

Tourism Culture

Rebalancing Strategies Under Overtourism

機関誌

観光文化

Tourism Culture



公益財団法人 日本交通公社

265

May
2025

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Tourism Culture ... 2025 Special Edition

— Rebalancing Strategies Under Overtourism

Japan Travel Bureau Foundation

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* This publication is a revised and translated edition based on Tourism Culture issues No. 265, 264, and 262, originally published between 2024 and 2025.

Prefatory Note: Reconsidering Overtourism

Yoshitaka Kumagai

In recent years, there has been a surge in media coverage concerning overtourism. Notably, the number of inbound tourists has exceeded pre-pandemic levels, and the depreciation of the yen has further contributed to this trend. Major tourist destinations are now filled with diverse linguistic landscapes and a vibrant atmosphere. Visitors have flocked to the three major metropolitan areas, iconic scenic spots such as Mount Fuji, and regions that have gained popularity on social media.

At the same time, however, various issues have become increasingly serious. These include inappropriate behavior by so-called “nuisance YouTubers,” disruptions to the daily lives of local residents due to noise and overcrowding, as well as incidents of graffiti and property damage at temples and shrines. Furthermore, in areas such as Niseko in Hokkaido and Hakuba in Nagano Prefecture, foreign investors have been purchasing real estate for speculative purposes, leading to rising property prices and making it more difficult for local residents to secure housing.

While the term “overtourism” has increasingly taken on a negative connotation, its actual implications are far from uniform. Overtourism entails inherent trade-offs; when tourism brings economic benefits to local communities, the implementation of restrictive measures must be approached with caution. For tourism businesses such as accommodation providers and souvenir shops, overtourism can represent a significant economic boon. In contrast, for local residents engaged in everyday life, the associated congestion and noise may constitute a major source of discomfort. Thus, perceptions of overtourism diverge sharply between those who benefit directly from the tourism industry and those who experience the inconveniences it brings. Accordingly, effective responses to overtourism require tourism management strategies that are grounded in the economic, cultural, ecological, and social sustainability of the affected regions.

In addressing overtourism, it is essential to first clarify several key issues. Rather than simply framing the problem as one of “too many tourists,” it is crucial to examine the characteristics of visitors—who they are, when and where they travel, and how they behave at destinations. Attention must also be paid to the specific attributes of areas experiencing overtourism. For instance, the impacts and implications of overtourism differ significantly between tranquil settings such as temples, shrines, or nature-rich environments, and more urban contexts. Consequently, uniform measures are inadequate, and responses must be tailored to the unique conditions of each locality.

This special issue presents case studies of overtourism countermeasures and explores strategies for promoting tourism in ways that align with the broader goal of regional sustainability.



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Feature Article #1: Destinations Coping With Success

— A Venetian Lesson

Jan van der Borg

The Persistent and Intrinsic Unsustainability of Tourism

It was only after the Second World War that tourism as an economic and social activity rapidly transformed. In many places, especially in industrialized countries, average per capita income, the number of days of paid vacation, not to mention the ownership of a private car, among other things, increased dramatically and tourism has finally transformed from an activity reserved for a limited number of wealthy people into a mass phenomenon. With this frightening growth of mass tourism, a corresponding business model has emerged, based on the mere replication of successful formulas, articulated through the search for economies of scale and a competitiveness almost based purely on prices.

The first criticisms of this model appeared decades ago (see for example Krippendorff, 1986), especially with respect to the effects of tourism on delicate places such as seaside and mountain areas. In the 90s several authors have argued that other types of destinations, including heritage cities, started to suffer significantly from excessive tourist pressure, as they had embraced the same mass tourism business model. Today, successful destinations such as Venice, Barcelona or Kyoto are afflicted by excessive and unsustainable tourist presence, which has been fashionably labeled “overtourism” (UNWTO, 2019).

Unsustainability is, unfortunately, a direct consequence of the very nature of the tourism product. Since many tourist assets of a destination (such as attractions, public spaces, infrastructures and public services) are uniquely linked to a specific geographical context, and thus are not reproducible, turn out to be extremely scarce public commodities. Trying to determine their optimal allocation exclusively by market forces can never lead to optimal allocation of such capital and the unsustainable use of it becomes almost a certainty.

Indeed, this mix of being extremely scarce and being based on commons, raises the risk that destinations become victims of what Garrett Hardin famously called the tragedy of the commons. In his groundbreaking article in *Science*, Hardin (1968) describes how the use of a commons works in a marginalist economy. Hardin asks us to imagine animals grazing on publicly owned land for which rules of use are absent. Individuals aiming to increase their wealth are driven to expand their herd. However, each animal added to the total contributes inevitably to degrade the commons in a gradual but significant way. ‘Therein is the tragedy. Each man is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit – in a world that is limited. Ruin is the destination toward which

all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons'. I believe overtourism is but one of the many manifestations of the Hardin's tragedy of the commons.

Overtourism is, of course, not the only form of suboptimal allocation of tourism. Tourism underutilization, or in other words undertourism, which reflects the opposite direction in which tourism market inefficiency could move, is also socially and economically undesirable, especially in places where tourism represents a key asset for economic revitalization and where other alternative development trajectories have not been explored or are difficult to implement.

Indeed, the misallocation of tourism resources because markets are imperfect and policies are absent, both in the form of overtourism and undertourism, finds a possible interpretation also following the innovative vision of a sustainable pace of economic development that was designed by Raworth (2017). She conceptualizes the state of the global economy comparing it to a donut. Her theory can easily be declined into a vision of the development of a destination that combines both forms of unsustainable tourism development together with that of optimality in sustainability terms. The donut destination has, very much like the global economy, two boundaries: an external one and an internal one. The "external boundary" corresponds to the maximum tourist flow that a tourist destination can support before the impacts become unsustainable. The "internal boundary" of the donut represents the threshold below which the destination is not yet benefiting socially and economically from tourism. Sustainability according to Raworth means decisively overcoming the internal boundary, but at the same time respecting the external one. Pursuing sustainable tourism development for a destination therefore means, in Raworth words, both using tourism to "be able to satisfy the primary needs of people", but without being so intensive "as to go beyond planetary boundaries".

The crossing of the ecological boundary presents similarities with what is known as the tourist carrying capacity or TCC (see for example Costa and Van der Borg, 1988). The exceeding of the TCC involves the emergence of a negative (environmental) damage incompatible with the sustainability of the destination. Ergo, overtourism is, therefore, to need not to overcome the external boundary of the (tourism) donut. Representing a tourist system using the metaphor of the donut helps to better understand the political dilemma destinations will more frequently need to face, that is how do you create wealth and wellbeing for the destination without harming it, and what the real causes of unsustainable tourism are. Any other simplifying analysis that proposes to indistinctly criticize AIRBnB and B&Bs, low-cost airlines, greedy tourism entrepreneurs, 'uneducated' visitors, and powerless local politicians, often leads to a smokescreen that obscures the true, fundamental causes of an unsustainable tourism development process, and, hence, to the wrong set of tourism policies.

Understanding Venice May Help Us To Understand Unsustainable Tourism Development

Venice is one of the world's iconic tourism destinations. It is still a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Photographs of the city can be found in the promotional materials of virtually all major tour operators (Van der Borg, 1994). In addition, the city provides the backdrop for numerous films while Venice serves as a sounding board for any event or demonstration. Some of its most prominent buildings have been rebuilt in full scale to add flavor to the casinos, exhibition areas and parks all over the world. The uniqueness of Venice, the incredibly strong brand it has, and its constant media exposure have turned it into an attraction that is successful like no other.

Not surprisingly, Venice is visited yearly by approximately 30 million people. Of these visitors, approximately 4.5 million have arrived in 2023 in official accommodation establishments, spending slightly more than 2 nights on average, thus generating almost 10 million overnight stays. Although the official data have not yet been published, the year 2024 promises to surpass the 2019 record year.

A first indication of the impact of tourism on local society is obtained by calculating the number of overnight stays per inhabitant of the historic center, an intensity indicator often used to evaluate the tourist pressure on destinations, and comparing this indicator for various destinations of city travel. Hodes (2015) argued that Amsterdam is one of the most intensively visited cities in Europe, with 13.0 overnight stays per inhabitant. Lisbon follows closely behind with 12.6 overnight stays per inhabitant, while Prague (10.3), Zurich (9.7), Stockholm (7.5) and Athens (6.4) follow at a distance. The same indicator for the historic center of Venice and updated to 2023 amounts to 173.2 overnight stays per inhabitant, confirming the fact that Venice is the example that other urban destinations should never follow.

Secondly, an updated version of the linear programming model of the TCC of Venice (see Costa and Van der Borg, 1988 and Bertocchi et al. 2020) clearly showed that the yearly number of visitors abundantly exceeded that indicator. Indeed, in 2018 the TCC of Venice had risen from 11 million visitors in 1988 to 17 million visitors per year, equally distributed in tourists and day visitors. This calculation was obtained by taking into account investments made in local public transport, improvements in the solid waste management system, and, in particular, the expansion of beds in accommodation facilities, including B&Bs. With respect to the TCC of 17 million visitors, in fact not only are the 30 million people per year that come to the Italian city of art (almost twice the TCC), but also the composition of the flow of visitors (in reality 20% tourists with 80% day trippers) and very far from a desirable one (optimally 50 % tourists with 50% day trippers).

The quantitative and qualitative imbalance between tourist supply and demand in Venice, together with the excessive pressure perceived by the hosts (expressed by the earlier mentioned ratio between overnight stays and inhabitants) are the reason why

the collective costs that tourist flows generate are far higher than their collective benefits, which are mainly concentrated in the industry. In other words, those who pay this bill in many cases do not benefit from tourism at all or do so only in a very indirect way.

Old and New Ideas for Venetian Tourism: From an Analysis to Suggestions for Concrete Tourism Strategies and Policies

In places that possess economies dominated by tourism like Venice, tourism should be a fundamental ingredient in a strategic urban development strategy for economic and social development of the city. Before outlining how such a strategy could look like, it is necessary to consider that tourism in such a strategy does not survive in some sort of bubble. It is very important that the tourism interacts with many dimensions of life, and therefore the tourist strategy must also be strongly integrated into the strategy as a whole. Creating a credible, integrated, and shared vision for the lagoon city is a necessary precondition for any tourism policy. A vision into which the tourism policies might be anchored is completely lacking in Venice today.

A sound and innovative tourism development strategy for Venice embraces two fundamental starting points. In the first place, it should be based on a new business model of this business and to replace the obsolete mass tourism business model. To do so, it should be focusing on the quality of tourism, by looking into the "overall footprint" of the visitors to Venice, maximizing, if possible, the added value tourism creates, not of tourism just generating income and jobs, but also considering its positive impacts on the society and the environment. Secondly, tourism development should not be a means on itself, but it should be a vehicle to generate welfare and wellbeing to the locals and the local firms that 'own' the tourism assets in the first place.

On a more tactical level, there have been some specific ideas circulating in Venice for some time that, embedded within this new strategy, finally deserve to be implemented:

1. Venice being an island in a lagoon, a buffer zone can be created between the mainland and the center of the city to intercept the day visitors of Venice before entering the historical center. Separating the flow of visitors in dedicated hubs or terminals from the traffic of the commuters forms the basis of an innovative visitor management policy. Obviously, together with the terminals, intelligent transport infrastructures to and from the historic center will also have to be implemented.
2. In the second place, a reservation system would not only make all visitors, including day-trippers, aware of the limited availability and the sensitivity of Venice as a commodity, and may therefore nudge people to plan their visit to Venice rather than improvise it. It would definitely be unconstitutional according to European law to close all the accesses to Venice, or discriminate visitors on the basis of their socioeconomic profile. A reservation, however, should not be made

mandatory, but it would make it more difficult and much more expensive to visit Venice without a reservation, thus making visitors more mindful. The idea of a reservation was tested between 2002 and 2005 with some success;

3. What should be avoided at all costs is to place further explicit limits on the development of tourist accommodation, including B&Bs, as they are currently doing in many overtouristic places in Europe. This was already attempted in Venice in the 80s and 90s and, instead of stopping the gentrification process, it simply incentivized day tourism and had no effect whatsoever on the yearly influx of visitors.
4. New ICT technologies can be used in various ways to reorganize the chaotic flows of all visitors to the center of the city. Security cameras present throughout Venice, together with the results of an analysis of the data collected through the cells that facilitate the use of mobile phones, credit card data, ticketing in public transport and attraction, and so forth, might be aggregated in a sort of control room. This control room can suggest alternative modes of transport, terminals and routing in real time, and thus contribute to the anticipation of the problem of congestion and thus solve the problem before any crowding occurs;
5. Fifthly, the City of Venice has started very timidly to promote alternative routes that involve more peripheral attractions under the label "Detourism". This might help to foster a better distribution of tourist pressure on the historic center. Although the project has important limitations, not in the least place the lack of financial support, it could still help mitigate the negative impacts that this pressure entails;
6. Finally, it is important to note that fiscal policy schemes can be used to make tourism development more sustainable. After the establishment of an Area Restricted for Traffic (ZTL) for tourist busses in 2001, the Italian Government made it possible for tourist cities to reintroduce a 'classical' tourist tax that substantially affects those who spend the night in Venice. Together, the ZTL and the tourist tax generate revenues of over 50 million euros per year. In 2024 the City of Venice has started an experiment with an "access fee", originally designed to make the daily tourist contribute to the maintenance of the city and to act as a disincentive for those who visit Venice in an unaware and hasty fashion. Seen from this perspective, the first results are absolutely unsatisfactory. In fact, not only has the overall expenditure for communication and for the collection of this contribution been higher than the amount of taxes collected, but on the red (critical) days in which the complex system of collection of the "access contribution" was activated, the pressure of tourism even increased slightly with respect to 2023. In any case, the experiment was a partial success since it has achieved the main objective of Venice. Indeed, with this bluff and the decisive help of the Japanese delegation in Doha, it has convinced UNESCO to postpone by at least one year (next municipal elections) the inscription of Venice in the list of

World Heritage in danger. The scheme will be repeated in 2025 in a slightly different form. More 'red days' and a higher tax, but the same counterproductive exemptions. Although the idea of asking day visitors a contribution to the collective costs they are producing is a good one, the implementation will prove to be a fiasco also in 2025.

It is obvious that Venice might become a best practice for many other destinations that face the consequences of an excess of success. Not only has Venice been studied intensively and many of these studies have led to a major understanding of the factors that cause overtourism, some of the proposals that have been constructed for Venice during the last 50 years deserve attention and even some careful following. Coping with their success, destinations should first of all change the dominating mass tourism business model in that based on footprints and quality. Moreover, they should realize themselves that tourism development policies that makes their citizens and the local entrepreneurs unhappy should be abandoned immediately and replaced with ones that are community based (Van der Borg (ed), 2022).

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Feature Article #2: Current Situation and Reflections on the Coexistence of Tourism and Daily Life in Italy

Hiroyoshi Sano

1. Observations from Living in Rome

From July 2024 to March 2025, I had the opportunity to spend nine months in Italy on a research sabbatical. My residence was an apartment over 500 years old, located on a narrow alley near Piazza Navona in Rome—an area heavily frequented by tourists. Upon beginning my life in Rome, two aspects in particular came as a surprise.

The first was the large number of homeless individuals. While I had been aware of their prevalence near Termini Station, I was struck by how many could also be seen around the Piazza Navona area. There were people begging in front of churches, as well as individuals who would at times

wander the streets shouting loudly.

Encounters with such scenes became a frequent part of walking in the vicinity of my residence. It is true that housing conditions in Rome are severe. The rent for the apartment I leased was nearly twice that of my home in Tokyo, and I felt it would be difficult to continue living there for more than a year. According to the OECD, Italy's per capita national income in 2023 was 41,124 USD (compared with Japan's 35,588 USD), slightly higher than Japan's but not markedly different. It is likely that for many Italians, rents in central Rome are far beyond affordability. OECD data also show that rents in Italy have continued to rise—the rent index for 2024, with 2015 as the base year (100), stood at 107.9, compared with 99.7 for Japan—underscoring the severity of the housing situation.



Photo: Late-Night Scene in Front of the Apartment Rented by the Author in Rome

The second was the noise. My apartment was on the fourth floor, but the ground floor of the building across the street housed a restaurant. It appeared to be fairly popular, drawing many customers each day. In the evenings, tables and chairs were set out on the street in front of the establishment, and many patrons enjoyed dining outdoors. The lively atmosphere continued until late at night—an appealing scene from a tourist’s perspective, yet a considerable nuisance for residents. Even with the windows closed, the cheerful conversations and laughter of guests carried into my bedroom, making it difficult to fall asleep. This experience gave me a tangible sense of what it truly means to live in a tourist area.

2. Overtourism in Italy, a Leading Tourism Destination

Italy is a major tourism power. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of international tourist arrivals in 2023 reached 57.39 million, ranking fourth in the world after France, Spain, and the United States, and continuing on an upward trajectory. The share of value added by the tourism industry (tourism GDP) in the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) stood at 5.7% in 2019, far exceeding Japan’s 2.0%. Rome, the capital and one of Italy’s premier tourist destinations, likewise recorded all-time highs in 2024, with 22.20 million tourist arrivals and a total of 51.40 million overnight stays. With 2025 designated as a Jubilee Year in the Catholic Church, a further surge in tourist numbers is anticipated.

So, what is the actual state of overtourism in Italy? Gaining an accurate grasp of this is far from straightforward. As noted in my initial observations, there is little doubt that the increase in tourist numbers is related to the severity of housing conditions and to noise levels; however, the extent of this relationship remains unclear. Even while living in the center of Rome, I found it difficult to tangibly sense overtourism or to confirm its presence in any visible way. The city is certainly crowded with both people and vehicles, yet it is also filled with the smiles of residents and visitors alike. Shops, restaurants, and public spaces such as piazzas bustle with activity, at times leading me to wonder whether overtourism is, in fact, something of an illusion.

At the same time, the term “overtourism” is frequently used in the media, including newspapers and online outlets. The market research firm IPSOS, in its study on Italian tourism entitled “Future4Tourism”, has shed light on Italians’ perceptions of overtourism. According to the survey, 60% of Italians support the implementation of some form of countermeasures against overtourism, with the proportion being higher in regions that attract greater numbers of tourists. The survey further identified the most serious perceived impacts of overtourism as the deterioration of residents’ quality of life (51%), negative visitor experiences for tourists (39%), and adverse effects on the environment and ecosystems (38%). These findings attest to the high level of public concern about overtourism among Italians—an aspect that is not readily apparent in the course of everyday life. Moreover, according to a survey conducted by the same company

between 2023 and 2024 targeting foreign respondents from 22 countries, when asked which Italian cities they were familiar with, the top responses were Rome (68%), Venice (53%), Milan (47%), Florence (30%), and Naples (30%), while all other cities received recognition rates below 10%. It is therefore easy to envisage a concentration of tourists in these highly recognized cities. In recent years, many media outlets have reported that in such major cities, housing for families and students is increasingly being converted into short-term rental properties for tourists. While most residents displaced from their homes have little opportunity to voice their criticism and are often ignored, signs of protest have gradually begun to emerge.

For example, an activist campaign called “Robin Hood gang”, launched around October 2024, has targeted key boxes used to store apartment keys for tourist accommodations, particularly those associated with short-term rental services such as Airbnb. At night, activists roam the streets in search of these key boxes, injecting glue into them to prevent the entry of passcodes and thereby disabling their use, before affixing stickers depicting Robin Hood’s hat. Originating in Rome, this movement has begun to spread across Italy. Other visible expressions of protest have included banners hung in the city criticizing the Minister of Tourism, as well as graffiti on building walls conveying messages of unwelcome toward tourists. Such visible signs of dissent are swiftly removed or erased by the government, making them scarcely noticeable in daily life; awareness of these activities thus largely comes through media coverage. I, too, walked through the city in search of such expressions of protest, but found them difficult to spot in the central districts. It was instead in areas on the periphery of the city center that I came across traces of them—not in the almost fully touristified historic quarters like the one in

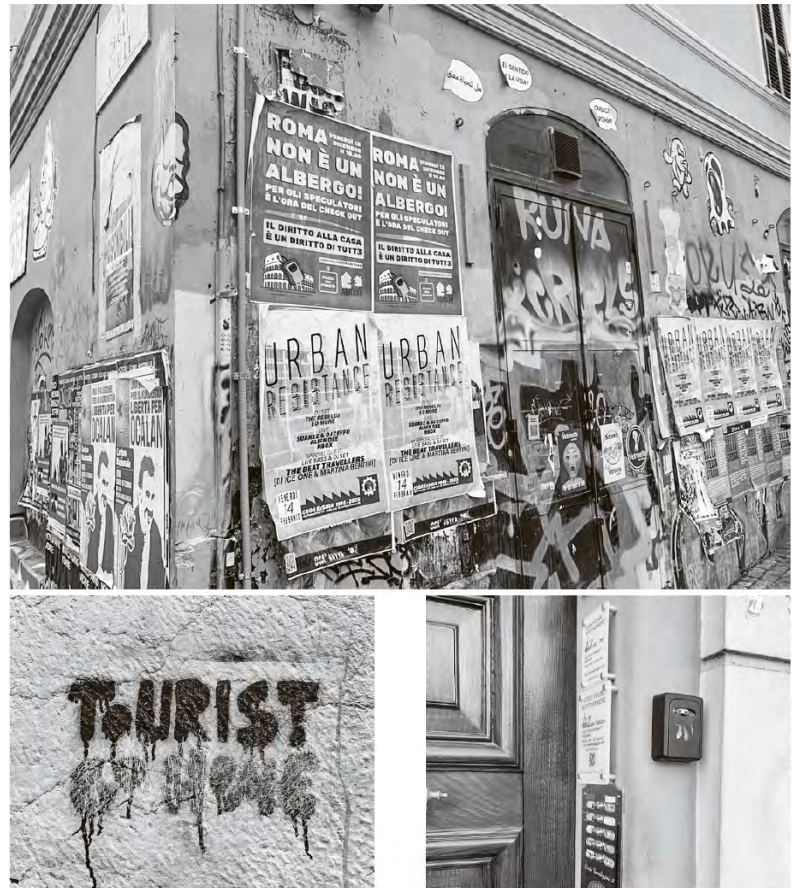


Photo : Voices of Protest Against Tourists

Top: Poster Displayed in Rome’s San Lorenzo District: “Rome is Not a Hotel”

Bottom Left :Graffiti in Front of Santa Chiara Church, Naples: “Tourists Go Home”

Bottom Right: Damaged Key Box (Suspected Vandalism) on Via Gregorio VII, Rome

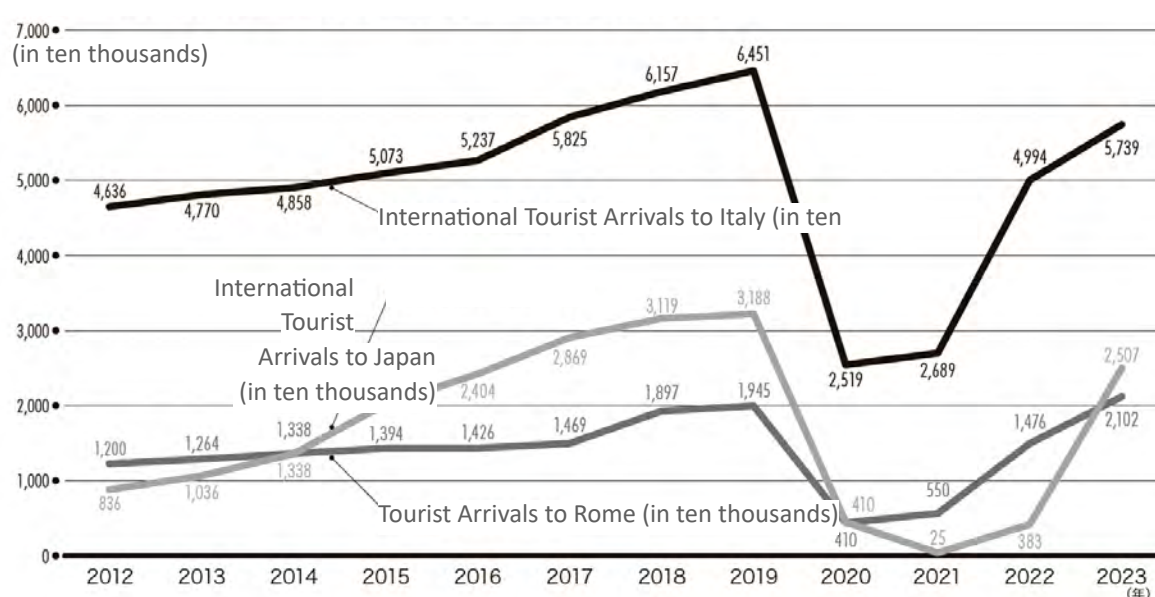
which I lived, but in residential neighborhoods where tourists were seldom seen, yet where short-term rental properties catering to visitors appeared to be on the rise. These could perhaps be described as the front lines in the struggle between tourists and residents over housing.

3. Overtourism Countermeasures in Italy

The problem of overtourism in Italy is undoubtedly real, yet its nature and scope remain unclear. How, then, does the government perceive this issue, and what measures is it undertaking in response? As a tourism powerhouse, Italy naturally places significant emphasis on tourism within its national strategy. Leveraging funds from the so-called NextGenerationEU initiative in the wake of the pandemic, the country enacted its National Recovery and Resilience Plan (Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza, PNRR) in July 2021. Tourism is positioned as the first of the plan’s six missions, with explicit reference made to the issue of overtourism. However, the plan does not elaborate on the specific nature or scope of overtourism. Instead, it frames the issue as a rationale for promoting a sustainable redistribution of tourist flows across Italy, with the aim of revitalizing depopulated areas through the promotion of culture and tourism. More specifically, this is embodied in the “Caput Mundi” (Capital of the World) project, which seeks to utilize the historic and distinctive roads extending from Rome throughout the country to develop new tourism routes designed to cater to a variety of market segments.

Similarly, as part of the Italian government’s response to overtourism—spurred in part by public pressure—the Ministry of the Interior issued a directive in November 2024 aimed at tightening controls on the use of key boxes for short-term rental properties. Rather than imposing an outright ban, the measure prohibits the

Table 1. Trends in International Tourist Arrivals in Italy and Japan, and Tourist Arrivals in Rome



Source: UNWTO, City of Rome

unauthorized use of key boxes for security reasons, including the potential risk of terrorism, and requires accommodation managers to ensure proper verification of guests' identities. As seen above, at the national level Italy appears to be addressing the problem of overtourism indirectly through various measures, without explicitly defining its nature or scope. It is also noteworthy that since 2020, the five cities of Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, and Milan have been collaborating to tackle issues related to short-term rental properties and have jointly submitted policy proposals to the national government.

Overtourism countermeasures are more concrete and progressive at the municipal level than at the national level. Building on the wider tourism area established in 2018 in cooperation with 17 surrounding municipalities, the City of Florence has, since 2022, pursued efforts to disperse tourist flows concentrated in its historic center by promoting initiatives such as cycling routes to encourage wider regional distribution. According to tourism flow data collected by the Florence Center for Tourism Studies, the number of tourists visiting surrounding municipalities increased sharply in 2024, indicating tangible results from these initiatives. Furthermore, in June 2023, with the aim of improving living conditions for long-term rental residents, the city introduced a ban—modeled after Barcelona—on the establishment of new short-term rental accommodations within the UNESCO World Heritage area. Although this decision was initially invalidated by the courts, in July 2024 the city once again approved an urban planning resolution to prohibit the opening of new short-term rental accommodations. Businesses planning to launch such operations contend that there is no direct causal link between the increase in short-term rental properties and the shortage of housing for residents, and they are preparing to file suit against the city. The outlook for this dispute thus remains uncertain.

