

DESIRABLE TOURISM

CAPITALISING ON
OPPORTUNITIES IN THE
LIVING ENVIRONMENT

SEPTEMBER 2019



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The Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (*Raad voor de leefomgeving en infrastructuur*, Rli) advises the Dutch government and Parliament on strategic issues concerning the sustainable development of the living and working environment. The Council is independent, and offers solicited and unsolicited advice on long-term issues of strategic importance to the Netherlands. Through its integrated approach and strategic advice, the Council strives to provide greater depth and breadth to the political and social debate, and to improve the quality of decision-making processes.

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The Dutch version of the advisory report contains an additional analytical section.





SUMMARY

Tourism is growing rapidly in the Netherlands, with the number of Dutch and foreign visitors increasing exponentially. It is a money-generator. The Dutch tourism industry now earns almost as much money as the construction sector and twice as much as the agricultural sector. Visitors also ensure vitality and high-grade amenities. Tourism is inextricably linked to today's society, in which we enjoy taking trips and seek out peace and quiet or, conversely, activity and entertainment. However, there is also a downside to this enormous growth. The presence of too many tourists harms the living environment and local communities by overstraining public spaces, roads, nature and the environment, and by inconveniencing local residents. These disadvantages diminish support for tourism among local people and the appeal that destinations have for visitors.

In this advisory report, the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) observes that a change of perspective is needed in tourism policy. The current interest in tourism among politicians and policymakers is not commensurate with its significant economic and societal impact. At present, authorities still focus too unilaterally on the economic benefits of tourism, but they should also be aware of its increasing opportunities and its adverse effects on the living environment and local communities. To manage the projected increase in visitors and to prevent our being 'caught unawares' by tourism, the Council argues that the authorities in all regions

of the Netherlands should take a forward-looking approach. This is a matter for both municipal and provincial government, and requires coordination by the national government.

Analyse the consequences: examine tourism pressure and the carrying capacity of the living environment

The impact of tourism is felt mainly at the regional scale. To be able to respond to the development of tourism at this scale, we need a precise analysis of the relationship between tourism and the living environment. The proposed method of analysis is to compare the nature and magnitude of tourism *pressure* with the *carrying capacity* of the living environment. Tourism pressure refers to the number of visitors and the impact of their activities on a destination. Even when tourism puts heavy pressure on a destination, however, this does not necessarily imply inconvenience or damage; it all depends on the carrying capacity of the living environment there. The carrying capacity of the living environment refers to the capacity of the living environment at a certain destination to accommodate visitors, without any adverse consequences. The Council distinguishes in this case between *physical* elements of carrying capacity (mobility, real estate, public space, heritage, nature and the environment) and *social* elements (public space and personal living environment). Analysing tourism pressure and carrying capacity gives us an idea of the scope for development and the challenges of a destination, both in areas that attract many visitors and in areas that would like more visitors.

Make a plan: draw up regional tourism development strategies

A desirable tourism policy focuses on striking the right balance between tourism pressure and the carrying capacity of the living environment. The Council advises municipal and provincial authorities to ensure that, in two years' time, a tourism development strategy is in place for each region that outlines the pathway to achieving this balance. The strategy should offer choices regarding the desired development of tourism and a corresponding set of policy measures appropriate to regional challenges and requirements. The strategy should then be incorporated into the environment and planning policy of the municipality and province. The Council advises the national government to contribute to regional tourism development strategies in relevant issues. Examples would include nature conservation, sustainable mobility, the built environment or climate change adaptation. It is important for the national government to set out a detailed agenda for tourism in the regions and to make clear what support regions can expect it to provide.

Take action: incorporate the development targets into policy measures

There are more than enough policy measures available for managing tourism development with a view to striking the right balance between tourism pressure and the carrying capacity of the living environment. Tourism pressure can be influenced by destination marketing and accessibility measures, or by dispersing tourists over several locations or at different times of the day. Another way to relieve tourism pressure is to influence the behaviour of visitors. The physical carrying capacity of a destination can be managed by increasing that capacity or by improving



quality, by regulating growth or, alternatively, by reducing capacity. The social carrying capacity of a destination can be influenced by compensating local residents or by increasing their engagement and control. At the moment, authorities are making inadequate use of the many options for managing the relationship between tourism development and the living environment.

Invest in a powerful knowledge infrastructure and more policymaking capacity

Knowledge is the foundation of good quality policymaking. At present, we do not know enough about the impact of tourism on the living environment and local communities and about the effectiveness of policy measures. There is no monitoring. The Council advises the national government to cooperate with the provincial and municipal authorities on drawing up a multi-year agenda for building and maintaining a powerful knowledge infrastructure. The national budget for research and development into tourism must be increased structurally and by a substantial amount. The local, provincial and national authorities will also have to invest heavily in policymaking capacity and research to achieve a forward-looking policy that focuses on tourism development in balance with the economy, the living environment and local communities.

National government, take charge: develop a vision statement and implement it

The Council advises the national government to define the new tourism policy in a vision statement focusing on the economy, the living

environment and local communities and aligned with national and other objectives. In addition, the vision statement should specify the national government's contribution to the knowledge agenda and the extra capacity and resources needed to achieve the specified objectives. It should inspire regions, offer guideposts for their regional tourism strategies, and encourage them to make active use of policy measures. Where necessary, the national government should also facilitate regions by implementing its own measures. To shift the perspective from an economic to a society-wide agenda for tourism, the Council recommends setting up a ministerial Tourism Committee or including it as an additional task in the Intergovernmental Programme (IBP).





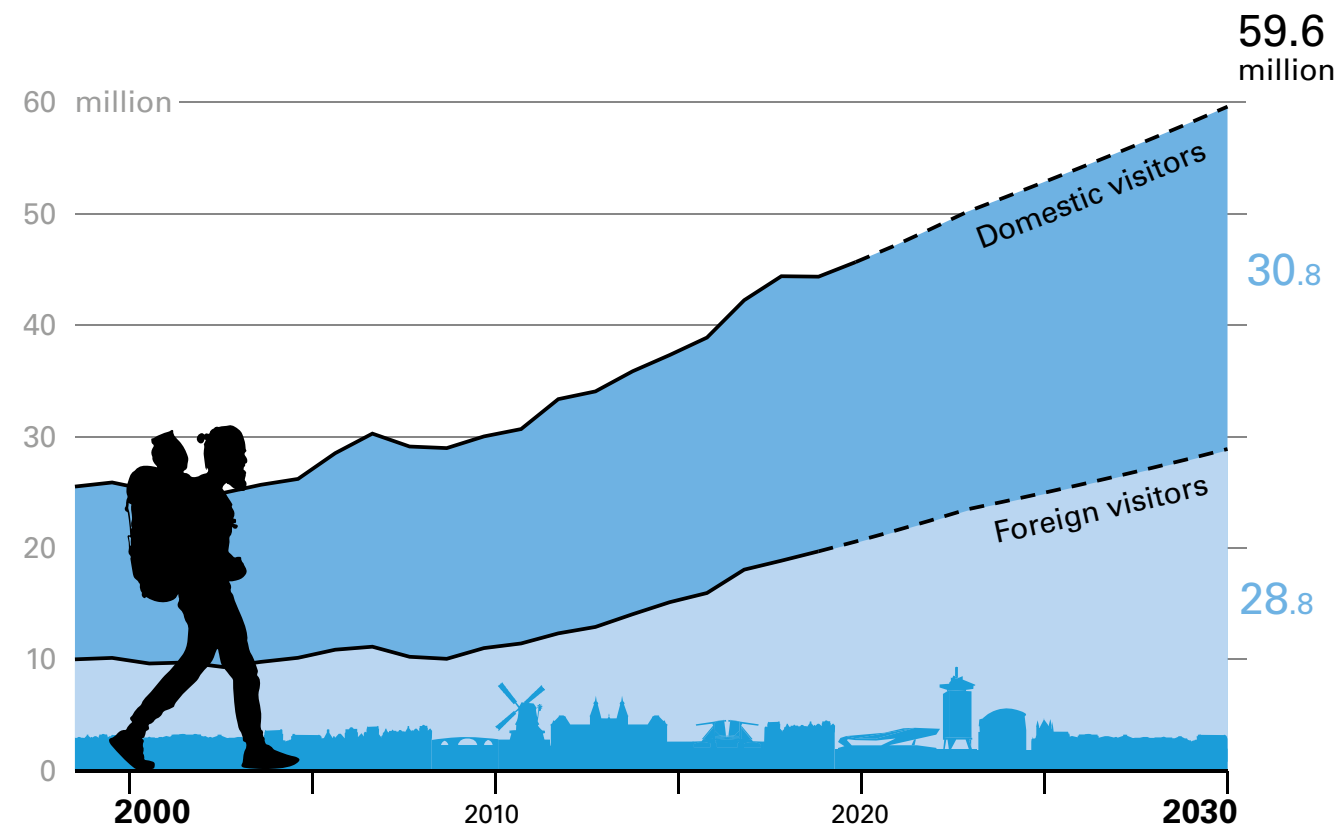
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Exponential tourism growth in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is a prosperous country with attractive cities and landscapes, good quality amenities, a sound infrastructure and a rich cultural heritage. These attributes attract large numbers of visitors, both Dutch and foreign. The stream of visitors has increased significantly in recent decades, reflecting a broader trend that is seeing a phenomenal rise in the number of tourists worldwide.

