Chapter in an edited volume

Powerful ways of (not) knowing New Urban Tourism conflicts

Thin problematisation as limitation for tourism governance in Berlin

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Challenging the ways of knowing conflict-laden tourism

Until recently tourism seemed to be an ever-growing phenomenon. The effects of a tourism overload sparked a so-called 'overtourism' debate. Even if today, a COVID-19 induced 'undertourism' captures lots of attention, both debates express a dimension of conflict and prompt to reconsider urban tourism governance. Indeed, research dealing with "the debate on overtourism" (Oskam 2020, p. 3) includes harsh and reasonable governance criticism. According to Dodds and Butler (2019, p. 10) one "key enabler of overtourism is the attitude, or mindset, of companies, governments, [and] marketing organisations […] that favour growth above all else". From a political-economic perspective, the governance of conflict-laden urban tourism is often discussed as a manifestation of an entrepreneurial or post-political urban governance (e.g. Novy and Colomb 2019). The chapter at hand offers a different perspective. Instead of questioning if and why current modes of tourism governance are determined by a growth-focused mindset (which could be discussed as expression of neoliberalism), it is detailed *how* destination governance actors *frame* frictions associated with New Urban Tourism.

Assuming that the construction of governance problems is linked to the availability of solutions, it is relevant to better understand how New Urban Tourism problems are known or even denied by governance actors (e.g. destination management organisations (DMOs), administrative bodies responsible for tourism, mayors). Not saying that better knowledge does guarantee better governance, the distinct governance habits of knowing conflict-laden New Urban Tourism are presumed to limit or extend governance options. Therefore, the chapter asks: How exactly do the governance actors of destinations render tourism as a governance issue doable? More specifically, how far do distinct governance habits of knowing conflict-laden New Urban Tourism (powerfully) predetermine governance options?

Using Berlin as a case, generic governance techniques of problematising conflict-laden tourism are empirically reconstructed. Berlin represents an informative case as New Urban Tourism conflicts have been intensively debated in Germany's capital for the last decade. Additionally, Berlin is a city-state in the German federal system. This makes it interesting to ask how actors involved in Berlin's destination governance (i.e. the public–private DMO visitBerlin, see below) use their comparatively extensive institutional power to frame New Urban Tourism conflicts. Building on document analysis, the text empirically shows that the power of (not) knowing urban tourism conflicts turns up in what I call – and conceptually develop in this paper – 'thin problematisations' mobilised by governance actors involved in tourism issues. As a conclusion, I address the question of how to challenge such simplifications academically and in practice-related ways.

Thinking governance problems and solutions relationally

The key conceptual assumption guiding my case study is that knowing how to reduce the complexity of New Urban Tourism conflicts represents an essential and necessary practice accomplished by destination governance actors. In contrast to "good governance" research taking tourism problems as given in advance, this piece builds on stances pointing to the construction and contestation of problems as powerful aspects of urban governance. Basically, it is assumed that problems and adequate solutions co-emerge in a mutually constitutive manner.

Regarding the governance of urban tourism, Novy and Colomb (2017, p. 6) pointedly stress that "the process of defining, conceptualising and measuring tourism […] itself" needs to be regarded as "deeply political". They argue that it is, in particular, the tourism industries' view on tourism (in terms of hotel guest statistics etc.) which limits the understanding of tourism as it neglects, for example, other temporary visitors like day-trippers or tourists visiting friends or relatives. On a more general level, Hall (2011) argues in a similar way. According to him (2011, p. 437) the "shift in approach in the tourism policy literature […] from the notion of government to that of governance" implies analytically taking into account even "the definition of policy problems" (ibid.). Referring to Bachrach and Baratz (1962), Hall (2009) also reminds us taking into account a second face of power in tourism governance settings: to consider the possibility that certain potentially controversial issues might not even enter the tourism governance arena as they are actively forced back before they get discussed at all.

