

# **An Analysis of Resident Involvement in and Attitudes Toward Tourism and Management Implications for Asheville, North Carolina**

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## Abstract

As human populations and the ability to travel increases, tourism destinations are experiencing overtourism. This is when a tourist destination is subjected to a number of visitors that decreases the quality of life for its residents and negatively impacts the location. These destinations often receive an influx of new businesses that, along with visitors, are recipients of benefits that come with the tourism industry while residents bear more costs, such as increased cost of living, destruction of the environment, and a negatively impacted job market. A mixed methods study was conducted in Spring 2023, consisting of a literature review, key informant interview, participant observation of Asheville tourism stakeholder meetings, and analysis of United States resident surveys and destination stewardship councils. One of the key findings was that the main hindrance to success in tourism management was maintaining momentum. For instance, destination stewardship councils and volunteer and community organizations struggle with consistent project timelines and meeting goals. Tourism destinations that conducted resident surveys on attitudes and overtourism had created goals, but struggled to follow through. Successful destinations were in regular contact with their partners and had high community engagement. Those that prioritized resident viewpoints in decision making and planning processes had favorable outcomes. To create a tourism industry that reflects the needs of its host location and avoids overtourism, it is recommended to form destination stewardship councils that consider both the tourism industry and the wellbeing of the destination and its residents -- instead of destination marketing organizations, which cater to potential visitors. Using surveys to gauge resident priorities helps identify what roles and actions residents want government entities to

adopt as well as what actions residents are willing to take to support a destination with sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** sustainable tourism, demarketing, destination stewardship council, destination marketing organization, Doxey's Irridex, visitor carrying capacity

## 1.0 Introduction and Literature Review

Tourism is a driving force of economies around the world, existing and emerging as a main source of income for popular destinations and their burgeoning or already well-known attractions. As the rate of tourism increases, prominent tourist destinations can become overwhelmed by high amounts of visitors. The high tourism numbers create an increasing strain on the city or destination, subsequently leading to a state of overtourism. Overtourism is defined as “the impact of tourism on a destination, or parts thereof, that excessively influences perceived quality of life of citizens and/or quality of visitors experiences in a negative way.”<sup>1</sup> Without intentional planning in place, areas can be devastated by human traffic, changing into an area unrecognizable from the once thriving tourist location<sup>2</sup>.

Located in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the city of Asheville's popularity has been rising steadily, with the number of visitors increasing every year. With over ten million tourists visiting every year<sup>3</sup> in comparison to a population of over 94,000<sup>4</sup> the issue is apparent. The high disparity between the number of visitors in Asheville and the number of residents results in problems such as increased costs of living, overcrowding, and destruction of natural areas and culture<sup>5</sup>. Overtourism is not a new concept to Asheville residents, who have frequently voiced their concerns for overtourism<sup>6</sup>, speaking out against unchecked growth and management practices, such as the amount of hotels<sup>7</sup>. As of 2023, tourism in Asheville is managed by the Buncombe County Tourism Destination Authority, also known as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO).

To ensure that these areas can sustain visitors without harming resident quality of life or creating irrevocable damage to their environment, cities have created groups known as Destination Stewardship Councils (DSC). Prior to the conception of DSCs, cities would employ DMOs, which remain as the main form of tourism management. When evaluating a city's approach to handling tourism, it is important to know the difference between DSCs and DMOs, which I researched and give examples of in my results section.

Another way communities work to prevent and counteract the effects of overtourism is through resident involvement, creating volunteer and community organizations (VCO) and the use of resident surveys. The creation of VCOs occurs because of a widely held passion of community members. They are organizations created and maintained by volunteers and can vary in size and mission. A VCO is private and self-governing, without government oversight. Resident surveys are used by both DSCs and DMOs to monitor residents' attitudes towards their cities' tourism industry and how it is being managed<sup>8</sup>. Data collected can be used in the creation of a tourism management plan and to measure the success of tourism initiatives<sup>9</sup>.

The overall research goal was to develop an understanding of overtourism's effects and how overtourism affects residents. I analyzed tourism techniques used both in and outside of Asheville, North Carolina to identify effective techniques used in creating a sustainable tourism industry; understand how residents could be involved in tourism management; and to identify commonly held concerns by residents about tourism.

