



## Research article

# Crowd-pleasing, niche playing and gentrifying: Explaining the microgeographies of entrepreneur responses to increasing tourism in Amsterdam



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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 25 October 2022

Received in revised form 5 July 2023

Accepted 17 July 2023

Available online 8 August 2023

Handling Editor: Antonio Russo

## Keywords:

Touristification

Entrepreneurship

Consumption spaces

Retail

Business climate

Microgeographies

## ABSTRACT

Touristification of consumption spaces describes a process in which retail and hospitality businesses adapt to the tourist demand, eroding place attachment among local residents. While this is an important cause of resistance to tourism, little is known about the mechanisms that drive or mediate this process. We address this gap by interviewing entrepreneurs in Amsterdam. We found three distinct areas in close proximity where entrepreneurs responded to increasing tourism in markedly different ways; by crowd-pleasing, niche-playing and gentrifying. The resulting microgeographies of touristification of consumption spaces have not only been overlooked in literature, but also in urban policies. This causes a mismatch between the more generic, city-wide regulation and the highly differentiated effects of tourism on consumption spaces.

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## Introduction

One of the inevitable ways in which host societies are confronted with increasing tourism, is through its effects on consumption spaces (González-Pérez, 2020; Guimarães, 2021; Novy & Colomb, 2016; Snepenger et al., 2003); defined in this study as an assembly of shops, hospitality and public space in residential areas. While tourism can provide a significant boost to retail and hospitality businesses, large numbers of visitors can lead to crowding and associated nuisance, which in turn can cause avoidance behavior among local residents (Jacobsen et al., 2019). The changing consumer base may cause shops, services and hospitality businesses to adapt to the tourist demand, eroding feelings of place attachment among local residents. We refer to this interplay of changes in the consumer base and the consumption landscape as touristification of consumption spaces, a process that spurred resistance to tourism in popular destinations such as Venice (Caserta & Russo, 2002), Lisbon (Guimarães, 2021), Berlin (Novy & Colomb, 2016) and Amsterdam (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017).

In Amsterdam, heated public debates about touristification of consumption spaces inspired far reaching policy interventions, culminating in a ban on tourist shops in inner city zoning plans (City of Amsterdam, 2018). Combining restrictions on specific sectors, products, advertisement and business models, the ban on tourist shops stretches the limits of what national planning laws

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allow local governments to regulate. Remarkably, these policy interventions took place in absence of a thorough understanding of how touristification of consumption spaces works and what factors drive or mediate it. Over the past years, both policy research in Amsterdam and literature on touristification tended to focus on how residents experience effects of tourism on consumption spaces (Jakobs & ten Berge, 2013; Pinkster & Boterman, 2017). Recently, a number of studies have measured how consumption spaces change when tourism increases (González-Pérez, 2020; Guimarães, 2021). However, the mechanisms behind these changes remain unaddressed or extrapolated from macro-economic approaches focusing on changing consumer demand (Caserta & Russo, 2002) and increased interest from retail capital (Fox Gotham, 2018; Gonzalez & Waley, 2013).

This study builds on the idea that increasing tourism changes the incentive structure for local entrepreneurs and contributes a qualitative understanding of entrepreneurial strategies that pays attention to the economic, social and institutional business climate in which businesses operate (Kloosterman & Rath, 2018; Su & Chen, 2017). We interviewed entrepreneurs in three consumption spaces in the heart of the historic city center of Amsterdam, resulting in a more fine-grained understanding of touristification of consumption spaces as well as the circumstances that mediate it. The next sections conceptualize how increasing tourism changes the incentive structure for entrepreneurs, as well as how entrepreneurs respond to these changes depending on their personal background and the local business climate. We then present the findings from three case study areas, where different entrepreneurial strategies dominated in response to a growing number of tourists. The conclusions reflect on the factors that drive these different responses and advocate a microscale approach both to study and to address touristification of consumption spaces.

### *Incentive structure: changing consumer demand and the role of retail capital*

Increasing numbers of tourists change the incentive structure for entrepreneurs in consumption spaces in two crucial ways. Firstly, it changes local demand. Tourists, varying widely in terms of country of origin, age, wealth and purpose of visit, are far from a homogenous group with similar consumption preferences (Oh et al., 2004). However, especially international tourists share some common tendencies, simply as a result of being on holiday in an unfamiliar environment. They are more likely to shop as a leisure activity and tend to be more interested in unique local products and experiences (Oh et al., 2007). Moreover, their consumption behavior is often affected by time constraints, lack of information and risk associated with shopping and consuming in a foreign country (Lloyd et al., 2011). Entrepreneurs therefore have to strike a balance in offering unique local products that are at the same time highly recognizable for international visitors. A specific consequence of tourists' time constraints, lack of information and risk aversion behavior, is that they tend to cluster around the most well-known tourist highlights (Russo, 2002), causing entrepreneurs in the direct vicinity to experience a relative monopoly (Caserta & Russo, 2002). This is argued to allow entrepreneurs to get away with offering less value for money compared to competing businesses further away from the main tourist destinations (Caserta & Russo, 2002).

Secondly, the increasing concentration of visitors raises the interest of retail capital (which in this case applies to hospitality businesses and consumer services as well as shops). Retail capital refers to the variety of stakeholders who extract exchange value from products and services sold to a consumer looking for use value (Ducatel & Blomley, 1990; Mermet, 2017). These include entrepreneurs, who achieve higher revenue in consumption spaces with higher footfall, property owners, who can extract higher rents (Liu et al., 2020), and the owners and shareholders of retail chains. Well-known national and international chain stores can generate high sales and pay rent prices that independent stores often cannot afford (Mermet, 2017). Increased interest from chain stores can therefore be both a cause and effect of increasing rent prices, together causing voluntary and involuntary displacement of independent entrepreneurs. Some may choose to sell their lease due to favorable market conditions (Mermet, 2017). Others may no longer be able to afford the increasing rent price and are forced to move out (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013). The economic incentive structure thus leaves entrepreneurs with the double challenge of adapting to the tourist demand and doing so in such a way that their revenue can increase in pace with the growing footfall and increasing rent prices.