Tourism will continue to grow in the Netherlands, according to forecasts. In fact, the upward trend of recent decades is likely only the beginning of much stronger growth: from 42 million domestic and foreign visitors in 2017 to over 59 million in 2030 (Nederlands Bureau voor Toerisme en Congressen [NBTC], 2019; see figure 1).

Figure 1: Growth in number of overnight tourists



Source: Rli, based on NBTC data, 2019

The tourism sector is growing faster than other economic sectors in the Netherlands. As a result, its economic significance for the Dutch economy will also continue to grow. At over 4%, the tourism sector currently contributes almost as much to the Netherlands' gross domestic product as the construction sector, and twice as much as the agricultural sector (CBS Statline, 2018). In 2018, it accounted for 761,000 jobs (Pleasureworld NRIT et al., 2018). The growing importance of tourism for the economy and for employment creates many opportunities for regional and national development.

Box 1: Definition of tourism

This advisory report is based on the definition of tourism used by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). According to that definition, tourism refers to visits to destinations outside the visitor's 'usual environment',¹ where these visits (1) last longer than two hours and (2) are undertaken for tourist-related leisure or business purposes.

This advisory report focuses on both inbound and domestic tourism and on both same-day and multi-day visitors. 'Visitors' therefore include not only foreign visitors who travel to a city, village, beach or heritage site, but also Dutch day-trippers who go to an amusement park or museum, explore the countryside on foot or by bike, go shopping, or have an evening out.

1.2 Tourism and the living environment: a reciprocal relationship

Visitors travel to places mainly because they are attracted there by a heritage site, a tourist attraction, an area of natural beauty or a beach, and during their visit they make use of infrastructure, public spaces and real estate (such as hotels). All these elements are part of the living environment that is typical of the Netherlands. The living environment is therefore the foundation on which tourism can develop.

¹ The 'usual environment' refers to the direct vicinity of a person's home and place of work or study and other places frequently visited.



At the same time, tourism affects that living environment in various ways, in both a positive and a negative sense. For example, tourism can stimulate the presence of shops, restaurants and theatres or better infrastructure. It can also, however, be a source of inconvenience because it leads to extra congestion on the streets and in squares, puts pressure on parking and exacerbates environmental pollution. Such inconvenience means that tourism is in danger of undermining its own foundations in some places: overcrowding, rubbish on the streets or damage to natural features diminishes the attractiveness of a destination for visitors.

According to the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) (hereafter: the Council), the authorities and businesses in the tourism sector are not paying close enough attention to the interaction between tourism and the living environment. Their efforts are mainly focused on attracting more visitors and getting them to stay longer and spend more. The current policy takes little notice of the opportunities that tourism can create to improve the quality of the living environment and thus to add value to it. The adverse effects of tourism have only recently been acknowledged by the sector and policymakers: drunken visitors to Amsterdam's Red Light District disrupting public order; tourists in Giethoorn walking into homes uninvited; crowds of visitors damaging biodiversity in the Veluwe and the Biesbos nature reserves; investors pushing up property prices in the towns of Domburg and Veere. These are just a few examples of reports in the media. The adverse effects are now so pronounced in some places that support for tourism among local residents is crumbling while their appeal

as visitor destinations is fading. Tourism is at risk of killing the goose that lays the golden egg.



1.3 Tourism is valuable

Tourism has become an integral part of our society. We alternate working hard with relaxation and entertainment. Tourism not only attracts visitors from other areas of the Netherlands and abroad; we too are often tourists. After all, almost everyone takes trips around the Netherlands and travels to other countries. Tourism, in other words, is about us as well. Thinking of tourism in this way makes it easier to appreciate how valuable it is (see Box 2).

Box 2: Leisure and travel improve the quality of life

Tourism helps us and others to relax and enjoy life. There is a reason why we like going to other places. We all have an intrinsic need to taste freedom, seek distraction and satisfy our curiosity. For these and other reasons, many people go on multi-day trips once or several times a year, take a walk in the woods, spend a day shopping, visit a beach or a museum nearby or farther away, or seek relaxation or entertainment by spending a week in a holiday park.

1.4 The main question: balanced growth

The Dutch government is at a crossroads: will it allow tourism to expand unchecked, causing more and more damage to the living environment and communities, and ultimately also undermining its very foundations? Or will it choose to focus on desirable tourism, in which the flow of visitors

benefits not only the economy but also the community as a whole, and its adverse effects are minimised?

This advisory report focuses on the impact of tourism growth on the economy, the living environment and society. It looks specifically at what the government can do to seize opportunities and contain threats.

The following question is central to this advisory report:

How can we manage inbound and domestic tourism in the Netherlands so as to attain balanced growth, with the economy, local communities and the living environment being viewed as interacting elements?

Subsidiary questions are: what roles should the stakeholders (governments, businesses, visitors, local residents and knowledge institutions) play to achieve balanced growth, and which policy measures are effective in this respect? And what is the role of the national and other authorities?

In answering these questions, the Council focuses not only on places experiencing a high level of tourism pressure, but also on places where tourism could make a valuable contribution to the vitality and well-being of the local community.



1.5 Relationship with previous Rli publications

In 2014, the Rli published an advisory report entitled *Influencing Behaviour: More Effective Environmental Policy Through Insight Into Human Behaviour*. The policy measures identified in that report as being conducive to managing people's behaviour are discussed again in this report, this time with a view to the interaction between tourism and the living environment.

A second, more recent Rli publication of relevance to the issue of tourism is the advisory report *Aviation Policy: A New Approach Path*, published in April 2019. In that report, the Council specifically addressed the aviation sector in the Netherlands. That is why the relationship between tourism and aviation is not covered in this report.

1.6 Reader's guide

Chapter 2 of this report outlines some of the distinguishing characteristics of tourists in the Netherlands. Where do they come from and what places do they visit? Chapter 3 then raises six points that the Council believes are important for managing tourism in a way that strikes the right balance between the economy, local communities and the living environment. With this balance in mind, the Council goes on in Chapter 4 to analyse the relationship between 'tourism pressure' and the 'carrying capacity of the living environment' in more detail. Finally, Chapter 5 considers which effective and proactive measures are needed to attain desirable tourism. The Council also presents its recommendations in this chapter.





2 GETTING TO KNOW THE VISITORS: AN EXTREMELY VARIED GROUP

Who are they, the people who visit our cities, nature reserves and museums? And where do they come from?

2.1 Tourists come from all over the world, but most of all from nearby

Most visitors are same-day visitors and come from the Netherlands. The Dutch go on more than 1.5 billion same-day trips a year (NBTC, 2019). Approximately 60% of the visitors who stay in overnight accommodation in the Netherlands also live here (CBS, 2018a); in other words, they are domestic tourists. Of the 40% who are inbound (foreign) tourists, four out of five come from elsewhere in Europe (NBTC, 2018). The most foreign visitors by far come from neighbouring countries, i.e. Germany, Belgium and the United Kingdom (CBS, 2018a). At the moment, inbound tourism from Europe is growing fastest in absolute terms.