Hence, analysing the governance of New Urban Tourism conflicts starts with an explicit analytical focus on the construction and contestation of problems and solutions. The notion of governance is used primarily as a lens to analyse "the actors and interests that make urban policy decisions, set and control agendas, define problems and propose solutions" (McCann 2017, p. 314). The case study at hand focuses on actors involved in destination governance at federal state level. As a city-state in the German federal system, Berlin has a two-tier government system (a citywide administration and 12 local boroughs). Actors involved in destination governance at federal state level first and foremost involve the DMO visitBerlin, the Senate Department for Economics, the Senate Chancellery (= the office of the governing mayor) and the House of Representatives. Within Berlin's tourism governance setting, the DMO visitBerlin (organised as public-private partnership) is often assumed to be *the* authority responsible for issues relating to tourism marketing and development (Novy 2017). At the same time, the Senate Department for Economics is a powerful player, since it is as the city's administrative body responsible for tourism, authorised to issue directives towards visitBerlin.

As mentioned above, it is presumed that ways of knowing *doable* problems and *viable* solutions in respect to conflict-laden urban tourism play a key role in evidence-based destination governance processes. As a crucial aspect of tourism-related policymaking, processes of measuring, interpreting or also denying tourism conflicts are embedded in institutional arrangements (polity) and processes of decision-making (politics) alike. These far-flung knowledge processes are assumed to be necessarily selective and reductionistic as the messiness of the world out there needs to be somehow organised (AutorInnenkollektiv 2010). However, rendering New Urban Tourism conflicts doable is not limited to one single (e.g. statistical) logic of knowing. As Valverde (2011, p. 277) convincingly shows, such necessarily reductionistic knowledge production in urban governance involves "epistemologically hybrid" approaches. The "pragmatic approach" of urban governance builds on "old and new gazes, premodern and modern knowledge formats, in a nonzero-sum manner and in unpredictable and shifting combinations" (ibid., p. 281). Considering these conceptual thoughts, the chapter aims to empirically pin down how exactly New Urban Tourism conflicts in Berlin are powerfully constructed by the destination governance actors involved.

Evidence from Berlin: rendering New Urban Tourism conflicts doable

Berlin represents an informative case to study destination governance habits of (not) knowing tourism frictions. Conflicts of – in particular – New Urban Tourism have been intensively debated in Berlin since 2010. The touristic search for urban experiences off the beaten track is a vital feature of the city's tourism. In various inner-city neighbourhoods, a broad range of disputes have arisen (see e.g. Novy 2017, Sommer and Kip 2019, Müller et al. 2019), mainly concerning (retail) gentrification, noise and the expansion of tourist accommodations. Nevertheless, governance processes of knowing (defining, measuring, denying etc.) conflictladen urban tourism have remained under-researched (with a few exceptions, e.g. Sommer and Helbrecht 2017, Füller et al. 2018), as has the relational governmental *construction* of doable tourism problems and practicable solutions. The piece at hand aims to address this gap in research.

Regarding methods, this chapter mainly builds on an analysis of policy documents, assessing 34 policy documents (2011–2016) of the DMO visitBerlin, of the Senate Department for Economics and of the Senate Chancellery as well as media statements of representatives of the latter. This allowed capturing the institutionally objectified knowledge produced by Berlin's major institutions responsible for tourism governance. In the following, three empirically reconstructable governance techniques of problematising conflict-laden urban tourism are discussed: interpreting conflicts in the media (see "Interpreting conflicts in the media"), knowing the problem perception of residents statistically (see "Knowing problem perceptions statistically") and regulating

problem-conclusion-combinations conceptually (see "Regulating problem-conclusion-combinations on paper"). They represent crucial ways of (not) knowing conflict-laden tourism.

Interpreting conflicts in the media

Framing urban tourism conflicts in the context of Berlin's success as a destination is a well-established destination governance approach to tame tourism problems. This framing builds on the city's evolution towards a "tolerant metropolis" (visitBerlin 2014, p. 3, transl. by the author) with overnight stays "having increased fourfold since 1990" (visitBerlin 2016, p. 7, transl. by the author). The development is qualified as a "catch up process" (visitBerlin 2014, p. 3), which Berlin has undergone since 1990, when the socialist German Democratic Republic merged with the Federal Republic of Germany and Berlin ceased to be a divided city. This narrative is mainly reproduced through media statements by destination governance actors. On closer examination the following argumentative patterns structure the contextualisation of tourism conflicts within the successful urban development trajectory.