### *Entrepreneur responses: personal background and business climate*

Changing local demand and increased interest from retail capital thus alter the economic incentive structure for entrepreneurs. Their response to these changes, however, also depends on both the social and institutional context in which they operate (Su & Chen, 2017) and on personal characteristics (Sorenson, 2018). The social context describes interpersonal relations of the entrepreneur (Kloosterman & Rath, 2018), for instance with regular customers, competitors, other entrepreneurs in the area, perhaps even with property owners, banks, suppliers and law enforcers (Kloosterman & Rath, 2018; Sorenson, 2018; Zukin et al., 2015). These relations are one of the factors that cause entrepreneurs to be very rooted, especially in the retail sector (Koster & Pellenbarg, 2019). The institutional contexts transcends interpersonal relations and refers to an opportunity structure (Kloosterman & Rath, 2018). This opportunity structure covers a wide range of factors at different levels of scale, some of which facilitate easier access to entrepreneurship, while others limit employment opportunities for particular social groups who are then more likely to start their own business (Hall, 2021). These could range from national institutions, such as the tax system, to local regulation such as zoning plans and permits. Finally, the opportunity structure is not only shaped by governments, but also by institutions such as media, industry organizations and a business or street association (Zukin et al., 2015). All of these can be factors that stimulate entrepreneurs to adjust, to stay rooted in a particular place or to move out, either aggravating or mitigating touristification of consumption spaces in the process.

Finally, business strategies adopted in response to increasing tourism also depend on the personal background of entrepreneurs (Hall, 2021). After all, they are more than calculating, profit-maximizing actors (Berg, 2014). Desires, ambitions, resources and abilities vary greatly between different entrepreneurs and all play an important role in business decisions, for instance to locate in a particular place, or to stay put (Sorenson, 2018). Moreover, entrepreneurs are driven by different degrees of and different types of entrepreneurial passion: Some are highly attached to the specific niche in the market that they have discovered, while others identify strongly with their role in growing and developing their business (Cardon et al., 2009). While the first type might be more inclined to relocate their business in response to changing local demand, the latter is more likely to stay put and adapt their business strategy. The next sections will outline how we analyzed entrepreneurial strategies in three consumption spaces in Amsterdam and what this has taught us about touristification of consumption spaces.

### Microgeographies of entrepreneur responses to increasing tourism in Amsterdam

Touristification of consumption spaces has played an important role in the growing local resistance to tourism in Amsterdam. When the number of tourists surged in 2014, tourism started to be perceived increasingly negative, even as one of the main threats to livability for inner city residents (City of Amsterdam, 2015). The resulting resistance to tourism in Amsterdam has featured prominently in local media, but also gained considerable national and even some international media attention in items depicting the inner city as congested, dirty, inauthentic and swarmed with tourists (Pijbes, 2014). This inauthenticity is expressed in metaphors depicting the inner city as a museum or theme park from which local residents feel increasingly alienated (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017). The increasing number of tourist-oriented businesses, often reconstructing a local identity for the tourist gaze (Guimarães, 2021), contribute to this perceived inauthenticity. Resistance to tourism started to focus more and more on tourist shops, problematizing their lower status, unhealthy foods and non-Dutch appearance, even raising suspicions about money laundering practices. This is argued to affect livability in the inner city, causing inner city residents to move out and residents of the wider metropolitan area to avoid the city center.

Alarmed by the increasing concerns about touristification of consumption spaces, Amsterdam's local government researched the effects of tourism on shops, hospitality businesses and consumer services extensively. This included mapping touristic sectors in the inner city (City of Amsterdam, 2017), identifying and counting businesses with 'touristic expressions' in their shop-window (van der Groep and de Graaff, 2020) and survey research on residents' valuation of consumption spaces (Rekenkamer Amsterdam, 2016). Meanwhile, literature on overtourism in Amsterdam concentrated on explaining resistance to tourism (Gerritsma, 2019), effects on the housing market (Overwater & Yorke-Smith, 2022) and efforts to manage overtourism in a comparative context (Hübscher & Kallert, 2022; Koens et al., 2019). A notable exception where local businesses play an important role, is Pinkster and Boterman's (2017) study among Canal Belt residents. They demonstrate how transformations to shops and services erode residents' sense of belonging (Pinkster & Boterman, 2017). Entrepreneurs, however, seem largely overlooked in media, policy and literature, except for a subset of entrepreneurs that have been very vocal about the negative effects of increasing tourism on their business (van Bolderen, 2016).

The explicit concern for livability and relative neglect of entrepreneur perspectives is tangible in the local policy response to touristification of consumption spaces. The most important pillars of this policy response are zoning plan restrictions and increased monitoring. Since 2017, inner city zoning plans include a ban on tourist shops. This ban restricts particular sectors, such as souvenir shops and take-away shops, but also curtails the use of non-Dutch language, the offer of tourist-oriented products and flashy advertisements (City of Amsterdam, 2018). The changeability of these criteria requires more elaborate monitoring by the municipal law-enforcement department. However, not only compliance with zoning plans is monitored more extensively, businesses in the inner city are also subjected to more frequent all-encompassing checkups by a special, interdisciplinary task force looking for violations with regulation from health and safety to employment and tax law. These checkups are motivated by the idea that tourist oriented businesses are more likely to be involved in so-called *undermining* criminal activity, a deliberately vague term that refers to the legal infrastructure that supports illegal activities (Vols, 2019). This idea stems from the history of criminal activities in the Red Light District (van Traa and Coenen, 1996), but is also rooted in a demonstrated connection between tourism and money laundering activities, as suspicious transactions are less likely to be discovered in touristy areas with a higher number of bank transfers from abroad and more frequent use of cash (Biagi et al., 2012; Ryan, 1993). Altogether, this makes the policy response to touristification of consumption spaces one in which entrepreneurs are regarded with suspicion, rather than an effort to change the incentive structure entrepreneurs respond to.