In smaller municipalities exposed to overtourism, even more ambitious measures are being implemented. The Cinque Terre, a national park along the Ligurian Sea encompassing a series of picturesque fishing villages east of Genoa, receives 3.5 million visitors annually—2 million of whom arrive via cruise ships—despite having a population of only 4,000. During the peak summer season in particular, the narrow streets become completely filled with tourists, and the Cinque Terre Express, the train line serving as the primary means of access to the area, becomes so congested that it is unable to operate on schedule. Residents who once enjoyed a quiet life now find their mobility restricted and are troubled by noise that continues late into the night. In addition to the influx of tourists crowding the narrow coastal footpath known as the “Path of Love,” the area faces significant collapse risks due to natural hazards, including frequent storm surges and landslides. As a countermeasure, the Cinque Terre National Park introduced the Cinque Terre Card in 2001, offering access to multiple tourism services for a fixed fee. By packaging the region's attractions—including trails such as the “Path of Love”—the initiative has sought to disperse visitors, extend their length of stay, and simultaneously generate funds for purposes such as the restoration of stone

walls. Currently, access to the “Path of Love” is subject to advance reservations with a cap on the number of visitors, and the route is designated as one-way in principle. Residents are admitted free of charge and are granted longer access hours than tourists. In 2024, further technological measures were introduced, including the use of algorithms to predict congestion and implement one-way restrictions on trails other than the “Path of Love,” as well as the installation of digital totems at the entrances of major trails to provide real-time information and warnings.

By contrast, Rome’s measures against overtourism appear somewhat passive. While the city has considered imposing entry restrictions or introducing an admission fee for the Trevi Fountain, where tourist congestion has reached hazardous levels, these efforts seem localized and symptomatic rather than part of a comprehensive strategy. As noted earlier, the “Caput Mundi” project seeks to promote the spatial dispersion of tourists by undertaking initiatives such as the improvement of the Appian Way in the suburbs of Rome and the development of the Unexpected Itineraries app, which proposes alternative tourism routes in the vicinity of the city, including sites such as the ancient city of Gaii. As an unconventional initiative, the local DMO Esquilino Comunità is exploring a pilot model in the Esquilino district—located in the heart of Rome yet largely unknown to tourists—aimed at fostering the coexistence of daily life and tourism while offering an authentic tourism experience. However, at the scale of the city as a whole, there appears to be little attention given to the deterioration of residents’ quality of life.

4. Approaches to Strategies for Rebalancing Tourism and Daily Life

This overview of overtourism countermeasures in Italy shows that most initiatives have only recently begun and have yet to yield significant results, making it difficult to evaluate them at present. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that without clearly defining the nature and scope of overtourism, it will be impossible to devise effective measures. Whether the issue at hand concerns a decline in residents’ quality of life or a deterioration in the quality of tourists’ experiences, the nature of the problem varies across spatial and temporal contexts. For this reason, measures implemented by small-scale policy bodies capable of delivering finely tuned responses are likely to be the most effective. Systematic measures such as those applied to the “Path of Love” in the Cinque Terre—where the number of visitors per hour is used as a parameter and capped at a threshold of 400—represent one possible approach. However, it is essential to continually debate and assess whether such parameter settings accurately address the core of the problem and whether the thresholds chosen are truly appropriate for resolving it.

On the other hand, in most areas it is likely to be difficult to establish parameters or thresholds such as those described above. Whether a situation is perceived as overtourism is inherently subjective and varies from person to person. There are also

differences in perspective between those who benefit from tourism and those who are adversely affected by it. As observed in Rome, it is easy to imagine that the vast majority of individuals whose lives are adversely affected by excessive tourism are compelled into silence, finding it difficult to voice their concerns except through unlawful means. Survey results indicate that many Italians believe some form of countermeasure against overtourism is necessary. It is therefore essential to give voice to those who suffer in silence from its impacts. Conversely, it is equally important to inform the public more broadly about the benefits that tourism brings to civic life. Building on this, it would be desirable to create arenas for dialogue and debate among citizens with differing views on overtourism. Rather than framing the issue as a binary choice between promoting tourism and opposing it—through mechanisms such as mayoral elections or litigation—efforts should be directed toward seeking dialectical solutions that can transcend this dichotomy.



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Feature Article #3: From a “Tourism City” to a “City Living in Harmony with Tourism”

— The Frontline of Overtourism Countermeasures in Barcelona

Daisuke Abe

Local residents aim water guns at tourists seated at terrace tables, a scene from early summer in Barcelona, Spain, that was sensationally reported even in Japan. Carrying boards emblazoned with stark messages such as “Tourists Go Home,” “Barcelona Is Not for Sale,” and “Mass Tourism Is Killing Barcelona,” some 2,800 residents marched through streets heavily frequented by tourists, raising their voices in protest.

Organized by the local federation of neighborhood associations known as the “Residents’ Assembly for the Reduction of Tourism,” this protest was not primarily about crowding or tourist behavior. Rather, it addressed the relentless growth of tourism, which places strain on public services, drives up rents and prices, and forces long-standing residents out of their neighborhoods. It also denounced the unfair distribution of tourism industry profits and the resulting exacerbation of social inequality. Citizens’ dissatisfaction with tourism—expressed even before the COVID-19 pandemic—appears to have resurfaced with renewed intensity.

Of course, the City of Barcelona has not been standing idly by. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the city was already experiencing increasingly severe negative impacts from tourism and had a history of undertaking various policy initiatives to address them (Abe, 2020). Indeed, it could be considered a leading city in the field of overtourism countermeasures. Given the slowdown in tourism activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, what concerns now shape Barcelona’s approach, and what specific measures is the city envisioning? This article reports on the forefront of Barcelona’s tourism policies aimed at mitigating overtourism.

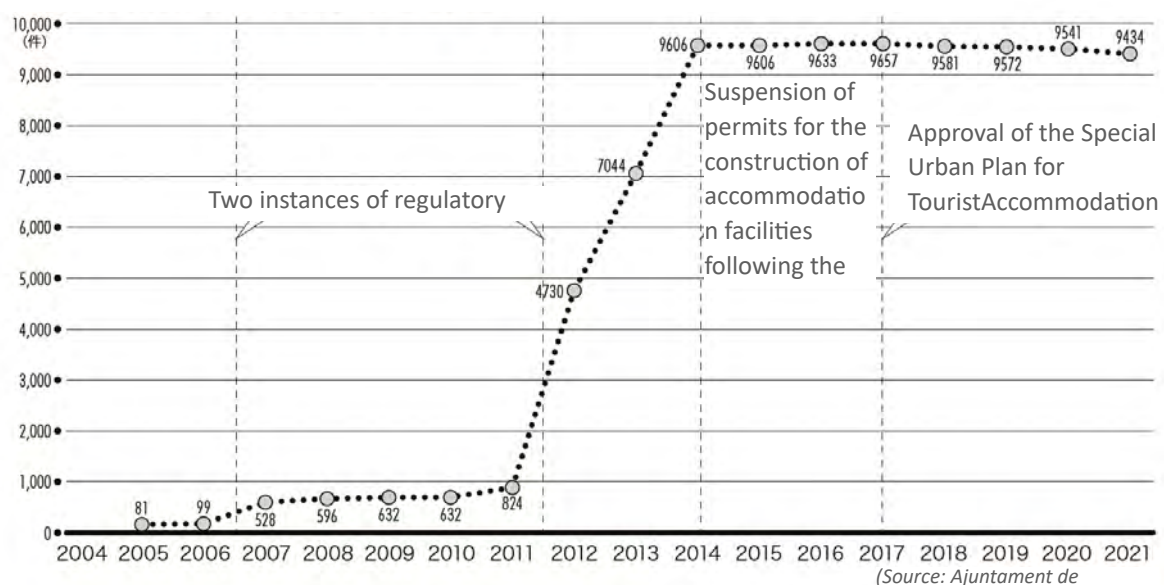
1. The State of Overtourism

Although the number of tourists, which reached approximately 16.1 million in 2019, declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic, it had recovered to around 15.6 million in 2023 and about 15.5 million in 2024. Foreign visitors account for 80% of all tourists, a proportion that is notably high even within Spain, itself a major tourism destination. Although the number of tourists has slightly decreased compared with pre-pandemic levels, a notable change in tourist behavior is the increase in average length of stay, which is up 9.3% from 2019. Tourist expenditure per person per night also rose by 8.7% from 2023, and the economic impact of tourism is estimated to exceed 10 billion euros.

In Barcelona, overtourism began to emerge as a serious concern among residents around the summer of 2014. Declines in residents' quality of life became evident through overcrowding in public spaces and on public transport, deteriorating tourist behavior, rising prices, surging real estate values due to the rapid increase in accommodation facilities, the displacement of residents and local businesses, and the transformation of neighborhood communities. At the same time, sporadic incidents of resident backlash against tourists—commonly referred to as “tourist phobia” or “tourist hatred”—began to occur, as illustrated in the introduction. Messages such as “Tourist Go Home,” spray-painted on tourist information boards, have the potential to negatively affect the quality of the visitor experience.

The number of tourist flats—dwellings used for tourism purposes, roughly equivalent to short-term vacation rentals in Japan—rose dramatically, particularly after 2011 (Figure 1). Between 2011 and 2014, the number surged from 824 to 9,609. In the May 2015 mayoral election, Ada Colau, who had made resolving overtourism a central policy platform, was elected, and following the subsequent freeze on permits for new accommodation facilities, their numbers have gradually declined. This trend reflects the impact of the urban planning measure known as PEUAT, which focuses on controlling the location of tourist accommodation facilities and will be discussed later. As of 2023, the total number of registered tourist accommodation beds stood at 152,320, of which 76,662 were in hotels and 58,124 in tourist flats (short-term rentals).

Figure 1. Trends in the Number of Tourist Flats (Short-Term Rentals) in Barcelona



The negative impacts of overtourism on the local community are, in principle, similar to those observed in other tourist cities. However, in Barcelona, particular concern has centered on the location of accommodation facilities and the rise in land prices, along with the resulting transformation of neighborhood communities.

2. The Historical Development of the City's Tourism Policies

The Ongoing Challenge of Harmonizing Tourism and Civic Life

The foundation of Barcelona's current tourism policy can be traced to the Tourism Strategic Plan 2015, formulated in 2008. The plan's objectives were "to promote the improvement of tourism" and "to enhance ways of harmonizing tourism with civic life." As this policy was conceived before the excessive concentration of tourism activities had emerged as a shared concern among residents, it can be regarded as a highly innovative initiative for its time.

From around 2013, tensions between tourism activity and civic life began to surface, and overtourism became a political issue. As the unchecked growth of tourism demanded urgent attention, three main types of measures were devised in 2015 as emergency responses.

- Formulation of the Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation (PEUAT), regulating the location of youth hostels, short-term rentals, and shared housing.
- Establishment of the Tourism and City Council as a permanent body to facilitate discussions on tourism and bring together diverse stakeholders involved in shaping the city's tourism model.
- Development of the Tourism Strategic Plan 2020 as the roadmap for the city's tourism policy from 2016 to 2020.

Tourism Strategic Plan 2020 (2017)

In June 2015, Ada Colau assumed the office of mayor (serving from June 2015 to June 2023). The Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation (PEUAT), the centerpiece of the aforementioned emergency measures, was incorporated into a more comprehensive policy and released in January 2017 as the Tourism Strategic Plan 2020. The plan's stated aim was "to reconcile residents' quality of life with tourist satisfaction, to maximize the social return of tourism activities, and to ensure the sustainability of Barcelona as a tourist destination." In addition to conventional initiatives such as tourism management in congested areas, marketing, and promotion, this master plan encompasses a wide range of tourism-related policy domains, including transportation policy, urban planning (land use), regional economic development, corporate social responsibility, and accommodation taxes (Abe, 2020).

Table 1. Basic Principles of Barcelona's Tourism Policy		
Initiative	Overview	Specific Measures
1. Management of Public Spaces	The concentration of visitors in specific urban areas invites externalities, as the density and number of visitors exert extremely high environmental impacts on these areas, undermining the quality of life for residents and the quality of visits for tourists. Such pressure must be alleviated to ensure a balanced urban environment, maintain public order, and uphold the responsibilities of the tourism industry and tourists alike. To this end, tourism activities must be managed. In areas with concentrated tourism activity, management measures must be implemented in accordance with each location's unique characteristics, needs, potential, and challenges.	Identification and management of Extremely Crowded Areas (EGA)
2. Strengthening of Taxation and Finance	The management of tourism activities imposes costs on municipal finances, and it is necessary to explore funding mechanisms that balance these costs with the revenues they generate for municipal resources. Activities that impose the greatest externalities on residents must increase their economic contribution to municipal finances and enhance the replenishment of social return funds. The challenge lies in promoting more responsible and sustainable tourism behavior while discouraging actions that produce negative externalities, which is considered a key means of addressing the issue. The objective is to enhance fairness in the allocation of direct user costs and social expenses, and to secure the economic sustainability of the system through a general fee structure or targeted taxation on specific behaviors.	Creation of a tourist return fund for citizens
3. Improvement of Urban Transportation	It is necessary to manage the increasingly complex and diversified mobility of visitors. The aim is to promote a responsible tourism model that is harmonized with residents' everyday travel and to ensure the rational and coherent use of transport systems and public space.	Development of bus zones 4.0 to improve in town transportation
4. Accommodation Facilities	The regulation of tourist accommodation facilities is a fundamental measure to safeguard the rights to housing, everyday life, and sustainable tourism. Amendments to the Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation (PEUAT) are implemented while maintaining the original spirit and objectives. That spirit and purpose are to alleviate tourism pressure, pursue urban balance and diversity, and protect rights relating to the quality of housing, rest, neighborhood well-being, and spatial quality.	Revision of PEUAT Enforcement against illegal vacation rentals
5. Coexistence, Governance, and Prevention	The intensity and concentration of tourist activities lead to the deterioration of the living environment of local communities and a decline in residents' quality of life. Likewise, spaces with a high density of tourists often pose problems, particularly in terms of public safety. To address these issues, it is necessary to establish rules, conduct awareness campaigns, provide mediation services, and promote harmonious coexistence between tourists and non-tourist users of such spaces.	Communication campaigns for visitors (etiquette education)
6. Sustainability and Resilience	It is essential to manage environmental, cultural, labor, social, and economic returns responsibly and respectfully. In the context of climate emergencies, tourism management measures must also be considered from a resilience perspective that addresses severe threats such as drought and extreme heat.	Water conservation for drought mitigation
7. Digitalization and Innovation	Promoting the comprehensive digitalization of tourism activities, promotion, visitor care, services, and experiences is essential to establishing sustainability standards for Barcelona as a tourist destination and ensuring its structural competitiveness.	Digitalization of promotion
8. Economic Development and Economic Benefits	Ensuring the economic development and social benefits of tourism activities is important for guaranteeing that the tourism industry contributes to the growth and well-being of the city and local communities. It is essential to promote private-sector initiatives and foster the foundations of an innovative local economy that is both sustainable and creative. Strengthening the connections between tourism and local society is also crucial to delivering balanced economic development and social benefits for all citizens.	Digital transformation subsidies for the private tourism sector
9. Regional Strategies and Tourism Services	Because tourism is inherently geographically concentrated, its management must address each area individually. At tourist destinations, incorporating new experiences such as culture, sports, gastronomy, and education promotes both the geographical dispersion and diversification of tourism activities.	Improvement of Barcelona's beaches and Revitalization of Forum beach (ZBF)
10. Promotion and Communication	While shaping its image as a tourist destination, the city also responds to segments and markets motivated by travel or interested in urban tourism. By leveraging digitalization, it seeks to increase the average length of stay and the number of repeat visitors, thereby generating greater economic and social benefits.	Development of new tourism promotion strategies

11. Information	Accumulating information and data on tourism activities is essential for making informed decisions. It is also necessary to identify trends, opportunities, and challenges, optimize the use of resources, and adapt to change. Innovative methods for collecting, managing, and visualizing information must be developed.	Use of big data technology and analysis of tourist flows
12. Community and Governance	In recent years, tourism in Barcelona has grown, and the number of public- and private-sector actors involved in its activities has increased. This has created a need for an effective governance framework to address the sector's complexity and to appropriately coordinate and integrate the efforts of all stakeholders.	Formation of an international urban tourism network
(Based on Adjutament de Barcelona 2024)		

Measures for Tourism Management (2024–2027)

In light of the slowdown in tourism activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Barcelona faced the difficult task of simultaneously steering the recovery of the tourism industry—through temporary subsidy programs for businesses—while also mitigating the severe negative impacts of overtourism that had existed prior to the pandemic. In 2021, the city announced the Barcelona Green Deal. The Green Deal designates the tourism industry as one of the strategic sectors of the urban economy, affirming that tourism development should generate prosperity for all citizens. Furthermore, in June 2023, the mayoralty shifted from Ada Colau—who had pursued radical tourism policies—to Jaume Collboni, whose support base includes the hotel industry.

In response to these societal changes, the city has introduced new short-term measures to be implemented through 2027, while maintaining the framework of the Tourism Strategic Plan 2020. According to the planning document, the objective is “to promote a sustainable and respectful tourism economy that prioritizes the prosperity and well-being of residents and fosters the development of other economic sectors.” The policy—aptly named “Tourism Management”—is founded on the position that such management is indispensable for achieving high-quality tourism experiences integrated with the daily lives of residents. It further emphasizes promoting economic diversification, accelerating human resource development and innovation beyond the tourism sector, reducing the share of the urban economy derived from tourism, and transforming tourism into an activity that generates social benefits.

The basic principles and overview of the Tourism Management policy, along with the specific measures corresponding to each principle, are presented in Table 1.

While all of these initiatives are of interest, the discussion here will, due to space constraints, focus on three areas: “congestion management in concentrated tourist areas,” “location control of accommodation facilities,” and “taxation,” with the following sections describing the distinctive features of each.

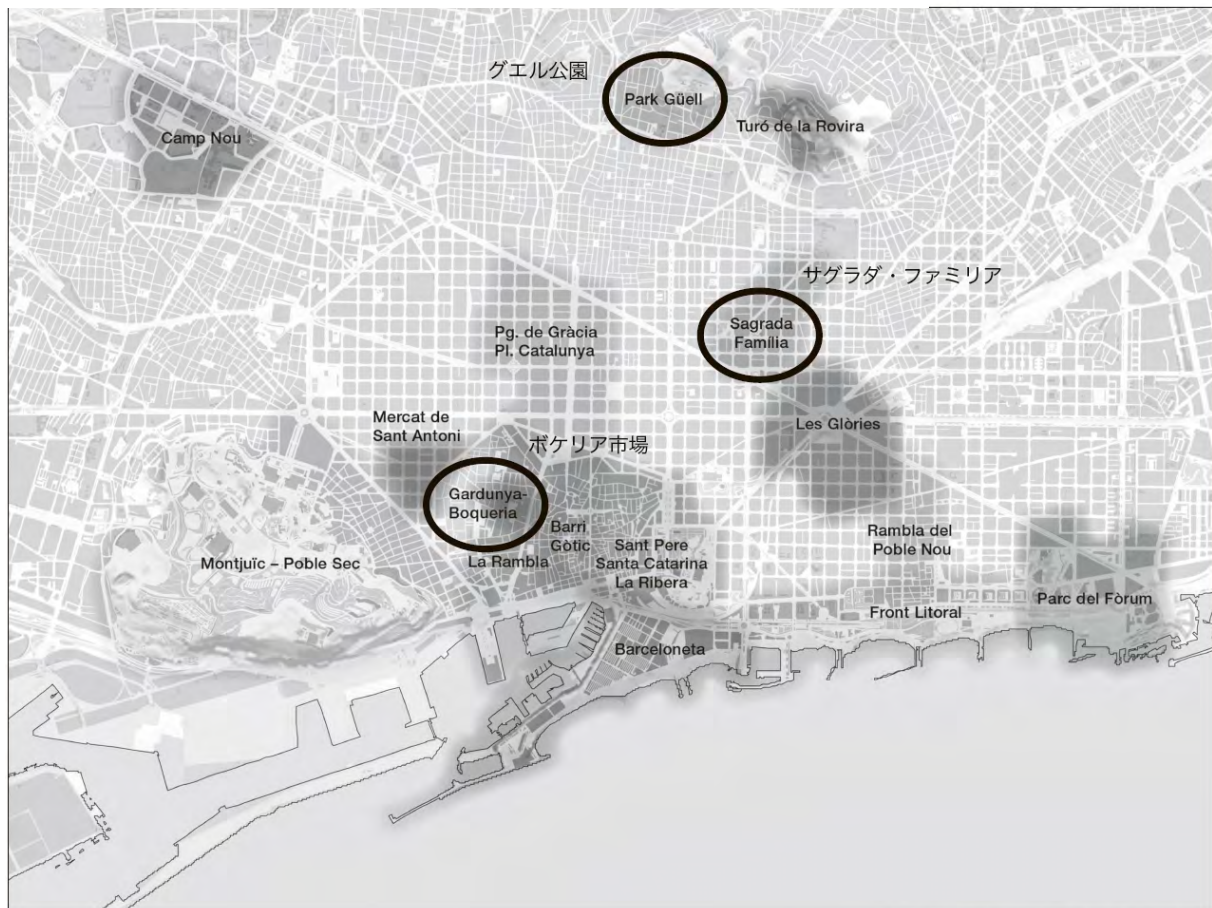
3. Measures to Alleviate Congestion in Public Spaces

Designation of Extremely Crowded Areas (EGA)

As a unit of policy intervention, the city has introduced “Extremely Crowded Areas” (Espacios de Gran Afluencia - EGAs), defined as locations where large numbers of people congregate, regardless of whether they are visitors or residents. Sixteen areas in total have been designated—places of high tourist appeal that are also important settings for citizens’ daily lives, where overtourism has created friction in the use of space (Figure 2; Photos 1 and 2).

Although these areas may appear to be dominated by tourism activities, they still retain important functions for civic life—such as markets, small-scale livelihoods, and local shops—making the implementation of coexistence strategies an urgent priority.

Figure 2. “Extremely Crowded Areas” (EGAs) Subject to Tourism Activity Management



(Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona 2024)

Specific Measures

For each EGA, concrete actions are implemented to mitigate and alleviate issues related to “occupation and congestion of public space,” “changes in activities and land uses

associated with tourism,” “pedestrian flow,” and “friction with daily life and the local community.” Among the 16 areas, priority measures have been implemented first in three locations where tourist concentration is particularly pronounced: the area surrounding the Sagrada Família, the Boqueria Market, and Park Güell. The main initiatives can be broadly classified into the following categories: “reorganization of traffic and pedestrian flows,” “strengthening of advance reservation systems,” and “promotion of civic use of space.”



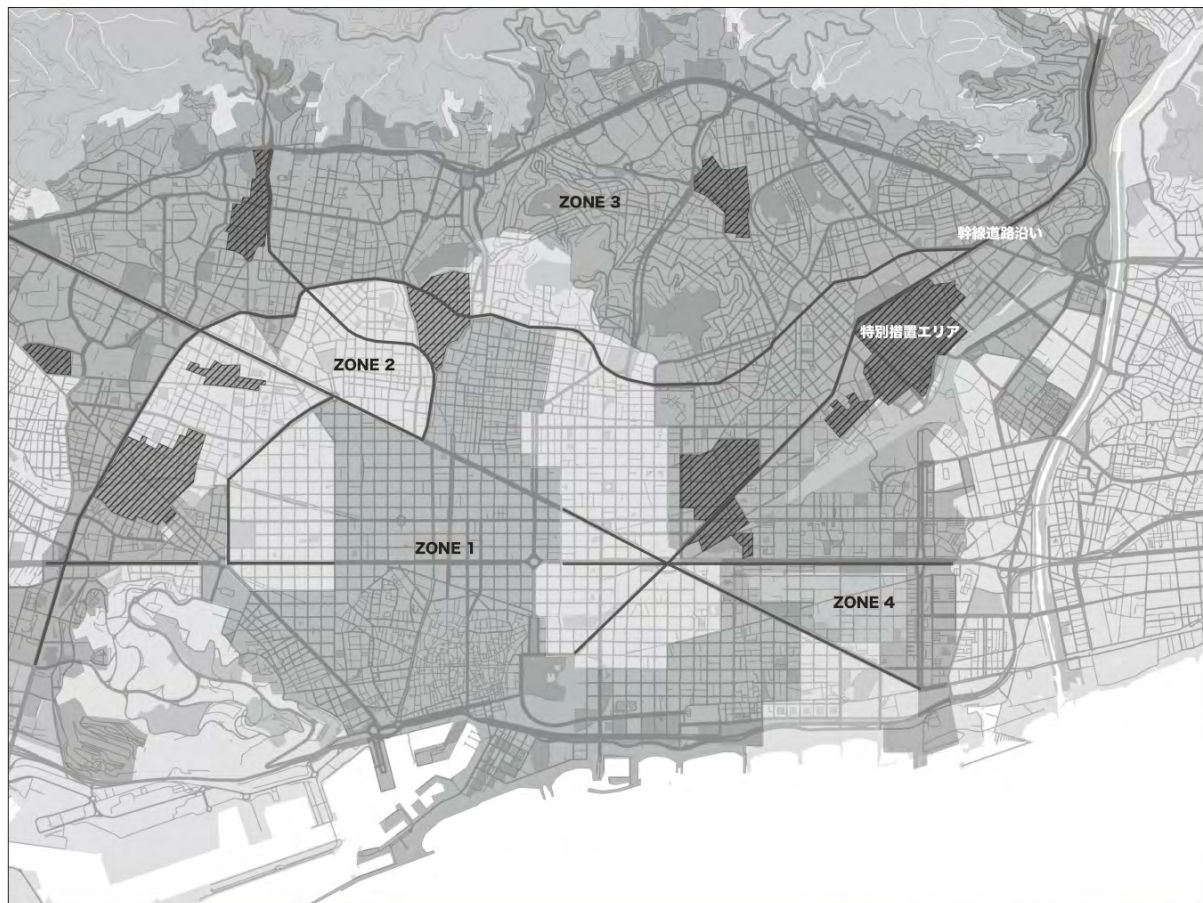
Photo 1: Park Güell



Photo 2: La Boqueria Market

- Removal or relocation of tourist bus stops and taxi stands: eliminating stops located along routes overlapping with residents’ daily movements and relocating them to wider streets (Sagrada Família / Park Güell)
- Strengthened monitoring of inappropriate parking, bicycle movement, and speeding by personal mobility vehicles (Sagrada Família)
- Support measures for local commerce not oriented toward tourism (Sagrada Família)
- Enhancement of cleaning and security activities
- Regulation of products and services offered in the market (Boqueria Market)
- Surveys to determine appropriate usage levels for both tourists and residents (Boqueria Market)
- Promotion of civic use of public spaces within and around the market
- Strengthening of regular bus services (Park Güell)
- Tourist education campaigns on appropriate behavior (Park Güell)
- Online ticketing: implementing advance reservations for entry to avoid congestion at the entrance (Park Güell)

Figure 3. Zoning under the Special Urban Plan Regulating the Location of Accommodation Facilities



(Source: Ajuntament de Barcelona 2024)

4. Regulation of Accommodation Facility Locations through Urban Planning

Purpose of the Regulation

Location control of accommodation facilities is arguably one of the most distinctive measures in Barcelona's tourism policy. Based on the Urban Planning Act, the Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation (PEUAT) was passed and approved in January 2017. Through the regulation of accommodation facility locations, the plan seeks to promote mixed land use, maintain everyday life in neighborhood public spaces while minimizing the impact of tourism on them, and foster the development of sustainable economic activity. Above all, its foremost objective is to safeguard residents' right to housing.