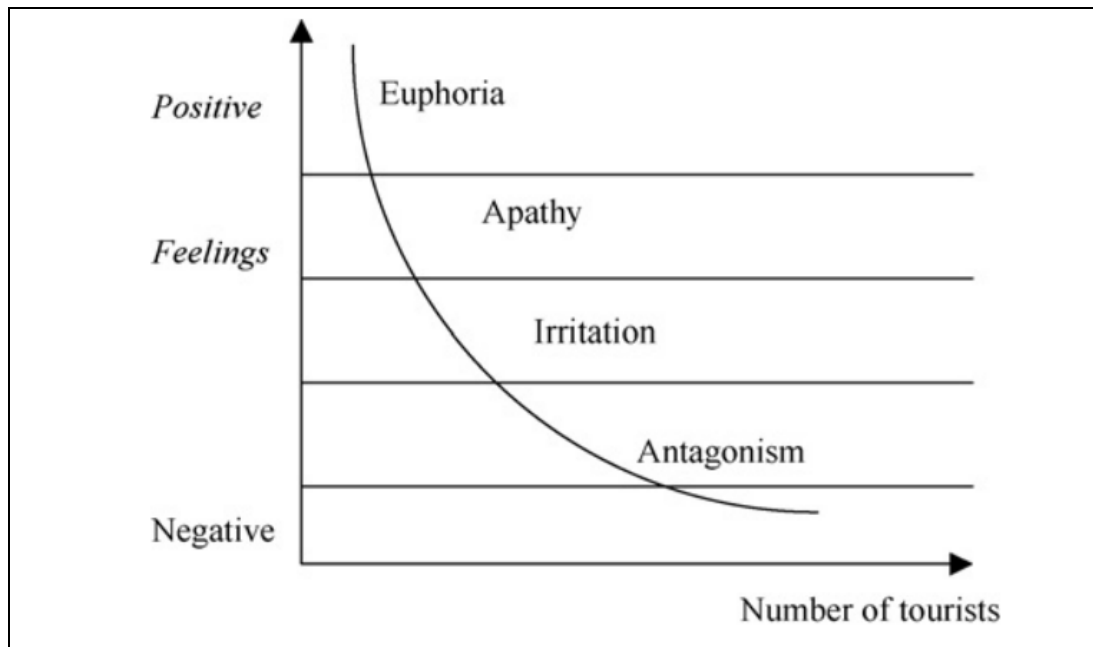
To assess the effects of overtourism on communities, I researched the following questions:

- (1) What is a Destination Stewardship Council (DSC) and a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)? How are they different and what does this mean for Asheville, NC?
- (2) How is tourism managed in the city of Asheville?
- (3) What have previous tourism studies in United States cities found about attitudes towards tourism?

To accomplish this, I completed a mixed methods research approach, which combined qualitative and quantitative research and data, including a key informant interview, participant observation of stakeholder meetings, and an analysis of DSCs in the United States and Canada. Key informant interviews are qualitative interviews with people who have an in-depth knowledge of the happenings in their community and are experts within their field<sup>10</sup>. Participant observation is observing participants in daily life for data collection purposes<sup>11</sup>, in this study it was the Asheville DSC working committee.

Throughout the spring of 2023, I investigated how DSCs address resident concerns and the broad issue of overtourism differently from DMOs and other related tourism authorities, what methods are commonly used to measure resident opinions, and how residents are involved in tourism management. From this data I aimed to determine what actions are effective in tourism management and which methods would have the most success if applied to Asheville, North Carolina.