#### Case study areas

This incentive structure is crucial to our aim to unravel the mechanisms behind touristification of consumption spaces. To allow variation in the incentive structure, we compared three consumption spaces: *Damstraten*, *Hoogstraten* and *Negen straatjes* (Fig. 1). These specific cases share some important characteristics, yet seemed to have been affected by increasing tourism in different ways. The most important similarity is that all three areas receive a high number of tourists as spaces that connect Dam square, the heart of the historic inner city to other important tourism destinations. *Damstraten* and *Hoogstraten* form the main thoroughfare from Dam square into the Red Light District. *Negen straatjes* is a brand name for a cluster of shopping streets that run perpendicular to the famous 17th century Canal Belt. Moreover, the case study areas are similar in the way they all have a long history as secondary shopping streets (Lesger, 2011). Because the streets are rather narrow, with small business spaces, they have a relatively high share of independent shops. Directly adjacent to, but not part of the main retail arteries of



Fig. 1. Case study areas (photos by author).

Amsterdam, they traditionally housed more niche businesses as well as some shops, services and hospitality outlets that cater to the inner city population. The *Negen Straatjes* area is located in a rather upmarket residential area, while *Damstraten* and *Hoogstraten* are located in an area with a socialist history and a traditionally high share of social housing. However, all areas are characterized by a city-wide, regional and national function rather than as consumption spaces for local residents. The increase of tourism led to rising footfall in all three case study areas and each of the case study areas have seen the rent prices per m<sup>2</sup> for new leases of commercial property more than double since 2008 as a result.

The increasing number of tourists and rent price increases seem to have affected the case study areas in different ways, however, since the three areas saw different types of changes in their consumption landscape. In *Damstraten*, an increasing number of stores for comparison goods have been replaced by take-away businesses. The transformation of the consumption space has caught the attention of local residents, media and government. It became the focus area of policies to curtail the emerging touristy monoculture in Amsterdam's consumption landscape (City of Amsterdam, 2017). The transition to more take-away businesses has been less prominent in *Hoogstraten* and *Negen straatjes*, which are still characterized by a high degree of businesses for comparison shopping. However, while *Hoogstraten* show a relative consistency of the consumption landscape, *Negen Straatjes* area seems to have seen a larger transformation. The area used to be known for its exclusive as well as more quirky boutiques. The quirky

**Table 1**  
Overview of respondents.

	Damstraten	Hoogstraten	Negen straatjes	Total
Shops for daily products	1	3	1	5
Specialty shops	1	5	4	10
Tourist shops	3	1	1	5
Take-away	2	1	2	5
Hotel, restaurant or café	3	0	3	6
Total	10	10	11	31

boutiques that played a crucial role in the area's image are increasingly replaced by clothing shops and an increasing number of chain stores. While the properties tend to be too small for the largest clothing brands, a growing number of smaller, more exclusive labels has opened flagship stores in *Negen straatjes*.

### Study methods

The perspective of entrepreneurs is researched in semi-structured interviews with 31 business owners, co-owners or store managers in the three consumption spaces in the inner city of Amsterdam. We selected independent businesses, local chain stores (concentrated in the metropolitan region of Amsterdam) and franchise businesses. Large, national or international chain stores were excluded from this selection, since the location strategy, pricing and product offer of these businesses tends to be more centralized.

In our sample we aimed for variation in the ways entrepreneurs respond to the changing incentive structure as a consequence of increasing tourism. To this end, we selected different types of businesses, that were established in different periods of time and that seem to be perceived as more tourist- or more resident-oriented. Firstly, the types of businesses include shops, cafes, fast food places and restaurants. Table 1 shows the distribution of the different types of interviewed entrepreneurs over the three case study areas. Secondly, we made sure to include entrepreneurs that located in the case study areas before and after 2014. This year represents not only a surge in the numbers of tourists that visited Amsterdam, but also the emergence of increasing resistance to tourism (Rekenkamer Amsterdam, 2016). In our final sample, the longest established entrepreneur had been located in the case study area since 1983 while the most recently added entrepreneur opened his business in 2020. Since one of the strategies to deal with increasing tourism could also be to move out of the area, we also included a number of entrepreneurs that had closed their business or relocated in the past few years. Finally, we aimed to include both businesses that are perceived as tourist-oriented and businesses that are perceived as resident-oriented. We used indicators from Amsterdam's ban on tourist shops<sup>1</sup> (City of Amsterdam, 2018) to sample businesses in tourist-oriented sectors, such as souvenir shops and mini-supermarkets, as well as businesses with souvenirs or touristic imagery in their shopwindow. We sampled resident-oriented businesses based on a resident organization that promoted businesses they see as resident-oriented (Stichting de Goede Zaak, n.d.). Because we did not know beforehand who owned the businesses, respondents were not purposefully selected based on their personal background. However, the respondents showed significant range in terms of gender, migration background and business history. Out of the 31 respondents, ten were women, twelve had a migration background, out of which eight were foreign-born. While most had started their own business, we also interviewed six entrepreneurs who continued a family businesses.

