWTO seems to suggest to a certain extent.

Ultimately, the overtourism debate is about the tension between understanding a spatial context as a tourist destination and as a living space for the local population. The awareness of the need for balancing the interests of protection and use has already been introduced and elaborated in the context of nature conservation. In destination management, however, the main focus was previously on marketability.

To proactively try to avoid a shift in the mood of an urban society, it is advisable to focus closely on local participation and to take any subjective feelings of unease they may have seriously. The role of DMOs is therefore likely to change in importance in the coming years. Until now, DMOs have seen themselves as players primarily committed to quantitative growth, focusing on the target group of visitors. In the future, it will be at least as important for them to act more as a mediator, taking the perspective of local stakeholders. This certainly poses a central challenge for the fundamental reorientation of tourism governance. At the same time, it may well be that the overtourism debate also introduces a more fundamental paradigm shift in tourism, which has previously always been growth-oriented. The new paradigm in tourism policy must be the interests of citizens balanced with the interest of the tourism industry and visitors.

At the same time, overtourism is much more than a purely sectoral tourism problem. The often discussed misappropriation of living space by AirBnB cannot be treated in isolation, but must be seen in a holistic way as part of the whole housing market.

4 Challenge: address and involve citizens

Encountering articulations of overtourism seems to be some kind of "silver bullet" in the run-up to its emergence, by strengthening resilience and communication with the population. However, the ability to influence acceptance among the local population is a complex social construct that will probably not be achieved by running modest image campaigns or taking simple limitation approaches.

Instead, it requires a systematic, coordinated approach by all relevant actors in many areas of action, based on well-founded social science analyses. If interaction with the local population is to be successful, the previous perspectives and patterns of action among professional tourism players should also be fundamentally called into question. Communication is not just a one-way street where tourism stakeholders can communicate their positions and perspectives. Successful communication requires multilateral interaction at eye level.

However, achieving participation at eye level is no easy task. Findings from focus group interviews in Munich (Erdmenger 2021 and Erdmenger and Kagermeier 2021) have shown that there is little interest or willingness among the population to express minor irritation or unease in a structured way (focus groups, workshops, round tables) as long as the situation is regarded as "bearable". The local population would often only express their problems and grievances once a certain threshold had been crossed (tipping point). However, by the time the local population has expressed its initial concerns about the perceived visitor pressure and the negative effects of tourism, the "horse has usually already bolted," i.e. it is usually too late to implement preventive approaches.

On the other hand, residents who do not see their city or neighbourhood as a marketable product, but as their living environment, tend to be very sensitive to changes in their environment. As early as the 1970s, the phenomenon of residents resisting change was described as the NIMBY phenomenon (Not In My Back Yard) (Badger 2018). Whether new construction projects, infrastructure projects, industrial development or even wind turbines are concerned, almost any change in the familiar and long-established environment can lead to protest. While negative impacts and repercussions are usually – unsurprisingly – at the heart of such arguments and disputes, the discussion is often very emotional and also highly dependent on the perceived impact. Sometimes the objective impact is exaggerated, and protests can also be prompted by a general unease (Borell and Westermark 2018). To a certain extent, it can even be assumed that any change in a familiar environment will lead to uncertainty and backlash, which is partly independent of the actual expected impact. This means that dealing with the impact of change in a spatial environment is not just about providing facts and arguments, but also, to a large extent, about managing the psychological concerns and sensitivities of individuals in a given community.

In light of the above, stakeholders in DMOs and tourism policy should not make absolute any articulations, but should also look at the general settings of urban society. Protests may also be prompted by a general unease and pressure resulting from other spheres (such as the housing market and economic or social transformation).

Early warning approaches with low threshold values must therefore be developed to ensure that the subjective sensitivities of the local population are heard before they become the subject of local governance discourses – which are then often transformed into the aversive rejection of tourists. Two types of interaction with residents seem to be necessary:
1) identification of the (subjective) perceptions and attitudes of residents and
2) open and frequent communication with residents.

To keep in touch with sentiment among residents, (traditional) systematic quantitative surveys are needed to detect indications of irritation or unease as an early warning tool (to be repeated at set intervals to detect changes). This could be the first step in helping local policymakers to identify possible future conflicts.

However, systematic monitoring of the mood of the local population cannot be done by surveys alone. Simple quantitative surveys are not fully able to recognise emerging potential conflicts at an early stage and explore them in terms of content. The systematic

evaluation of letters to the editor in local newspapers or online platforms could be another way of recognising emerging unease before it turns into wider protest. A first step, for example, was taken in Berlin recently. In November 2022, a so-called Citizens' Advisory Board (Bürger:innen-Beirat) was founded there with representatives from all 12 districts (https://du-hier-in.berlin/buergerinnenbeirat). The board invites citizens to a Citizens Forum (https://du-hier-in.berlin/buergerinnenforum), which met for the first time in January 2023. The aim of these activities is to create platforms where citizens, the DMO, urban policymakers and representatives of professional tourism service providers can share ideas, enabling sensitivities to be sounded out.