These figures do not support the image of tourism in the Netherlands that emerges in media coverage, with headlines like 'Giethoorn flooded with

Chinese' (Kroezen, 2017) and claims that 'In the first half of this year the number of visitors to our country increased by no less than 7.1%, with a rise in German, Asian and US visitors' (*De Telegraaf*, 2015). Such coverage tends to focus on foreign visitors, especially those from other parts of the world (United States, Asia). And these visitors are indeed well represented at some of the 'hotspots', for example Keukenhof Gardens and the Anne Frank House, which welcome a relatively large number of intercontinental tourists. But from a national perspective, this image is inaccurate, because most of the people visiting places in the Netherlands are Dutch, German, Belgian or British. Where visitors come from thus varies markedly from one destination to the next.

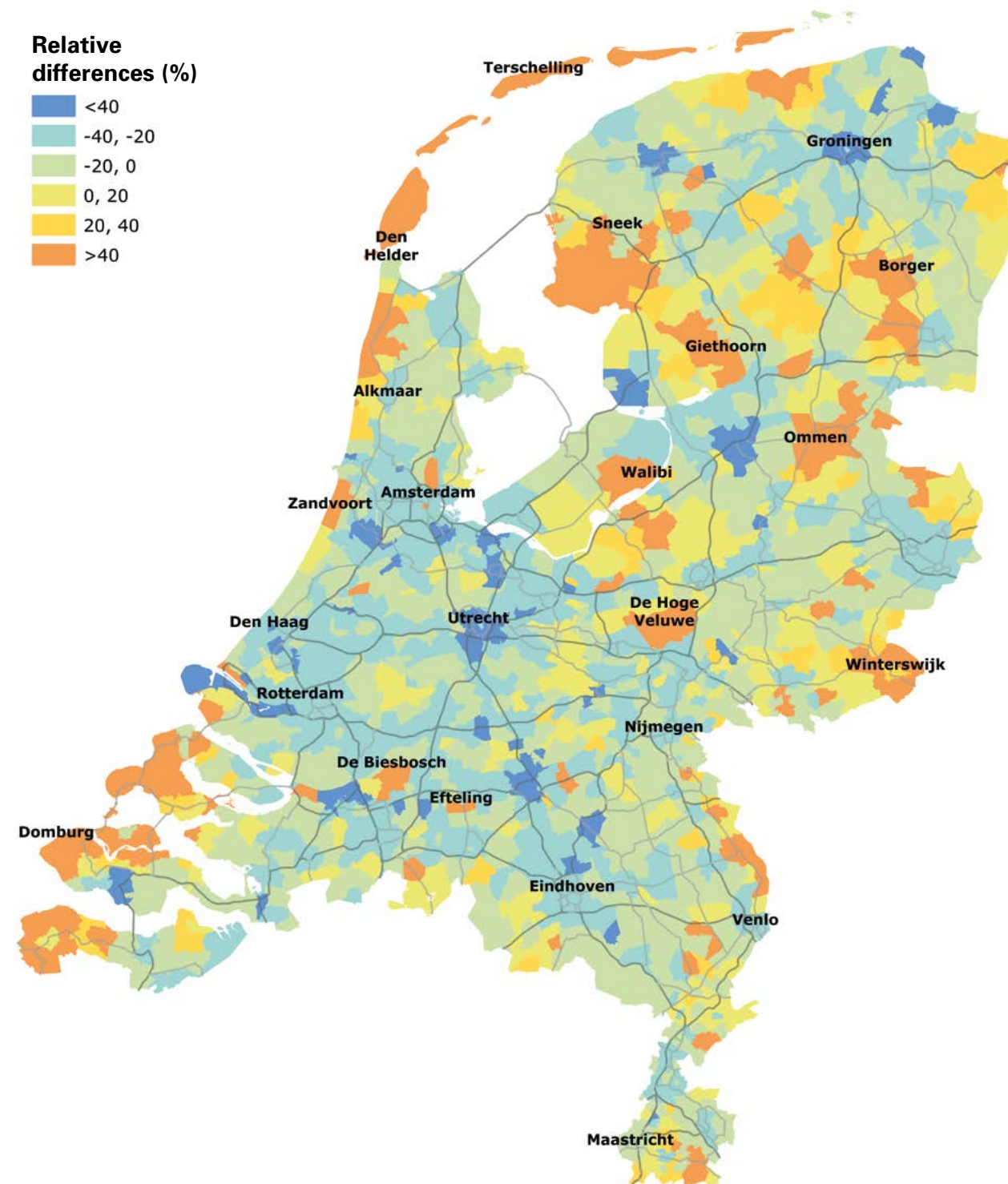
2.2 From Amsterdam to Ameland: movements, destinations and activities

The vast majority of domestic tourists on multi-day trips (90%) travel by car. Only 5% take the train (NRIT Media et al., 2017). Inbound visitors usually travel to the Netherlands by plane (44%) or car (40%). The rest come by train (8%), or by coach or shuttle bus (4%) (Pleisureworld NRIT et al., 2018). Tourist destinations and tourist activities in the Netherlands vary considerably. Dutch tourists like to go out; they enjoy the outdoors (walking, cycling) and recreational shopping. They generally do this in their own municipality. If they spend their holiday in the Netherlands, they tend to visit the provinces of Noord-Holland, Gelderland and Zuid-Holland (NRIT Media et al., 2017). The British and intercontinental visitors mainly go to Amsterdam. Germans are also frequent visitors to Amsterdam, but they

also like to stay on the Dutch coast. Belgians prefer to cross the border to the provinces of Limburg and Noord-Brabant; they too visit the Dutch coast regularly (CBS, 2018a). Different groups have different visiting patterns, and they vary widely in their activities and destinations.



Figure 2: Traffic congestion on a summer's day



Source: Analysis of DAT.Mobility (Data: Mezuero)





3 IMPACT OF TOURISM: POINTS OF CONCERN

The impact of tourism is wide-ranging and also varies with the time and place. Visitor numbers peak in specific places (e.g. around an attraction such as the Alkmaar cheese market, or in a nature reserve such as Dwingelderveld National Park) and at specific times (e.g. always in the middle of the day, or only during school vacations). Other locations and times are less crowded or even quiet. These subtle distinctions are often omitted from the debate on tourism pressure. The image that people have of the accessibility of the Dutch coast is then coloured by traffic jams on the roads leading to the beach at Zandvoort or Scheveningen. And the masses who flock to Amsterdam on King's Day (the Dutch King's official birthday, a national holiday) and during Gay Pride are held up as examples of overcrowded city centres.

But the reality is more complex. To arrive at a balanced policy for managing tourism growth, it is important to have a clear understanding of the true scale and multidimensionality of the problem. That requires careful analysis that takes into account the impact of tourism on the economy, local communities and the living environment. The Council has identified several points of concern in that respect, which we discuss below.

3.1 Public space and nature under strain in a growing number of locations

Many places that attract large numbers of visitors are publicly accessible: Utrecht's canals, the paths and waterways in and around Kinderdijk, the flower fields around Lisse, the beach at Bruinisse and nature reserves such as the Loonse and Drunense Dunes. These public spaces, used primarily by local residents and businesses, are put under severe strain by the arrival of large numbers of visitors. Crowds inconvenience local inhabitants, or animal and plant species suffer. The number of places reporting inconvenience or damage to the natural environment is increasing. To maintain the foundations for tourism, specific limits must be imposed on such adverse effects.

3.2 Consequences for local residents neglected: displacement and disruption

Tourism affects the living environment of local residents in many ways. For example, it impacts the availability of housing and house prices. But it also has an impact on people's private lives. If all the shops in the neighbourhood slowly but surely turn into 'tourist shops', local people may ultimately no longer feel at home in their own city. If strangers wander into their garden to have a look, or if the tourists renting their neighbour's flat make a lot of noise when they return in the middle of the night, their private lives will be disrupted. Such occurrences are no longer confined to a few incidents in large cities and they are set to increase as the number of

tourists grows. Tourism policy should therefore devote explicit attention to local residents and the quality of life in their surroundings.²



3.3 Uneven distribution of costs and benefits

Tourism has its drawbacks, but it also has much to offer. The problem is that not everyone benefits from it to the same degree. In many cases, those who benefit are not the ones who suffer its disadvantages. People who live in places that attract large numbers of tourists bear a disproportionate share of the burden, but this also applies to the owners of nature reserves.

² Various regions have launched studies into the perceptions of local residents, e.g. Zuid-Limburg, Friesland and Zeeland.



That is the case, for example, when tourists cause congestion day in and day out in certain parts of a city, disturbing the sleep of residents and leaving their rubbish behind. In other cases, the burden is more material in nature: while visitors enjoy themselves and shops and hotels and catering establishments earn money, residents and owners of nature reserves cover the cost of maintaining pathways, cleaning up rubbish, appointing extra community service officers³ and implementing additional parking measures. In addition, residents of popular destinations often see local housing prices rise.