The interviews were conducted between January and May 2021, which meant that some of the businesses were closed for at least some of this time period due to Covid-19 measures. While most interviews were conducted face-to-face, we also used telephone interviews to reach entrepreneurs who were not around or preferred not to make physical appointments during the pandemic. Because touristification of consumption spaces has become a rather sensitive topic in Amsterdam, we avoided topics around tourism, crowding, nuisance or resident resistance at the start of the interview. Instead, we focused on the entrepreneurs' backgrounds, their business concepts and the way they had adapted these concepts over time. After that, we asked them about their location decision and local demand. Finally, we probed for the entrepreneurs' relations with customers, residents, other entrepreneurs, street associations and the local government. This approach left room for entrepreneurs to talk about a range of topics that would change local demand or the local business climate, such as globalization and digitalization. Tourism tended to come up unprompted as a topic that was on the front of the entrepreneurs' minds. The interviews have been recorded and transcribed with the respondents' consent and were analyzed in multiple rounds of deductive and inductive coding. The next section presents the most important findings from the three case study areas, where entrepreneur strategies were characterized as crowd-pleasing, niche-playing and gentrifying.

<sup>1</sup> Tourist shops are defined using a combination of sector, offer of products, ways of advertising and business model. Tourist-oriented sectors include souvenir shops, businesses that sell small quantities of soft drugs or paraphernalia for smoking or growing marihuana, mini supermarkets and take-away food shops. Businesses that do not fall under these categories can still be seen as tourist shops. In this case they are distinguished by an offer of souvenirs or take-away food and drinks that comprises more than 5 % of the total floor space, or by conspicuous and flashy advertisement, often in English. In terms of business model, it is argued that customers are often assisted in English, spend relatively little time in the shop, products are often packaged in souvenir-like packaging and prices are higher than those in local shops.

*Crowd-pleasing in Damstraten: snacks, drugs and souvenirs*

Entrepreneurs in *Damstraten* describe a changing incentive structure that closely matches the expectations from literature on touristification of consumption spaces. Firstly, they describe how tourism gradually increased crowding and nuisance, with peaks of extreme crowding in 2019. This resulted in congestion, with several entrepreneurs commenting that you could hardly walk or cycle through the street anymore. Moreover, local facilities, such as waste management, became overcharged. A café owner described himself “*Sliding into the store on fries and pizza slices*” every morning. Some also noticed a change in the rhythm of the street, with the peak hours moving from the afternoon to the evenings. The evening party crowd is also argued to cause some nuisance. The owner of a specialty store has experienced situations in which she was threatened or harassed by people in the street. Moreover, at some point she needed to call an ambulance on a weekly basis for visitors who had passed out in front of her shop:

There have been Saturdays that I was crying when I closed off the shop at the end of the day, you know. Yelling and vomiting and passing out in my porch.

Specializing in bulky homeware, this shop is perhaps the most obvious example of a business that mismatches with the increasing number of tourists in the street. It therefore does not seem to benefit from the increased footfall to the extent that other entrepreneurs do. In fact, the increased foot traffic only reduced the number of customers for this store, since local consumers started to avoid the area.

The businesses that seem to benefit most from the increased footfall are take-away stores for food or drinks and restaurants for, as one of the entrepreneurs called it “*fast, casual dining*”. Consistent with earlier findings on tourist demand (Lloyd et al., 2011; Oh et al., 2007), familiarity is seen as an essential strategy to appeal to the increasing crowds. The owner of an Argentinian steakhouse noticed this first hand, as he leases two adjacent properties. He initially started the steakhouse on one side and opened a tapas restaurant on the other. After a while, he noticed that due to the familiarity and fast service, the steakhouse was doing much better and he ended up integrating the second property into the steakhouse. He describes this restaurant as one of the least innovative concepts he has introduced, but claims that the location requires this type of familiarity:

A tourist, who is here for only two days or three days, wants to go to the Anne Frank house, wants to go everywhere. They actually have little time and creativity to think about anything else. But what do they all eat? Everybody eats pizza, right? Everybody eats a hamburger. Everybody drinks Coca Cola. (...) So you don't want a difficult concept that they don't understand, because then they won't come in.

The changing incentive structure pressures entrepreneurs to adopt a strategy we refer to as crowd-pleasing: Capitalizing on the increased footfall by selling recognizable products with a familiar presentation. This does not necessarily mean cutting purchasing costs and offering lower value products for a higher price (as suggested by Caserta & Russo, 2002). Firstly, some entrepreneurs argue that quality of their offer continues to be very important. Tourists are not always seen simply as one-time visitors, but also as potential return customers. The owner of a cheese store, for instance, emphasized that some tourists will order more products from the online shop upon returning home. A café owner claimed that many of his customers returned to Amsterdam more frequently and tended to come back to the same café and even “*leave something behind and return to see whether it is still there*”. Moreover, some entrepreneurs point out that online reviews and personal recommendations from friends or hotel receptionists are very important among tourists. Because of these feedback mechanisms, customer satisfaction is of vital importance even for one-time visitors. Secondly, the owner of the before mentioned Argentinian steakhouse argues that there is no real economic incentive to reduce costs because “*you can make perfectly fine [profit] margins with regular purchasing. (...) You would have to be a real scrooge if you start to buy cheaper to save money.*”

Rather than saving costs on purchasing, entrepreneurs describe a pressure to reduce the variety of their offer. This cheese store owner, for instance, stopped offering rare cheeses and instead used more and more shelf space for the typical Dutch cheeses that were most in demand:

You start to cut things from the assortment, the things that actually cost money sometimes, very special things that you just have because you want to have them. So you start taking the edges off everything. (...) Yeah, and then entrepreneurship isn't fun anymore.