First, the success of Berlin as city/destination is framed as a comeback story. According to this narrative, Berlin is allegedly in the process of "swinging back in the normal state of a world city" (e.g. visitBerlin 2020). I understand this contextualization as reactivation of a myth which has been mobilised again and again for imagining the city's future – for example after German reunification. In the 1990s, as the German Democratic Republic (colloquially: East Germany) became part of the Federal Republic of Germany (colloquially: West Germany), the formerly divided Berlin was reunited into a single city. Back then, the revival of an imagined Berlin was guided by the idea of becoming a world city and service sector metropolis (Farías 2005). In the 2000s the successful future of the city was connected with the idea of becoming a cosmopolitically diverse – and therefore competitive – metropolis (Lanz 2011). Regarding the contextualisation of tourism conflicts, the world city comeback myth has a particular function. Following Farías (2005), one could claim that the "myth works […] as a kind of urban memory which does not consist of verifiable historical events and dates, but of images which are used for the apprehension and assessment of current processes" (Farías 2005, p. 22, transl. by the author). In the case at hand, the world city comeback myth serves as a narrative which naturalises ever-growing tourism and turns concomitant conflicts into a minor side effect.

Moreover, the narrative of Berlin's world city comeback resonates with a reading of tourism conflicts which substantially builds on a dominant 'public opinion' in favour of tourism. From the outset, growing tourism and concomitant conflicts haven been dubbed a matter of customisation. According to this claim, Berliners will have to get used to the city's growing popularity as "the place to be" (visitBerlin 2010, visitBerlin

2019). As myths naturalise a certain status quo as irrevocably given (Assmann 1992), the world city comeback seems to leave no choice; "nothing else remains to be done but to accept the role [as world city]" (visitBerlin 2015, transl. by the author). Being proud of so many visitors, a former mayor of Berlin thwarted those who criticised tourism conflicts like noise, residential and commercial gentrification, etc.: "All attempts of some parts of town to talk problems into happening are disconnected from reality" (Wowereit 2012, transl. by the author). Thus, regarding the interpretation of the debate about tourism conflicts, destination managers and politicians (at least at the beginning of the past decade) appealed to the relaxed attitude of a cosmopolitan majority. Hence, the conclusion that no further destination governance action is required to solve tourism-related problems is at least implied.

A further problem interpretation still to be found in media statements until recently is the *argumentum ad hominem* expounding tourism critique as something which feeds on resentment. Corresponding with the results of Holm (2015) one can observe that in public discourses tourism critique is often tied to xenophobia and unwillingness to move ahead. So, critical voices regarding tourism externalities are attributed to a 'backward' minority which aims to stick with one's kind (visitBerlin 2019). Or alternatively, tourism critique is directly accused of being intolerant and xenophobic (visitBerlin 2011a).

Taking into consideration the above-mentioned problematisations, the question is how they resonate with the conclusions. I claim that the myth of the world city comeback, as well as the arguments referring to cosmopolitan majorities and 'backward' minorities, narrowed down the possibility of discussing tourism conflicts. The need for a "debate on principles" (visitBerlin 2011b, transl. by the author) has been literally refused (ibid.). At least in the first half of the past decade, this relativisation of tourism problems and critique facilitated non-decisionmaking on how urban tourism conflicts might be addressed.