Framework of the PEUAT

The PEUAT first froze new permits for short-term rentals at the 2014 level of 9,609 units, effectively prohibiting, in principle, the establishment of new such accommodations thereafter. As a planning approach, the PEUAT is straightforward: it

divides the city into four broad zones (Figure 3) and sets specific conditions for the development of accommodation facilities in each. As outlined below, it imposes stringent regulations that, in principle, prohibit the establishment of accommodation facilities in Zones 1 and 2, which together cover almost the entirety of the city center.

- Zone 1: Complete Prohibition of All Accommodation Uses

Zone 1 encompasses many of the city's historic districts, where long-established residential life persists, alongside concentrations of tourism resources such as architectural landmarks, traditional streetscapes, and beaches. This zone already contains more than 60% of the city's accommodation facilities, and transformations in the makeup of local shops—driven by the proliferation of tourism-related industries—are beginning to alter the fabric of civic life. It is also an area where the ratio of tourists to residents is particularly pronounced. While the citywide average is 7.5%, the average in Zone 1 stands at 25.1%. Within Zone 1, the Gothic Quarter—home to the Cathedral and Plaça Reial—records a ratio of 46%, and the Eixample district, the city's premier commercial area lined with Modernist architecture, reaches 68%.

- Zone 2: Conditional Approval, but Expansion Generally Prohibited

Zone 2 lies just outside Zone 1 and includes areas where the concentration of accommodation facilities has begun to stand out and where further development is likely. The ratio of tourists to residents is around 10%. These are areas where the mixing of tourism uses with local residential functions is a concern, and where signs of transformation in public spaces are already emerging. The restrictions here can be understood as a preventive measure intended to avoid the saturation of accommodation facilities seen in Zone 1.

Zone 2 also prohibits, in principle, new developments, with the basic policy of maintaining—i.e., not increasing—the total number of beds within the zone. In addition, minimum distances between accommodation facilities are stipulated according to their size: using 150 beds as the reference point, facilities exceeding this capacity must maintain a separation of 200 to 300 meters from one another.

- Zone 3: New Facilities and Expansions Permitted

Zone 3 comprises areas where the supply of accommodation facilities is relatively low and where, from the standpoint of physical capacity, further development is still feasible.

While the total number of accommodation beds in this zone—across hotels, youth hostels, and short-term rentals—is expected to account for roughly 10% of the citywide total, facilities are not permitted to be established anywhere within the zone without restriction. Instead, each administrative district within the zone has a specified maximum number of beds, with the combined total across five districts capped at 4,025.

As in Zone 2, minimum distances between accommodation facilities are prescribed according to their size.

- Zone 4: Development Permitted in Conjunction with Redevelopment

Zone 4 encompasses four areas within the city currently undergoing large-scale redevelopment. In these areas, the establishment of accommodation facilities is permitted in accordance with the progress of redevelopment projects.

- Special Measures Areas

These areas consist of historic districts that developed around former settlements outside the city walls and were incorporated into the city between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. While such areas correspond to Zones 2 or 3, their unique urban form and land-use characteristics warrant the application of distinct, area-specific regulations rather than the general provisions of their respective zones.

- Along Major Arterial Roads

Major arterial roads running through Zones 2 and 3 are subject to regulatory measures separate from those applied to the surrounding areas. Accommodation facilities must be located at least 150 meters apart, while also meeting the distance requirements relative to other accommodation facilities within the same zone in which they are situated.

The “30% Regulation” to Safeguard the Right to Housing

In light of the recognition that overtourism is exacerbating the city’s housing problems, the municipality introduced in October 2018 an urban planning measure commonly referred to as the “30% Regulation.” This measure requires that, in developments of 600 m² or more, 30% of the floor area be allocated to low-rent social housing. The regulation applies not only to new developments but also to large-scale housing renovations. The aim is to secure housing at affordable price levels, thereby enabling residents to continue living in the city. Naturally, this regulation places a considerable burden on developers, and to date it has resulted in the creation of only 93 housing units.

Following the change of mayor in 2023, calls have emerged to relax or abolish the 30% Regulation, and debate on the issue is ongoing. An NPO strongly engaged with the city’s housing problems has estimated that a substantial relaxation or repeal of the regulation would put 62,756 households residing in 3,909 buildings at risk of eviction and cause the city to forgo the opportunity to construct up to 18,827 additional public housing units.

Debate over the Complete Abolition of Short-Term Rentals

Against the backdrop of a worsening housing crisis not only in Barcelona but across society at large, a decree regulating tourist accommodation facilities in several

municipalities of Catalonia facing problems of access to housing was approved on November 7, 2023. As a result, Barcelona will see the abolition of approximately 10,000 tourist flats currently holding permits. This measure aims to reconvert flats from tourist use back to residential use, thereby increasing the city's housing stock. It also prohibits room rentals in which the contract holder resides on the premises. Under this decree, all tourist apartments in Barcelona will be eliminated by November 2028.

The decree, which to some may seem abrupt, has been met with strong opposition from the Association of Tourist Apartments (APARTUR), which regards it as a measure that will devastate the family-oriented tourism sector. The association notes that it has long sought ways for short-term rentals to coexist with the city amid the worsening problem of overtourism, and warns that "eliminating legal tourist apartments in the city will only lead to a sharp increase in illegal ones." Since its establishment, the Association of Tourist Apartments has consistently focused on eliminating illegal short-term rentals. It warns that an increase in such illegal operations would evade taxation, hinder the promotion of coexistence with residents, and become a source of conflict between locals and tourists.

5. Returning Tourism Profits to Society through Taxation

Tourism Citizen Return Fund

Barcelona's accommodation tax, officially known as the Tourist Establishment Stay Tax, has been in effect since November 2012 under Catalonia's regional law. According to the law, the revenue must be used to promote tourism development within the region; however, it may also be reinvested in initiatives aimed at mitigating the negative impacts of tourism and promoting improvements in residents' quality of life.

The revenue is channeled into what is known as the "Tourism Citizen Return Fund," made possible through the city's own supplementary tax (up to 4 euros per stay). Rather than being used for tourism promotion, it is returned directly to the city's finances and reinvested specifically in the following activities:

- Strengthening the management of short-term rentals
- Improving the quality of life for residents in neighborhoods most affected by tourist pressure
- Promoting economic, social, and cultural activities not dependent on tourism
- Developing new content to enhance the spatial redistribution of tourism

In conjunction with other initiatives related to revitalizing the local economy, the Citizen Return Fund is also invested in regenerating the foundations of daily life, including the creation of cultural content for residents, the promotion of neighborhood commerce, the advancement of community activities, and the attraction of business establishments.

The Barcelona City Council is currently considering urging the Government of Catalonia to revise the purposes and allocation criteria of the accommodation tax so that a larger share of the budget is directed toward initiatives aimed at mitigating the negative externalities of tourism.

Revision of the Accommodation Tax

The city is seeking to raise the current accommodation tax rate for short-term cruise tourism (stays of less than 12 hours). The aim is to maximize revenue from the substantial impact cruise ships have on the use of urban space and to offset the additional burdens currently placed on the municipal budget for the provision of specific public services, such as cleaning and security. A progressive tax structure, adapted to both the cruise season and vessel capacity, is also under consideration.

6. Toward a City Living in Harmony with Tourism

At the core of Barcelona's social consciousness lies a shared sense of urgency at the citizen level regarding the current tourism model. This concern goes beyond the inconvenience caused by tourist congestion. More than a matter of diminished convenience, it reflects a declaration about the very viability of the city: the displacement of residents and local businesses—driven primarily by soaring land prices and a shortage of reasonably priced real estate—is altering the fabric of neighborhood communities, ultimately threatening to render “our city, Barcelona” a place that belongs to no one.

Tourism policy should be implemented in such a way that citizens' daily lives are maintained, that their quality is further enhanced through tourism, and that this enhanced quality, in turn, is regenerated as part of the city's touristic appeal. Moreover, as tourism activities manifest themselves spatially, coordination with urban planning through land-use regulation is indispensable. Barcelona's struggle—and its accompanying dilemmas—to transform itself from a *ciudad turística* (tourism city) into a *ciudad con turismo* (city living with tourism) offers numerous points of reference for rethinking the future relationship between cities and tourism.

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Feature Article #4: Trends and Recent Developments in Overtourism Policies — Focusing on Amsterdam’s “Balanced Tourism Ordinance”

Kentaro Goto

1. Introduction: The Resurgence of Overtourism and Tourism Intervention

With the rapid rebound in tourism demand following the COVID-19 pandemic, some regions are once again experiencing a resurgence of overtourism. While tourist numbers have recovered to a certain extent, it would be premature to conclude that the pandemic’s impact on the tourism industry has entirely dissipated. At the same time, attention must also be paid to the fact that, during the prolonged and severe disruption caused by the pandemic, there were regions that reassessed the very nature of tourism and steadily advanced overtourism countermeasures. The City of Amsterdam is one such example. During the pandemic, it enacted a tourism ordinance and established a framework for public intervention based on objective data. Within the context of European cities, it stands out as a leading example of a municipality implementing distinctive overtourism countermeasures.

In European research on addressing overtourism, the need for public intervention has often been a subject of discussion. Before the pandemic, the limitations of market-oriented approaches in effectively tackling the issue had been pointed out, and in their place, renewed debate emerged over the potential of more regulatory, government-led approaches to tourism management—approaches that had appeared to have fallen out of favor since the early 21st century. This also indicates that the impacts of tourism are diverse, complex, and multifaceted, while suggesting that cities have a carrying capacity that can be overshoot by tourism (Koens et al., 2018). Moreover, the era of simple sector-specific approaches in tourism policy and management has ended. To advance toward stable (urban)



Photo 1. Scenes of Amsterdam - Canal Streetscapes and Houseboats

tourism, 20th-century economic sector-oriented DMOs must be transformed and integrated into an overarching approach to urban governance (Kagermeier, 2023).

“Tourism intervention” by the public sector seeks to appropriately manage and mitigate the negative impacts of tourism while guiding it in a desirable direction. In some cases, the purposes of such intervention may include securing a moratorium to allow time for considering future directions. However, insofar as temporary or permanent restrictions are imposed and resources are committed, the underlying data, procedures, and standards of action must be made transparent to society. The City of Amsterdam represents a pioneering example in the effort to build such a framework.

Amsterdam’s tourism policies and overtourism countermeasures have been periodically reported in Japan (see References 46, 48). This article therefore focuses on two aspects: the content of the tourism ordinance enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic and the actions taken under it (Section 3,5), and the broader context within which these measures can be understood (Section 4). For this study, a review of documentary sources was conducted, focusing primarily on information published on the city’s official website (<https://www.amsterdam.nl/>) and on Open Research (<https://openresearch.amsterdam/nl/>), followed by an on-site investigation.

During the fieldwork, an interview was conducted with the official in charge of the comprehensive City Centre Approach (Aanpak Binnenstad) in Amsterdam.

2. Urban Growth and Overcrowding: Tourism and Residents’ Sense of Alienation in Amsterdam

Amsterdam, the capital of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is the country’s largest city, with a population of approximately 930,000. It serves as a business hub attracting expatriates and international students from around the world, as well as an intellectual center hosting research institutions. Known for its image as a free and tolerant city, diversity is one of its defining characteristics. In 2025, the city will celebrate the 750th anniversary of its founding. The scenic ring of canals was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2010 [Photo 1]. The city is home to a wide range of institutions, from major museums such as the Rijksmuseum and the Van Gogh Museum to numerous smaller venues, attracting visitors from around the world as one of the leading cities of art and culture. In 2019, the annual number of tourists reached 22 million, comprising 10 million overnight visitors, 11.3 million day-trippers, and 700,000 cruise passengers.

An important factor in understanding (over)tourism in Amsterdam—particularly in contrast to Japan—is that the city is experiencing growth. Its population has increased by 200,000 over the past two decades and is projected to exceed one million by 2038. Amid a severe housing shortage, residents have felt a sense of alienation due to the rapid growth of short-term rentals that strain the housing market; changes in the everyday consumer environment brought about by an increase in tourist-oriented shops and similar establishments (leading to landscape homogenization and

monoculturalization); and nuisance behavior and congestion caused by tourists (though congestion is not attributable solely to tourism growth). While the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to the tourism industry, there was also public sentiment against a partial return to the pre-pandemic status quo. In response, the City of Amsterdam reviewed the very nature of “how tourism should be” and introduced a new set of overtourism countermeasures.

3. Enactment of the Balanced Tourism Ordinance and Development of Data Systems

3-1. Overview of the Ordinance (2021)

— Setting Bandwidth Limits (Upper and Lower Thresholds)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Amsterdam enacted the “Balanced Tourism Ordinance.” This measure originated from a July 2017 petition by a residents’ group titled Amsterdam Heeft een Keuze (“Amsterdam Has a Choice”) and was subsequently approved by the City Council in June 2020. The ordinance consists of eight articles in total [Figure 1]. The details will be discussed later, but the ordinance’s statement of purpose clearly articulates its underlying intent.

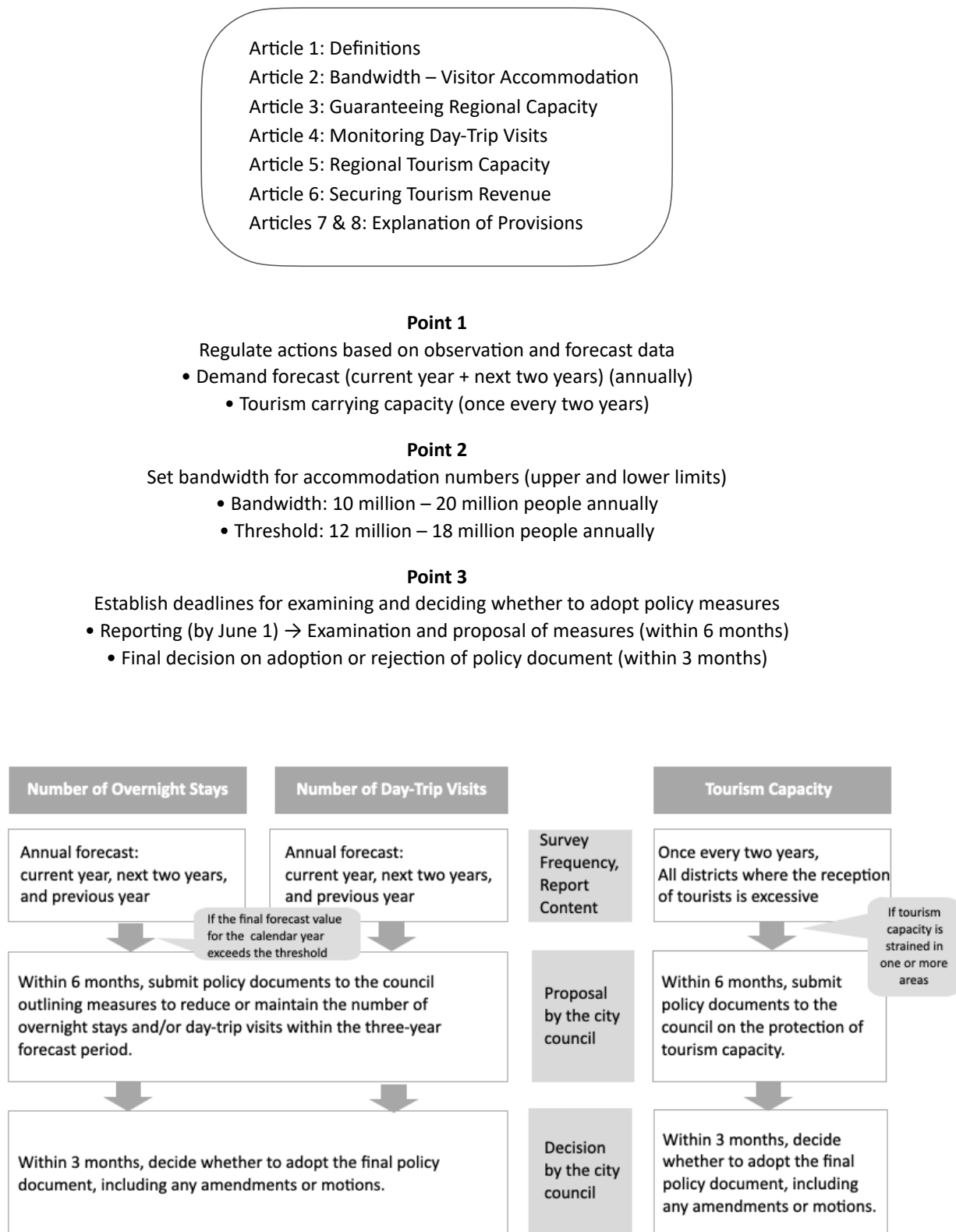
“Essentially, tourism is a positive force for Amsterdam. It contributes to sound public finances, employment, cultural richness, and the vitality and prestige of the city.

However, there is an optimal level. Once the number of tourists exceeds a certain threshold, the balance of the city is disrupted, and the disadvantages of tourism outweigh its benefits.

The mayor and city councilors are **expected to intervene proactively** when the balance between the interests of residents, businesses, and visitors is, or is likely to be, disrupted.” (Emphasis added by the author)

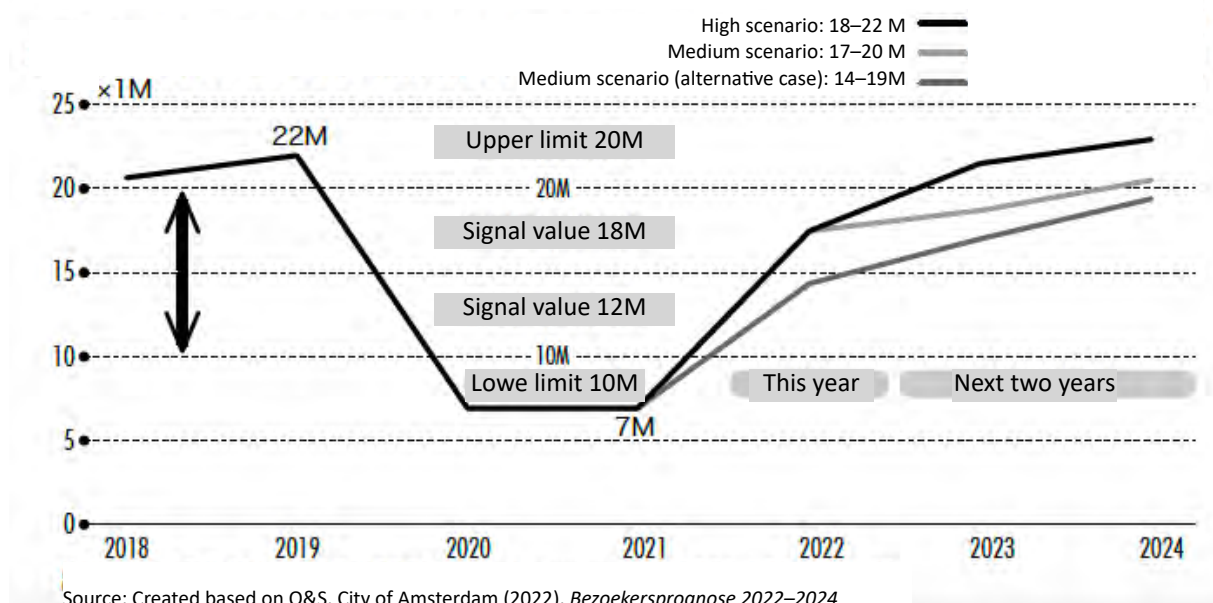
The ordinance sets out three key points governing such intervention. First, it mandates that actions be based on observed and forecast data. Second, it establishes a “bandwidth” for the number of annual overnight stays in Amsterdam—setting the acceptable range between 10 million and 20 million, with “signal values” triggering action at 12 million and 18 million. Third, it specifies time limits for the consideration and decision-making process regarding whether to adopt countermeasures. If the number of overnight stays is expected to exceed a signal value, the City Council must, within six months, consider and propose countermeasures, and within a further three months decide whether to adopt the final policy document. The municipal authorities then implement measures based on this decision.

Figure 1. Overview and Key Points of Amsterdam's Balanced Tourism Ordinance



Source: Created based on Verordening van de gemeenteraad van de gemeente Amsterdam houdende regels omtrent toerisme (Verordening op toerisme in balans Amsterdam)
<https://lokaleregelgeving.overheid.nl/CVDR660686/1>

Figure 2. Example of Annual Overnight Stay Projections Based on Scenarios (2022-2024)



It should be noted that the aforementioned residents’ proposal had initially suggested an upper limit of 12 million annual overnight stays (the 2014 figure). However, in light of the severe impact of the pandemic not only on tourism but also on cultural institutions, subsequent adjustments were made, resulting in the establishment of a lower limit as well (Kleijn, 2021).

The following section introduces two major surveys linked to the ordinance.

3-2. Demand Forecasting for Overnight Stays

Each year, the City of Amsterdam produces forecasts for the number of overnight stays, day trips, and cruise ship passengers. For the calendar year in which the forecast is published, as well as for the subsequent two calendar years, projections are calculated under three scenarios—high, medium, and low [Figure 2]. These forecasts are based on historical data, supplemented with expert knowledge from the tourism, economic, and mobility sectors. They also take into account municipal policies on private housing rentals and hotel development. If the projected value for the final forecast year exceeds a signal value, the City Council is required to propose countermeasures within six months.

3-3. Measuring Tourism Carrying Capacity

The City of Amsterdam also measures the city’s tourism carrying capacity, an assessment that has been conducted three times to date. Tourism carrying capacity is defined as “the level of tourism pressure that a neighborhood can withstand without significantly compromising quality of life.” This definition is based on the assumption that tourism pressure (the cause) has the potential to undermine neighborhood quality of life (the effect). Under the ordinance, the measurement is conducted every two years and reported to the City Council.

Tourism Carrying Capacity:
The level of tourism pressure that a local area can withstand without (significantly) impairing quality of life.

Note: The causes of crowding are not necessarily limited to the pressure on public spaces caused by tourists, which cannot always be avoided or reduced, but also include pressure from other uses (such as residential housing, commuting, or students). In order to distinguish between these different pressures, detailed observational data on the condition and use of facilities—targeted as much as possible to tourism—are required.

Quality of life balanced with tourism-related pressures

Quality of life (Y-axis: 7 to 28)

Tourism pressure (X-axis: 7 to 25)

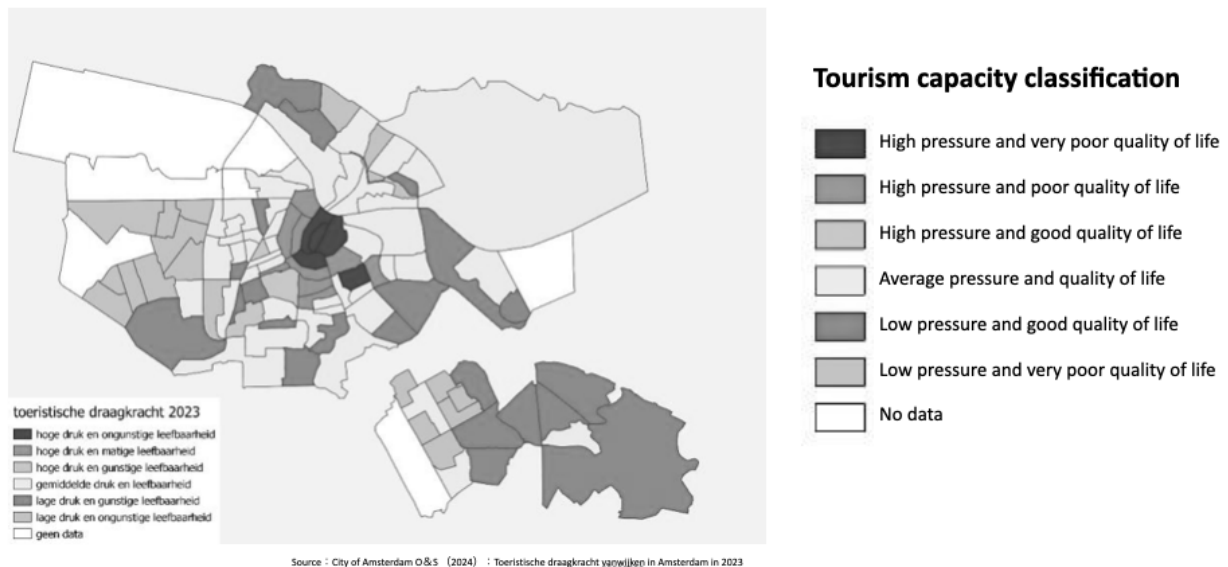
Quadrants:

- Top-Left (Low pressure, good quality of life):** Includes areas like Prinses Irenebuurt e.o., Bloemendalermeer, and Westelijke Buurt.
- Top-Right (High pressure, good quality of life):** Includes areas like Oostelijk Havengebied, Scheldebuurt, and Overtoomse Sluis.
- Bottom-Left (Low pressure, poor quality of life):** Includes areas like Kolenkit, Overtoomse Veld, and Slotervaart-Zuid.
- Bottom-Right (High pressure, poor quality of life):** Includes areas like Jordaan, De Weteringschans, and Grachtengordel-West.

Legend:

- Quality of life:** Y-axis (7 to 28)
- Tourism pressure:** X-axis (7 to 25)
- Low pressure, good quality of life** (Top-Left)
- High pressure, good quality of life** (Top-Right)
- Low pressure, poor quality of life** (Bottom-Left)
- High pressure, poor quality of life** (Bottom-Right)

Status of tourism capacity in the city of Amsterdam



Source: City of Amsterdam (2019). Research on the tourism carrying capacity of neighborhoods and the impact of tourism on livability. City of Amsterdam, O&S (2024). Tourism carrying capacity of neighborhoods in Amsterdam in 2023. Compiled by the author.

Tourism carrying capacity is composed of two parameters—“tourism pressure (tourism supply and use)” and “tourism-related quality of life”—each of which is assessed using seven indicators [Figure 3, upper section]. These indicators were established through the following three steps.

Step 1: Compilation of the List

To compile a list of potentially relevant themes, indicators, and data sources, the municipal research and statistics department gathered expert input from various municipal policy departments as well as local and national agencies. Drawing on this expertise, along with a literature review and expert workshops, they produced a list of more than 100 indicators.

Step 2: Testing of Measurement Criteria

The listed indicators were tested by the municipal research and statistics department against the following criteria: whether data were available at the district level; whether they were available for all or most districts; and whether they could be obtained regularly (annually or biennially).

As a result, 63 indicators were classified under the theme “tourism-related quality of life,” and 36 under the theme “tourism pressure.”