The distribution of the costs and benefits of tourism is a point of concern that bears further analysis. The difficulty is that we still know very little about the scale of these costs and benefits, let alone about how precisely they are distributed among residents, owners of nature reserves, visitors, businesses and the authorities. A quantified and evidence-based overview is needed to ensure a fair and well-balanced policy in this area.

3.4 Tourism policy inadequately aligned with other policy objectives

Although the inhabitants of popular destinations are often inconvenienced by tourism, there are also several aspects of tourism that are beneficial to them – sometimes without their being aware of it. In terms of the living environment, such advantages are associated with the available amenities

³ Community service officers (in Dutch, buitengewoon opsporingsambtenaren or Boa's) are deployed to enforce the rules in nature reserves or public order and safety on the streets.

and the quality of public space. After all, amenities often attract both visitors and local residents. For example, one reason why the Netherlands has such a wide variety of cultural attractions is that they appeal to visitors. The many hospitality establishments on the Wadden Islands, the supermarket in Ossenzijl and bus 391 between Amsterdam Central Station and the Zaanse Schans area also exist in part because of local tourism (see Box 3).

Box 3: Tourist bus service also benefits commuters⁴

To tempt more international visitors to travel by public transport, bus 391 between Amsterdam Central Station and the Zaanse Schans area has been branded the 'Industrial Heritage Line'. As a result, the number of visitors taking the bus doubled within a year and the operator, Connexxion, decided to double the number of buses per hour. This made the service an attractive option for commuters as well, and masses of them began taking it to and from work. Seat occupancy is now 25% higher than before, even with twice as many buses in service.

Tourism development can also benefit local residents and promote public objectives, but the present policy tends to overlook this. A well-balanced approach to tourism development involves identifying and capitalising on such opportunities, combining policy objectives and adding value.

⁴ R. Rienties, in private correspondence, 10-9-2018.



3.5 Tourism sparks reactive policy on the living environment

Most local authorities see tourism mainly as a source of (extra) revenue and as a driver for the local economy.⁵ This attitude can be found, for example, in their policy on the tourist tax. In reality, local authorities do not usually levy tourist tax as a means of deliberately managing tourist flows so as to protect the living environment, but rather for the purpose of covering general costs. Generally speaking, local policy pays only scant attention to the adverse effects of tourism on the living environment, nor are the tax revenues earmarked to counteract such effects.

Policies that *are* implemented are usually reactive in nature. It is only when tourism puts too much strain on the living environment that local government intervenes, usually by trying to enforce public law and order or by curtailing the number of ‘tourist shops’, for example Belgian waffle boutiques or souvenir shops. However, they often only take steps to combat the symptom (inconvenience), paying little attention to the underlying cause (overly generous facilitation of visitor flows). In the Netherlands’ biggest cities, for example, policymakers were very slow in taking action against mass Airbnb rentals (see Box 4).

⁵ See, for example, Sweco (2019), who sees a similar focus on economic benefits in local government. There is, however, also a unilateral focus on the economic aspects of tourism in national government as well, revealed in various interviews conducted by Rli.

Box 4: Large cities ‘caught unawares’ by Airbnb issues

Airbnb rentals have become a problem for a growing number of tourist hotspots. Initially, Airbnb gave people a welcome opportunity to rent out their house to holidaymakers, but it has now become ‘an unregulated form of commercial rental’ (Rethmeier, 2018, p. 60). People living in what were once quiet residential streets in popular neighbourhoods found themselves suffering the noise of rolling luggage and partying holidaymakers and a rapid turnover of ‘neighbours’. Rental and house prices were driven up in certain neighbourhoods. Cities and seaside resorts were ‘caught unawares’ by the sharp increase in rentals through such platforms and had virtually no control over the number of bed-places.

Slowly, regulations are now being put into place. For example, since 1 January 2019, Amsterdam has imposed a maximum rental period of thirty days a year. The local government even wants to ban rental platforms such as Airbnb in some popular neighbourhoods, and it is also imposing heavy fines on those who violate the rules (Rethmeier, 2018). Eight European cities, among them Amsterdam and Barcelona, are teaming up to combat illegal holiday rentals (Wezel, 2018).

The projected growth of tourism calls for a more thoughtful and proactive policy, with due concern for development opportunities and the impact of tourism on the living environment.⁶

⁶ For more information about tourism management, see Chapter 5 of this report.



3.6 Insufficient interest in and capacity for tourism policy

The economic focus that we have observed in local authorities' tourism policy is reflected in their organisation: in the case of municipal and provincial authorities, tourism is usually assigned to the 'Economy' department. As a consequence, local authorities tend to facilitate initiatives by tourism businesses.

In addition, they generally reserve little staff capacity for tourism and are not very knowledgeable about the topic itself. Many municipalities and provinces and even the national government have only one or two public servants who concern themselves (part-time) with tourism policy. This is astonishing, given the huge impact of the growing tourism industry on the living environment and its enormous economic significance for the Netherlands. Economically comparable sectors such as construction and agriculture receive much more attention from policymakers. To manage tourism effectively, all levels of government must take a greater interest in it and build the necessary capacity.





4 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOURISM AND LIVING ENVIRONMENT DEFINES SCOPE FOR DEVELOPMENT

The points of concern raised in Chapter 3 make it clear that there are a number of issues to consider if we are to seize the opportunities and avert the threats of tourism. For a proper grasp of these issues, we need an accurate analysis of the relationship between tourism and the living environment. This involves comparing the nature and magnitude of tourism *pressure* with the *carrying capacity* of the living environment. The two concepts are explained in Chapter 4.1. Based on this comparison, we can then assess the available scope for development and the challenges presented by tourism (Chapter 4.2).

4.1 Tourism pressure versus the carrying capacity of the living environment

Tourism pressure refers to the presence of visitors and the impact of their activities on a destination. The degree of pressure is related to visitor intensity (number of visitors per local inhabitant), visitor density (number of visitors per hectare) and visitor behaviour (use of space and amenities,

social behaviour). The degree of tourism pressure varies both in time ('peak hours and periods' as opposed to 'quieter hours and periods') and in space ('attractions' as opposed to 'less-visited places'). It is not only the current situation that is important; any analysis of tourism pressure must also consider likely *trends* in such pressure, an essential factor in the proactive management of opportunities and threats.

Even when tourism puts heavy pressure on a destination, however, this does not automatically imply inconvenience or damage there. The effects depend on the carrying capacity of the local living environment and the local community. The carrying capacity of the living environment and local communities refers to the capacity of a certain destination to accommodate visitors, without any adverse consequences. A group of fifty visitors may be too many for one nature reserve, while another can easily absorb many more. Some city centres are also better equipped than others to accommodate large numbers of users (residents *and* visitors). And even if their physical absorption capacity is the same, one seaside community may experience and evaluate an influx of beach-goers on Sundays very differently from another. It depends on the local colour ('the DNA') of a destination: one seaside town is known for its spaciousness and tranquillity, the other for its hustle and bustle, entertainment venues and tourist industry jobs.

The Council has identified eight elements of carrying capacity. Six are *physical elements* (mobility, real estate, public space, heritage, nature and the environment) and two are *social elements* (public space and

personal living environment). Figure 3 combines these elements of carrying capacity with the degree of tourism pressure. The impact of tourism on the living environment and local communities can be assessed in this way for a variety of scenarios, ranging from 'low pressure' to 'structural high pressure'.