Knowing problem perceptions statistically

Measuring attitudes towards urban tourism represents an established market research practice of DMOs. As a variant of governance by numbers, the statistical monitoring of attitudes towards tourism is understood as a "technology of persuasion" (Heintz 2008, p. 117). The statistical knowledge produced by destination managers endows them with considerable interpretational power. Statistical data is assumed to be eminently robust as it is comparatively difficult to prove numbers wrong. The so-called tourist acceptance survey (commissioned yearly by the DMO visitBerlin among Berliners, from 2012 to 2019) consisted of six questions. Four questions address aspects of tourism commonly thought of as positive (e.g. advantages of tourism for Berliners), two questions ask if and why tourism is perceived as annoying. The document analysis

rendered visible that numerous policy documents contain references to the statistically proven sympathy towards tourism. Accordingly, it is exposed, for example, that a vast majority is "proud that people from all over the world visit their city" (visitBerlin 2013, p. 13, transl. by the author); or it is stressed that "84 percent of the Berliners think that they are good hosts" (Senate Department for Economics 2016, p. 2). All in all, one could say that the statistically produced knowledge prompts an interpretation of tourism conflicts which is "zooming in approval towards tourism" while simultaneously "zooming out the perception of problems" (Sommer and Helbrecht 2017, p. 165). The results of the survey might be representative, but only for the favourable scope of analysis defined in advance by visitBerlin.

Recalling the conceptual assumption that problem interpretations and conclusions/solutions co-emerge, how does this work with statistic-based ways of representing tourism acceptance? Statistical knowledge is used to numerically underpin media statements arguing that only a small minority of residents has a problem with tourism – while on the other hand a vast majority of the Berliners is displayed as being proud of the visitors and sees the benefits of tourism. Highlighting the approval towards tourism implies that tourism critique is just a matter of some parochial reactionists. Moreover, the acceptance numbers helped to justify the course of action regarding the management of conflict-prone tourism. This could be exemplified with the way in which a distinct concept for dealing with increasing tourism pressure (proposed by an opposition party in 2013) was declared not necessary. A decision-maker of the Senate Department for Economics is cited in a memo of the House of Representatives in the following way: "As these measures [regarding acceptance maintenance] work, which is proven by the high acceptance of 87 percent, no new concepts are needed" (Senate Department for Economics 2015, p. 52, transl. by the author). Third, it can be observed that the statistical findings trigger idiosyncratic solutions. The statistical result that "only 62 percent of the respondents […] assess tourism […] to be an important economic factor" (Senate Department for Economics 2016, p. 11) was read by destination managers as a reason to better market the economic benefit of tourism towards Berliners. Assuming that knowing the benefits of tourism would increase acceptance towards tourism (e.g. Senate Department for Economics 2016) resulted in a media campaign. It contained advertisements in local newspapers depicting the economic effects of tourism in combination with an acknowledgement of gratitude addressing Berliners in their role of hosting so many visitors.

Regulating problem-conclusion-combinations on paper

As indicated above, statistical knowledge is actively produced to construct acceptance and goodwill towards tourism. This served to deny the need for a new concept paper explicitly dealing with conflict-laden tourism. Instead of a concept, just a short "report

on tourism acceptance" (Senate Department for Economics 2014) was delivered in 2014. In the following, two telling examples regarding the way conflictive tourism was known in concept work, are depicted.

The first example concerns Berlin's official tourism strategy of 2011 (which was replaced in 2018). It is interesting to note that the conflictive side of tourism was already addressed within the 'Tourism Concept 2011+' (Senate Department for Economics 2011, transl. by the author). It reports that tourism partly leads to phenomena of overuse and conflicts compromising the quality of life of residents (Senate Department for Economics 2011). The conclusion regarding the future development of tourism was "that a tourism-friendly development in accordance New Urban Tourism conflicts with the interest of residents" (ibid., p. 23, transl. by the author) needs to be aspired to. However, besides the aim of better managing tour-bus traffic, no tangible measures were listed to mitigate conflicts. As Novy (2017, p. 64) points out, the "extensive references to issues such as overcrowding […] and the need to address them" did not make it into the final version of the concept. Problematisation of conflict-prone tourism was at best indistinct and the accountability of the city's destination management regarding the handling of tourism problems remained vague.