However, far more comprehensive and low-threshold activities are needed to keep track of attitudes in local civil society and to seek intensive contact and interaction.

1) One option could be for representatives of DMOs or local politicians to systematically attend meetings of local NGOs, civic organisations and interest groups. Following such discourses could be another way of discovering unease and displeasure in "statu nascendi" in good time.

2) Participating in local festivities could be another (albeit personnel-intensive and time-consuming) way of establishing informal contacts with inhabitants and keeping track of the mood of the population. Early warning symptoms have rarely been systematically documented and analysed – or even taken into account – up to now. To prevent the "overtourism perception syndrome", such early warning signs must be taken seriously. Local and regional decision-makers must take appropriate action to reduce frustration among residents – sometimes at the expense of visitor interests. Berlin has taken a step in this direction by offering a so-called Kiez-Tour (*Kiez* = neighbourhood), where representatives of the local DMO "VisitBerlin" set up a stand at highly frequented locations (such as local markets) in the districts. The aim is to engage in relatively informal conversations with citizens on the subject of "Berlin and tourism" in the local neighbourhoods (https://du-hier-in.berlin/kiez-tour).

3) Another approach could be to communicate more information about certain leisure activities to the local population. Showing (and even creating) places and opportunities that are rarely frequented by foreign visitors could constitute alternative options for retreat and privacy. These coping options could offer alternatives to the hotspots in the tourist bubble that are heavily frequented by foreign visitors, helping to improve the coping capacity.

4) Other low-threshold ways to involve the local population could be to organise idea workshops (perhaps in the context of existing festivities in the neighbourhoods). Incorporating the idea of gamification, specific result-based and benefit-oriented themes must be chosen, because abstract and protracted participation processes are usually not very popular.

In addition to addressing the specific subject, these approaches also seek to communicate and convey the picture that local tourism actors care about the interests and benefits of inhabitants – and that they take them seriously, not just viewing them as an internal marketing tool.

5 The need for a holistic approach

Establishing and maintaining close – and personal – contacts with residents also offers representatives of the public sector and DMOs the opportunity to act as advocates for tourism issues. As has been shown, there is no fixed absolute limit for social carrying capacity (similar to Eisenstein and Schmücker 2020, p.36 or Postma, Koens and Papp 2020, p.233 et seqq.). The threshold, at which the mood changes, i.e. a tipping point, also depends on the state of mind in the local community. The level of tolerance towards out-of-town visitors also depends on overall sensitivities among the local community.

The subjective perception of no longer feeling comfortable in one's neighbourhood or the feeling of alienation in one's living environment has a stronger effect than any cognitive knowledge of positive economic effects. When a DMO tries to proactively communicate with the local population in an effort to increase residents' acceptance of the challenge of intensive tourism frequency, it must find more subtle topics for communication. As the Munich example suggests, a more nuanced, indirect way might be to focus on local pride and residents' identification with the city. Promoting approaches that target local pride and identification with the "hometown" of locals could also be seen as an indirect way of increasing the social capital and stability of the urban society (Erdmenger 2019). This in turn would involve the integration of tourism acceptance into a comprehensive and holistic communication discourse with reference to the well-being and social climate in a city or region.

In sum, it is important to look for ways to reconcile the interests and needs of residents with the promotion of tourism activities as an important economic aspect of the local and regional economy. However, this would imply a fundamental paradigm shift in the role played by local and regional DMOs.

Moreover, there are no easy ways to accommodate residents' needs. Systematic monitoring of residents' attitudes is necessary. Professional tourism players – above all, the DMO and public stakeholders – must also be willing not only to assess the concerns of citizens, but also to take them seriously. The future challenge will be to strike a balance between the divergent needs of the tourism industry and visitors on the one hand, and the local population on the other. Taking simmering unease seriously also means moving away from a traditional tourism marketing perspective so as not to endanger social peace in an urban society.

Promoting a holistic community discourse also means that focusing on mere (over-) tourism aspects falls short of the mark. Far-reaching tensions in urban society must be taken into account. Stress and pressure in an urban society, e.g. due to transformation processes in other urban economic or social fields, influence resilience. This could refer to the housing market or disruptive changes in an urban society. Sociocultural, economic and demographic frame conditions must be taken into account as part of a holistic, integrative and spatially differentiated urban development policy. A holistic approach must therefore start at the root of an urban society's state of mind. This has a fundamental impact on urban governance. The era of simple sectoral approaches in tourism policy and management seems to be over. The economically sectoral DMOs of the 20th century must

transform and merge with the entire urban governance approach if they want to succeed in progressing towards stable (urban) tourism – at whatever level.

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