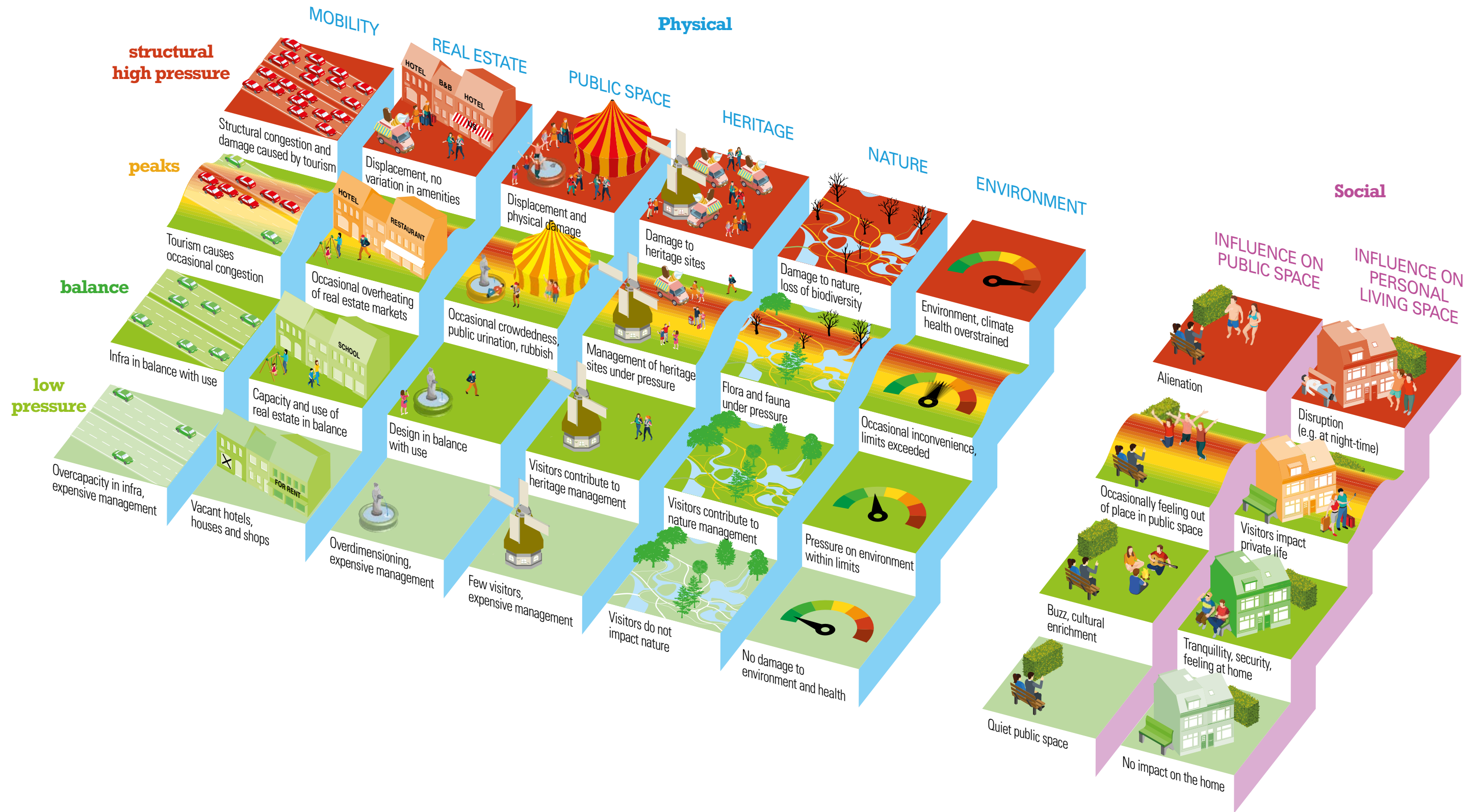
4.2 Determine scope for development and identify challenges

By determining the degree of tourism pressure for each of the elements of carrying capacity, we get a good idea of the scope for development and challenges at a destination. In many cases, the various elements at a single destination receive very different 'scores'. For example, there may be a mobility challenge because the infrastructure is permanently overstrained, whereas the property market is well-balanced and local heritage sites even have enough capacity to accommodate tourism development.

The scope for development and challenges must always be considered in combination for each destination. The above example makes this clear: if tourism development at cultural heritage sites leads to a significant increase in the volume of traffic, the mobility problem will be aggravated.



Figure 3: Assessment of the impact of tourism on the environment and local community



To determine the scope for development and challenges associated with tourism at a particular destination, we must pinpoint any local imbalances between pressure and carrying capacity and gauge how serious they are. To do this involves looking beyond user numbers and capacity data to consider:

- The 'DNA' of a destination: the specific local or regional attributes that make a destination what it is. Rotterdam, for example, describes itself as 'international, enterprising and boisterous'. The DNA is an important factor in a destination's popularity with visitors and local residents. It also has consequences for the way in which local people gauge pressure.
- The relevant stakeholders: what are the stakes for residents, visitors and companies, now and in the future? How pressure (and trends in such pressure) is judged may vary from one party to the next.
- The scale at which any issues arise: regional, municipal or at district- or street-level. Having an accurate idea of which places are balanced and which are not makes it possible to identify the opportunities for and constraints on tourism development and who needs to take action.

In addressing the scope for and challenges of tourism development, it is naturally important to consider the relationship with other public challenges and aims, for example with regard to sustainability, employment and health.





5 FORWARD-LOOKING MANAGEMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOURISM AND THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT

5.1 Basic principles for a balanced policy

Governance and policymaking must focus both on the many opportunities offered by tourism and on tackling undesirable adverse effects, both in situations where tourism can support regional socio-economic development agendas and in situations where tourism puts too much pressure on a location. In the Council's view, the purpose of identifying tourism targets and implementing the corresponding policy should be to strike the right balance between tourism pressure and the carrying capacity of the living environment and local communities. Our analysis in the previous chapter of the relationship between tourism pressure and the (physical and social) carrying capacity of the living environment provides a sound basis for designing policy that focuses on the balanced growth of tourism going forward. The Council describes three basic principles for such a policy below.

1. Tourism development is only possible if it contributes to the quality of the living environment

An attractive living environment is vital to the well-being of local residents. It is also a prerequisite if tourism is to deliver benefits. After all, that attractiveness is often what draws visitors to a region. The underlying principle for tourism policy should therefore be that the use of public space by visitors and residents must not affect the attractiveness of the living environment.

The implication is that tourist amenities – not only campsites, holiday parks and hotels, but also attractions and public spaces – must be of good quality, including with respect to aspects such as safety and sustainability, for example rubbish, energy efficiency and respect for nature. The focus of all these efforts must be to improve the quality of the living environment.

2. Fluctuations in tourism pressure require continuous monitoring and adjustment

Many destinations in the Netherlands would like to welcome more visitors than they currently do and have the capacity to do so. External events can, however, plunge such destinations into an unwelcome situation of structural high pressure. A mere mention in *The Lonely Planet* or a summery day may be enough of a trigger. Another example is the sudden fame of the seaside village of Zoutelande, thanks to a hit number by pop group Bløf. The opposite also happens: tourists sometimes get tired of a certain destination and tourism pressure may take a nosedive. Fort Oranje in Rijsbergen is a good example. A downward trend of this kind can have a negative impact on the local economy, especially if it depends heavily on tourism.

To protect regions from being ‘caught unawares’ by tourism growth and decline, fluctuations in tourism pressure (including consumer preferences and earning potential) should be monitored continuously. The same applies to trends and developments that affect the carrying capacity of destinations. Detecting such fluctuations in good time makes timely adjustments possible.

3. Cooperation between municipalities and between government tiers is essential for managing tourism

Most of the impact of tourism on the living environment falls within the remit of (cooperating) municipalities, and they have policy measures at their disposal to manage that impact. The provincial authorities and the national government also have relevant powers and responsibilities, however, in particular when it comes to tourism development. They can play an important facilitative role, as in the case of the Coast Pact,⁷ and they have responsibilities of their own that touch on tourism development, such as spatial planning, nature conservation or mobility policy, as well as market regulation, employment and income policy issues. It is precisely because tourism issues often play out at the regional scale that cooperation between municipalities and between government tiers is essential for well-balanced tourism development. The national government can be expected to play an inspiring, agenda-setting and encouraging role in this respect.

⁷ The Coast Pact (Tweede Kamer, 2017) comprises a set of agreements between more than sixty national governance bodies, provinces, municipalities, water boards and drinking water companies in the provinces of Zuid-Holland, Noord-Holland, Zeeland and Friesland, as well as various nature and landscape conservation, leisure and site management organisations. They have agreed that new leisure developments on land in the coastal zone must not undermine such values as ‘unobstructed views and grand scale’ and ‘natural forces and momentum’.



5.2 Five recommendations for ensuring desirable tourism

This advisory report focuses on the relationship between tourism and the living environment. The impact of tourism is felt mainly at the regional scale. That is in part why most of the Council's recommendations address regional public administrators. The Council also has a number of recommendations for the national government.