The pressure to adopt a crowd-pleasing strategy is intensified by increased interest from retail capital (Liu et al., 2020). Many entrepreneurs experienced rent increases, some were even contacted by real estate agents inquiring about taking over their lease. Rent increases often caused entrepreneurs to reconsider staying put or leaving. Interestingly, this did not seem to cause a lot of direct displacement. Most entrepreneurs, including the ones that left, agreed that the central location of *Damstraten* was worth the higher price because it generated more footfall. However, not all entrepreneurs are willing to adopt the crowd-pleasing strategy that enables them to benefit from the higher footfall, which depends in great deal on the type of entrepreneurial passion that motivated the start of a business in the first place (Cardon et al., 2009). Entrepreneurs driven by a passion to grow and professionalize their business, for instance, are more willing to adapt their business concept to changing demand, whereas those who highly identify with the products or services they sell are more reluctant to adopt the crowd-pleasing strategy that the street demands.

Rather than direct displacement, increasing tourism and rent increases cause displacement pressure. This is exacerbated by the changing business climate as businesses in the street gradually change character. Especially notable was the shift from comparison shopping to fast food. A number of prominent, longer established businesses, such as the Dr. Adams shoe store and a specialized cowboy-boot store, have disappeared over the last couple of years. These specialty shops have been replaced by take-away food businesses, causing some entrepreneurs to refer to the street as a 'snack-street'. Remaining businesses for comparison shopping feel increasingly out of place. While food stores and hospitality businesses experience more complementarity with other entrepreneurs, they also noticed increasing competition, up to a point where a baker saw that his garbage bags were opened by competitors who wanted to know what suppliers he ordered from. This caused a widespread feeling that local social ties between entrepreneurs became weaker or even hostile.

The local business climate is not only affected by tourism, but also by the increasing resistance to tourism. Some entrepreneurs worried that increasing local resistance harms the area's reputation, exacerbating avoidance behavior among local residents and perhaps even discouraging tourists from visiting the inner city. Moreover, the resistance to tourism also affects the institutional context and relations with the local government. Especially the perceived link between tourist oriented businesses and crime and the intensified checkups left some entrepreneurs feeling targeted. The owner of a souvenir shop, for instance, was suddenly labeled as 'criminogenic' by a local alderman:

I had to look it up to see what it means. It means that you are susceptible for criminal activities. I am in the dullest business in town, I was selling keychains and fridge magnets. And (the alderman) has the audacity to claim I'm criminogenic.

Some businesses therefore start to feel like their position in the inner city is precarious, scrutinized by local residents and unwanted by a local government that will seize every opportunity to drive them out.

Summarizing, findings in *Damstraten* are largely consistent with the expectations in literature on touristification of consumption landscapes. Crowding and a changing composition of visitors change local demand. Entrepreneurs notice a growing preference for take-away food and drinks, fast dining and recognizable products. Increasing rent prices make adjusting to this demand an imperative. For some entrepreneurs, this is too much out of line with their vision. This may drive them to relocate or terminate their business. This caused most businesses for comparison shopping to disappear, leaving the remaining businesses that do not provide food and drinks or daily products feeling out of place in the area as local and regional consumers increasingly avoid the street.

#### *Niche-playing in Hoogstraten: an ecosystem of fabrics, phone repairs, vintage and vegans*

Entrepreneurs in *Hoogstraten* experienced rather different changes in the incentive structure due to increasing tourism. Similar to *Damstraten*, many entrepreneurs noticed an increase in foot traffic and shoppers in the years leading up to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this never reached such levels that it was perceived as crowding. In fact, the street was often described as rather quiet. Even in the absence of crowding and nuisance, some business saw a gradual disappearance of local customers. This disappearance occurred before the number of tourist surged and was attributed to increasing competition with supermarkets, larger department stores and online shopping rather than to nuisance caused by tourism. To the contrary, tourism was often mentioned to mediate the effects of increasing competition, since tourists filled the gap in local demand left by local residents.

When asked about how the increase in tourism changed local demand, entrepreneurs would often speak about cultural differences. Some entrepreneurs made a private game out of guessing their customers' nationality and predicting the products they would buy or the amount of money they would spend accordingly. The differences in demand that they describe, however, are often very particular rather than confirming the demand for authentic local products, familiarity or fast service (Lloyd et al., 2011; Oh et al., 2007). The owner of a vintage clothing store described, for instance, how tourists tend to love fleece fabrics:

Especially if there is a brand name on it, well, you blink and the rack is empty. And the Dutch, on the other hand, want absolutely nothing to do with it.

More than to increasing tourism and cultural differences, however, entrepreneurs seem to respond to current trends or adjust their business as a result of their professional development. The owner of a store specialized in underground lifestyles (for instance burlesque, clubwear and drag) described how her offer became more extravagant due to the revival of the drag scene, but also as a product of her growing creativity and skill in garment making. The owner of a smart shop noticed increasing interest in health benefits of psychedelic products and updated his shop façade and interior with a more professional look to appeal to this new clientele. Many entrepreneurs thus adopted a niche-playing strategy; specializing their offer according to both changing demand and their professional development as an entrepreneur.

Not only the tourist demand is experienced differently at *Hoogstraten*, pressure from retail capital also seems significantly lower. To some extent, this is because part of the buildings is owned by social real estate corporations, which rent out properties somewhat below market prices with the ambition to reinforce livability and accessibility of the inner city. However, many of the businesses that rented from private owners did not experience high rent increases either. Some felt like this is due to the fact that property owners appreciated their business model. The owner of the underground lifestyle store, for instance, mentioned that the property owners were artists who appreciated her craft. Others felt like their reliability as tenants and good relations with the property owner had prevented major rent increases, consistent with earlier work on social embeddedness of entrepreneurs (Su & Chen, 2017). Of course, another possibility is that the lower footfall simply does not justify the types of rent increases that

entrepreneurs in *Damstraten* face. The question of whether to stay, relocate or quit is therefore not as readily on the minds of entrepreneurs in *Hoogstraten*, especially not for those businesses who sell comparison goods and cater to a niche market. To the contrary, displacement pressure was most obviously felt by the owner of a shop with liquor and refrigerated drinks who doubted whether local demand offset the rent prices or whether he would be better off either in a busier part of the inner city or in a residential area outside of the city center.