Step 3: Selection of Indicators

Following an analysis of the correlations between the roughly 100 indicators and two core indicators measured in a separate survey—“neighborhood satisfaction” and “neighborhood development” (each required to have at least a linear relationship with one of the two)—the final selection of indicators was made based on the results of regression analysis. These selected indicators were then tested and finalized by the municipal research and statistics department for usability and other practical considerations.

The tourism carrying capacity of a neighborhood is determined by the combination of its total score for “tourism pressure” and its total score for “tourism-related quality of life.”

Since the units of measurement for each indicator differ, they were quartiled and converted into scores. Using the total scores for each parameter, neighborhoods were classified into

four quadrants. When plotting “tourism pressure” on the horizontal axis and “tourism-related quality of life” on the vertical axis, the fourth quadrant—characterized by high tourism pressure and low quality of life—is identified as indicating that a neighborhood’s tourism carrying capacity is under strain [Figure 3, middle to lower section]. In the 2023 survey, measurements were conducted across 110 districts.

As noted in the survey report, classification using the four-quadrant method does not provide an on-the-ground visualization of crowding. Therefore, to monitor actual congestion conditions, the report includes tables showing the absolute scores for each indicator in every district.

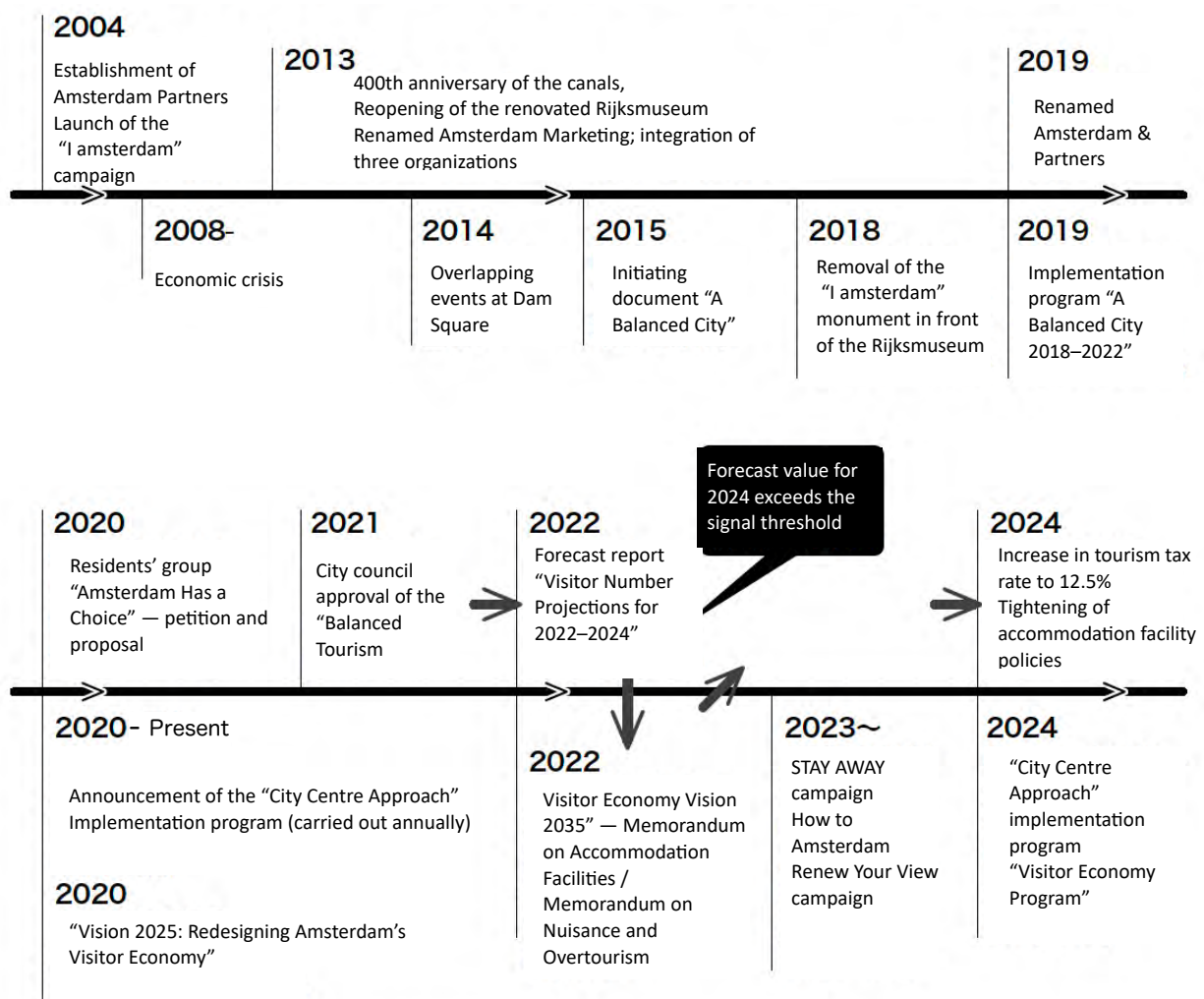
The ordinance also emphasizes that, in certain situations arising from a comparison of the results of the two surveys, it is important to adjust elements such as the bandwidth and signal values in line with residents’ lived experiences.

4. Timeline of Amsterdam’s Tourism-Related Policies and Overtourism Countermeasures”

Here, the broader trends before and after the enactment of the ordinance are outlined as the background leading up to its adoption [Figure 4] (for convenience, the timeline begins in 2004, though tourism policy itself predates this).

Amsterdam’s tourism-related policies and overtourism countermeasures are highly diverse. Drawing from planning documents and other sources that position these measures in a comprehensive framework, this section focuses on the city’s perspectives, attitudes, and values regarding tourism and visitors.

Figure 4: Amsterdam's Tourism-Related Policies and Overtourism Countermeasures
(Top: Pre-COVID-19, Bottom: Post-COVID-19)



Source: City of Amsterdam website, Reference 11-20, 33-35, 46 and 48

4-1. City Marketing (2002-)

"I amsterdam"

In 2002, Amsterdam launched its city marketing initiative. Faced with intensifying intercity competition, the city's leading position on the global stage was perceived to be under threat. Recognizing that its defining characteristic lay in its diversity, the city undertook a comprehensive profiling exercise. Based on this, seven target groups were identified, using the following criteria: whether significant benefits could be expected, whether there was an affinity in values, and whether mutual needs and shared interests existed—allowing both parties to act as consumers and co-creators in strengthening Amsterdam's position. Overseas visitors and tourists were among these target groups. In 2003, the city established a new organization, Amsterdam Partners, and in September

2004 it unveiled the statement “I amsterdam,” intended to embody Amsterdam’s core values and spirit (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2004). Through strategic communication efforts both within the city and in domestic and international markets, Amsterdam worked to restore and strengthen its position.

Subsequently, as part of efforts to recover from the impact of the 2008 economic crisis, the city hosted the 400th anniversary celebration of the canals and oversaw the reopening of the renovated Rijksmuseum in 2013. In the same year, it consolidated three organizations, including the tourism board, into Amsterdam Marketing to strengthen promotional capacity. Furthermore, for a two-year period starting in 2013, the city temporarily increased the accommodation tax rate to secure funding for tourism promotion initiatives.

4-2. “A Balanced City” (2015–)

— Resident-Centered, Quality of Life as the Top Priority

Amsterdam, a city experiencing continuous growth, published the launch document for the “Balanced City” (Stad in Balans) initiative in 2015.

During this period, the population was increasing by an average of 10,000 people per year, while the number of overnight visitors rose from 4.5 million in 2008 to 7.2 million in 2014. This rapid growth brought with it a shortage of hotel beds, a surge in short-term rentals (including illegal listings), a shortage of housing, sharp increases in property purchase and rental prices, as well as heightened congestion and antisocial behavior.

Confronted with the dilemmas and tensions of growth, Amsterdam feared that the social balance could be undermined, potentially leading to fragmentation and division within the community. The document marked the first step in seeking a new balance between growth and quality of life, setting forth Amsterdam’s future course as “ensuring that the city remains attractive for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.”

The strategy aimed to physically expand the urban area so as to disperse visitors and stimulate urban development in surrounding districts. Anticipating continued global growth in tourism, the city chose to focus on attracting repeat and high-quality visitors, while working to distribute tourist flows both spatially and temporally.

In 2019, the city released the Balanced City 2018–2022 Implementation Program. From the outset, the document states clearly: “Visitors are very welcome, but residents come first.” As the subtitle indicates, the program seeks a new balance between quality of life and hospitality. However, unlike the initial launch document, which emphasized balancing growth and quality of life, this program underscores the need to “once again put quality of life first” in order to achieve that balance. Up to that point, the city’s policies had not been aimed at reducing tourist numbers or curbing the growth of the tourism industry, but rather at “balancing tourism with other demands in the city.” The dispersal of tourists was intended to ease pressure on the urban core, but did not

fundamentally challenge the prevailing premise of continuously attracting more visitors—a point later noted in academic assessments (Kuenen et al., 2023). Since 2018, measures have been further strengthened. In December of that year, the “I amsterdam” monument in front of the Rijksmuseum was removed, and in March 2019, Amsterdam Marketing was renamed Amsterdam & Partners. The organization shifted its emphasis from visitor-promotion campaigns to activities aimed more heavily at encouraging spatial dispersal and reducing nuisance behaviour.

4-3. “City Centre Approach” (2020–)

— Comprehensive Measures

The City Centre Approach (Aanpak Binnenstad) was announced in May 2020, with an implementation program reflecting its principles adopted by the city council in December of the same year and launched in 2021. This initiative integrates the efforts of the City in Balance program with those of the City Centre Approach, combining both short- and long-term measures as well as a strategic vision. It aims to address the city centre’s challenges in a comprehensive manner, setting clear priorities and implementing targeted measures to strengthen the historic core of the city. The program document is both a product and a set of guidelines, jointly developed through partnerships with existing stakeholders in the city centre, including residents’ associations, businesses, property owners, and cultural and educational institutions. In its *Ambitie* section, the document states: “The city centre must once again become a place where all residents of Amsterdam enjoy coming and where residents feel at home. We will continue to welcome visitors from both home and abroad as an open and international city centre — but **only if they share our fundamental values**” (emphasis added by the author). This marks a step beyond the pre-pandemic focus on “balance,” “resident-centered,” and “quality of life first.”

Around 80 projects are implemented annually under the six priority areas—(1) mixed-use functions and diversity, (2) management and enforcement, (3) a valuable tourism economy, (4) enhancement of cultural diversity and neighborhood identity, (5) promotion of a more varied housing supply, and (6) increasing residential space and greenery in public areas—with progress monitored through three annual observation reports.

4-4. Tourism Economy Vision (2020, 2022)

— Image, Interpretation of Freedom, and Values

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Amsterdam formulated two tourism plans: Vision 2025: Redesigning Amsterdam’s Tourism Economy (Amsterdam & Partners, 2020) and Tourism Economy Vision 2035 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2022c). The latter plan was prepared in November 2022 as a measure in response to the projected final

calendar year figure for annual overnight stays in 2024 exceeding the signal value, as reported earlier that year. Based on the view that desirable outcomes cannot be achieved solely through early concrete actions or individual measures, but rather through the cumulative effect of all measures, the city first developed a vision (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2022b). At the same time, it published a proposal document addressing tourist accommodation facilities (including references to hotel capacity management) as well as nuisance behavior and overtourism. Since 2024, two initiatives—the City Centre Approach and the Visitor Economy Program—have been implemented.

Returning to the plans, both share two common features: (1) they redefine what “freedom” means for Amsterdam, and (2) they clearly distinguish and articulate what the city wishes to embrace and what it seeks to eliminate—namely, the forms of tourism it welcomes and those it does not. In the earlier plan, the city acknowledged the importance of balance by stating, “Without tourists, the city’s balance would also be lost,” while discarding the term “high-quality tourists” (those with higher per-capita spending) in favor of actively focusing on “valuable tourists”—visitors who come for Amsterdam’s unique values, character, and identity, and who add value themselves. In the subsequent plan, it is stated that changes which make Amsterdam a better city and a positive place for residents will also appear attractive to those who work there and to visitors, thereby drawing new audiences. The plan also makes an explicit commitment to addressing the paradox faced by any “attractive city.” It emphasizes that tackling nuisance behavior and overcrowding requires intervention, and that keeping the city livable demands choosing limits over irresponsible growth (DutchNews, 2022).

5. Measures Based on the Ordinance

The tourism ordinance explicitly lists the possible measures that can be implemented [Figure 5]. Here, focusing specifically on responses related to the number of overnight stays, the surrounding context before and after implementation is also summarized.

5-1. Regulations on Accommodation Facilities

In recent years, the City of Amsterdam has adopted a strict accommodation policy aimed at preventing the construction of new tourist accommodation facilities and the expansion of capacity in existing ones [Table 1]. Development zones have been designated, and the Accommodation Policy sets stringent conditions regarding hotel concepts, engagement with the surrounding neighborhood, sustainability, and social entrepreneurship. Recent trends in accommodation capacity are shown in [Figure 6]. As additional context, the accommodation capacity in the City of Amsterdam increased by approximately 43,000 over the 12-year period from 2010 to 2022. In the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (excluding the city itself), capacity also rose by about 12,000 during

the same period. The city's hotel occupancy rate exceeded 80% prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the number of guests staying in short-term rentals has declined and remains under control.

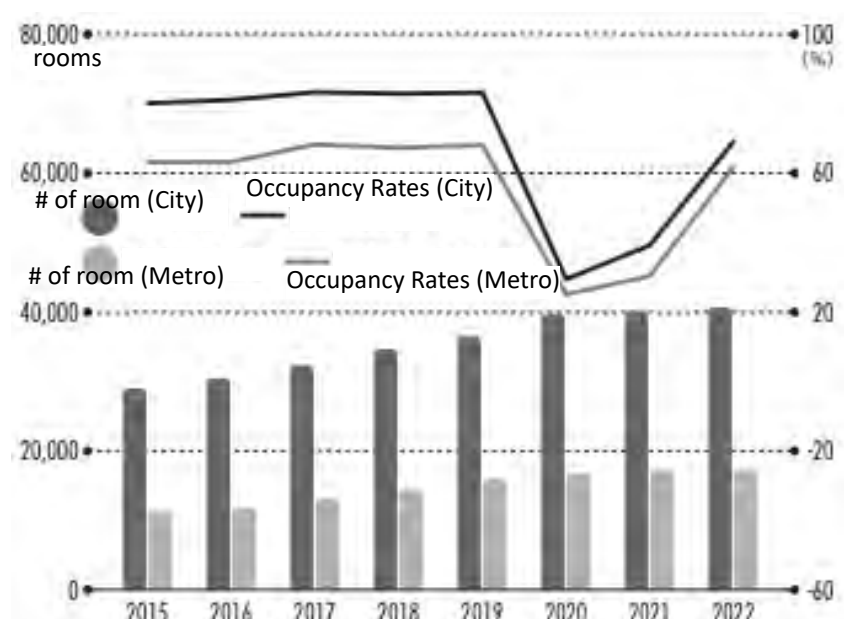
Initially, short-term rentals played a role in compensating for the shortage of accommodation facilities, diversifying lodging options, and providing stays that allowed visitors to experience local life. Subsequently, although the number of overnight stays within the city has been regulated through accommodation restrictions, the number of lodging facilities in surrounding municipalities has increased (the so-called “waterbed effect”). This raises concerns that the number of day-trip visitors to Amsterdam may increase as a result, and at the same time, that nuisance behavior and overtourism may be transferred to other areas (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2022a).

Figure 5: Measures Specified in the Balanced Tourism Ordinance

Number of Overnight Stays	Number of Day-Trip Visits	Tourism Carrying Capacity
- Measures the council may take to keep or maintain the number of tourist overnight stays within the set range: i. Possible regulation of the number of tourist overnight stays in residences that may be rented out for short-term tourist purposes. ii. Possible regulation of tourist overnight stays through the use of the tourist tax. iii. Any other related measures the council may take to regulate the number of tourist overnight stays. - Anticipated impacts of the measures: i. Number of tourist overnight stays during the three-year forecast period. ii. Municipal budget.	- The municipality's influence on the volume of day trips and tourist overnight stays within the MRA. - Possible regulation of the number of visiting days through the use of entertainment expenses. - Any other related measures the council may take to regulate the number of daily visits.	- Overview of districts where tourist carrying capacity is under pressure. Measures the council will take to reduce tourism-related pressure in the district. Measures the council will take to restore tourism-related quality of life in the district. - Expected impact of the measures on: i. The tourist carrying capacity of the relevant district(s). ii. The municipal budget.

Source: Amsterdam's Balanced Tourism Ordinance (Verordening van de gemeenteraad van de gemeente Amsterdam houdende regels omtrent toerisme (Verordening op toerisme in balans Amsterdam))

Figure 6: Trends in Accommodation Capacity (Number of Rooms) and Room Occupancy Rates in the City of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area



Source: Created based on the Amsterdam City Government website “Hoeveel toeristen komen er naar Amsterdam en regio, en waar verblijven zij?” <https://onderzoek.amsterdam.nl/interactief/toerisme-in-amsterdam>

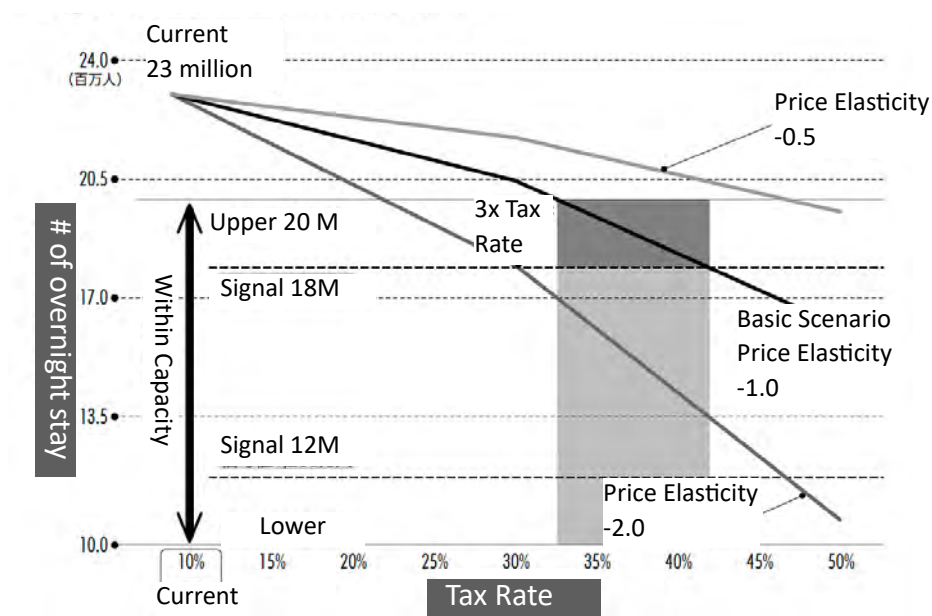
Table 1: Measures on Accommodation Facilities in the City of Amsterdam	
2007 ~2010	Statement in the “Basic Economic Program” and “Hotel Policy Document” noting that peak-time capacity is insufficient, and that hotels need to be dispersed outside the city center
2014	Amsterdam signs a cooperation agreement with Airbnb (world’s first)
2015	“Amsterdam Sharing City Declaration”
2017	Ban on new hotel construction in Centrum Mandatory registration for short-term rentals
2018	Maximum of 60 nights per year allowed for short-term rentals
2019	Maximum of 30 nights per year allowed for short-term rentals (reference: Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (MRA)) Public disclosure of hotel development policy
2020	Introduction of permit system for B&Bs Ban on short-term rentals in Centrum’s three districts Introduction of permit system for other areas
2021	“Hotel Policy 2021”: tightening of accommodation policy, restriction of development through use of land lease rights
2022	Policy document on accommodation facilities (reference: Tourism carrying capacity of Amsterdam Metropolitan Area (MRA))
2024	“Hotel Policy 2024”
(Source : Reference 38 & 46, City of Amsterdam’s website	

Table2: Changes in the tourist tax rate in the City of Amsterdam	
1973	4%
1988	5%
2013	5.5% *only for two years
2015	5%
2018	By Area • 6% (City Center: Centrum, Zuid, West en Oost) • 4% (Suburb)
	By Facility Type • 6% (STR, B&B, Vacation Rental)
2019	7% * Introduction of an €8 per person day-trip tourist tax (for cruise passengers) * Nationwide increase in value-added tax (VAT) in the Netherlands from 6% to 9% (lower rate)
2020	Facility type-specific, dual tax structure introduced • 7% + €3 per person per night (hotels, hostels) • 7% + €1 per person per night (campgrounds) • 10% (other lodging facilities such as B&Bs, vacation rentals)
2024	12.5% * Day-trip tourist tax increased to €14 per person
Source: Compiled from the City of Amsterdam (2015): <i>Onderzoek toeristenbelasting Amsterdam</i> , as well as Reference Document 2 and the City of Amsterdam’s official tourism tax website.	

5-2. Increase in Tourist Tax Rates

The City of Amsterdam's tourist tax (Toeristenbelasting), or accommodation tax, has in recent years been revised frequently through amendments to the municipal ordinance, with rates being raised at short intervals. The current rate stands at 12.5%, the highest in Europe [Table 2]. The stated purpose of the tax increase is to provide funding for services to local residents, rather than to deliberately discourage people from visiting the city (DutchNews, 2023). According to the report (Reference 40), while an increase in the tourist tax is not without a deterrent effect, its impact on the number of overnight stays is limited, and it is expected to contribute primarily to increased tax revenue. When the objective is "to increase tax revenue," it is considered relatively effective; however, in order to keep the number of overnight stays below 18 million, the tax rate would need to be raised to at least more than three times its current level [Figure 7]. In the end, while the vast majority of tourists stay overnight in Amsterdam, half of the decrease in overnight guests is offset by visitors who lodge in surrounding municipalities and make day trips into the city. As a result, the reduction in overnight stays does not translate into a proportional decrease in nuisance behavior. The same report points out that, under these circumstances, tax revenues flow into other municipalities instead.

Figure 7: Relationship Between Annual Overnight Stays and Tourist (Accommodation) Tax Rates



Source: Created based on Significant APE (2023): Het effect van toeristenbelasting op overnachtingen en belastinginkomsten in de gemeente Amsterdam (Amsterdam Tourism Tax Survey).

Another report (Reference 2) also notes that “while nuisance behavior caused by overnight visitors in the city decreases, nuisance behavior associated with one of the main purposes of visiting the city—partying—does not.” It further states that “although the collection of tourist tax can indeed serve as one means of combating undesirable tourism in Amsterdam, it cannot constitute an independent measure for combating tourism.” This underscores the necessity of a comprehensive approach that includes the “other measures” specified in the ordinance.

6. Conclusion

Striving for the Optimal Balance

— Measures at Various Spatial Levels

The measures that the City of Amsterdam can take to address overtourism are limited to the scope of authority held by the municipal council, making it difficult to implement them solely within the framework of the local government. Needless to say, policies concerning transportation, aviation, and other areas that extend beyond the city’s boundaries are also involved.

Looking at broader spatial scales, the Metropolitan Region Amsterdam (MRA) formulated a Hotel Policy in 2019 (Reference 30) and, in 2022, also measured tourism carrying capacity at the metropolitan level (Reference 6) [Table 1]. At this wider scale, efforts are guided by data to identify areas where active promotion should be pursued, where balance has been achieved, and where restrictions should be applied. Tourism promotion is to be advanced with each area’s unique characteristics (DNA) as the central focus.

At the national level, the Netherlands Board of Tourism & Conventions (NBTC) formulated the national tourism plan Perspective Destination Netherlands 2030 in 2019. The plan emphasizes shifting from promoting destinations to managing and developing them, clearly stating the stance: “We put the common interest—i.e., the public interest—and local residents first.” While the Netherlands as a whole is not in an overtourism situation, the plan stresses the importance of selecting desirable visitors who align with the profiles and objectives of individual cities, regions, and provinces. It also defines the characteristics and “DNA” of each region at the national level, signaling a significant policy shift.

— Future Research Directions and Implications for Japan

Amsterdam’s tourism policy—particularly the measures based on the Balanced Tourism Ordinance—is grounded in the 2022 forecast results and represents an ongoing initiative.

Given its current and evolving nature, an assessment will be withheld at this stage, with continued close monitoring deemed necessary going forward. In addition, the specific

forms of engagement by diverse stakeholders—including local residents and community organizations—as well as initiatives aimed at revitalizing regional appeal beyond the scope of overtourism, and policies concerning the hospitality industry (HORECA: hotels, restaurants, and cafés), remain topics for future research.

Finally, in light of Japan's circumstances, it is important to adopt a perspective that assesses conditions using objective data and promotes tourism in a more appropriate manner. The comprehensive initiatives undertaken by the City of Amsterdam should not be regarded solely as measures against overtourism; rather, the key question, amid constantly changing environmental conditions, is whether their research methods and response mechanisms can be effectively adapted to the realities of Japanese tourist destinations.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the City of Amsterdam for their cooperation in facilitating the interviews conducted for this research study. This paper is based on a review of literature and documentary sources, primarily drawing on the city's open data, and the author assumes sole responsibility for all interpretations and conclusions herein.

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Column: Recent Trends in Amsterdam's Tourism Economy Policy

Kentaro Goto

In 2022, the City of Amsterdam formulated the Tourism Economy Vision 2035 and is currently implementing both the City Center Approach and the Visitor Economy programs. Both constitute long-term approaches that are adjusted annually.

The former was integrated with the Balanced City program in 2020 and has since been advanced under six priority areas, with the aim of making the city centre an attractive place where residents can enjoy spending their time comfortably. The Implementation Program: City Center Approach 2025 (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2025) sets out seven new transformation goals [Figure]. One of these is “2. Fewer visitors to the city center, and visitors show respect.” In many cases, each transformation affects multiple goals, and there is said to be considerable interdependence among the goals.

The latter focuses on transforming the tourism industry sector. The *Implementation Program: Visitor Economy 2025* (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2025) contains 53 programs, of which 18 are new initiatives [Figure]. A selection of the new initiatives, with some of their specific contents summarized, is presented below.

It will be necessary to continue monitoring developments in Amsterdam's tourism economy policies aimed at achieving balance.