Recommendation 1. Draw up regional tourism development strategies for every region of the Netherlands

In the Council's view, regional public administrators should break with their usual practice, in which tourism policy is primarily geared towards attracting more tourists and promoting the revenue-generating capacity of the tourism sector. In many cases, authorities intervene only when the problems caused by high tourism pressure get out of hand. Tourism policy should address all the many aspects of our living environment and focus on striking the right balance between tourism pressure and the carrying capacity of the living environment. That calls for a proactive policy for every region in the Netherlands. The Council recommends effectuating this change in perspective by drawing up regional tourism development strategies setting out the choices made with respect to tourism development and identifying the corresponding set of policies, in line with the region's environment and planning policy and appropriate to its challenges and requirements. Some regions, such as Valkenburg aan de Geul and the Veluwe, have already taken steps in this direction.

In the Council's view, such tourism development strategies should be based on an analysis of pressure (going forward) and carrying capacity as well as on the region's own objectives. After all, tourism can also help to attain objectives in *other* domains, for example accessibility, housing or environmental targets, or economic and employment targets.⁸ The process of drafting tourism development strategies is one in which municipalities and government tiers must reach agreement about the aims, the measures to be taken and the division of roles between them. Since there may be major conflicts of interest involved, however, they must also coordinate with one another and engage in dialogue.

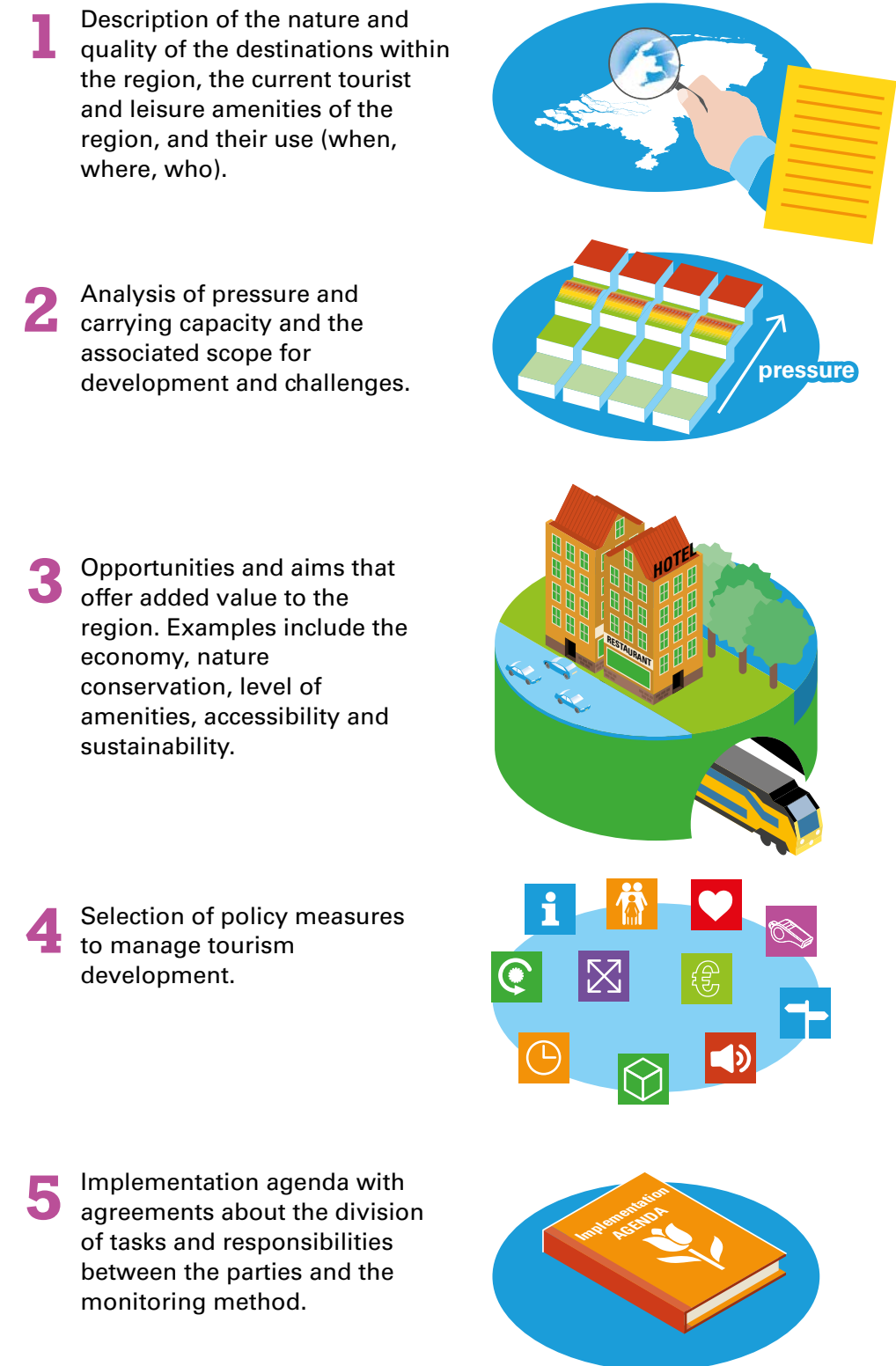
The Council advises municipal and provincial authorities to ensure that, in two years' time, a tourism development strategy is in place for every region outlining the pathway to achieving an ideal balance between pressure and carrying capacity. The Council expects that many of the elements of tourism development strategies will need to be incorporated into municipal and provincial environment and planning vision statements and plans, and it therefore recommends accomplishing this within two years of the strategy being adopted. The national government and provincial authorities should work together on monitoring the progress and quality of the development strategies.

⁸ See also [Perspectief 2030 \(NBTC, 2019\)](#). One specific example is the [Rewilding Europe programme](#), with nature development in peripheral regions serving to make tourism an economic driver for the local community. [Tourism combines economic and nature conservation objectives in this way.](#)



The Council advises the national government to contribute to regional tourism development strategies in relevant cases, for example plans related to national nature conservation policy and national targets for sustainable mobility, the built environment and climate change adaptation. It is important for the national government to come up with its own detailed agenda and to explain what support regions can expect it to provide. The Council advises the national government to present its own inspiring and agenda-setting perspective on tourism development and to elaborate its own broad agenda. Figure 4 suggests a table of contents for a tourism development strategy.

Figure 4: Table of contents for a tourism development strategy



Recommendation 2. Convert tourism development targets into available policy measures

The Council concludes that there are more than enough policy measures at hand to manage tourism development with a view to striking a balance between tourism pressure and the carrying capacity of the living environment. Figure 5, 'Menu of management options', lists the many different management options and can be used to achieve the desired tourism development targets. At present, however, public administrators make little use of such measures, and when they do, they are not motivated by a desire for balanced tourism development. The Rli urges public authorities to make active use of these measures.

As the menu shows, they address different actors: tourists, local residents and businesses. It should be noted, however, that measures often have consequences for other groups as well, intended or not. For example, raising parking fees for tourists may make parking unaffordable for local residents. And controlling tourist flows by managing access to an area could make it difficult for local residents to reach their own living environment.

It is therefore crucial to identify the interests of the various stakeholders and take them into account when selecting policy measures. These interests can be considerable, as can the differences between the stakeholders: businesspeople versus local residents and/or nature conservation organisations, housing owners versus tenants, residents/businesses in one district versus those in another, one municipality versus another, municipalities versus province, and so on. The Council notes that