The perceived symbiosis with other businesses is part of the reason why entrepreneurs are happy to stay in *Hoogstraten*. In a remarkable contrast with *Damstraten*, where the location near Dam square and the Red Light District draw the crowds and specialized stores seem to feel increasingly out of place, the most mentioned crowd-puller is a fabric and haberdashery store. This shop has been in the same location for decades and became a sort of local institution, benefitting many of the surrounding businesses. The owner of a phone repair shop, for instance, argues the older crowd exiting the haberdashery store often comes in for help with their phones when they spot his shop across the street. The underground lifestyle store benefits from the creative people attracted by the fabric and haberdashery store. In turn, she often refers her customers to the vintage store across the street to accessorize the outfit they just bought at her shop. In fact, she argues most of the businesses in the direct vicinity of her shop can generate clientele:

It's a nice combination of everything, you know? I've also had customers who came in to the bicycle shop to bring their bikes for repair and said: 'Oh what a special shop across the street'. That they walk in here and discovered the shop that way.

Although entrepreneurs in *Hoogstraten* experience notably different effects of tourism, the institutional context of increasing resistance from local residents and distrust from the local government is highly similar to what is described in *Damstraten*. The owner of the vegan candy store, for instance, noticed that his shop was mentioned as a tourist shop on a Facebook page that addresses touristification in Amsterdam. In response, he invited the owner of the Facebook page into his shop to change this perception. He also decided to register as a parcel pickup point to make sure more local residents would get acquainted with his shop. This strategy was also used by a phone repair shop. In addition, this phone repair shop removed some of the Amsterdam themed lighters from his store, because a local resident told him that the touristy imagery made local residents feel out of place.

The neighbors don't want, you know, tourist stuff like lighters and so I got rid of them. (...) [a customer] said 'with this kind of products, we prefer not to come here'.

Distrust from the local government surfaces especially in increasing encounters with law-enforcers. These law-enforcers would come to check, for instance, whether the T-shirt shop does not sell T-shirts with touristy images of Amsterdam. Some businesses have had problems with their advertisements. A sign with 'staff wanted' was seen as touristy because of the use of English language, and several shops were told that they had to move the signage on the shop window back to one meter behind the window. Some entrepreneurs felt harassed by these encounters, even to the extent that they started to consider moving out of the inner city, as the owner of a vintage store explains:

It really trumps your passion for entrepreneurship (...) it makes me think: 'Do I really want this in my life? (...) The local government breathing down my neck over nothing?'

Altogether, the experience of increasing tourism at *Hoogstraten* differs markedly from that at *Damstraten* and expectations from literature on touristification of consumption spaces. The amount of visitors increased, but not to such an extent that it was perceived as crowding. Moreover, it did so at a time when local demand changed due to increasing competition with international chain stores and online shopping. In that sense, increasing tourism may have preserved rather than overturned local businesses. Especially businesses that offer comparison shopping benefit from the increasing tourist footfall. Rather than feeling pressured to appeal to a broader audience with more recognizable products, many have adjusted their offer and presentation to cater to a more specific niche. The longevity of businesses and their niche markets creates a lot of complementarity that many entrepreneurs appreciate. Retail capital seems to play a role in preserving this local ecosystem of specialized businesses as well by keeping rents somewhat lower than they are at the start of the street. Nevertheless, entrepreneurs experience increasing resistance from residents and distrust the local government. Especially the changing relationship with the local government seems difficult to cope with, in some cases even a reason to consider relocating or terminating their business.

### *Gentrifying in Negen Straatjes: flagship harbor*

Similar to *Damstraten*, entrepreneurs in *Negen Straatjes* have also seen an increase in the number of visitors that caused avoidance behavior among local residents. However, this started earlier and under different circumstances, leading to changes that resemble commercial gentrification rather than touristification (Mermet, 2017; Zukin et al., 2015). In the late 1990s, the local entrepreneur association started branding the area as '*Negen Straatjes*', allegedly to compete with the nearby shopping area *Jordaan*. The brand name took flight and popularized the area as a shopping and tourist destination. It was picked up by national and international media (Osten Gerszberg, 2008), as well as travel guides that quickly mentioned *Negen Straatjes* as one of the best shopping areas in Amsterdam. The owner of a travel book store perceived that:



[The street's] image hasn't really changed, because it was already known for small, nerdy shops. It just became much more commercial, because of course we started calling it *Negen Straatjes* and started really exploiting it.

The increasing number of consumers includes visitors from other neighborhoods in Amsterdam, from other cities in the Netherlands and from abroad. Several entrepreneurs also mentioned increasing number of expats, who they emphasize do not appreciate being confused with tourists. This illustrates how entrepreneurs in *Negen Straatjes* experienced less of a dichotomy between the (native Dutch) resident and the (foreign) tourist, but rather perceived the growing visitor number as a variety of people with different backgrounds and consumption preferences.

Several entrepreneurs argued that the increased popularity caused avoidance behavior among local residents. A number of restaurants had to start more active crowd management strategies, for instance by placing a "wait to be seated" sign, or by hiring someone to manage queues in front of the restaurant. This was experienced negatively by local customers, who prefer their local restaurants to be accessible without queueing or booking. The owner of a pancake restaurant clearly saw a tipping point when her restaurant gained international media attention and suddenly became much more popular:

All of a sudden there were queues at the door. And well, what that brings with it is that – Dutch people don't queue up for a pancake. So we lost our daily guests. (...) If you become too busy, too popular, the neighborhood actually rejects you a bit.