Two causes of the current trend of overtourism are soft technology (e.g. media) and hard technology (e.g. improved transportation options)<sup>2</sup>. Soft technologies are social media, the sharing economy, and bucket list travel, whereas hard technologies are physical developments in the industry, such as the progression of airplane and cruise ship technology. Hard technology contributes to overtourism through increasing tourists' ability to travel through constantly bettering airplanes fuel capacity and overall flight time. In addition, Online air carriers lower flight costs by offering operations in cities just outside of major tourist destinations and their large airports. This decreases costs to the buyer but redirects tourism to small cities that do not have the capacity to host large numbers of tourists. While tourism is redirected, there was little evidence found that can conclude that this has reduced the number of visitors to large established airports<sup>2</sup>. Soft technologies contribute to overtourism through advertising areas that would not have been possible prior through social media tagging<sup>2</sup>. The sharing economy of rideshare and home rental apps give tourists access to areas that are majority residential. One issue that follows is the alienation of residents, pushing them out of their homes through the cancellation of renting to switch to companies like Airbnb and increased costs of living. The author Martha Honey connects this to the first of the WTTC's five major effects of overtourism: (1) alienated local residents, (2) degraded tourist experience, (3) overloaded infrastructure, (4) damage to nature, and (5) threats to culture and heritage<sup>12</sup>. The alienation of residents results in the resentment of tourists, as they are the root cause of their displacement. This relates to a framework known as Doxey's Irridex, which measures resident attitudes towards tourists through four stages: euphoria, apathy, irritation, and antagonism<sup>13</sup>.



**Figure 1.** Doxie’s Irridex “Irritation” Index

The tourism industry continues to benefit from the “growth is good” mentality that is common in cities seeking to boost their economies. The issue that follows is that the planning process for how the city will support tourism in the long term is not considered, instead cities focus on the immediate benefits the economy will receive. Overtourism continues to be an ever-present issue at the global level, showing no signs of slowing down soon.

Tourism has remained relatively consistent throughout the 21st century, with major events like the terrorism events of 2001 and the 2008 recession slowing the industry for short periods of time. However, it was quick to bounce back as of 2010, superseding gross domestic products in 2010<sup>2</sup>. This steady trend came to a halt in 2019 after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the cease of international travel due to risk of spreading the disease<sup>14</sup>. While the COVID-19 pandemic decreased tourism worldwide, it demonstrated the need for the tourism industry to evolve with respect to increasing populations and precautionary measures for spread of diseases<sup>15</sup>. Researchers have begun to study how resident opinions and priorities have changed because of the pandemic in the form of both COVID-19 specific studies<sup>16</sup>, inclusion of COVID-19 related questions in resident surveys, and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Tourism Recovery Tracker<sup>17</sup>.

In an assessment of Summit County Utah, the Global Sustainable Tourism Council described a DSC as “Representative of County initiatives in sustainable planning, non-profit organizations, public land management, tourism business sectors, public health sectors, public health and safety, and more”<sup>18</sup>. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) oversees managing and establishing standards for tourism within two major criteria: Destination criteria for policymakers and destination managers, and Industry criteria for hotels and tour operators<sup>19</sup>. They work to uphold four pillars of sustainability: marketing for sustainability, social, culture and economy, and environment<sup>20</sup>. This is done through providing assurance for those who uphold sustainable tourism practices in the form of certifications and accreditations, providing a

destination stewardship framework, creating maps of certified destinations, and offering a sustainable tourism training program for those in the industry.<sup>21</sup>

Another international tourism management organization is the UNWTO (or WTO). The UNWTO operates under a management vision, placing tourism as a policy priority, leading in knowledge creation, and enhancing their capacity through partnerships<sup>22</sup>. This is done by the means of five pillars: (1) “making tourism smarter through celebrating innovation and leading the digital transformation of the sector; (2) making tourism more competitive at every level through promoting investment and promoting entrepreneurship; (3) creating more and better jobs and providing relevant training; (4) building resilience and promoting safe and seamless travel; and (5) harnessing tourism’s unique potential to protect cultural and natural heritage and to support communities both economically and socially”<sup>22</sup>. Cities use the frameworks set forth by the GSTC and the UNWTO to model their own DMOs and DSCs<sup>23</sup>. This creates a set expectation on the roles and responsibilities of tourism authorities. An additional international authority for tourism would be the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), which is a nongovernmental nonprofit organization. The council is made up of business members from the private sector of the tourism industry and has a goal to promote sustainable growth in tourism, work alongside governments and other institutions to create jobs, and increase exports<sup>24</sup>. Other organizations involved in responsible tourism include the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), which is nonprofit that aims to promote responsible tourism policies and practices globally<sup>25</sup>, and the Destination Stewardship Center (DSC), which is a volunteer nonprofit whose goal is to support wisely managed tourism and destination stewardship<sup>26</sup>. Currently CREST, DSC, and GSTC work together in a collaborative project known as the Destination Stewardship Report. The project is published online quarterly, and its goal is to provide useful information on destination stewardship. This includes case studies of specific locations and other featured stories<sup>27</sup>.