Selected new initiatives relevant to this special feature (partial list):

- Implementation of New Surveys and Research
 - Survey on reducing queues and congestion in public spaces
 - Study on the impact of the tourist tax
 - Survey of residents' perceptions of the visitor economy (conducted by Amsterdam & Partners), among others
- Engagement with Europe: Strengthening International and Domestic Cooperation Beyond Municipal Boundaries
 - New research on urban monocultures and enhancing diversity in retail (to be conducted jointly with cities participating in the European Alliance on Balanced Urban Tourism), scheduled for completion and publication in the second quarter of 2025
 - Giving back to residents (drawing on initiatives in several European cities that communicate the benefits of the visitor economy and channel tourist tax revenues into projects for local residents, with a stronger emphasis on ways visitors can contribute to the city and its residents)

Figure: Overview of Each Implementation Program Document

City Center Approach 2025	Visitor Economy 2025
· Introduction · Path of transformation with others 1. Balanced dining, shopping, and employment opportunities across the city	• Introduction • Sustainable tourism economy • Coordination between the City Centre Approach and the Visitor Economy Program • Accountability and reportingFinance
2. Limit visits to the city center and ensure visitors show respect - While aiming to reduce the number of visitors engaging in nuisance behavior, there remains ample scope for respectful visitors to come. - At the same time as limiting nuisance behavior and noise/congestion, efforts are made to reduce the magnetic attraction of the area to visitors who may cause problems. Changes and behavioral impacts (2) / Measures to reduce the magnetic pull (e.g., violations) (2) Fundamentals such as: safety measures (2) / congestion reduction (3)	• Accommodation: Hotel stays (4 (3)) / Private holiday rentals (2) / Tourist tax (1 (1)) • Overtourism: Regulating tourist movements (10 (1)) • Distribution of attractions and facilities (9 (3)) / Distribution of visitors (visitor management) and campaigns (5 (2)) • International cooperation (4 (3)) / National cooperation (5 (2))
3. Public spaces in the city center that are comfortable for residents 4. A green and rich city center 5. A robust cultural DNA 6. Large-scale and diverse housing supply in Amsterdam's city center 7. A socially cohesive city with well-equipped facilities	• A tourism economy as a driving force for a livable city • Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) (1) • Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) (6 (4)) • Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12) (3 (1)) • Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) (3 (2))
Note: () indicates the number of programs, [] indicates the main text section number Source: (Left) Created by the author based on <i>Uitvoeringsprogramma Aanpak Binnenstad 2025</i> https://www.amsterdam.nl/stadsdelen/centrum/aanpak-binnens (Right) Created by the author based on <i>Uitvoeringsprogramma Bezoekerseconomie 2025</i> https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/policy-tourism	

- This column serves as a supplementary report to “Trends and Recent Developments in Overtourism Policies – Focusing on Amsterdam’s “Balanced Tourism Ordinance” (Goto, 2025).

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Perspective: Rebalancing Strategies under Overtourism

— Through the Lens of European Cities

Kentaro Goto

1. Introduction: Approaches to Addressing Overtourism

The theme of this special issue is “overtourism.” This is the second time that the journal *Tourism Culture* has addressed this topic as its feature theme. The first occasion was in January 2019, at a time when overtourism was increasingly being recognized as a social issue. Initially, the feature theme was set as “The Threat of Overtourism Creeping into Local Communities,” but it was ultimately revised to “Local Will Tested by the Rapid Increase in Tourists” [Figure 1]. This change was made for the following reasons.

First, it became apparent that the level of concern among local communities about being featured as a case study in an “overtourism” special issue was far greater than anticipated. In the absence of sufficient internal discussion within the community, there was deep apprehension that being portrayed as an area experiencing overtourism would lead to the spread of a negative image. I still vividly recall being sharply questioned by representatives from one of the case study areas at the time: “With what stance and intent are you addressing and disseminating the issue of overtourism?”

That said, it was undeniable that certain areas were indeed experiencing problems. As a tourism research institution committed to realizing a richer society through the promotion of tourism culture, the question was how we should engage with the phenomenon of “overtourism.” Accurately identifying the problematic phenomenon is the first step, but can we go beyond raising issues and disseminating information to actually present effective solutions or guidelines? Is it enough merely to alleviate the pains caused by rapid or excessive growth? In some cases, there were even situations where opportunities to capture demand were being lost. At the time, our position ultimately concluded that “regions experience not only negative but also positive impacts from tourism, and isolating and highlighting only the former from a particular standpoint will not lead to a true solution” (Goto, 2019). Therefore, the previous special issue focused on regions that had continually sought ways for residents’ daily lives and tourism to coexist. It highlighted initiatives from various areas that, while experiencing environmental changes, engaged in ongoing discussions, established a “regional will,” and took action. Through these examples, the aim was to explore approaches to sustainable tourism in Japan.

About five years have passed since then. The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to the tourism industry. While tourist numbers are gradually recovering to some extent, it is premature to conclude that the pandemic’s impact on tourism has fully disappeared. At the same time, attention must also be paid to the fact that, during the

prolonged and challenging years of the pandemic, there were regions that took the opportunity to reassess the very nature of tourism itself and to steadily implement overtourism countermeasures. In recent years, amid growing reports of a resurgence of overtourism, this issue focuses on efforts to seek an optimal state and achieve a rebalancing, highlighting overtourism countermeasures in European cities. Europe has seen its tourism market recover more quickly than Asia. As tourist numbers return to pre-pandemic levels, a key question arises: is the renewed overtourism the same as before COVID-19?^{*1} The remark, “Without tourists, the balance of the city itself will be lost” (Amsterdam & Partners, 2020), suggests a new awareness brought about by the sharp decline in tourism demand during the pandemic. In Japan, attention is not only focused on regions where the impacts of overtourism have already become evident, but also on various initiatives aimed at preventing its occurrence in the first place. There is a growing attitude toward assessing both the positive and negative impacts of tourism in a calm and comprehensive manner. At this juncture, it is timely to present new perspectives and frameworks for rethinking tourism and related initiatives that contribute to the sustainability of local communities in our country.

2. Overtourism and Urban Tourism in European Cities

This special issue focuses on European cities. While the severe impacts of overtourism in urban areas have long been reported, there has also been a growing recognition of the need to go beyond the overtourism debate and to engage in discussions on “sustainable urban tourism.” As urbanization advances, urban tourism has been increasing more rapidly than other forms of tourism. Owing to their multifunctional nature, cities can simultaneously accommodate a variety of visitor motivations and experiences. However, as the needs of tourists and residents increasingly intersect, the pressures generated by tourism risk disrupting the balance of the city and diminishing the quality of urban life (Aall et al., 2019). In this special issue, Dr. Borg has contributed an article and is also the editor of the volume *A Research Agenda for Urban Tourism* (2022). Furthermore, Inholland University of Applied Sciences, which introduced Mr. Borg, established a research group

Cover of *Tourism and Culture*, Issue No. 240



Note: The term “overtourism” is used only in the titles and text of the feature articles.

<https://www.jtb.or.jp/book/tourism-culture/tourism-culture-240vision/>

in 2020 dedicated to “New Urban Tourism.” The pressing question now is how to rebuild urban tourism in a sustainable and resilient manner (Koens, 2020).

This special issue focuses on prominent tourist cities in Europe, including Venice, Rome, and Barcelona. Contributions were received from three scholars who either currently reside in Europe or have lived there in the past. The intention is to view the situation from a European perspective rather than solely from a Japanese standpoint (regarding Amsterdam, findings from an on-site visit were reported in the previous issue of *Tourism Culture*, No. 264, “Special Feature: Global Tourism Dynamics 2024”). In addition, research on tourism carrying capacity in urban contexts remains insufficient in Japan. Therefore, for the foreword, we invited Dr. Kumagai, an expert in the environmental carrying capacity of national parks, to contribute an article. The following sections first review the situations in various locations as presented in the feature articles.

Feature Article #1 :Destinations Coping With Success —A Venetian Lesson

Dr. Borg states that the persistent, underlying unsustainability of tourism is a direct consequence of the very nature of tourism as a product. Because tourism resources are public goods that are geographically specific, non-reproducible, and scarce, leaving their allocation solely to market forces does not lead to an optimal distribution. The suboptimal allocation of tourism resources arises not only from overtourism, but also becomes evident in situations of undertourism, where tourism resources are underutilized. Simplified analyses of overtourism, he argues, obscure the factors driving unsustainable tourism development and hinder a fundamental understanding of the problem.

Regarding Venice, the analysis of tourism intensity and Tourism Carrying Capacity (TCC) shows that the indicators have already been significantly exceeded. At present, there is a quantitative and qualitative imbalance between tourism demand and supply, with the burdens and costs borne by the host community far outweighing the benefits, the majority of which are concentrated in the tourism industry. In this locality, where tourism is the main industry, tourism is an indispensable element of strategies for economic and social development, and since it interacts with various aspects of life, tourism strategies must be strongly integrated into the overall strategy. Furthermore, in order to mitigate the adverse effects of its own success, he contends that the destination must transition to a model that prioritizes environmental footprint and quality, and revise its policies to be grounded in the local community.

Feature Article #2: Current Situation and Reflections on the Coexistence of Tourism and Daily Life in Italy

Dr. Sano conveyed the severe housing conditions he experienced while living in Rome as a tourist destination, as well as the nuisance caused by outdoor dining noise that persisted late into the night on a daily basis. While the city overflows with the smiles of citizens and tourists and bustles with people, survey results indicate that many Italians are concerned about overtourism. He also reported on the frontline of the struggle over housing between tourists and residents, noting the situation in which visible protests by displaced residents are swiftly removed, while traces of such protests can still be found on the periphery of the historic city center.

Overtourism countermeasures in Italy are still in their initial stages, and it is essential to clarify the nature and scope of the issues. In order to address the decline in residents' quality of life and the deterioration of tourists' experience, flexible measures implemented by small-scale policy groups are deemed necessary. In Italy, local municipalities tend to be more progressive than the national government. For example, in Cinque Terre, a method to limit the number of tourists has been introduced. However, its validity requires further discussion and examination, and it is pointed out that in many regions, setting appropriate parameters and thresholds is challenging. The perception of overtourism is subjective, with some people benefiting from tourism and others suffering from its negative impacts. It is therefore essential to amplify the voices of those adversely affected, while at the same time making the benefits of tourism widely known to the public. The establishment of forums for dialogue among citizens is desirable, with the aim of seeking solutions that transcend the dichotomy of pro-tourism versus anti-tourism positions, he states.

Feature Article #3: From a “Tourism City” to a “City Living in Harmony with Tourism”

— The Frontline of Overtourism Countermeasures in Barcelona

Dr. Abe reported on “Barcelona’s struggle and dilemmas in its transformation into a city that lives alongside tourism.”

He noted that the renewed wave of resident protests is not primarily about congestion or issues of visitor behavior. Rather, it concerns the strain that tourism growth places on public services, as well as the soaring land prices, rents, and general cost of living, which lead to the displacement of residents and shops, thereby transforming local communities. The unfair distribution of profits within the tourism industry is exacerbating social inequality. Furthermore, he stated that residents' sense of crisis represents “a declaration that, in time, our city of Barcelona may belong to no one at all”—a statement that strikes at the very core of the city's identity.

A distinctive feature of the Tourism Master Plan (2017) is that it integrates a wide range of tourism-related policies, including those on transportation, urban planning, regional economic development, business responsibility, and accommodation taxes. In recent years, amid social changes such as a change in mayoral leadership, the city has shifted toward prioritizing “the prosperity and well-being of residents” and promoting “a sustainable and respectful tourism economy that fosters the development of other economic sectors.”

As part of congestion management, in “extremely crowded areas,” measures are being implemented to reorganize traffic flows, strengthen advance reservation systems, and promote the use of space by residents. In terms of controlling the location of accommodation facilities, the “Special Urban Plan for Tourist Accommodation” aims to ensure mixed land use and guarantee residents’ right to housing, while also maintaining everyday life in public spaces and fostering the development of sustainable economic activities. In addition, urban planning measures have been introduced to allocate 30% of floor space to low-rent social housing. Regarding the complete ban on short-term rentals, it has been pointed out that such a measure could lead to a surge in illegal rentals. In terms of taxation, the city has introduced its own additional levy on top of the regional accommodation tax, with revenues allocated to a “Tourism Citizen Return Fund,” which is reinvested in initiatives aimed at mitigating the negative externalities of tourism and improving residents’ quality of life.

Barcelona’s policy challenge presents a vision for the next generation of cities and tourism: a tourism policy that maintains citizens’ daily lives, further enhances them through tourism, and revitalizes them as a source of the city’s appeal.

3. Pathways to Rebalancing

In order for tourism to contribute to the creation of sustainable regions, it is essential to understand the intrinsic factors that render tourism unsustainable. Building on this understanding, it is necessary to formulate rebalancing strategies. This section first provides an overview of recent trends in sustainable tourism and overtourism in Europe (3-1), then, drawing on the concept of the “doughnut economy” introduced by Dr. Borg, discusses a comprehensive perspective for positioning tourism within an overall regional strategy (3-2). Finally, it outlines key perspectives for incorporating such considerations into tourism strategies aimed at achieving and correcting balance (3-3).

3-1 Sustainable Tourism in Europe

The UNWTO (now UN Tourism) defined the concept of sustainable tourism in 2005 as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities.”*²

Recent policy guidelines on sustainable tourism in Europe include key documents such as the Transition Pathway for Tourism (European Commission, 2022) and the European Tourism Agenda 2030 (Council of the European Union, 2022). These guidelines promote efforts to further accelerate the transition toward greening and digitalization, transforming the tourism ecosystem into one that is more sustainable and resilient.*³ Building on this context, the following section introduces, albeit in a fragmented manner, content relevant to the theme of this special issue.

• **Research on Imbalanced Tourism Growth**

According to the European Commission’s “Final Report on Unbalanced Tourism Growth at Destination Level” (2022), the term “unbalanced tourism” is used interchangeably with “overtourism,” while also implying the less visible impacts of tourism.

Furthermore, overtourism differs from mass tourism in that it is not limited solely to the sheer number of visitors, and it is regarded as a relatively recent phenomenon occurring in urban areas, often framed as a critique of such occurrences.

• **Sustainable EU Tourism**

— **Shaping the Tourism of Tomorrow**

In 2023, the European Commission launched a project to support the sustainability and resilience of EU destinations. It warns that for stakeholders with a growth-oriented mindset, destinations where the balance between economic benefits and the social, cultural, and environmental impacts is not maintained risk undermining environmental stability, authenticity, livability, and the destination’s positive image and reputation.

• **Sustainable Tourism Partnership Action Plan**

Launched in December 2022 under the EU Urban Agenda, the “Sustainable Tourism Partnership” focuses on addressing challenges specific to urban tourism within the context of urban policy. The Action Plan, developed in 2024, examines three main themes—“Environment,” “Development,” and “Imbalanced Growth”—and defines six actions based on three pillars: better regulation, better funding, and better knowledge.

3-2 A Broader Perspective and Vision

—**The Doughnut Destination**

Doughnut Economics (2017) is a theory proposed in 2011 by Oxford University economist Kate Raworth. Starting from the long-term goals of humanity, it was developed to explore pathways toward balanced prosperity, visualizing sustainable human living through two concentric rings—large and small—shaped like a doughnut. The inner small circle (the “hole” of the doughnut) represents the Social Foundation, indicating the minimum conditions necessary for people to live healthy lives. The outer large circle (the “outer edge” of the doughnut) represents the Ecological Ceiling,

denoting the limits of the planet's environmental capacity. Exceeding the safe space—the doughnut's "dough" area bounded by the inner and outer circles—signifies that the economy has lost its balance (a detailed explanation of Doughnut Economics is omitted here). The first city in the world to adopt this concept was Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In 2020, the city announced the Amsterdam City Doughnut as its vision for placing the concept at the core of its circular economy strategy. Interpreting and adapting this "Doughnut Economics" framework to the context of tourism, Hartman and colleagues at the European Tourism Futures Institute (2022) developed the concept of the Doughnut Destination [Figure 2].

The Doughnut Destination applies the concept of Doughnut Economics and its seven associated ways of thinking to explore and reconceptualize how destination management can be rethought in a more positive direction. It visually illustrates the types of balances a destination should consider in order to achieve sustainable prosperity, and is said to resonate well with current approaches to tourism—such as regenerative tourism, resilience, transition thinking, the purpose economy, and carrying capacity.

(1) A model that prevents both overshoot and shortfall

Positioning within the safe space represents a state in which the destination is being managed sustainably. In order to remain within this safe space, it is important for the destination to maintain a balance among four elements—namely, the quality of working conditions for entrepreneurs and employees, the quality of visitors' experiences, the quality of residents' lives, and the quality of place (including public spaces, heritage, and ecosystems)—while avoiding both overshoot and shortfall. An "overshoot," in which the destination extends beyond the outer boundary of the safe space, indicates a state of excessive development that exerts negative impacts on the environment and society. Conversely, a "shortfall," in which the destination falls inside the inner boundary of the safe space, signifies a failure to meet the necessary level of social foundations. Monitoring the upper and lower limits, or thresholds, of the safe space functions as both an early warning signal and an emergency alert for stakeholders. Once the emergency threshold is exceeded, the destination is considered to be out of balance, requiring immediate action.

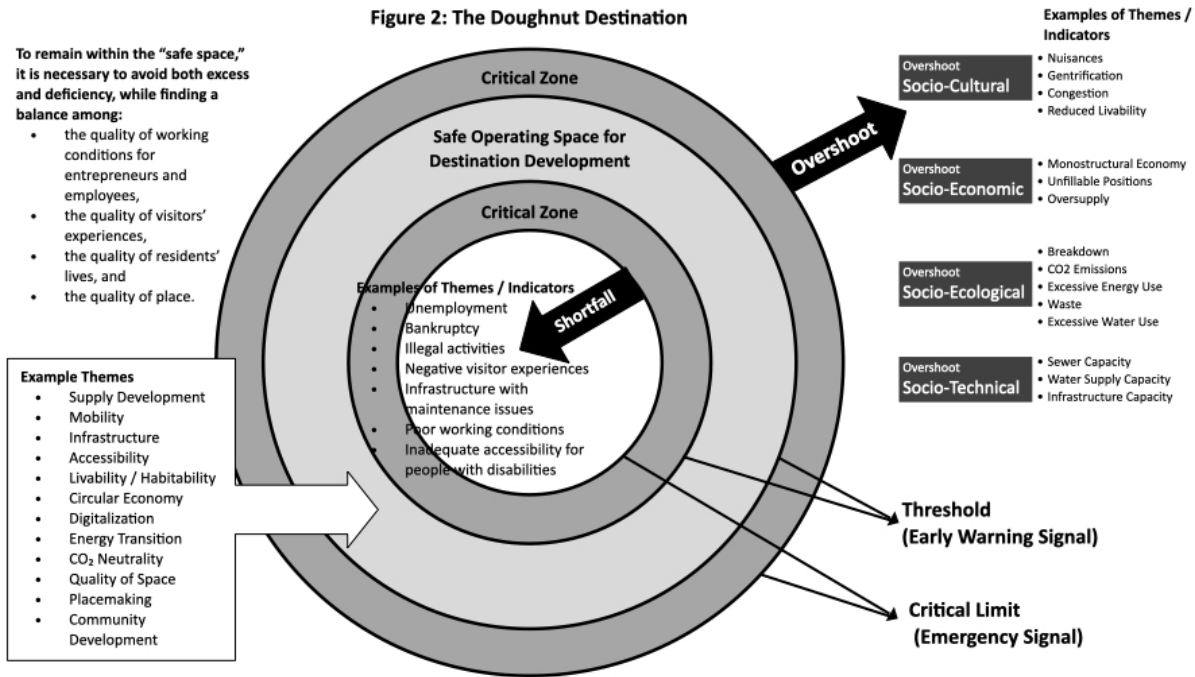


Table 1: Application of the Seven Ways of Thinking to Tourism

Ways of Thinking: From 20th-Century to 21st-Century Approaches	Seven Ways of Rethinking Tourism Destinations
1. Change the Goal —from GDP to the Doughnut	1. Change the Goal —Tourism as a means, not an end
2. See the Bigger Picture —from self-contained markets to embedded economies	2. See the Bigger Picture —Tourism is embedded within a larger whole
3. Nurture Human Nature —from rational economic man to socially adaptable human beings	3. Nurture Human Nature —Tourists are not merely rational economic actors
4. Get Savvy with Systems —from mechanical equilibrium to dynamic complexity	4. Get Savvy with Systems —Tourism is part of a dynamic and complex system
5. Design for Distribution —from “growth will eventually trickle down” to distribution by design	5. Design for Redistribution —Tourism must benefit all people
6. Create for Regeneration —from “growth will clean it up again” to regeneration by design	6. Create for Regeneration —Tourism must be regenerative
7. Be Growth-Agnostic —from growth dependence to growth agnosticism	7. Be Growth-Agnostic —Tourism growth is not infinite

Source: Left column: Adapted from Doughnut Economics by Kate Raworth (Japanese translation by Atsushi Kurowa). Right column: Author’s translation and adaptation based on Hartman and Heslinga (2022).

(2) Seven Ways of Thinking for Rebuilding Destinations

Raworth proposed seven ways of thinking, alongside the Doughnut model, to present a comprehensive perspective for driving a major transition toward a new economy. Applied to destinations, these constitute the Seven Ways of Thinking for Redefining Destinations [Table 1].

1. Change the Goal —Tourism as a means, not an end
2. See the Bigger Picture —Tourism is embedded within a larger whole
3. Nurture Human Nature —Tourists are not merely rational economic actors
4. Get Savvy with Systems —Tourism is part of a dynamic and complex system
5. Design for Redistribution —Tourism must benefit all people
6. Create for Regeneration. —Tourism must be regenerative
7. Be Growth-Agnostic. —Tourism growth is not infinite

Based on a review of the study, it appears that there remains considerable room for further discussion and the need for supplementation. For example, with regard to “1: Tourism as a means,” it is necessary to first clearly define what is to be achieved through tourism as a means, and to share this in a verifiable form. At the same time, without aligning closely with the purposes and behaviors of visitors, it will be difficult to position within the “safe space.” In this context, it would be precisely the mindset that “it is the plan itself that should shape an appropriate tourism market” (Abe, 2019) that is called for. With regard to “2: Tourism is embedded within a larger whole,” Dr. Borg emphasized that tourism does not exist in isolation. This is precisely where the “need for discussions beyond overtourism” arises in the context of framing sustainable urban tourism. With regard to “7: Tourism growth is not infinite,” a concrete example is provided by the City of Amsterdam’s bandwidth setting (an upper limit of 20 million overnight stays and a lower limit of 10 million overnight stays). However, at present, while measures for exceeding the upper limit are in place, the response to falling below the lower limit remains unclear.*⁴ Dr. Sano regards the systematic measure of setting a threshold—such as the upper limit of 400 visitors implemented on the Via dell’Amore in Cinque Terre—as one possible approach. However, he states that “it is necessary to continually discuss and verify whether the parameter settings address the essence of the problem and whether the threshold is appropriate for solving it.” He also questions whether, in fact, the majority of destinations face significant challenges in setting such parameters and thresholds.

According to Raworth, the seven ways of thinking are not intended to propose specific policies or systems. As she notes, “Given the pace, scale, and uncertainty of the changes we will face, it would be reckless to decide now on the policies and institutions of the future” (Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics*, trans. Atsushi Kurowa, 2021, p. 48). In this sense, the content of these ways of thinking must not be fixed. The same applies

to the model itself. For implementation, the key question is how it will be utilized, and it is essential to continually update it in relation to the goals.

3-3 Perspectives and Considerations for Implementation

In Japan, countermeasures (tactics) against overtourism have already been organized to a certain extent, drawing on domestic and international case studies. In order to avoid presenting similar measures, this section focuses on two points considered important for Japan from the perspective of rebalancing: first, the expansion and re-recognition of target areas for intervention; and second, the application of systems thinking aimed at achieving overall optimization.

(1) Stakeholder Relationships in Tourism Policy and Destination Marketing and Management (DMM)

– Quality of Life for Residents and Workers

Kagermeier (2022) presents a framework that organizes the relationships among stakeholders targeted by tourism policy and Destination Marketing and Management (DMM) [Figure 3]. This framework can also be viewed as a cross-section of the Doughnut model.*⁵ Tourism policy and DMM now need to broaden their scope from solely the economic sector to include residents and workers. In reality, however, residents are “too diverse to be treated as a single group” (Mano, 2013), yet they have, in most cases, been treated as a homogeneous group up to now (Żemła and Szromek, 2024). Dr. Kumagai, Dr. Borg, and Dr. Sano have pointed out that residents are not a uniform group, that the ways in which they benefit from tourism vary, and that their perspectives differ significantly in reality. The same applies to workers, who are likewise far from homogeneous and cannot be treated as a single group. Even within the same group, opinions and interests often diverge and may at times be in conflict (Gómez and Alfonso, 2019). As with tourists, residents and workers must also be segmented and approached with greater nuance in the future. In doing so, it is important to consider whether the approach fosters a sense of ownership and pride. Six key areas of action can be identified:

1. Mitigating negative impacts
2. Understanding and sharing perceptions
3. Promoting understanding of tourism’s benefits
4. Establishing opportunities and mechanisms for engagement and dialogue in tourism
5. Ensuring access to, and the redistribution of, resources and facilities for residents
6. Housing policy

In Japan, efforts have primarily focused on 1 and 4, while the other areas remain challenges for the future.

Figure 3: Stakeholder relationships and scope as addressed by tourism policy and DMM



Source: Adapted, translated, and revised by the author from Figures 3 and 4 in Kagermeier (2022).

(2) Systems Thinking

– Toward System-Wide Optimization

In addressing the complex issue of overtourism, it is essential not merely to treat its superficial symptoms, but to delve deeper into the problem, examining its underlying background and causes. Beyond identifying and breaking down the phenomenon into individual components, systems thinking is required to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the interactions and interdependencies among these elements. This approach enables the establishment of strategies that account not only for short-term solutions, but also for the long-term impacts and potential side effects, thereby ensuring a more holistic and sustainable response. To this end, it is necessary to conduct continuous measurement and monitoring, expand the scope of tourism data collection, and establish a robust statistical foundation aimed at optimizing tourism capacity and enabling early detection of emerging issues. As noted by the European Commission (2022a), it is essential to encompass a wide range of information—from basic statistics on travel and accommodation to data on the social, environmental, and economic impacts of tourism.*⁶

As an example of the interactions and impacts resulting from overtourism and its countermeasures, in the city of Amsterdam, the regulation of accommodation facilities has led to an increase in such facilities in surrounding municipalities (the so-called “waterbed effect”). This has raised concerns about the displacement of overtourism, as visitors ultimately travel into the city on day trips from the surrounding areas, resulting in limited reduction of the problematic phenomena and leakage of tax revenues (Itsukida, 2025; Goto, 2025). Dr. Borg contends, based on the experience of Venice, that the further tightening of restrictions on the development of accommodation facilities for tourists should be strictly avoided. Rather than hindering the growth of the tourism industry, it is important to promote non-tourism economic activities and alternative activities to tourism (such as housing subsidies) (Bertocchi et al., 2020).

Going forward, it will be necessary to consider building an integrated system underpinned by data-driven decision-making and clearly defined standards of action. Coordinated measures that minimize the negative impacts of overtourism and foster an environment in which both residents and visitors can coexist in harmony will be essential.

4. Conclusion: Balanced Tourism

The impacts of overtourism are multifaceted and cannot be resolved overnight. As cities grow and societies evolve, it will become increasingly important to strike a balance between ongoing investments that anticipate changes in tourist needs and reinvestments in the local areas that serve as the stage for residents’ daily lives. This issue has explored, through case studies of European cities, approaches to tourism that can sustainably reconstruct destinations under the pressures of overtourism, and has examined the potential for achieving balanced tourism. Tourism does not exist in isolation; it is closely and intricately connected to the economy, environment, and daily life of urban residents. Beyond simply maximizing the economic benefits of tourism, there is a need for frameworks that enable it to contribute to addressing local societal challenges. Drawing on the concept of Doughnut Economics, considering tourism’s balance within the broader strategy of the entire community will be an essential perspective moving forward. Building on the insights presented in this special issue, it is essential for Japan to enhance the sustainability of its regions by developing flexible policies tailored to the specific characteristics of each area, maintaining a long-term perspective, and exploring appropriate ways to balance the distribution of tourism’s benefits and burdens.