The area's reputation did not only increase the number of visitors, entrepreneurs emphasize how *Negen Straatjes* attracts an increasingly higher income segment of consumers. This seems especially true for tourists. The owner of a store for vintage bags, for instance, mentioned that Dutch customers are often surprised by the prices of second hand bags while tourists are more aware of the value of the exclusive labels she sells. The owner of a pastry store argues that tourists are more willing to pay a somewhat higher price for higher quality products, as other cultures often value good food and drinks a lot more than the Dutch tend to do. He is especially pleased if he can meet the high standards of French visitors. Entrepreneurs thus tend to adopt a gentrifying strategy, specializing their offer and presentation into an increasingly upmarket version.

Consistent with later stages of commercial gentrification (Mermet, 2017), the influx of people with higher spending power raised interest from retail capital, most notably in the form of chain stores. So far, these have been mostly smaller chains, international chain stores opening a first or one of the first locations in the Netherlands, or flagship stores, which preserves the exclusive image of the shopping area. The interest from large, international holdings is argued to drive up rent prices and make it more difficult for independent entrepreneurs to compete. Several entrepreneurs described sudden rent increases or harassment by their property owner. A bookstore was displaced when the property owner decided to sell the building, for which he could get a better price without renters. Entrepreneurs feel powerless when it comes to rent price developments. The owner of a night store claims, for instance, that if he would protest his rent increase:

The property owner says 'if you don't pay (...) we're just going to work on the foundations... And then you need to close down for a year and you're just not going to earn money and then you're broke'. (...)The property owner is more powerful, it's his own building.

This leads to more typical stories of direct displacement in *Negen Straatjes*, including the paradox that the very pioneers who set the area's transformation in motion are the ones who end up being displaced and 'killing what they love' (Zukin, 2010), as the long-established owner of the pastry shop explains:

We have had an unprecedented success. With few resources, we have put ourselves on the map, and it is of course a nice area. At one point, we became so popular that rents simply went through the roof. The rents went from 3000 to 9000 euros, for example. That eroded the business offer enormously.

The upgrading of the consumption landscape and the increasing number of chain stores changes the local business climate. Many entrepreneurs lamented the disappearance of the really quirky small shops, such as the toothbrush shop and the button store. Interestingly, many entrepreneurs considered the area's reputation and consumption landscape beneficial from an economic perspective. The more exclusive chain stores and flagship stores tend to be crowd pullers and the high-end reputation of the area draws in affluent consumers. Their resentment of the changing business climate seems to come from a more personal perspective, as the area they highly identified with changes into something that does not match their personal taste.

The increasing number of chain stores also affects the social context in which entrepreneurs operate, for instance their contacts with other entrepreneurs and the shopping street association. Several entrepreneurs mentioned that they used to know all of the other businesses in their block, but do not seem to get in touch with the chain stores where employee turnover is higher and the owners are distant. The increasing number of chain stores has also caused a lack of commitment in the shopping street association. It is often company policy for chain store locations to not get involved in street associations. This has caused freeriding problems, up the point where it was difficult to raise funds for Christmas lights, something several entrepreneurs say was never a problem before.

Finally, some entrepreneurs mention a changing relationship with the local government quite similar to what was mentioned by entrepreneurs in *Damstraten* and *Hoogstraten*. However, these experiences seem to vary greatly. The owner of a book store hardly had any contact with the local government at all, while the owner of a cookie shop received a rather hostile phone call from a public servant threatening to close the shop if it would sell cookies for direct consumption rather than tins of cookies

to take home. Several entrepreneurs have experienced an increasing number of check-ups. This restaurant owner, for instance, felt like she was regarded with increasing scrutiny:

The queues at the door had to change, I think my outdoor seats were checked ten times every summer. I get an application for the Commodities Act twice a year, while my neighbor says: 'I never get them.' And then I thought: 'whatever', it could all be coincidence, I mean... But at a certain point you think: 'Well, I don't know, but I think I'm being targeted'.

She actually went to the inner city district chairman to ask whether there was a specific reason for the closer scrutiny she experienced over the years, and got her suspicions confirmed. The problem seemed to lie in her business's English name, which the inner city district chairman claimed had "a negative ring to it".

Summarizing, the experience of increasing tourism in *Negen Straatjes* is closely entangled with the area's upgrading into a more upmarket shopping destination. This largely the result of contingencies in the institutional context (Zukin et al., 2015); the upgrade was set in motion by a collective branding strategy launched by the shopping street organization, and took flight when this brand was picked up by international media. Ultimately, it seemed to spiral out of control to the point where the very businesses that initiated the brand name now risk displacement due to its success. An increasing number of chain stores drives up rent prices and erodes social ties between entrepreneurs. The gentrifying strategy of entrepreneurs is in some ways the opposite of the crowd-pleasing strategy that is expected in consumption spaces that experience touristification. Nevertheless, some entrepreneurs in *Negen Straatjes* have noticed effects of increasing resistance against tourism in a similar way as *Damstraten* and *Hoogstraten*. Especially restaurants and food stores noticed that local residents started to avoid their business as they got more popular and that they are increasingly targeted by local law-enforcement due to the area's reputation as a tourist attraction.