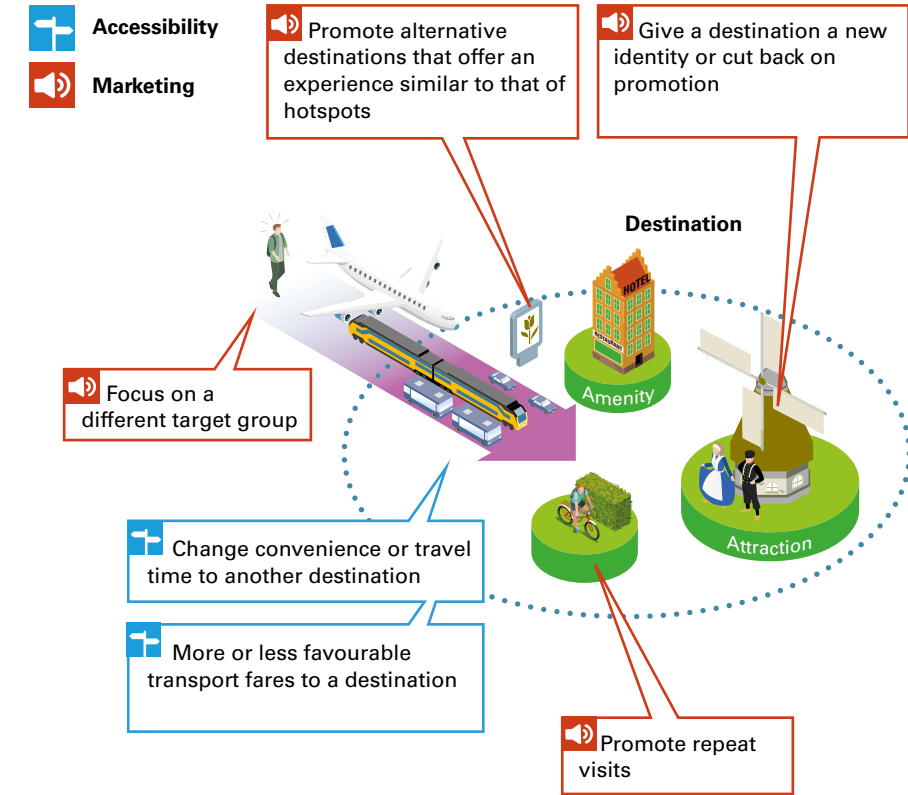
various measures, including specifically financial ones, can be used to redistribute the pressure between groups, but that this rarely occurs. Funding, supplemented by tourist tax or other income, can serve to join up issues and groups that have no obvious links. Such decisions can be a source of tension in society, but given the impact of tourism on the living environment, local communities and the economy, there is no avoiding them.



Figure 5: Menu of management options

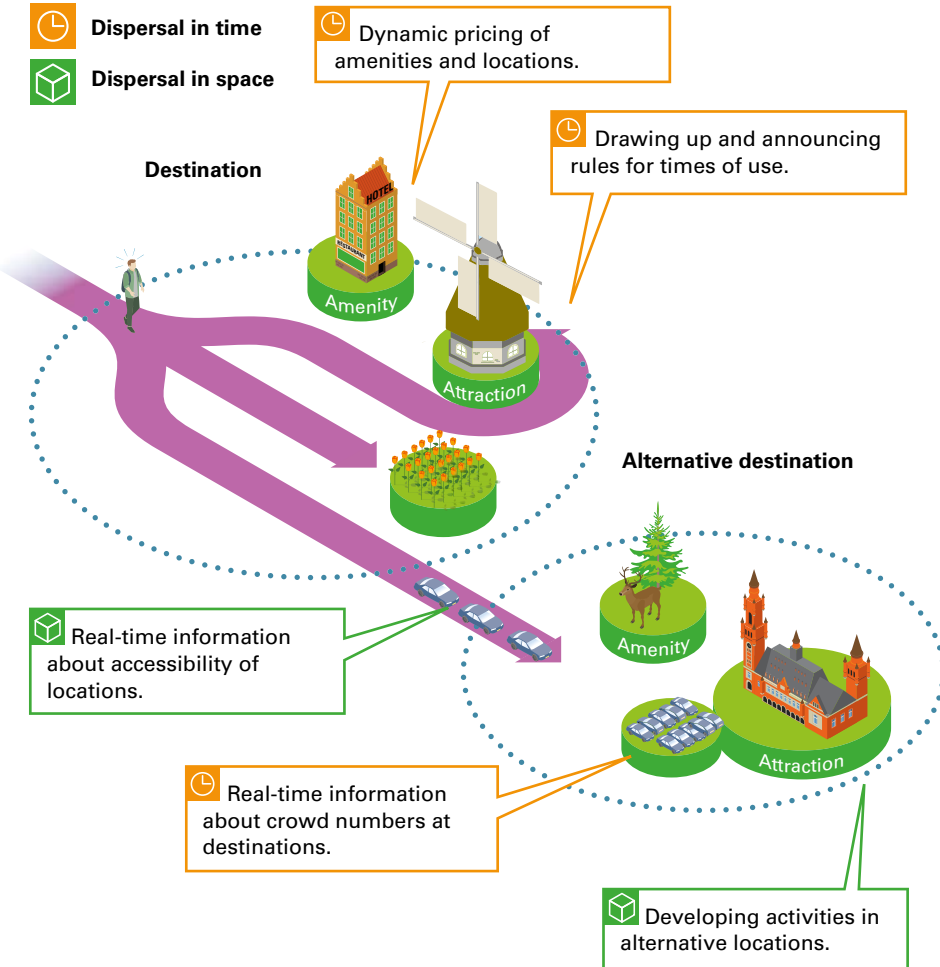
1. Visit to a destination

Tourism pressure can be influenced by optimising marketing prior to the arrival of visitors and increasing or even decreasing accessibility.



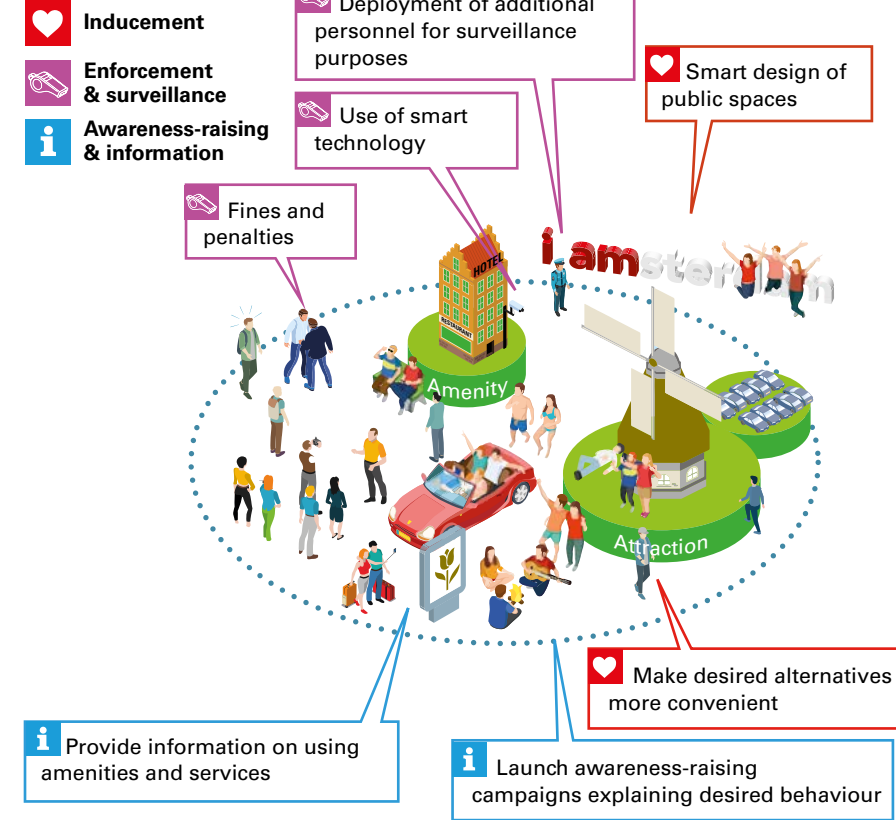
2. Access to and use of amenities at the site

Tourism pressure can be influenced by measures controlling access to and use of amenities at the destination. This is about dispersal of tourists in time and space.