Notes

* 1 : To avoid fueling anti-tourism social movements, it has been proposed to limit the use of the term “overtourism”; however, pretending the phenomenon does not exist or fixating on semantics will not resolve the problem (Cheer and Novelli, 2023). Moreover, careful judgment is required when determining

whether all issues arising from the supply reductions during the pandemic and the subsequent rebound in demand should be categorized as overtourism.

*2 : The economic, social, and environmental dimensions are referred to as the Triple Bottom Line (TBL), a concept proposed in 1994 by John Elkington, a prominent figure in the field of CSR. In 2018, however, Elkington pointed out the hollowing out of the TBL concept and announced its withdrawal, while advocating a transition to the three Rs: Responsibility, Resilience, and Regeneration.

* 3 : As a premise for its tourism guidelines, the European Commission announced the “European Green Deal” in December 2019, aiming to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

* 4 : Whether the economic trade-offs resulting from a decline in tourist numbers due to implemented solutions are acceptable is a completely different matter (Cheer and Novelli, 2023).

* 5 : The VICE model proposed by the World Tourism Organization, which comprehensively encompasses Visitors, Industry, Community, and Environment & Culture, can also be interpreted as a cross-section of the doughnut; however, in this case, the focus is placed on residents and workers.

* 6 : The European Tourism Dashboard was made publicly available in October 2022. It uses indicators aligned with the EU’s policy pillars of environment, digital, and socio-economic dimensions.

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Supplement #1: Tourism for Sustainable Regions

— Insights from Tourism-Related Policies in South Korea

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1. Introduction

This paper examines tourism-related policies grounded in legal and institutional frameworks in three districts of South Korea—Bukchon Hanok Village in Jongno-gu, Seoul; Seongsu-dong in Seongdong-gu, Seoul; and Jeonju Hanok Village in Jeonju City—from the perspective of tourism for sustainable regions (Table 1). The rationale for selecting these districts in South Korea as the focus of this study is as follows.

First, South Korea has implemented more far-reaching measures than Japan in response to the growing demand for tourism and the resulting changes in residential and commercial environments. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, it had been pointed out that Japan's approach to the overtourism issue tended to be "reduced to problems of congestion and poor manners caused by the rapid increase in tourists".*¹ However, in recent years, a new phase has emerged, as evidenced by media reports from certain regions in Japan highlighting issues such as the difficulty residents face in securing housing. In South Korea, measures have long been in place to prevent the involuntary displacement of local residents, small business owners, and tenants, to promote the coexistence of everyday life and tourism, and to control the quality of industrial agglomerations. This, of course, reflects the fact that the problematic phenomena in question had already emerged and become visible at an early stage.

Second, in South Korea, alongside regions that have introduced new measures for regulation and coexistence—either preemptively or in phases—under municipal ordinances or national laws in response to growing tourism demand, there are also examples of regions that have implemented relaxation measures to adapt to changes in the tourism market. These cases serve as useful references for considering how to achieve coexistence between daily life and tourism in light of changing visitor needs and future prospects.

Third, in tourism destination management, attention is paid not only to the "quantity" and "quality" of tourism, but also to controlling the "pace of change." A city is a living entity, and change itself is inevitable; however, surveys are conducted and measures are taken to ensure that such change proceeds at a rate tolerable to those who must adapt to it. Moreover, beyond the context of cultural utilization for tourism, efforts are directed toward fostering and embedding a "tourism culture" grounded in mutual understanding among diverse stakeholders, including visitors and residents.

Table 1: Tourism-Related Policies in the Target Areas

Subject	Bukchon Hanok Village, Jongno-gu (Seoul Metropolitan City)	Seongsu-dong, Seongdong-gu (Seoul Metropolitan City)	Jeonju Hanok Village (Jeonju City [North Jeolla Special Self-Governing
Theme	Protection of residents' right of residence and the establishment of correct tourism culture	Protection of the ecosystem of the local community and of the scenery of local shopping districts and streets	Protection of residents' real lives and response to changing tourism trends
Content Covered in This Document	Overtourism countermeasure: First designation of a "Special Management Area" in Korea (July 2024)	Korea's first gentrification countermeasure (designated in September 2016, area expanded in August 2023)	Partial relaxation of regulations · Partial relaxation of regulations on use and sales items · Partial relaxation of height and floor restrictions, and change to underground floor permission
Ordinances / Plans (partial) – Only the latest revisions/changes are listed	Seoul Metropolitan City Jongno-gu Tourism Promotion Ordinance (enacted October 2020, revised October 2024) Article 10 (Designation of Special Management Areas, etc.)	Seoul Metropolitan City Seongdong-gu Local Community Mutual Cooperation and Sustainable Development Zone Designation Ordinance (enforced September 2015, revised December 2022)	Jeonju Urban Management Plan / Jeonju Traditional Culture District Unit Plan (formulated 2003, revised July 2023)
Legal Basis (abbreviation)	Tourism Promotion Act (enacted 1979, revised 2019, 2021, 2023)	Act on Coexistence and Revitalization of Local Commercial Districts [Local Commercial District Act] (promulgated 2021, enforced 2022)	National Land Planning and Utilization Act [National Land Planning Act] (2002, integrating the National Land Use Management Act and the Urban Planning Act) Framework Act on Land Use Regulation [Land Use Regulation Act] (enacted 2002)
Related Information (within and outside the same district)	In 2016, the Seoul Metropolitan Government amended the Seoul Tourism Promotion Ordinance and newly established Article 9-2 (designation of special management areas, etc.). In 2024, the Seoul Metropolitan Government amended the unit district plan for Bukchon.	In November 2015, the Seoul Metropolitan Government announced a comprehensive countermeasure against gentrification. In June 2016, a council of local governments was launched to prevent gentrification and promote sustainable communities.	In July 2016, the Seoul Metropolitan Government amended the Seochon district unit plan, strengthening restrictions such as land use restrictions and building height limits. In May 2023, the Jeonju City Government amended the unit district plan for the historic city center, easing regulations.

The three districts addressed in this paper are outlined below [Table 1]. The first two are located in the Seoul Metropolitan Government. Bukchon Hanok Village is a residential area composed of traditional hanok houses, where policies aim to protect the settlement rights of local residents. Seongsu-dong, on the other hand, seeks to prevent gentrification amid rapidly rising rents and to safeguard the local commercial sphere operated by small business owners. The third case, Jeonju Hanok Village, has historically imposed restrictions on aspects such as landscape, business types, and merchandise in order to establish, maintain, and develop its identity. However, it is now moving toward easing these restrictions in response to the daily lives of residents and evolving tourism trends. The situation in Bukchon (prior to 2018), as well as the phenomena of gentrification and touristification partially addressed in this paper, have already been reported by Kim (2019) in *Tourism Culture*, Issue 240, to which the reader is referred.

In what follows, in addition to a review of the literature, this paper also incorporates findings from on-site surveys conducted in fiscal year 2024 (with only part of the results presented in this issue).

Case Study #1

Jongno-gu Bukchon

- Protection of Local Residents' Right to Remain

· Transition to Legally Grounded and Effective Measures

Bukchon is a district situated on elevated terrain to the north of central Seoul, characterized by rows of traditional Korean houses known as hanok. As the area, which is primarily a residential neighborhood, became increasingly popular as a tourist destination, problems such as noise, littering, violations of privacy, and illegal parking began to threaten the living environment of local residents. Amid continued population decline—where out-migration exceeded in-migration—the pressing challenge for the district has been how to safeguard the right of local residents to remain in their community.

In 2013, Jongno District began initiatives to encourage tourists to maintain quiet, and in 2017 it conducted a survey [Figure 1]. Based on the findings, the Seoul Metropolitan Government and Jongno District jointly announced the “Eight Major Measures to Minimize Damage to Bukchon Residents” in 2018.*² However, even after the implementation of these measures, the absence of a legal basis meant that they lacked practical effectiveness. Consequently, as a next step, Jongno District proposed amendments to national legislation from the perspective of protecting residents' right to remain in their community. In response, South Korea amended the *Tourism Promotion Act* several times after 2019, during the COVID-19 pandemic, to enhance its legal

framework. Article 48-3 of the national *Tourism Promotion Act* (Sustainable Tourism Revitalization) [Table 2] defines a “Special Management Zone” as “an area recognized as requiring management due to the risk of damage to the natural environment or disruption of residents’ peaceful living conditions caused by tourist visits exceeding the area's capacity.” Under this law, local governments are authorized to enact ordinances to regulate the following matters..

- Restrictions on visiting hours (with the option to impose fines)
- Collection of usage fees
- Restrictions on vehicle and tourist passage (e.g., prohibition of bus entry), etc.

Figure 1: Strategic Model Proposed Based on the Survey



Source: Figure 6-1 (p.101), Survey on the Actual Damage to Residents in Residential Areas with Tourist Attractions (Jongno-gu, 2017), translated and prepared by the author

Table 2: Article 48-3 of the national <i>Tourism Promotion Act</i> (Sustainable Tourism Revitalization)	
Article 1	The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism may take necessary measures, such as providing information and financial support, to encourage the development of sustainable tourism resources that minimize the use of energy and resources, respond to climate change, reduce environmental degradation, strike a balance with the lives of local residents, and promote co-prosperous development with the local economy. <Amended December 3, 2019>
Article 2	Governors of cities and provinces, as well as mayors, county heads, and district chiefs, may designate regions falling under any of the following categories as Special Management Areas, as prescribed by ordinance. <Newly established December 3, 2019; April 13, 2021; October 31, 2023> 1. Areas where the number of tourist visits exceeds carrying capacity, thereby risking damage to the natural environment or disturbance to the peaceful living environment of residents, and which are deemed to require management. 2. Areas where activities such as lodging or cooking using vehicles cause damage to the natural environment or risk disturbance to the peaceful living environment of residents, and which are deemed to require management. However, areas where entry, parking, cooking, and camping are prohibited under other laws and regulations are excluded.
Article 3	Governors of cities and provinces, as well as mayors, county heads, and district chiefs, may take necessary measures for Special Management Areas, as prescribed by ordinance, including restrictions on visiting hours for tourists, the installation of convenience facilities, notification of usage regulations, collection of usage fees, and restrictions on the passage of vehicles and tourists. <Newly established December 3, 2019; April 13, 2021; October 31, 2023>
Article 4	Governors of cities and provinces, as well as mayors, county heads, and district chiefs, may impose and collect an administrative fine of up to 10 million won, in accordance with Article 27 of the Local Autonomy Act, on any person who violates an ordinance under Paragraph 6. <Newly established April 13, 2021>
Source: Partially excerpted and translated by the author from the Tourism Promotion Act, Enforcement Decree of the Tourism Promotion Act, and Enforcement Regulations of the Tourism Promotion Act (National Law Information Center); bold text indicates sections relevant to this paper. https://www.law.go.kr/LSW//lumThdCmpJo.do?lsiSeq=255789&joNo=0048&joBrNo=03&datClsCd=010103&dguBun=&lsId=001744&chrClsCd=010202&gubun=STD&lnkText=%25EC%25A2580%25EC%2597%25AD%25EC%259D%2584%2520%25EC%25A1%25B0%25EB%25A1%2580%25EB%25A1%259C	

Subsequently, following the enactment of relevant ordinances, the conduct of surveys, and consultations with residents, Jongno District designated Bukchon in July 2024 as the first “Special Management Area” in South Korea, pursuant to Article 48-3 of the Tourism Promotion Act and Article 10 of the Jongno-gu Tourism Promotion Ordinance of the Seoul Metropolitan Government. This designation was made “to protect residents’ right to remain and to foster the establishment of a sound tourism culture, thereby achieving a balance with the lives of local residents and building a foundation for sustainable tourism policies that can coexist and develop in harmony with the local economy” (Jongno District, 2024). Taking into account the level of inconvenience experienced by residents, the district designated specific areas and divided them into four zones [Figure 2]. In October of the same year, a partial amendment to the ordinance was enacted to introduce restrictions on visiting hours for tourists (effective March 2025) and restrictions on tourist bus traffic (effective January 2026) [Table 3]. Violations will result in the actual imposition of fines, based on

established guidelines. It should be noted that the collection of usage fees will not be implemented at this time.

• **Public awareness and education through information and publicity, and the placement of management personnel**

Regarding the restriction on visiting hours, public awareness and education efforts began in November 2024. During this site visit, the dissemination of information and operational status within the restricted areas were observed at different times of the day. In the Red Zone, Yellow Zone, and surrounding roads, an exceptionally large number of information boards for various types of notices had been installed. They were placed so prominently that visitors could not plausibly claim, “I didn’t notice” or “I wasn’t aware,” clearly conveying a stronger determination than before to resolve the issues.

In both the Red Zone and the Yellow Zone, management personnel were stationed (personnel deployment had been implemented prior to the current designation; starting in March, public officials known as “Bukchon Safety Officers” will be assigned to specifically handle the enforcement of penalty provisions). It was observed that these personnel approached visitors engaging in undesirable behavior and instructed them to modify their actions (Photo 1). The personnel stationed along the main street of the Red Zone were positioned on the sidewalk at the zone’s entrance during restricted hours—after 5:00 p.m. and before



Figure 2: Designated Area and Zoning of Bukchon Special Management Zone

Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government webpage, “Notice on Restrictions on Tourist Visits in Bukchon (Special Management Area) (from November 2024)” (Japanese) <https://japanese.seoul.go.kr/%E3%83%97%E3%82%AF%E3%83%81%E3%83%A7%E3%83%B3%E5%8C%97%E6%9D%91%E7%89%B9%E5%88%A5%E7%AE%A1%E7%90%86%E5%9C%B0%E5%9F%9F%E3%81%AB%E3%81%8A%E3%81%91%E3%82%8B%E8%A6%B3%E5%85%89%E5%AE%A2%E3%81%AE%E8%A8%AA/>

Photo 1: Management personnel response in the Red Zone (addressing a visitor with a suitcase)



Note: The back of the management personnel’s vest displays the visiting time restrictions and fines (photographed in January 2025).

10:00 a.m.—to approach individuals attempting to enter and confirm, on a case-by-case basis, whether they were overnight guests or otherwise permitted entrants. During restricted hours, access to the Red Zone is allowed only for residents of the zone and their family members or acquaintances, customers of businesses within the zone, merchants, and lodging guests.

Table 3: Implementation Details by District		
Implementation Area	Implementation Details	Public Awareness and Education
		Effective Date
Designated Area: Entire Bukchon District Unit Plan Area (1.12 million m ²) Restricted Area (Zoning Area): 120,000 m ² within the designated area (approximately 10% of the total)		
Red Zone (1 Area)	Prohibition of Tourist Visits within Restricted Areas during Restricted Hours - Restricted Area: Bukchon-ro 11-gil and surrounding area (approx. 34,000m²) - Restricted Hours: From 17:00 until 10:00 the following day Penalty: Administrative fine of up to 100,000 KRW for violations	November 1, 2024 – February 28, 2025
		March 1, 2025
Tourist Bus Restricted Area	Prohibition of Tourist Bus Traffic within Restricted Areas - Restricted Area: Section of approximately 2.3 km - Restricted Hours: At all times (including weekends and public holidays) Penalty: Administrative fine imposed for violations - First violation: 300,000 KRW - Second violation: 400,000 KRW - Third violation: 500,000 KRW	July 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025
		January 1, 2026
Orange Zone (2 Areas)	Strengthening of Intensive Awareness Campaigns *Target area: Mixed residential–commercial zones	In effect After October 2024
Yellow Zone (1 Area)	Implementation of Local Management through Intensive Monitoring * Target area: Zones where resident complaints have begun to increase	In effect After October 2024
Source: Seoul Metropolitan Government Website, “Notice on Tourist Visit Restrictions in the Bukchon Special Management Area (from November 2024)” (Japanese) https://japanese.seoul.go.kr/%E3%83%97%E3%82%AF%E3%83%81%E3%83%A7%E3%83%B3%E5%8C%97%E6%9D%91%E7%89%B9%E5%88%A5%E7%AE%A1%E7%90%E5%9C%B0%E5%9F%9F%E3%81%AB%E3%81%8A%E3%81%91%E3%82%8B%E8%A6%B3%E5%85%89%E5%AE%A2%E3%81%AE%E8%A8%A/ Jongno-gu Office (2024): Jongno-gu Office Notice No. 1735, June 28, 2024 (Designation of Bukchon Special Management Area) https://www.jongno.go.kr/prev/html/skin/doc.html?file=FILE_20240628075907110&rs=/prev/html/bbs/FILE_0000000000197263		

As for future challenges, stakeholders and researchers have pointed to issues such as the operation of Hanok stays within the district (including those run by corporations), nighttime noise disturbances,^{*3} and the need to set seasonally flexible visiting-hour restrictions^{*4} to ensure coexistence with commercial activities. Efforts to strike a balance between protecting residents and stabilizing the local commercial sphere are expected to continue.

Case Study #2

Seongsu-dong, Seongdong District

- Protecting the Local Commercial Sphere and Alleyway Landscape through Proactive Measures

· Sustainable Development and Rent Stabilization

Seongsu-dong has rapidly emerged as one of Seoul's most popular "hot places" and, in recent years, has been featured in Japanese travel magazines as a noteworthy tourist destination. Originally designated as a quasi-industrial zone, the district is now home to a large concentration of businesses, including many facilities repurposed from former factories through renovation (Photos 2 and 3). Seongdong District, where Seongsu-dong is located, took a proactive approach to address the phenomenon of gentrification^{*5} by establishing, in 2015, the nation's first "Sustainable Development Zone System" under the Ordinance on Mutual Cooperation within the Local Community of Seongdong-gu, Seoul, and the Designation of Sustainable Development Zones. This initiative was prompted by the district's rapid transformation resulting from the influx of businesses and other entities spurred by urban regeneration. To

Note: For details on the Seongdong Community Assurance Shopping Street Building, refer to the following.

<https://www.sd.go.kr/main/contents.do?key=1745&>

The Seongdong Community Assurance Shopping Street Building was initiated following the signing of a social contribution Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Seongdong District and a private company in 2015.

Construction commenced in 2017, and the building was completed and opened for occupancy in 2018



Photo 2: Vibrant atmosphere on the main street of Seongsu-dong (Seongsu Station side) (photographed in January 2025)



Photo 3: View of Seoul Forest Café Street (Ttukseom Station / Seoul Forest Station side) (photographed in January 2025)



Photo Photo 4: Seongdong Community Assurance Shopping Street Building (photographed in January 2025)

prevent homogenization and to protect the local commercial sphere and the unique alleyway culture of Seongsu-dong, Seongdong District encourages the conclusion of co-existence agreements among property owners, tenants, and the district government. In addition, in coordination with district-level planning, the district has introduced measures such as restrictions on the entry of large corporations and franchise chain stores (Table 4). Furthermore, when a rent stabilization agreement is concluded, property owners may be granted relaxed floor area ratio limits for new construction or extensions (with the district retaining partial authority over rent setting in exchange for providing such incentives).

Table 4: Occupancy Requirements for Public Assurance Shopping Street

Contract Period (See Article 20)

- 5 years (thereafter, extension determined by the Public Safety Commerce Operation Committee)

Eligible Applicants (See Article 20)

- Commercial district tenants driven out by a sudden rise in rent
- Social economy organizations (Article 2(2), Seoul Metropolitan City Seongdong-gu Ordinance on Supporting the Revitalization of the Social Economy)
- Small business owners (as defined in Article 2 of the Act on the Protection and Support of Small Business Owners)
- Young entrepreneurs (pre-entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs aged 19–39 residing in Seongdong-gu, Seoul)
- Senior employment creation enterprises (developing and promoting jobs suited to the abilities and aptitudes of persons aged 60 or older residing in Seongdong-gu, Seoul)
- Shared enterprises (Article 2(3), Seoul Metropolitan City Seongdong-gu Ordinance on Promoting Shared Enterprises)
- Other workplaces or offices recognized by the district office as requiring tenancy

Restricted Business Types (See Article 18)

Businesses or establishments requiring the consent of the residents' council (if deemed to have caused, or are likely to cause, significant harm to the community ecosystem and local commercial districts within sustainable development zones)

- Large enterprises (those outside the scope of SMEs as defined by the Framework Act on Small and Medium Enterprises)
- Franchise headquarters, regional headquarters, and franchise business operators
- Karaoke pubs and entertainment bars
- Video viewing rooms
- Massage parlors
- Other businesses or establishments likely to impede the protection of the community ecosystem and local commercial districts

Source: Seoul Metropolitan City Seongdong-gu Ordinance on Mutual Cooperation within Local Communities and the Designation of Sustainable Development Zones, Article 18 (Consent for Entry of Businesses, etc.) and Article 20 (Establishment and Operation of Public Safety Commercial Districts)

<https://www.law.go.kr/ordinInfoP.do?ordinSeq=1188236&chrClsCd=010202&gubun=ELIS&nwYn=N&conDatGubunCd=1>
and Seongdong Safety Commercial District — Tenant/Facility Guide and Tenancy Procedures, translated and prepared by the author
<https://www.sd.go.kr/main/contents.do?key=1749&>

· Policy Effectiveness Assessment and Interventions Based on Diagnostic Results

- Expansion of Designated Areas

During this field survey, we primarily visited two of the four districts included in the expanded designation (Seongsu 1-ga 2-dong and 2-ga 3-dong). While the effects of the system cannot be readily verified through simple visual observation, the vibrancy of the area was evident. In addition, we were able to confirm some of the 18 buildings secured thus far under the Public Assurance Shopping Street program (Photo 4).

According to a survey conducted by Seongdong District, rental prices in the Seongdong local shopping district in 2023 increased by 42% compared to 2020—the highest rate of increase in Seoul. In response, in August 2023, Seongdong District expanded the designated area from the existing 259,518 m² to 2,250,470 m², an 8.6-fold increase (excluding certain areas such as the Seongsu Strategic Redevelopment Zone). This measure was implemented after investigating and verifying the effects of the district's unique policies and diagnosing the stage of gentrification progression.

- Effectiveness of the Measures

According to the results of a survey conducted by Seongdong District in 2021, shops located on Seongsu-dong Café Street within the Sustainable Development Zone that had signed a Coexistence Agreement had an average operating period of 79 months, compared to 52 months for those without such an agreement. The average rent increase rate was 2.49% for shops with a Coexistence Agreement, compared to 2.85% for those without one.*⁸

- Indicators for Diagnosing the Presence and Progression of Issues

In expanding the designated zone, Seongdong District conducted its own independent survey and also utilized the indicators developed by the Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements in 2018 (Lee et al., 2018) to analyze the annual stages of progression and take preemptive action. The survey results indicated that Seongsu-dong was showing an increasing trend in both the “caution stage” and the “threshold stage.”*⁷ The study by the Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements classifies the progression of gentrification into four stages:

1. Initial Stage – before the onset of problems
2. Caution Stage – characterized by regional revitalization accompanying policy implementation
3. Threshold Stage – marked by rising real estate prices
4. Danger Stage – where adverse side effects become more pronounced

The indicators include factors such as population, household income, business openings and closures, business duration, the presence of franchise companies, and floating

population. A composite score is calculated by integrating these variables, with each variable weighted accordingly. The indicator values are intended for use in policies that require specific benchmarks and public consensus. The introduction of such indicators aims to establish a foundation for promptly responding to changes in the community and for implementing measures tailored to each stage of progression.

- Legislation at the National Level

Two relevant national-level developments are introduced here. In 2018, South Korea amended the Commercial Building Lease Protection Act, extending the lease protection period during which tenants can exercise their right to request contract renewal from five years to ten years (Article 10, Paragraph 2 of the Act). It also lowered the upper limit on rent increases from 9% to 5% (Article 4 of the Enforcement Decree of the same Act).

In addition, Seongdong District's unique policy of designating a "Sustainable Development Zone" is now implemented under the Act on the Coexistence and Revitalization of Local Commercial Districts (hereinafter "Local Commercial Districts Act"), enacted by the national government in 2021. This was the first law in South Korea established to provide support at the level of entire commercial districts, rather than for individual shops, with the aim of preventing the decline of local commercial areas. Under this Act, municipalities may designate either a "Local Coexistence Zone" or an "Autonomous Commercial District" according to the characteristics of the district in question.

Finally, a pre-pandemic study on this policy in Seongdong District (Cho et al., 2020) pointed out that by the time the district was designated as a Sustainable Development Zone, commercialization was already well underway. Consequently, the system focused on commercial tenants and the stabilization of their rents, while providing insufficient measures to address changes and adverse impacts in non-commercial spaces—such as the displacement of residents living in rental housing or the eviction of industrial tenants operating factories and manufacturing businesses.

Efforts in Seongsu-dong continue to pursue balanced development while simultaneously aiming to establish a stable business environment and an urban ecosystem based on mutual cooperation. Details will be reported on another occasion, including initiatives to revitalize the local economy through symbiotic consumption that reduces the burden on small business owners, as well as movements by municipal councils calling for the expedited amendment of relevant laws.

Case Study #3

Jeonju Hanok Village

- Regulation and Relaxation in Response to Tourism Trends

· Establishing and Developing Local Identity while Controlling Commercialization

Jeonju Hanok Village is the largest concentration of hanok—traditional Korean houses—in the country (Photo 5), and is a region where the preservation of historic buildings and the transmission of traditional culture are of great importance. The area is located outside the walls of the old fortress town (eupseong) and developed as a residential district in the modern era.*⁹ Since the 2000s, Jeonju City has faced rapid growth marked by a sharp increase in tourist numbers and a rising proportion of commercial establishments. In response, the city has undertaken initiatives aimed at establishing and enhancing regional identity, improving residential conditions for local inhabitants, and strengthening its capacity to accommodate visitors. Measures to regulate the landscape and curb commercialisation have also been part of these efforts. Since 2011, Jeonju has strengthened restrictions on building height and the number of floors*¹⁰, while also imposing limitations on the entry of franchise and fast-food outlets, as well as on business types and items sold. In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the city introduced regulations to restrict existing rental businesses, such as hanbok (traditional Korean dress) rental shops.*¹¹ As the proportion of non-residential buildings (including mixed-use residential-commercial structures) increased in what was originally a residential area, the city has sought to maintain industrial clusters appropriate to Hanok Village by promoting traditional activities suited to the area and preventing certain types of businesses from becoming overly concentrated or entrenched.



Photo 5. Scenery of Jeonju Hanok Village
(Taken in January 2025)

· Deregulation to Protect Daily Life and Accommodate International Tourism

In recent years, in response to changing tourism trends, the city has shifted toward deregulation in order to protect residents' daily lives while positioning itself as an international tourism destination. In 2023, Jeonju City announced a decision to amend the "Jeonju Traditional Culture Area District Unit Plan." The purpose of this amendment was to enable the regeneration of the area as an urban-type hanok while safeguarding the daily lives of residents. The details are as follows [Table 5]. In the Taejo-ro district (designated as both commercial and residential areas) and Eunhaeng-ro (Photo 6), where the main streets intersect in a cross formation, the building height restrictions were relaxed, and the installation of basement floors was permitted throughout the area. In addition, the minimum lot size requirements in commercial areas were expanded (to promote more efficient land use), and the frontage requirement was eased to roads of 6 meters or more in width, thereby facilitating business development. While certain industry restrictions were maintained, regulations on businesses such as hanbok rental shops were lifted. Furthermore, restrictions on food product categories were abolished, allowing a wider range of dining establishments, including those serving foreign cuisine [Table 6]. In response to the growing demand among tourists for culinary experiences, these deregulations aim to promote a shift toward stay-oriented tourism through the provision of diverse gourmet offerings.*¹²



Photo 6: View of the main streets (left: Eunhaeng-ro, right: Taejo-ro) (photographed in January 2025)

Jeonju City as a whole, in response to the annual increase in tourist numbers, is moving toward building the framework of a tourism-oriented city befitting its international status.