## Conclusions

As essential actors in the transformation of consumption landscapes, entrepreneurs provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of touristification and the circumstances that mediate this process. Our interviews with 31 entrepreneurs in *Damstraten*, *Hoogstraten* and *Negen Straatjes* in the inner city of Amsterdam, confirmed that increasing tourism changes the incentive structure faced by entrepreneurs, due to changes in local demand (Caserta & Russo, 2002) and rent increases for commercial property (Gotham, 2005; Mermert, 2017). However, these changes can be highly localized and the strategies with which entrepreneurs respond to these changes depend on the social and institutional context entrepreneurs operate in. Different business strategies dominated in the three case study areas: Crowd-pleasing, niche playing and gentrifying.

In the first case study area, *Damstraten*, entrepreneurs dominantly adopt a strategy of crowd-pleasing. Increasing tourist flows cause the consumption space to experience frequent crowding. Consistent with earlier findings the fast paced, hectic environment creates a higher demand for fast dining and take-away food and drinks (Guimarães, 2021), as well as for familiarity (Lloyd et al., 2011). Combined with increasing rent prices, this forces entrepreneurs to become crowd-pleasers that can quickly service the growing consumer base with a recognizable business concept. Those that adjust to these changes benefit from the increasing footfall and offset the steep rent increases. This makes direct business displacement less pervasive than in *Negen Straatjes* or other cases of commercial gentrification (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013). However, the changing demand causes significant displacement pressure, especially for entrepreneurs who would rather quit or relocate than change a concept they highly identify with (Cardon et al., 2009). This displacement pressure is intensified as more and more local businesses either adapt to the changing demand or relocate. Especially remaining businesses for comparison shopping perceive a loss of complementary and social ties with other entrepreneurs, causing them to feel increasingly out of place in *Damstraten*.

The dominant strategy in *Hoogstraten*, the second case study area, is niche-playing. Entrepreneurs increasingly specialized in niche products and services, either in response to trends or as part of their professional development. This specialization is possible because rent prices are relatively low. The social and institutional context play an important role in maintaining low rent prices, as a high share of properties is owned by social corporations and the many entrepreneurs mention positive relations with their property owner. The combination of specialization and relatively affordable rent prices creates a resilient local ecosystem of complementary businesses that many entrepreneurs see as an important asset. The tourist demand seems to preserve rather than jeopardize the favorable local business climate, since it reduces the impact of increasing competition with large chain stores and online shopping. Retail capital and complementarity between entrepreneurs thus interplay to mitigate touristification of the consumption space.

Our third case, *Negen Straatjes* is characterized by a dominant strategy of gentrifying, as the local consumer base has become increasingly affluent over the past years. In contrast to the expected shift to lower quality and take away businesses in touristy areas (Caserta & Russo, 2002; Guimarães, 2021), entrepreneurs have increasingly specialized in high-end products and services. This seems largely due to a successful branding strategy that promoted *Negen Straatjes* as a boutique shopping area. The increasing popularity of the area and its more and more high-end reputation have raised the interest of retail capital (Gonzalez & Waley, 2013; Zukin et al., 2015), especially chain holdings looking to open a flagship store in the streets and driving up rent prices. This causes direct business displacement, as well as eroding some of the social connections among the local entrepreneurs.

These three divergent cases leave a lot of questions unexplored. Firstly, with the interviews taking place during Covid-19 lockdowns, they raise the question how such external shocks affect entrepreneur strategies in tourist destinations in the long term. In the past decade, the Global Financial Crisis reduced local purchase power, causing many entrepreneurs to see tourists as a relatively stable target group. Travel restrictions due to Covid-19 completely reversed this situation and prompted entrepreneurs to

reorient to local customers. The coming years will show whether this will make a lasting difference. Secondly, this paper focused on direct effects of tourism on consumption landscapes. However, there may also be indirect effects, due to transformations on the local housing market as a consequence of increasing tourism. Especially developments around short term rentals deserve more research attention, as they may cause depopulation and reinforce the disappearance of local consumers. In Amsterdam, city-wide restrictions on short term rentals and a traditionally large social housing sector cause the three case study areas to remain densely populated. The housing market could therefore be a mitigating factor. A comparative case where depopulation has played a larger role could shed more light on this matter. Thirdly, our findings encourage new ways to manage touristification of consumption spaces, which include rather than antagonize local entrepreneurs. We suggest to turn our attention to how stakeholders such as entrepreneur collectives, resident organizations and property owners could form local coalitions to manage touristification of consumption spaces together in a more small scale setting.

Such a more small-scale policy approach would also do more justice to the microgeographies of touristification of consumption spaces that this study revealed. Our case studies illustrate that tourism does not affect all consumption spaces in the same way, a finding we expect to also see in other popular tourist destinations. Rather, consumption spaces change as a result of an interplay between the local incentive structure and entrepreneurial strategies formulated in response to these changes. These strategies, in turn, are highly dependent on the institutional and social context. This is particularly important, because the varieties of touristification of consumption spaces are not only a blind spot in scientific literature, but seem to be overlooked in urban policies as well. Entrepreneurs in each of the cases mentioned increasingly negative framing of the inner city, tourism and tourist shops in local media, which exacerbated avoidance behavior among local residents. Concerns about touristification of consumption spaces also compelled the local government to increase restrictions and law-enforcement throughout the inner city of Amsterdam. For many businesses, these restrictions were confusing and detrimental, complicating their relation with the local government. To some, the local business climate starts to feel rather hostile, something that weighs in on decisions to relocate or terminate their business. This draws attention to the risk of pursuing a generic strategy to address touristification of consumption landscapes, when the process is in reality much more specific. In those areas where increasing tourism did not lead to crowding, these policies seem to cause more displacement pressure among entrepreneurs than the process they aim to mitigate.

### Declaration of competing interest

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

### Acknowledgment

The research was funded by NWO (the Dutch Research Council). The grant number is RAAK.PRO02.149.

### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2023.103627>.

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