The second example of regulating problem-conclusion-combinations on paper shows how concept work was replaced by a far more noncommittal *reporting work*. As part of the parliamentary resolution concerning the federal state's budget for 2014/15, in 2013 the municipal government was required to create a coordinated concept and recommendations for action – with the goal of preserving acceptance of tourism (Budget Committee of Berlin's House of Representatives 2013). Instead of developing a concept comprising a schedule of responsibilities, the Department for Economics produced a short report of ten pages. It concluded that a "distinct concept for acceptance preservation" is not "useful" (Senate Department for Economics 2014, p. 10). For not containing a schedule of responsibilities (saying who is going to do what until when) this report was, unsurprisingly, heavily criticised by the oppositional Green Party (Ludwig 2015). Their proposal to produce a more detailed concept was declined – as mentioned above – with the explanation that the existing measures did work – which was, according to the argument, proven by the high acceptance of tourism of 87% (Senate Department for Economics 2015). Finally, this so-called acceptance report was updated yearly until 2017. Taking this example into consideration, it can be recorded that the yearly production of an acceptance report needs to be understood as a way of knowing conflict-prone tourism – albeit without increasing the destination governance accountabilities.

Both examples show that procedures of producing strategy papers (or solely reports) are – in this case – used without entrenching clear conclusions regarding conflictive

tourism. In the first example (Tourism Strategy 2011+) conclusions and problem descriptions have been wiped out in the course of the concept development. In the second example, a non-binding report replaced a concept paper, potentially more binding. It needs to be noted here that also the latest tourism strategy from 2018, which is explicitly committed to issues of sustainable urban tourism, is not making transparent which measures are pursued, until when, by whom.

The power of (not) knowing urban tourism conflicts

Berlin's destination governance combines strikingly different ways of knowing and contesting conflict-prone tourism. In this chapter, three empirically reconstructable techniques of arranging doable tourism problems and practicable solutions are depicted: media-specific, statistical and conceptual ('paper work') techniques of knowing conflictive tourism.[1]

Partly supplementing and contradicting each other, the mentioned techniques effectively structure the "political-epistemological space" (Lemke 2000, p. 2) in which tourism problems and adequate solutions can co-emerge. It has been revealed how the identified problems are intimately linked to the availability of solutions. Marketing the economic benefits of tourism (assuming thereby to increase acceptance of tourism), for example, only seems to be a plausible solution against the backdrop of distinct problem interpretations, in this case numerical acceptance data. At the same time, acceptance statistics justified (at least at the beginning of the debate about tourism conflicts) not governing tourism conflicts. The myths and the arguments discrediting tourism critique must be read as attempts to stifle the debate about how to deal with tourism and accompanying conflicts.

Taking the empirical findings into consideration, the destination management techniques of (not) knowing urban tourism are powerful. The inferred claim is that the latter proceedings are consequential to the extent that they paralyse a more sustainable urban tourism governance. Keeping down the issue of dealing with conflict-prone tourism requires active and influential work. Thus, the claim that ways of (not) knowing tourism conflicts are powerful is twofold. First, it refers to the destination governance capability of simplifying tourism conflicts and matching them with solutions. Along the lines of Scott's (1998) notion of 'thin simplifications', one could argue that 'thin problematisations' of tourism conflicts facilitate what Bachrach and Baratz (1962, p. 952) dubbed active "nondecisionmaking". According to Holmes (1988,

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[1] Regarding further destination management techniques for knowing conflictive tourism, see my PhD thesis, which this chapter partly builds upon (Sommer 2021). Notably, continuously advanced participatory discussion formats to negotiate issues of conflictive tourism (i.e. creative workshops, planned resident advisory board) must be mentioned here. These widely non-binding participatory formats only seem to be reasonable when tourism conflicts are assumed to result primarily from "communication problems" (Senate Department for Economics 2014 p. 2, transl. by the author).

p. 22, cited from Hall 2009, p. 4) this "allows political actors, organisations and collectives to 'leave selected topics undiscussed for what they consider their own advantage'". Thus, the destination governance accountability to act upon the problematised conflicts remains vague.