One of the methods used to address overtourism is degrowth. Sustainable degrowth is a socially sustainable process of downscaling society's metabolism and throughput<sup>29</sup>. One approach is demarketing - in relation to degrowth of tourism; this is described as discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers on either a temporary or permanent basis<sup>28</sup>. This method has been successfully used in cases like the Sissinghurst Castle Garden in Kent, England, who marketed the garden as having a wait time for admission. Previously the garden was being over visited, exceeding its carrying capacity.<sup>30</sup> Visitor carrying capacity is defined as “The maximum level of visitor use and related infrastructure that an area can absorb before the values of the place are diminished to an unacceptable degree”<sup>31</sup> and is used when determining the limits of tourist attractions. When locations exceed their visitor carrying capacity, they experience overtourism.

When discussing the tourism industry, it is important to look at the dispersion of costs and benefits for residents of the tourism destination. Often, certain groups are receiving more benefits without bearing their share of costs, also known as freeriding. Despite the prevalence of freeriding in the tourism industry, it is seldom studied. Freeriding is a term that describes a situation where individuals or enterprises achieve benefits that they have not paid for. In tourism, a freerider is an enterprise that gains part of a demand provided without its contribution<sup>32</sup>. Freeriding in relation to the destination can be seen in the use of natural areas by those who do not contribute to their preservation or maintenance<sup>32</sup>. While residents also enjoy the benefits from the tourism industry, they are receiving a disproportionate amount of the costs.

Tourism often occurs in places with historic value with long standing culture. Visitors will travel to experience new cultures different from their own, seeking out unique experiences. Destinations are aware of this demand and fulfill it through the marketing of cultures, which leads to the commodification of culture. Commodification of culture is “The act of taking something’s original form and commercializing it in order to be consumed.”<sup>33</sup> The effects of commodifying a culture include decreasing authenticity and trading off residents' own heritage for economic benefit. A common occurrence observed in the business of selling souvenirs from indigenous communities is that the owners of the stores will be white, while the artists are indigenous. While these artists can be compensated properly for their individual work, their designs and art styles are often used without consultation or payment<sup>34</sup>. Researchers have noted a deficiency in indigenous inclusion in the industry, which can lead to unequal benefits from tourism resulting in displacement<sup>35</sup>. One way displacement can occur is when governments choose to develop areas for tourism to bolster the location's economy. This can result in a community having to change their way of earning money either because it is no longer viable due to the loss of land, or because it can no longer support the cost of living<sup>36</sup>. This relates to the issue of freeriding, specifically by businesses in the tourism industry. In situations where land development for tourism is paid for using government funds, benefits outside businesses and workers, and leaves residents bearing costs without equal benefits, freeriding has occurred. While there are some benefits to tourism such as improvements in economy and increased preservation of natural areas, residents are still left with fewer positions of power, lower paying jobs, and a loss of lifestyles previously enjoyed.

In addition to changes in lifestyle and culture, tourism has also been an actor in changing perceptions of history. In Edward M. Bruner’s 2005 book *Culture on Tour: Ethnographies of Travel*, he found that the perception created from tourism sites and the history it presents to the public has altered historians' discussions of the site's history<sup>37</sup>. Thus, tourism and education are not independent of one another. In relation to tourism management, this brings further validity to concerns over how a city is presented to the public, whether it be through bus tours or performances. One example of this would be in Charleston, where residents expressed concerns over the information that tour companies were using. The city addressed this in their tourism ordinances, regulating tour companies through the knowledge they used, the historic areas they visited, and requirements of certifications for guides<sup>38</sup>. Regulations concerning knowledge delivered to tourists is an effective way to prevent inaccurate history from injecting itself into educational settings as well as preventing misinformation to the public.

## 2.0 Methods

To answer my research questions, I used a mixed methods research approach, including a key informant interview, participant observation of stakeholder meetings, a literature review, and an analysis of DSCs in the United States and Canada.