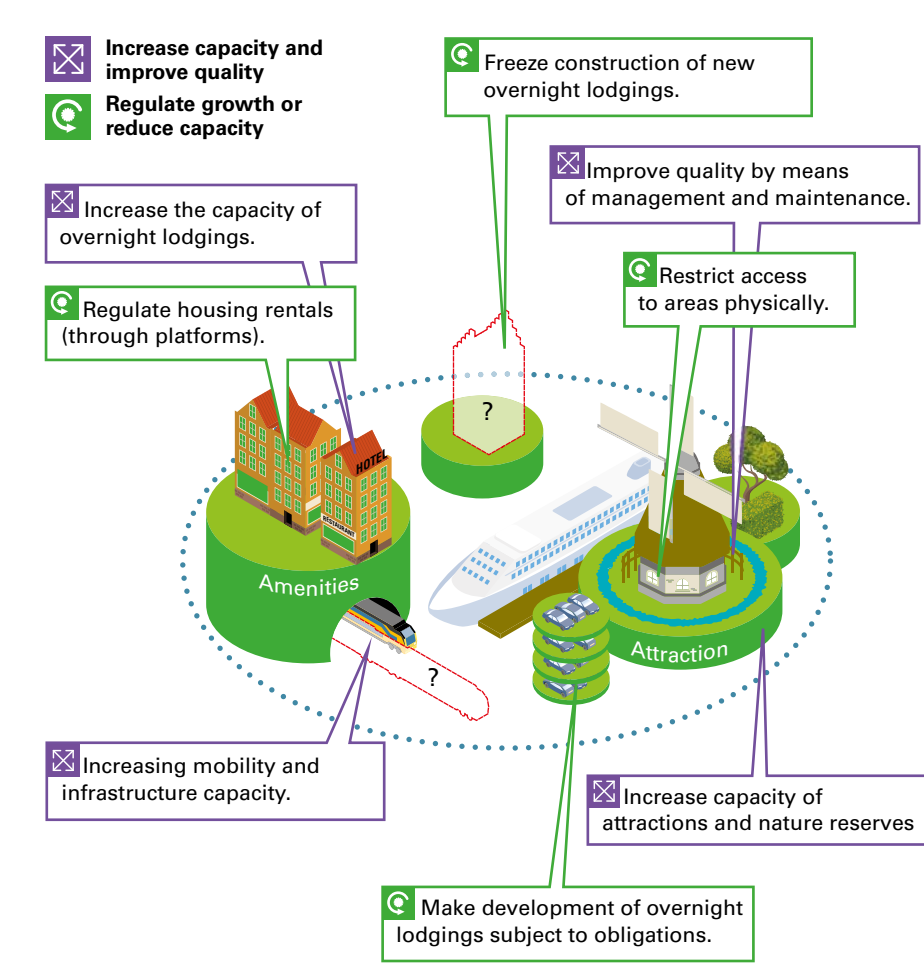
3. Visitor behaviour

Tourism pressure can be influenced by managing visitor behaviour at the site by means of inducement, enforcement & surveillance, and awareness-raising & information.



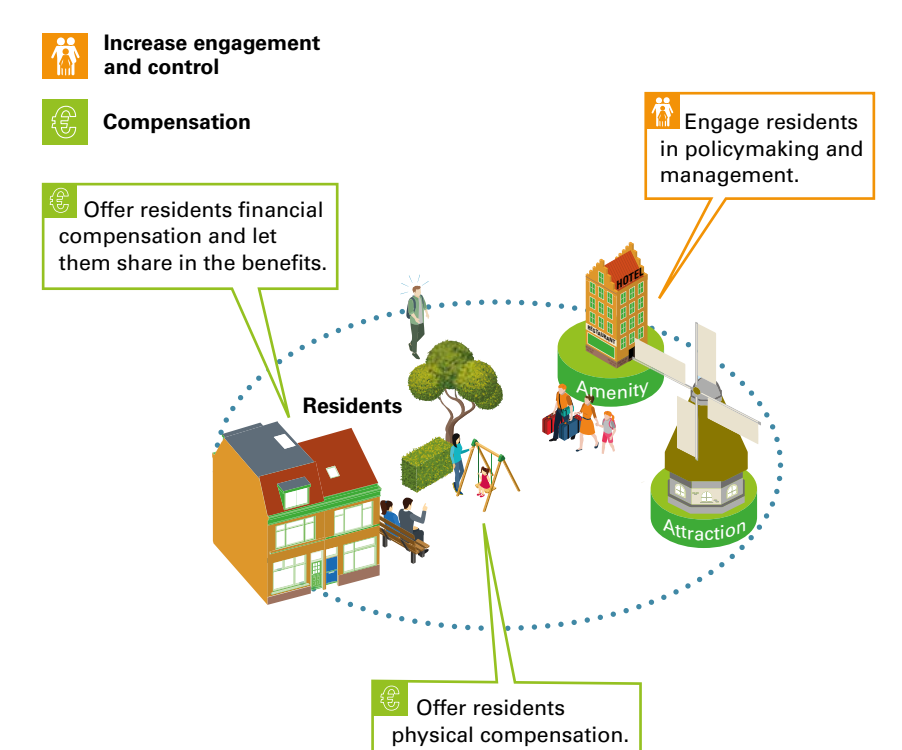
4. Increase or decrease tourism facilities

Physical carrying capacity at a tourist destination can be increased by expanding or improving tourism amenities. The opposite is also possible: regulate growth or limit capacity.



5. Compensate residents

The social carrying capacity of a tourist destination can be influenced by compensating residents for the pressures of tourism, or by engaging them in and giving them more control over plans and measures.



Recommendation 3. Organise cooperation between authorities

It is up to the municipalities to initiate a tourism development strategy, with the support of the provinces. The municipal authorities define the boundaries of a tourist region and make agreements about cooperation, not only between the various authorities and between the authorities and relevant stakeholders, but also within their own organisations. Such agreements can build on existing regional cooperation in tourism.

The national government can facilitate the regions by contributing expertise and – where necessary – by applying its own policy, for example in the form of regulatory measures (with regard to managing rental platforms such as Airbnb) and financial instruments (e.g. for building infrastructure). The Council recommends appointing one national representative for each region, who will assist where necessary and provide input from the various ministries involved.

Recommendation 4. Develop a powerful knowledge infrastructure for tourism

The Council advises the national government to cooperate with the provincial and municipal authorities on drawing up a multi-year agenda for building and maintaining a powerful knowledge infrastructure. It is crucial to know how tourism develops, what its significance is for society, how it impacts the living environment, and in what way management measures work. Without adequate knowledge, there is no foundation for good quality policymaking and there is a risk that opportunities will be missed and problems will arise.

A powerful knowledge infrastructure is crucial to increasing our understanding of these topics. Existing knowledge institutions, for example institutes of higher education, the Centre of Expertise, Leisure, Tourism & Hospitality (CELTH), the Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (NBTC) and Statistics Netherlands (CBS), must be given a fresh impetus, but to broaden the agenda it is also worth involving such organisations as the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP).

The Council believes that the knowledge agenda should consist of at least the following elements:

- *Research into the impact of tourism on the living environment.* Much remains unclear about the exact relationships between tourism and the living environment and, consequently, how it can be managed.
- *Experiments exploring the effectiveness of measures in real-world situations,* both low-pressure and high-pressure. For example, variable pricing and digital technology may offer major opportunities for more effective policies. The Council recommends establishing ‘communities of practice’ to accelerate knowledge-sharing, as is already the case in the National Parks Programme.
- *Development of monitoring systems.* Public authorities and businesses need to understand relevant trends and developments and the implications of policy so that they can manage its effects and make adjustments in good time. The National Data Alliance (LDA) and experimental ‘Data & Development Lab’ proposed by NBTC, CELTH and Statistics Netherlands is a good start.



Knowledge-building as described here will involve more than reallocating existing research budgets. That is why the Council recommends a structural and substantial increase in the available government budget for tourism research & development.

Recommendation 5. Articulate a national vision statement and build policymaking capacity for tourism

A proactive policy targeting tourism growth in balance with the economy, the living environment and local communities must stem from a national vision statement and a lasting increase in policymaking capacity. In addition, tourism policy should no longer be merged into economic policy. It must align with policy domains relevant to the living environment: mobility, real estate, public space, nature conservation, heritage, environment and liveability in neighbourhoods. The vision statement should clarify how the policy goals and measures in all these domains taken together can contribute to managing tourism development proactively. That calls for a major change in the present approach.

The Dutch Government has recently expressed its willingness to participate in changes outlined by the tourism sector,⁹ but ‘within the existing financial frameworks’ (Tweede Kamer, 2019a). Given the major challenges ahead and the necessary capacity-building needed to address them, the Council deems this insufficient. National government will also need to invest heavily in policymaking capacity and research, develop an engaging

⁹ In response to the publication *Perspectief 2030; Een nieuwe visie op de bestemming Nederland* (NBTC, 2019).

vision on tourism, and step up its own role and efforts. This will mean involving several ministries in tourism policy, at the very least the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (for economic policy), the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (for policy on real estate, spatial planning, public space, housing and residential areas), the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (for policy related to mobility, the environment and water management), the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (for heritage policy), and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (for nature conservation policy). To shift the perspective from an economic to a society-wide agenda for tourism, the Council recommends setting up a ministerial Tourism Committee or including it as an additional task in the Intergovernmental Programme (IBP).



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