Second, the claim that there are potent ways of *not* knowing tourism conflicts builds on the observation that the knowledge production about tourism conflicts does not seem to make any progress. However, I argue that a more detailed understanding of tourism conflicts represents a precondition to manage tourism conflicts better. To give some examples regarding persistent gaps in knowledge: at the time of writing, the federal state of Berlin did not possess data regarding the numerical and geographical development of hotels within the last decade (Senate Department for Urban Development and Housing 2019); the status quo of holiday apartments and short term rentals can only be estimated; the mapping of retail, gastronomy and service industries is still not more than a goal mentioned in Berlin's tourism strategy paper from 2018. Nevertheless, to preserve, for example, a balanced mix of uses or to build additional accommodation facilities within residential areas in a sustainable way – which is the alleged goal – requires better knowledge of the gradual change and development of tourism.

One explanation for the somehow 'fixed' ways of (not) knowing urban tourism conflicts can be hypothesised. Since the public-private DMO visitBerlin and the Senate Department for Economic Development are political organisations, they have "a bias in favor of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict (Schattschneider 1960, p. 71, quoted from Bachrach and Baratz 1962, emphasis in the original). Widely assumed to be Berlin's major destination governance actors, visitBerlin and the Senate Department for Economics are – willingly or not – in charge of addressing New Urban Tourism conflicts. However, regarding matters of tourism development, the organisational bias of visitBerlin and the Senate Department for Economics still seems to be in favour of destination marketing issues. This hypothesis can be underpinned by the observation that many attempts to handle tourism conflicts in terms of urban development approaches take years to get conducted or are abandoned. To give some examples: the hotel development plan first mentioned as badly needed in 2013 has not been realised until now; the idea of establishing a tourism advisory board constituted by residents was already conceptualised in 2015 – the founding of the advisory board is still in the making; the conceptual ideas for a spatial tourism development guideline (developed for the first time in 2007 by the Senate Department for Urban Development) apparently have been abandoned.

Summarising this somewhat provisional explanation could look like this: the power of (not) knowing urban tourism conflicts turns up in the various thin problematisations

mobilised by destination governance actors to approach tourisminduced problems. To align doable problems and viable solutions, the municipal destination governance builds on different knowledge formats (statistics, media statements, myths, concept work). Maintaining thin problematisations of tourism conflicts limits a more far-reaching understanding and governance of (possibly unsolvable) contradictions of New Urban Tourism.

How to better know tourism conflicts

For a further discussion of academic and more practice-related ways of knowing (New Urban) Tourism problems, it needs to be accepted that the complexity of New Urban Tourism inevitably needs to be reduced in order to be known/governed. This also implies reflecting upon critical stances often articulated in tourism research regarding the allegedly flawed governance of urban 'overtourism'. It does not move things forward to denounce deficits of urban tourism governance with abstract explanations (e.g. neoliberalism, post-politics) and most of the wellintentioned good governance advice articulated by tourism scholars fizzles out in the real world. It is also clear that more (detailed) knowledge about urban tourism externalities does not guarantee better governance.

Hence, it is worthwhile challenging thin problematisations of tourism governance. Equally, it seems interesting to ask how it is possible for researchers and destination managers to get in touch about the question of *how* we know New Urban Tourism and its problems. How is it possible to mutually increase the complexity and variety of problem constructions?

Especially against the backdrop of recent attempts to divide the discourse about the future of tourism in pro-growth vs. growth-limiting positions (critically discussed by Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020), it seems to be essential to strengthen the diversity of applied and academic perspectives. Without being limited from the outset by the imperative to find solutions, transdisciplinary research co-operations between (tourism) scholars, destination managers, planners, lawyers, politicians and residents could help to unlock analytical potentials between idiosyncratic ways of knowing New Urban Tourism conflicts. To jointly venture into "co-laborative" (Niewöhner 2014) research co-operations with epistemic partners from tourism research and urban practice might help to gradually establish a more complex understanding of tourism frictions. Participatory discussion formats, as recently developed by Berlin's destination managers for example, could serve as excellent starting points. Gaining multiperspectivity and jointly compiling knowledge seems to be a better option than relapsing again and again into simplifications regarding (New Urban) Tourism conflicts.

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