Table 5: Partial Amendments to the Jeonju Traditional Culture District Unit Plan

Relaxation of Building Height Restrictions

Limited to the Taejo-ro District (commercial and residential areas) and Eunhaeng-ro District [Photo 5]:

- Height limit raised from under 8m / 1 floor to under 11m / 2 floors above ground
- Floor area ratio doubled from previous levels in each district/area

* In other districts, the limit was reduced from under 8m to under 7.5m

Change from prohibition to permission of underground floors in all districts*

* Permitted only for uses other than residential living rooms, urban folk museums, hanok experience businesses, and lodging businesses (e.g., storage, boiler rooms, other ancillary uses)

Plot Size: Relaxation of Minimum Area Requirement

In the Taejo-ro District (commercial area), requirement changed from 50m² or more → 150m² or more

Relaxation of Commercial Permit Conditions

Requirement eased from “plots adjoining roads 8m or wider” (introduced in 2011) to “plots adjoining roads 6m or wider”

Partial Maintenance of Industry Restrictions

Restrictions maintained on franchises and certain fast-food outlets [Table 6]

Restrictions abolished (introduced in 2019) on businesses such as hanbok rental shops*

* In the case of retail shops intended for rental businesses (e.g., hanbok and other costumes, electric equipment rentals), approval may be granted upon deliberation by the Hanok Preservation Committee.

(However, relocation or expansion of existing rental businesses—costume or electric equipment—within traditional cultural zones is not permitted.)

Abolition of Regulations on Permitted Items [Table 6]

Source: Prepared and translated by the author based on Jeonju City Public Notice No. 2023-119: Decision on Amendments to the Jeonju Urban Management Plan (Jeonju Traditional Cultural Zone District Unit Plan) and Notification of Topographic Map, July 25, 2023 (Jeonju City) etc.

<https://www.jeonju.go.kr/synap/skin/doc.html?fn=256c7ab1-b678-4931-9fe3-df0e81dc413e.hwp&rs=/synap/result/202503/>

Table 6: Continued Prohibitions and Removals (2023 Amendments)

Maintained (Terminological revision)	Under the Enforcement Decree of the Building Act: - Category I Neighborhood Living Facilities (cafés, confectionery shops) - Category II Neighborhood Living Facilities (cafés, confectionery shops, general restaurants, manufacturing establishments) Among these, the following establishments, if operated as a franchise business or directly managed store by headquarters (excluding cases where the headquarters is located in Jeonju), shall fall under the scope: - Coffee specialty shops and similar cafés - Confectionery and bakery shops, and similar establishments - Fast food outlets (business establishments whose main menu items are doughnuts, hamburgers, pizza, or sandwiches)
Abolished (Provision repealed)	Among general restaurants classified as Category II Neighborhood Living Facilities, those that prepare and sell food in forms other than traditional cuisine, specifically: - Restaurants that prepare and sell Japanese cuisine - Restaurants that prepare and sell Chinese cuisine - Restaurants that prepare and sell Western cuisine - Restaurants that prepare and sell other foreign cuisines - Restaurants that prepare and sell fusion cuisine combining foreign dishes

Note: The above provisions apply to the Traditional Hanok District, Taejo-ro District, Eunhaeng-ro District, and the Traditional Culture District.

Note: The term “franchise business” refers to a continuous contractual relationship in which a franchisor authorizes a franchisee to use its trademark, service mark, trade name, emblem, or other business insignia, and to sell goods (including raw materials and subsidiary materials) or services in accordance with certain quality standards and business methods, while providing support, training, and control over the franchisee’s management and business activities. In return, the franchisee pays monetary compensation to the franchisor.

The term “directly operated store” refers to a business practice in which two or more outlets of the same type of business are operated under the same trade name, directly managed at the operator’s own responsibility and expense.

Source: Translated and compiled by the author, based on Jeonju City Notification No. 2023-119: Decision on the Amendment of the Jeonju Urban Management Plan (District Unit Plan for the Jeonju Traditional Culture Area) and Topographic Map Notice, July 25, 2023 (Jeonju City)

<https://www.jeonju.go.kr/synap/skin/doc.html?fn=256c7ab1-b678-4931-9fe3-df0e81dc413e.hwp&rs=/synap/result/202503/>

Conclusion

As illustrated by the three case studies of tourism policies discussed in this paper, legal measures and policy developments aimed at protecting the lives of local residents while enabling tourism to coexist are essential for achieving sustainable regional development. In Korea, efforts have been made to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while safeguarding and appropriately utilizing the unique character and identity of each region. These initiatives represent a challenge to create mechanisms that maintain harmony within an ecosystem where local residents, merchants, and tourists coexist, with the control of industrial agglomeration being one such measure. It is essential to discern the vitality introduced from outside and to envision desirable forms of coexistence.

Furthermore, these cases suggest that in sustainable destination management, not only controlling the quantity and quality of tourism but also adjusting the pace of regional change is a key factor. In Japan as well, there is a pressing need to formulate and implement policies that address the impacts of tourism on local communities and residents’ lives through a temporal lens.

Moving forward, while learning from Korea’s experiences, it will be important to explore tourism policies that take into account Japan’s regional characteristics, cultural contexts, and social conditions—such as population decline, the progression of an aging society, and the increase in vacant houses—with the aim of fostering sustainable communities where everyday life and tourism can thrive together. It is hoped that this paper will serve as a useful contribution toward that goal.

Notes

- * 1. See Reference 1, p. 14. The full text reads: “While the discussion often centers on congestion and etiquette issues caused by the rapid increase in tourists, the more fundamental concern should be the rapid and irreversible transformation of land ownership, which alters the social structure of neighborhoods, as well as the consumption of local resources without reinvestment.”
- * 2. The “Eight Major Measures” comprise: restrictions on visiting hours (prohibiting tourist passage during early mornings and nighttime; allowing passage only from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays and Saturdays; prohibiting passage on Sundays in designated alleys), on-site assistance for group tourists, special crackdowns on illegal parking/stopping of tour buses, designation of intensive cleaning zones, expansion of public restrooms, prevention of prohibited tourist activities, pre-arrival training for tour guides, and training of local residents as management personnel.
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- * 4. Kim, H. (2024, November 20). “Overtourism” coexistence and separation in Bukchon: The absence of fines. *The Scoop*. <https://www.thescoop.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=303930>
- * 5. In the Republic of Korea, surveys, research, and countermeasures had already been undertaken in the context of gentrification prior to the emergence of overtourism issues.
- * 6. According to Article 2 (Definitions) of the Act on the Coexistence and Revitalization of Local Commercial Districts discussed later in the main text, a “local commercial district” refers to a cluster of commercial buildings (commercial buildings as defined under the Commercial Building Lease Protection Act) where owners, landlords, tenants, landowners, and residents form a harmonized community centered on local lifestyle, culture, and economy.
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- * 9. Matters concerning the Historic Urban Core District Unit Plan mainly targeting the eupseong (walled city) area, as well as Jeonju City’s overall urban planning and tourism policies, will be addressed in a separate report.
- * 10. According to Reference 14, building regulations include relaxation provisions: Upon deliberation by the Hanok Preservation Committee, public buildings may be allowed up to two stories and a floor area ratio (FAR) of twice the standard (excluding the Traditional Hanok District and Hyanggyo District). In the Taejo-ro commercial area, buildings may be permitted up to two stories and an FAR of twice the standard. Where unavoidable due to differences in road elevation, two stories or a basement level may be permitted upon deliberation by the same committee, provided they remain within two levels in total.
- * 11. According to Reference 14, the reason for the 2019 change in permitted uses was to allow, upon deliberation by the Hanok Preservation Committee, the entry of retail stores engaged in costume rental (such as hanbok) or electric vehicle rental, as well as other similar rental businesses, with the aim of promoting traditional activities suited to Hanok Village while preventing the concentration and fixation of certain business types (applicable to the Traditional Hanok District, Taejo-ro, Eunhaeng-ro Districts, and Traditional Cultural District).
- * 12. In addition to the Jeonju Traditional Cultural Area District, the Historic Urban Core District also underwent changes to its District Unit Plan to implement deregulation measures.

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Supplement #2: Learning from Shibuya Ward's Halloween Measures

— Visitor Management in a Mature City Guided by the Principles of Diversity and Inclusion

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1. Introduction

— Appropriate Management of Visitor Quantity and Quality

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), the number of international tourist arrivals in 2023 recovered to 89% of pre-pandemic levels, driven by strong pent-up demand. Tourism export revenues recovered to 96%, and direct tourism GDP returned to the same level as in 2019. In the first quarter of 2024, international tourist arrivals increased by approximately 20% compared to 2023, reaching 97% of the 2019 level. Full recovery to pre-pandemic levels is expected in 2024, with projected growth exceeding the 2019 level by 2%.*¹

Amid this trend, there is growing concern over the resurgence of overtourism in both domestic and international destinations. In some areas, problematic phenomena have already begun to emerge. As conditions continue to shift rapidly in the post-pandemic context, it is becoming increasingly important to identify effective countermeasures. This paper examines the case of Shibuya Ward's Halloween crowd management as one such example.

The key similarities between Shibuya Ward's Halloween measures and overtourism countermeasures are as follows:

- They both address **issues arising from the spontaneous gathering of people in public spaces.**
 - **In the absence of a formal organizer, the goal is to appropriately manage spontaneous crowding (in terms of volume) and behavior (in terms of quality) in order to ensure the safety and security of both residents and visitors.**
- They involve **a multifaceted approach.**
 - **By deconstructing the problematic phenomena and combining various measures, the aim is to achieve overall optimization. This is supported by the establishment of organizational frameworks that enable a comprehensive, all-hands response.**

While overtourism countermeasures generally require a more long-term and continuous response, Halloween-related measures may appear somewhat different, as they are implemented over a short and specific period. Nevertheless, it has been noted that overtourism often manifests as a problem concentrated in particular locations and during specific times or seasons.*² Moreover, it has been confirmed that Shibuya Ward itself recognizes that during periods such as Halloween, the area experiences a concentration of visitors, effectively placing it in a state of overtourism.*³



Photo 1: View of the Shibuya Scramble Crossing

Shibuya Ward's policy responses to Halloween-related issues have been implemented consistently over many years, allowing for an understanding of how the ward has responded—both in principle and in practice—to evolving problems and critical junctures. From the perspective of administrative involvement and the leadership of the mayor as the representative of the local government, this constitutes a valuable case study.

In 2023, in addition to measures developed before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, new initiatives were also introduced. Shibuya Ward's efforts may serve as a useful reference for other regions, both in Japan and abroad, facing similar challenges. This paper outlines the key elements of these measures from the perspective of appropriate visitor management.

The research was conducted through a combination of literature review, field observations, and interview-based investigations.*⁴

2. Shibuya Ward's Core Philosophy and Vision for the Future

The Halloween measures are implemented as part of Shibuya Ward's broader efforts to realize its envisioned future. Without this perspective, it is impossible to fully understand the rationale behind past measures or the evolution of the ward's policy responses. This section begins by outlining the characteristics of Shibuya Ward, along with its fundamental philosophy and future vision.

2-1 Overview and Characteristics of Shibuya Ward

Shibuya Ward is one of Tokyo's 23 special wards and is home to distinct neighborhoods and resources such as Shibuya, Harajuku, Omotesando, Meiji Shrine, Yoyogi, Ebisu, and Daikanyama. Together, these areas contribute to the ward's overall diversity and vibrancy. Among them, Shibuya stands out as one of Japan's premier destinations, attracting large numbers of visitors from both within the country and abroad [Photo 1]. According to surveys conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government in 2022 and 2023, Shibuya ranked first among locations visited by international tourists in the city [Table 1].

Shibuya is renowned as a hub of street culture, youth culture, and commerce, and is home to the iconic Shibuya Scramble Crossing—a symbol of urban Japan and a globally unique space. Anchored by a major terminal station, the area attracts a constant flow of visitors from both Japan and abroad. It features a concentration of select shops, commercial complexes, live music venues, theaters, cinemas, and other cultural and entertainment facilities. Through its distinctive fashion and music scenes, Shibuya broadcasts a vibrant cultural energy fueled by a diversity of people. One of the district's defining characteristics is its inclusive and open atmosphere, shaped by the convergence of diverse individuals. In addition to being a center for fashion and design industries, Shibuya also hosts a growing cluster of information and communication technology enterprises. It is a creative city with fertile ground for nurturing culture, and has become a global hub for both cultural and business innovation, driven by its dynamic creative content industries. In recent years, large-scale redevelopment projects have further accelerated its transformation, drawing attention as a city in continuous evolution.

Table 1: Destinations Visited by International Tourists in Tokyo

	2018	2019	2022	2023
1st	Shinjuku·Okubo 55.4%	Shinjuku·Okubo 53.8%	Shibuya 58.4%	Shibuya 67.1%
2nd	Ginza 48.9%	Ginza 52.0%	Shinjuku·Okubo 50.3%	Shinjuku·Okubo 57.4%
3rd	Asakusa 45.0%	Shibuya 43.7%	Ginza 48.8%	Ginza 50.1%
4th	Shibuya 44.3%	Asakusa 43.4%	Tokyo Station· Marunoichi·Nihonbashi 45.2%	Asakusa 47.4%
5th	Akihabara 41.3%	Akihabara 37.6%	Asakusa 42.5%	Akihabara 46.2%

Source: Survey Report on Behavioral Characteristics of Foreign Visitors by Country and Region (Tokyo Metropolitan Government, 2018, 2019/2020, 2022). Prepared by Japan Travel Bureau Foundation (JTBF).
<https://data.tourism.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/data/kunibetsu/#activity>

2-2 “A City That Turns Differences into Strengths: Shibuya Ward”

— Creating Value through Diversity and Fostering City Pride

In 2016, Shibuya Ward established “diversity and inclusion” as its core principles from a long-term and global perspective, and presented its future vision for the next 20 years under the slogan “A City That Turns Differences into Strengths: Shibuya Ward.” The ward regards its unique atmosphere and experiences as irreplaceable assets and pursues governance that refines and promotes “Shibuya-ness” as a distinct value. One of the three perspectives outlined in the Shibuya Ward Long-Term Basic Plan 2017–2026 (formulated in February 2017) is “collaborative urban development involving not only residents but also visitors.” This concept entails not only accepting diversity, but actively embracing all forms of difference and transforming them into sources of energy. Through the multiplication of cultures and the chemical reactions of multiculturalism, the ward aims to foster city pride.*⁵

Subsequent ward-level plans have further articulated this vision. For example, the Shibuya Ward Urban Development Master Plan (formulated in December 2019) introduces the concept of “Shibuyans” (Shibuyamin), referring not only to those who reside in Shibuya, but also to those who work, study, visit, or simply have an affinity for the area. The plan clearly expresses the ward’s commitment to harnessing the collective energy of all people connected to Shibuya—both locals and visitors alike—as a driving force for urban development.

3. Overview of Shibuya Halloween, the Ward’s Response, and the Enactment of Local Ordinance

During the Halloween period, large crowds—particularly of young people—gather around the Shibuya Scramble Crossing and Center-Gai, transforming the area into a lively scene of costumes and performances. Shibuya Halloween has grown into a major event attracting attention both domestically and internationally. As visitor numbers increased spontaneously and the scale of the event expanded, a turning point came with the 2018 incident in which a mini truck was overturned. In response, Shibuya Ward enacted the “Ordinance on Ensuring a Safe and Secure Environment in the Area Surrounding Shibuya Station” in June 2019. This section outlines the background and events leading to the ordinance’s enactment, accompanied by statements and messages from the mayor and other key figures.

3-1 Disruptive Behavior Around Shibuya Station Becomes a Social Issue

· Rapid Expansion of Shibuya Halloween

Around 2010, people in costumes began to gather near Shibuya Station during the Halloween season. By the mid-2010s, the scale of these gatherings had expanded rapidly, drawing increasing attention from both domestic and international audiences. In response to this growing popularity, private commercial facilities and retail establishments also began to participate by organizing costume events and promotional campaigns.

However, alongside the rapid expansion, various problems began to intensify. Overcrowding made pedestrian movement difficult, while large volumes of litter were left behind. Commercial facility restrooms were occupied by people changing into costumes, and incidents such as fights, excessive noise, public urination and defecation, vomiting in public spaces, and damage to storefront windows became prominent social issues. Shibuya Halloween, lacking a formal organizer, saw a spontaneous influx of visitors that grew into large crowds, leading to repeated instances of disorderly and dangerous behavior.

Beginning in 2014, the police implemented safety measures during the Halloween period, including the deployment of “DJ Police” and traffic control regulations. Starting in 2015, Shibuya Ward introduced portable toilets, changing rooms, and waste collection stations, along with requests for vendors to refrain from selling alcoholic beverages in glass bottles.

Despite these measures, the number of visitors during Halloween continued to grow rapidly each year. Shibuya Halloween became widely recognized across Japan, attracting an increasing number of visitors from both domestic and international origins. As of 2017, the ward was working toward a shift in public perception—from viewing the event as a gathering of problematic individuals to positioning it as a vibrant celebration that communicates Shibuya’s appeal to the world. The goal was to transform public spaces, where visitors from Japan and abroad are most likely to interact, into areas where people could enjoy themselves in an orderly manner.*⁶

· “We want people to enjoy themselves with a sense of moderation” / “Balancing safety and vibrancy in the city is a vital responsibility for the head of a local government” (2018)

The year 2018 marked a turning point in Shibuya’s approach to Halloween management. Prior to the Halloween period, the mayor held a press conference, warning that the gatherings had become dangerously overcrowded. He emphasized that turning Shibuya Halloween into a genuine cultural event would require collective effort, urging people to enjoy the festivities with self-restraint and proper manners. He also

stated that if the situation failed to improve—or deteriorated further—regulatory measures would have to be considered.

However, contrary to these messages, the infamous incident involving the overturning of a mini truck occurred. Additional offenses such as molestation, voyeurism, assault, and theft were also reported, and arrests were made in 2018, marking a further escalation in the severity of the situation.*⁷ The incident received global media coverage, raising serious concerns about public safety in Shibuya.

On October 29, the day after the incident, the mayor issued a strongly worded statement expressing deep outrage. While acknowledging the presence of those who were enjoying the event responsibly, he criticized individuals violating rules and public manners as people “who do not love Shibuya or share in the desire to make this city something to be proud of,” contrasting their behavior with the ward’s vision for the future. He declared that “a series of actions that trample on the efforts and sentiments of those who genuinely love Shibuya and strive every day to make it a source of pride are absolutely unacceptable,” and reaffirmed that “balancing safety and vibrancy in the city is a vital responsibility for the head of a local government.” He pledged a strong commitment to addressing the issue.

· Establishment of a Study Committee — Interim Report: “The Ward Must Respond Proactively” (2019)

In early 2019, the mayor announced the formation of a new committee to consider concrete measures such as crowd size limitations around Shibuya Station during events, the prohibition of street drinking, and the implementation of traffic restrictions. He emphasized that a recurrence of the incidents witnessed in 2018 could not be tolerated. In February 2019, Shibuya Ward established the “Shibuya Halloween Measures Study Committee,” comprising local shopping associations, neighborhood councils, youth safety committees, private sector stakeholders, and the police. After holding a total of seven meetings, the committee issued an interim report on May 15, which included a recommendation to consider enacting a local ordinance. Based on the view that “the ward should proactively respond as a basic policy to prevent unforeseen incidents in the future,” the committee proposed the following measures:

- **Enactment and public dissemination of an ordinance incorporating necessary responsibilities and rules**
- **Examination of the effective deployment of police resources through close coordination among the ward, the Metropolitan Police Department, and local stakeholders**
- **Consideration of new initiatives to embrace and channel the energy of young people gathering in Shibuya**

- **Establishment of a “Shibuya Halloween Countermeasures Implementation Liaison Council” (tentative name), composed of members from the ward government, police, and local shopping districts, to address and implement solutions for various challenges**

Taking into account the need for a public awareness period, the ward submitted the “Ordinance on Ensuring a Safe and Secure Environment in the Area Surrounding Shibuya Station” (hereinafter, “the Ordinance”) to the second session of the Ward Assembly held in June, where it was passed with broad support. The Ordinance aims to ensure the safety and security of residents, businesses, and visitors in the area surrounding Shibuya Station, in light of the need to prevent criminal acts and public nuisances occurring in situations of extreme overcrowding beyond the area’s capacity. It seeks to enhance public manners and prevent disruptive behavior, thereby contributing to Shibuya Ward’s evolution into a mature international city.*⁸ The Ordinance clarifies the responsibilities and rules required during specific periods and restricts street drinking in public spaces. This provision was introduced in response to the fact that many disruptive behaviors had been triggered by the consumption of alcohol in public.

3-2 Overview and Intent of the Ordinance

The Ordinance consists of a preamble and Articles 1 through 9 [Table 2]. This section provides supplementary explanations of the intent behind each article and the specific considerations involved, based on records from Shibuya Ward Assembly proceedings and related documents.

A distinctive feature of the Ordinance is the inclusion of a preamble at the outset. It articulates Shibuya Ward’s core principles and vision for the future, outlines recent developments, and states the rationale for enacting the Ordinance. The conditions surrounding Halloween and related events prior to the ordinance had severely damaged the image of Shibuya as a safe urban area. In order to prevent a recurrence of such incidents, the preamble was deliberately included to reaffirm the ward’s foundational principles and basic policy framework. It also serves as a strong message from Shibuya Ward: that the community must take responsibility for protecting its own city—Shibuya as “our town.”

Article 2 defines three key terms: the area surrounding Shibuya Station, business operators, and visitors. In determining the scope of the area, the ward referred to the interim report of the study committee and designated zones where large crowds tend to gather during Halloween, as well as areas where criminal and nuisance behaviors had been frequently observed. The designated area was set relatively broadly in order to allow for flexibility in responding to unforeseen and potentially hazardous situations, similar to those that arise during Halloween.*⁹

Article 4 outlines the responsibilities of business operators, stating that they “must cooperate with the measures implemented by the ward, such as requests to voluntarily refrain from selling alcoholic beverages.” While Article 2 defines business operators as those who establish, operate, or are employed by food and beverage establishments, the provision regarding cooperation in refraining from alcohol sales specifically applies only to businesses engaged in the retail sale of alcohol at storefronts.

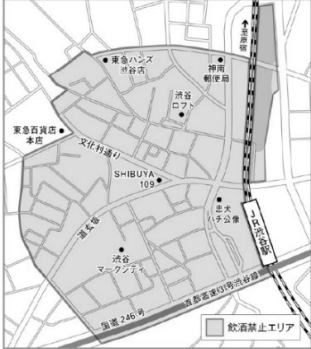
Article 6 specifies the locations and periods during which public drinking is restricted. “Public places” are defined as roads, parks, plazas, and similar spaces within designated areas established by ward regulations. For Halloween, the restriction period is defined in Item 1, but it may also be extended to “periods deemed particularly necessary by the mayor,” who is also responsible for determining the specific hours of restriction and issuing public notices accordingly. As stated in Article 8, individuals found to be in violation of these restrictions may be subject to guidance. Although no penalties or fines are imposed, the intent is to appeal broadly to the morality of visitors and others in public spaces by promoting compliance with rules and manners. Through this approach, the ordinance aims to ensure its effectiveness and contribute to the preservation of public order and the safety and security of visitors in the area surrounding Shibuya Station.

Article 7 prohibits specific nuisance behaviors, which are enumerated in Items 1 through 3. These prohibitions are not limited to particular periods or times. Although such acts are already regulated or prohibited under existing national criminal laws and Tokyo metropolitan ordinances, they were explicitly incorporated into the ordinance in response to strong requests from local residents and stakeholders. The provisions serve a symbolic function, sending a clear message about unacceptable conduct. The prohibited behaviors listed are generally considered socially unacceptable. While the ordinance does not include provisions for official warnings, any actions that violate criminal laws are addressed in cooperation with the police, potentially leading to arrest or legal penalties. For nuisance behaviors that do not fall under criminal statutes, warnings and guidance are issued through on-the-ground patrols. Item 4, which prohibits “acts that cause inconvenience to others,” is intended to address behaviors such as sitting in circles or dancing in the streets in a manner that obstructs pedestrian flow—actions that are objectively disruptive to others.

Table 2: Contents of the “Ordinance on Ensuring a Safe and Secure Environment in the Area Surrounding Shibuya Station”(Enforced on June 20, 2019)

Under the principle of Diversity and Inclusion, Shibuya City seeks to harness the collective strength of all who gather here as the driving force of urban development. The City aspires to become a vibrant metropolis, filled with diversity, grounded in strong human connections, and cherished by the world for generations to come. However, in the Shibuya Station area, which attracts large numbers of people from both within Japan and abroad, particularly during certain periods such as Halloween and New Year’s Eve countdown events, acts of discourtesy and public nuisance by a portion of visitors have disrupted the safe and comfortable order of the city. Therefore, by establishing the necessary rules that enable the ward government, residents, businesses, and visitors to share a common affection for Shibuya and to respect one another’s enjoyment of the city, this ordinance is hereby enacted to ensure the safety and security of all stakeholders and to further Shibuya’s evolution into a mature and attractive international city.

Purpose	Article 1 The purpose of this Ordinance is to ensure a safe and secure environment in the Shibuya Station area by clarifying the responsibilities of the Ward, business operators, and visitors, and by promoting the improvement of manners and the prevention of nuisance acts in the Shibuya Station area, thereby contributing to the evolution of Shibuya Ward into a mature and attractive international
Definitions	Article 2 For the purposes of this Ordinance, the meanings of the following terms shall be as prescribed in each item: 1. “Shibuya Station Area” means the districts of Shibuya 1-chome, Shibuya 2-chome, Shibuya 3-chome, Sakuragaoka-cho, Dogenzaka 1-chome, Dogenzaka 2-chome, Udagawa-cho, Jinnan 1-chome, and Jingumae 6-chome. 2. “Business Operators” means persons or entities that establish or operate stores mainly in the Shibuya Station Area for the purpose of running eating and drinking establishments, selling goods, or conducting other business activities, as well as their employees. 3. “Visitors” means persons who visit or pass through the Shibuya Station Area.
Responsibilities of the Ward	Article 3 1. In order to ensure a safe and secure environment in the Shibuya Station Area, the Ward shall establish a cooperative framework with relevant administrative agencies and related organizations, and shall formulate and implement necessary measures to improve the manners of visitors and to raise awareness among business operators. 2. In formulating the measures set forth in the preceding paragraph, the Ward shall establish opportunities for consultation with relevant administrative agencies and related organizations, and shall endeavor to respect and reflect their opinions.
Responsibilities of Business Operators	Article 4 Business operators shall fully understand the purpose of this Ordinance and, while complying with relevant laws and regulations, shall cooperate with measures implemented by the Ward—such as the voluntary restraint on the sale of alcoholic beverages—in order to ensure a safe and secure environment in the Shibuya Station Area.

Responsibilities of Visitors	Article 5 Visitors shall comply with relevant laws and regulations and shall not engage in the acts prescribed in the following Article and in Article 7, in order to ensure a safe and secure environment in the Shibuya Station Area.	
Restrictions on Drinking in Public Spaces	Article 6 - During the following periods, visitors shall not consume alcoholic beverages in public places (meaning roads, parks, squares, and other places of a public nature; hereinafter the same) within the areas of the Shibuya Station Area designated by municipal regulations: - October 31 and November 1, as well as Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from October 24 to October 30; - December 31 and January 1; - In addition to the periods specified in the preceding two items, such other periods as may be deemed particularly necessary by the Mayor. - The Mayor may limit the restriction on drinking under the preceding paragraph to specific hours of the day.	Designated Non-Drinking Zone
Prohibition of Nuisance Acts and Related Conduct	Article 7 Visitors shall not, without justifiable reason, engage in any of the following acts in public places within the Shibuya Station Area, except as otherwise provided by law or ordinance: - Producing abnormally loud sounds by means of sound equipment or the like; - Urinating or engaging in similar acts; - Climbing streetlights, signs, rooftops, or similar structures; - In addition to the acts listed in the preceding three items, any act that causes annoyance to others or is likely to cause harm.	
Guidance	Article 8 The Mayor may provide guidance to any person who is deemed to be engaging in conduct in violation of the provisions of Article 6, directing such person to cease said conduct.	
Delegation	Article 9 In addition to the provisions set forth in this Ordinance, matters necessary for the enforcement of this Ordinance shall be prescribed by District Regulations.	

Source: From the Shibuya City Reiki-Base Search System, prepared by the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation (JTBf)
<https://krg114.legal-square.com/HAS-Shohin/jsp/SVDocumentView>

It is important to note that the Ordinance does not reject the act of people gathering in itself. Despite the incidents that occurred in 2018, the intent was not simply to impose order. As the head of the Public Safety Division explained, “The purpose is not merely to maintain order, but to find a way to preserve both the vibrancy and the orderliness of the city.” Committee members also expressed hope, stating, “It is truly wonderful that people can autonomously enjoy the city,” and “We want to encourage the transformation of this spontaneously emerging activity into a movement that naturally respects public morals and manners.” The mayor added, “The ideal scenario is one in which those who voluntarily gather recognize the event as something enjoyable, and a shared understanding emerges among them that certain behaviors should be avoided.”

3-3 Halloween Measures and Outcomes Following the Enactment of the Ordinance

· Implementation and Coordination Framework

In August 2019, based on the newly enacted ordinance, Shibuya Ward established the “Shibuya Halloween Countermeasures Implementation Liaison Council,” composed of local shopping district representatives, relevant business operators, the police, and other stakeholders. The council deliberated on concrete measures such as the structure of security operations, strategies for crowd management, responses to issues related to restrooms and waste, requests for voluntary restraint in alcohol sales, and methods for communicating public drinking restrictions in shared spaces.

Initially, the ward’s Public Works Department played a central role in the response. As the department responsible for the use of public roads, it had prior experience managing traffic restrictions during New Year’s Eve countdown events, and sought to apply that expertise to Halloween. Within the ward government, a total of six departments—including Public Works—were assigned distinct responsibilities and worked together from their respective perspectives [Table 3]. The measures were multifaceted and implemented collectively as an integrated effort.

Table 3: Implementation Framework and Division of Key Responsibilities within Shibuya War

Department	Period	Division of Responsibilities
Department of Civil Engineering	Pre-event	Coordination of crowd control measures (outsourcing, coordination by the Secretariat of the Council, coordination with police and railway operators,
	During event	Awareness-raising activities on manners by ward staff, information sharing
	Post-event	Council Office (reporting meeting)
Department of Crisis Management	Pre-event	Coordination of crowd control measures (outsourced), requests for voluntary suspension of alcohol sales, ordinance promulgation, coordination with police, fire department, railway operators, etc., preparation for

	During event	Direction of outsourced crowd control measures, etc.
	Post-event	Attendance at reporting meetings of relevant parties
Department of Digital Services	Pre-event	Public relations and outreach (press conferences, social media, public information magazines, etc.)
	Post-event	Press conference (reporting)
Department of Industry, Tourism and Culture	Pre-event	Display of the Hachiko Square Charter Board and shopping street flags
Department of Health Promotion	Pre-event	Advance notification to stores with a history of street vending activities
	During event	Correction and guidance regarding street vending activities
Department of Environmental Policy	Pre-event	Coordination with contractors (installation of garbage stations)
	During event	Operation of garbage stations during the period, garbage collection, and closure of smoking areas
Source:Source: Materials provided by Shibuya City during the interview, compiled by the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation		

· Core Philosophy: “Shibuya Halloween, Shibuya Pride”

A key highlight of the 2019 Halloween measures was the articulation of the core philosophy, “Shibuya Halloween, Shibuya Pride,” under which the slogan “Let’s Make Halloween a Source of Pride for Shibuya” was promoted. This message embodied a declaration of intent: to cultivate a world-class event powered by the enthusiasm of those who love Shibuya, encouraging everyone gathered around Shibuya Station to act with proper manners and moral awareness. Through Halloween, the aim was to foster city pride and enhance the cultural and symbolic value of Shibuya itself.

This slogan was intended to be widely shared among the public, conveying a vision in which efforts to protect the city and foster civic pride proceed in tandem. By doing so, the aim was to maintain public order while generating urban vibrancy, ultimately guiding Shibuya’s transformation into a mature and globally appealing international city. The idea of making “Shibuya Halloween a source of pride” encompasses not only festive celebrations, but also the collective actions of those who cherish the city. This includes initiatives such as the “Halloween Zero Waste Operation,” launched in 2015, as well as the remarkably clean state of the city on the morning after Halloween—both regarded as integral elements of the event as a whole.

· Outcomes of the Halloween Measures

The year 2019 marked the first implementation of countermeasures under the newly enacted ordinance. Educational campaigns were disseminated through owned media and other platforms, while ward staff conducted patrols and provided guidance, and

private security firms were contracted to support enforcement. These efforts were carried out before, during, and after the event. As a result, street drinking significantly declined. This led to secondary effects such as a reduction in litter—particularly cans and bottles—and the disappearance of public urination and other nuisance behaviors that had previously posed challenges. While some safety and security concerns remained, no major incidents occurred compared to the previous year, and the measures yielded substantial success. Following the event, the mayor declared the intention to “further expand the circle of ‘Shibuya Halloween, Shibuya Pride’” as a guiding direction for future efforts.*¹⁰

Soon after, however, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a new phase for Shibuya’s Halloween countermeasures.

4. Halloween Measures in 2023

4-1 Halloween Measures During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a range of measures were implemented to maintain public order, including nighttime patrols by ward staff, requests by security personnel for people to refrain from drinking alcohol in the streets, the dissemination of educational messages via large screens near the station, and turning off those screens after 8:00 p.m. These efforts effectively prevented major disruptions. While the ward encouraged a “Halloween without gathering” during the pandemic, the mayor later stated that in the post-COVID era, “We hope to create a Halloween where everyone follows manners and rules, allowing order and vibrancy to coexist.”

However, in 2022, on the weekend just before Halloween (the night of October 29), a crowd crush incident occurred in Itaewon, Seoul, resulting in a major disaster with over 150 fatalities. Similar to Halloween in Shibuya, the Itaewon event was an unorganized gathering with no official host. In response to this tragedy, the mayor of Shibuya stated that while those planning to enjoy the city as usual were welcome, people intending to visit specifically for Halloween festivities were urged to refrain from coming to the area.

4-2 Key Features of the Measures Implemented in 2023

In May 2023, COVID-19 was reclassified under Japan’s Infectious Diseases Control Law as a Category V disease. The 2023 Halloween season marked the first since this transition, and a sharp increase in foot traffic—including inbound tourists—was anticipated. A spontaneous influx of visitors, particularly young people and foreigners, was expected to far exceed the levels seen in recent years. With the lifting of behavioral restrictions and business closures, there were growing concerns over crowd behavior fueled by a sense of release following prolonged pandemic-related suppression. During the pandemic, street drinking had become normalized. This not only obstructed

pedestrian flow but also led to problematic behaviors such as littering and noise, disrupting public order and threatening the safety of both residents and visitors. In response, Shibuya Ward introduced a new set of countermeasures beginning in May 2023.

This section focuses on four key measures implemented in 2023 from the perspective of managing both the volume and behavior (quality) of visitors, outlining their content and underlying intent.

① Suppression of Visitor Influx

— Request for Specific Groups to Refrain from Visiting

“Shibuya Is Not a Halloween Event Venue.”

In 2023, the mayor issued a clear and firm message: “Attention! Shibuya is not a Halloween event venue.” This message was intended to discourage people from coming to the public spaces around Shibuya Station during the Halloween period for the purpose of celebrating Halloween. The rationale behind this message was the recognition that the spontaneous formation of large, unregulated crowds—particularly in the absence of an official organizer—poses serious risks to public safety and even human life. Based on this assessment, the ward maintained that measures in the area around Shibuya Station would remain necessary for the foreseeable future.

Figure 1: Call for Visitors to Refrain from Coming — (YouTube Videos in Japanese and English)



While it was not the mayor’s true intention to publicly state “we do not want people to come,” the circumstances necessitated such a request in order to prioritize the safety of both residents and visitors. On September 12—more than a month earlier than usual—the mayor held a press conference urging people to refrain from visiting Shibuya during the Halloween period. To ensure the message reached international audiences, the ward released newly produced multilingual videos on October 5 and held a press conference at the Foreign Correspondents’ Club of Japan, thereby reinforcing the message to foreign tourists as well [Figure 1]. In addition to discouraging visits and

promoting good manners, Shibuya Ward also introduced alternative initiatives such as the use of “Virtual Shibuya,” allowing people to enjoy Halloween without physically visiting the area. These combined efforts aimed to ensure safety and security for all.

The phrase “Shibuya is not a Halloween event venue” was deliberately selected as a strong and unequivocal message in 2023, following deliberations between the ward and the Tokyo Copywriters Club (TCC). It was chosen from among entries submitted to the 2022 “Copywriters Summit.” Although the ward would have preferred not to issue such a stern message, the tragic crowd crush incident that occurred in Itaewon, Seoul, in 2022 compelled officials to prioritize public safety and take proactive measures to avoid the risk of loss of life. For this reason, the phrase was adopted as a necessary expression of precaution. The message was disseminated gradually across the city via shopping street banners and on Shibuya Ward’s Civic Charter Boards, ensuring it reached those planning to visit for Halloween, as well as local residents and regular visitors.

② Suppression of Nuisance Behavior Among Visitors

— Addressing Street Drinking Behavior That Became Prevalent During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Following the reclassification of COVID-19 to Category V, street drinking became increasingly visible. Beginning in May, Shibuya Ward commissioned a private security company to conduct patrols targeting nuisance behaviors [Photos 2 & 3]. In advance of Halloween, the ward declared a “Zero Tolerance for Nuisance Street Drinking” policy and strengthened patrol activities starting September 1. These efforts aimed to create a safer and more orderly environment in preparation for Halloween. In addition, the ward continued its previous initiatives, including requests for voluntary restraint in alcohol sales, garbage control measures, and public awareness campaigns promoting good manners such as proper smoking etiquette. On the night of Halloween, patrols were intensified with additional ward staff and security personnel deployed to monitor the area through the early morning hours.

③ Management of Visitor Flow

— Crowd Guidance Through One-Way Traffic Controls and Related Measures

After the reclassification of COVID-19 to Category V, baseline pedestrian traffic in Shibuya exceeded pre-pandemic levels, raising concerns about even greater congestion during the Halloween period. Among those who visit for Halloween are not only participants in costume, but also spectators who circulate through the area to observe them. This behavior contributes to crowd stagnation. In response, the ward held multiple consultations with the Shibuya Police Department, East Japan Railway Company, and other relevant organizations regarding security measures. At the entrance to Center-gai, barriers were installed to enforce one-way pedestrian flow. At Shibuya

Station, exit access from the Hachikō Gate was restricted, allowing only entry, while outbound foot traffic was rerouted through the Miyamasuzaka Exit to prevent direct access to the plaza in front of the station.

In addition to the presence of the “DJ Police,” ward staff and security personnel called on people to keep moving in order to avoid stagnation. New measures were also introduced, such as the placement of traffic cones to prevent illegally parked “booming cars” and other nuisance vehicles from occupying the area.

④ Temporary Closure of High-Congestion Areas — Installation of Temporary Fencing Around the Hachikō Statue

In coordination with the Shibuya Police Department, East Japan Railway Company, and other relevant agencies, the ward installed temporary fencing around key gathering points, including the area surrounding the Hachikō statue and in front of the Shibuya Ward Civic Charter Board [Photo 4]. By temporarily closing access to these popular tourist landmarks, the aim was to discourage lingering and ensure smoother pedestrian flow. At the same time, the ward encouraged people to visit these sites after the Halloween period had ended.



Photo 2: Patrol Activities (Provided by Shibuya Ward Public Safety Division)



Photo 3: Streetlight Flag Announcing Prohibition of Street Drinking



Photo 4: Temporary Fencing in Front of the Hachikō Statue Plaza

4-3 Outcomes and Results of the Measures

At the peak of the Halloween period in 2023—specifically at 10:00 p.m. on October 31—the number of visitors reached approximately 15,000, about 60% of the 2022 level, and no major disturbances occurred. Due to the rerouting of foot traffic, visitors were unable to access the plaza in front of the Hachikō statue, resulting in lower crowd density compared to previous years. Notably, no acts of vandalism or property damage were reported. The 2023 measures were centered on a strong message: “Shibuya is not a Halloween event venue.” According to the ward, “by implementing policies that encouraged people to refrain from visiting, we were able to suppress the overall number (quantity) of visitors compared to previous years, and as a result, qualitative issues such as damage to shop shutters did not become prominent.” At the same time, officials acknowledged that “even with such measures in place, it is unrealistic to expect street drinking to be entirely eliminated, and a certain number of cases were still observed.” In fact, it was reported that some foreign visitors gathered outside convenience stores located beyond the designated alcohol-restriction zones, where they were seen consuming alcoholic beverages.*¹¹

With regard to street drinking, patrols by ward staff and security personnel were conducted and intensified even outside the periods and hours announced by the mayor under the ordinance. Because such patrols occurred outside the official restriction period, enforcement actions could not be taken directly. Instead, on-site personnel employed creative, indirect methods—for example, reminding individuals by saying, “Please don’t leave alcohol containers on the street”—in an effort to discourage street drinking. These approaches reflect an ongoing process of trial and error in managing the issue.*¹²

5. Conclusion

— The Necessity of Defining and Reaffirming a Clear Vision for the Future

Shibuya Ward’s Halloween measures were implemented by the local government in response to spontaneous crowding and nuisance behavior associated with unorganized gatherings, with the aim of ensuring the safety and security of both residents and visitors. When viewed comprehensively, Shibuya’s approach to Halloween provides several important insights for the future of regional tourism policy in Japan.

• Responsive Management of Emerging and Evolving Problematic Phenomena

As Shibuya Halloween expanded in scale, the nature of the associated issues also evolved. Initially, the problems were qualitative in nature—such as littering, contamination, and other inappropriate behaviors by visitors. However, as crowd sizes grew and an increasing number of international tourists began to join, quantitative issues also became apparent. The demographic of visitors shifted to include not only

costumed participants but also large numbers of spectators drawn to the spectacle itself. With this expansion, nuisance behaviors became more severe, and in some cases led to arrests, indicating a qualitative deterioration in the situation compared to the early years. Moreover, it became evident that Shibuya Halloween was not contributing positively to the local economy. The COVID-19 pandemic further altered public behavior, normalizing street drinking. After the pandemic, the number of visitors exceeded that of 2019, and once again, crowd flow emerged as a major challenge.

As demonstrated above, the nature of problematic phenomena is subject to change over time. In response to such evolving circumstances, Shibuya Ward has implemented a wide range of measures—both quantitative and qualitative—over multiple years, covering the pre-event, event-day, and post-event phases of Halloween. In moments of crisis, such as the overturning of a mini truck in 2018 and the crowd crush incident in Itaewon in 2022, the ward swiftly issued public messages and revised its measures accordingly. In 2018, for example, Shibuya promptly established a study committee and enacted and enforced a local ordinance at remarkable speed.

At each critical juncture, the ward has skillfully combined responsive management with preventive strategies to address diverse and complex issues. Internally, a cross-departmental structure has been established within the ward office, enabling coordinated efforts that are also reflected and adapted creatively on the ground.

• Defining a Clear Vision for the Future and Making Decisions Aligned with It

At the foundation of Shibuya Ward's Halloween measures lies its unwavering commitment to the core philosophy of "Diversity and Inclusion" and the clearly articulated future vision of "A City That Turns Differences into Strengths: Shibuya Ward." These principles were derived through a globally oriented perspective, grounded in the unique characteristics and local identity of Shibuya as a place. Measures and target groups are determined based on whether they contribute to the realization of this vision.

For example, in 2017, Shibuya Ward emphasized that "leveraging the excitement is part of what makes Shibuya unique," and expressed the view that "it would be ideal to create order while collaborating with other districts to promote regional revitalization." This indicates a clear intention to harness the energy of the diverse individuals drawn to Shibuya as a driving force for urban development. In 2018, by contrast, the ward explicitly stated that even those who did not commit crimes but violated rules and public manners were "people who do not love Shibuya or share in the desire to make this city something to be proud of." In doing so, the ward made a deliberate decision—grounded in its future vision—not to include such individuals as part of the community contributing to the cultivation of city pride and the enhancement of Shibuya's value. While the specific measures and messages may vary depending on the issues and conditions at hand, the foundation for decision-making consistently lies in the ward's envisioned future. Recent Halloween countermeasures have focused on restrictions and

control. However, whether to hit the brakes (regulation) or step on the accelerator (promotion)—and to what extent to slow down or speed up—every response must be judged and decided in light of the future vision that serves as the steering wheel.*¹³

Finally, Shibuya Ward continues to advance toward its goal of becoming a “mature international city” that stands alongside global urban centers such as London, Paris, and New York—renowned for their vibrancy and international appeal. On May 31, 2024, Shibuya signed a sister city agreement with the City of Honolulu, a multicultural hub where diverse ethnic groups and cultures coexist. The partnership is expected to foster knowledge exchange and collaboration across a wide range of fields, including tourism, sports and wellness, diversity and inclusion, world-class art, environmental conservation, music and fashion, cultural heritage, and startup support.

Furthermore, on June 17, the Shibuya Ward Assembly unanimously passed an amendment to the “Ordinance on Ensuring a Safe and Secure Environment in the Area Surrounding Shibuya Station,” extending the restriction on street drinking to a year-round basis. The designated restriction area will also be expanded, with the revised ordinance set to take effect on October 1 [Table 4]. As Shibuya’s municipal government continues to take proactive steps, it is hoped that these ongoing efforts will contribute to the realization of the ward’s future vision. Moving forward, close attention will continue to be paid to the evolving status of Shibuya’s Halloween measures.*¹⁴

Acknowledgments

This research was made possible through the cooperation of the Public Safety Division, Crisis Management and Disaster Prevention Department; the Planning and Management Division, Public Works Department; and the Public Relations and Communications Division, Digital Services Department of Shibuya Ward. We would like to express our sincere gratitude for their support, particularly in facilitating the interview survey.

Overview of the Interview Survey

Date: Friday, March 8, 2024, 11:00–12:00

Location: Shibuya Ward Office

Interviewers: Kentaro Goto, Shinichi Goto
(Japan Travel Bureau Foundation)

Amendment to the Ordinance on Securing a Safe and Comfortable Environment in the Shibuya Station Area

In response to the ongoing issue of habitual street drinking in public spaces and requests from the local community, Shibuya City revised the ordinance in 2024. Following the change that extended the restriction period to year-round, the criteria for lifting such restrictions have also been stipulated in the regulations.

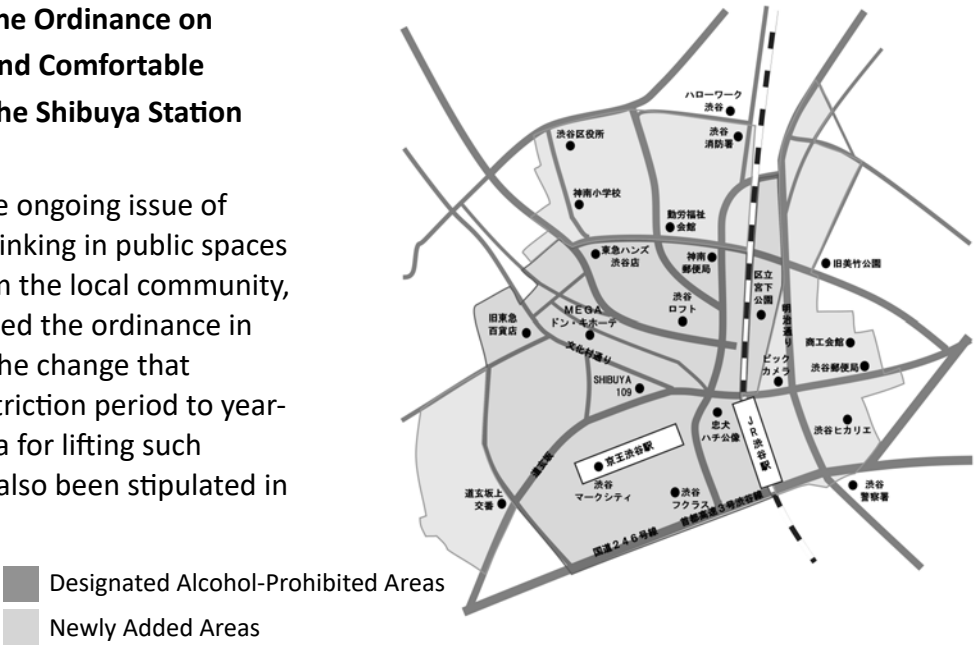


Table 4 : Overview of Amendments to the Ordinance and Enforcement Regulations	
Area	• Addition of "Maruyamacho" to the Shibuya Station surrounding area (Article 2) • Restriction areas for alcohol consumption: see the figure above (details in Supplementary Table of Article 3 of the Regulations)
Responsibilities	• Wording change from “visitors” to “visitors, etc.” (both residents and visitors) • Revision of their responsibilities to: “must cooperate with the measures implemented by the Ward” (Articles 3 and 5, etc.)
Period and Hours	• The restriction period for alcohol consumption has been changed from “specific periods such as Halloween and New Year’s Eve countdowns” to year-round (Article 6). • The restricted hours are “from 6:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m. the following day” (Article 3, Paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Regulations). * The Ward Mayor may, when deemed particularly necessary, designate specific dates to modify the above time frame. • In light of year-round restrictions, the Ward Mayor may “lift the restriction on alcohol consumption by designating specific dates, times, and areas deemed particularly necessary” (Article 6, Paragraph 2). • Lifting of restrictions is permitted within the restricted area and time frame in the following cases: (1) When an event is organized, sponsored, co-sponsored, or supported by the Ward. (2) When an event is organized within the restricted area by a neighborhood association, shopping district association, or a comparable local organization. (3) When otherwise deemed particularly necessary by the Ward Mayor. (Article 4 of the Regulations)
Guidance	• The Ward Mayor is authorized not only to provide guidance to cease violations of the alcohol consumption restrictions (Article 6), but also to instruct individuals to stop acts that violate the provisions of Article 7 (Article 8).
Source: Materials provided by Shibuya City, compiled by the Japan Travel Bureau Foundation (JTBF)	

Notes

* 1: UN Tourism (2024). “International tourism reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2024.”

<https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourism-reached-97-of-pre-pandemic-levels-in-the-first-quarter-of-2024>

* 2: Goto, Kentaro (2020). “Yufuin: The Balance Between Daily Life and Tourism in a Lifestyle-Oriented Destination.” In *Post-Overtourism: Tourism Strategies for Revitalizing Neighborhoods*, pp. 171–192.

* 3: Shibuya Ward Assembly Meeting Records, FY2019 Regular Session (4th), November 22 – Record No. 14. See also Shibuya Ward Industry and Tourism Vision (formulated April 2020), which includes among its 30 policy measures two related to public etiquette awareness for visitors and overtourism countermeasures.

* 4: Field surveys were conducted on September 9 (prior to the posting of Civic Charter Boards), October 22 (prior to the start of the Halloween period), and October 31 (before drinking restrictions took effect). The interview survey was conducted on March 8, 2024.

* 5: Shibuya Ward Implementation Plan 2020, p. 132. The plan states: “The multiplication of cultures will accelerate further. Shibuya Ward promotes urban development as a cultural scramble crossing that triggers such multiplication.”

* 6: Shibuya Ward Implementation Plan 2017, p. 59. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and before the 2018 light truck incident, the Halloween Measures Study Committee in 2019 considered the possibility of officially hosting the event. Options included holding it in Yoyogi Park; however, this was deemed impractical due to the distance from Center-gai, complex pedestrian routes, narrow streets, and the reality that crowds would still return to the Shibuya Scramble area. Unlike typical events, Halloween spans multiple days, making continuous crowd control difficult.

* 7: Local shopping districts reported being unable to operate during Halloween peak hours, with some shops forced to close their shutters. Sales fell to one-third of normal levels, indicating that Halloween did not contribute economically to the area.

* 8: Shibuya Ward Assembly Meeting Records, FY2019 Regular Session (2nd), June 6 – Record No. 06.

* 9: While expansion of the restricted area was proposed as a revision, there were also discussions emphasizing the need to keep the area as limited as possible.

* 10: Shibuya Ward Assembly Meeting Records, FY2019 Regular Session (4th), November 21 – Record No. 13.

* 11: Based on the interview survey conducted on March 8, 2024.

* 12: Based on the interview survey conducted on March 8, 2024.

* 13: In discussions on overtourism, the question is often raised as to whether tourism policy is pressing the accelerator or the brake. However, in the author’s view, such actions should always be assessed against the guiding vision, which serves as the “steering wheel.” Over time, it is natural that policy may sometimes accelerate and other times decelerate.

* 14: Although the Halloween measures are intended to ensure the safety and security of both residents and visitors, the actual targets of the measures are mainly those who visit for Halloween or to observe costumed participants. It is reported that ward residents themselves rarely participate in Halloween festivities. Since the ordinance’s enactment, concerns have been raised by the mayor, ward assembly, and residents about the use of public funds for this purpose, highlighting it as an ongoing policy issue.

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About Us

This Foundation initially began in 1912 as the Japan Tourist Bureau tasked with attracting foreign visitors to Japan, and became focused on research and surveys in 1963 with the separation of the sales division (the current JTB Corp). The organization was subsequently restructured as a Public Interest Incorporated Foundation in 2012, and received designation as an academic research institution from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2016. As one of the few think tanks and consulting agencies in Japan specializing in tourism, this Foundation accepts commissions for a variety of tasks from the national government, local public organizations, and public institutions to help promote tourism in Japan and at the national and local level. Furthermore, our non-profit projects include the hosting of seminars and symposiums and the publication of books on research results, centering on the promotion of independent research on travel and tourism from a variety of perspectives, as well as the operation of the Library of Tourism Culture, a library on travel and tourism containing over 60,000 volumes. As a Public Interest Incorporated Foundation tasked with the promotion of tourism culture, we contribute to the realization of an abundant society through tourism by conducting a variety of surveys and research programs.

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