The participant observation included attending meetings of Thrive Asheville's DSC working group, which aims to explore a DSC for the city of Asheville<sup>39</sup>. Thrive Asheville is an independent nonprofit organization and a civic infrastructure initiative, which is led by a group of community leaders called the steering committee<sup>40</sup>. They work on yearly projects to increase the equity and quality of life for residents of Asheville such as the Landlord-Tenant partnership program, Ideas to Action Leadership Forum, The Finding Home Project, and their work on sustainable tourism<sup>41</sup>.

Along with meeting attendance and participation, I worked with the DSC working group on the collection of data on DSC groups throughout the United States and Canada. There were a total of eight DSCs and one DMO. Information gathered included the makeup of the council and requirements, when it was established, if a survey was conducted, specific council goals, and if they had a pledge. Other material gathered covered the accomplishments of the DSC and its community involvement, resulting in recommendations on what could be applied to Asheville. Data from the DSC work was condensed and shared with the DSC working group. I was also tasked with creating questions to send out to the working group on how to move forward with the project.

In January 2023, I met with Jack Ingeman, a founding member of the Hominy Creek Greenway board. During the meeting I conducted a key informant interview regarding the greenway and the board's work. The main goal of the interview was to learn more about how the stewardship of the greenway has been conducted over time as well as learning what has made it successful. Questions asked during the interview focused on how the board has maintained its momentum overtime, especially when considering the COVID-19 pandemic. Other focuses included possible concerns for overtourism, greenway management, funding, board member selection, and community involvement.

Lastly, I conducted an analysis of resident surveys from both DSCs and DMOs independent of Thrive Asheville. I compiled information regarding the year of the survey, if it is conducted annually, and if so for how long. Data on who conducted the survey, key findings, and how the survey was organized was also included. This included the 2019 and 2022 resident surveys from Explore Asheville.

## 3.0 Results

Management practices of tourism vary across different sectors, such as states, local governments, and communities. Tourism is also managed at a national and international level. Resources can be managed through the oversight of access of tourists to popular locations<sup>30</sup>, altering the amount of marketing for a destination according to its needs<sup>42</sup>, the creation of long-term plans for tourism<sup>38</sup>, and collaboration with industry partners to promote sustainable tourism ideals. Modes of management introduced to address overtourism include the formation of destination stewardship councils, local volunteer organizations, and conducting surveys of residents to learn about attitudes towards the tourism industry and how it is being addressed in their communities.

### 3.1 Destination Stewardship Councils

Destination stewardship councils are becoming increasingly more common in cities experiencing overtourism, in addition to DMOs already in place. A destination marketing organization (DMO) is responsible for marketing their destinations to potential visitors. The difference between the two is that a DSC focuses on the implementation of sustainable tourism practices, whereas a DMO focuses on the promotion of tourism within a city to populations outside the destination. While this promotion could be of sustainable businesses or accommodations, its main goal is to attract visitors to improve the local economy. A DSC also aims to maintain its community's quality of life, popular tourist attraction's locations, and its cultural identity. Communities are beginning to form DSCs to both prevent future overtourism impacts as well as correct undesirable conditions residents are already facing. While a county or city may have a DSC, they

go by a different title. For the sake of understanding, each council will be referred to as a DSC in this paper, as they operate under the same purpose as a DSC.

Through an evaluation of eight DSCs and one DMO in the United States, I identified common goals, methodologies, and outcomes. First, I identified the composition of the council and its members. The council with the fewest members was The Crown of The Continent in British Columbia/Montana<sup>43</sup> with a minimum of eight members – and the highest was in Park City Utah, with 21 members<sup>44,52</sup>. Several councils required there to be a member with cultural knowledge of the area or a tribal representative<sup>43,45,38</sup>. The majority of the councils were voluntary and open, but there were some that were government-appointed, such as the Travel Oregon DMO, whose members were chosen by the Governor, and Charleston DSC members chosen by the Mayor<sup>46,38</sup>. Most frequently, the councils are created to reflect their community's makeup, including residents, local businesses, non-profit organizations, and government officials.

When viewing the councils, identifying their common objectives can help give insights to what the roles of a DSC should be. I found that goals held by the DSCs overlap, such as monitoring residents' views towards tourism (Table 1). Surveys gauging public opinions were implemented in all but one location studied. The location that did not have a resident survey was the Crown of the Continent, which instead opted to use public input in projects such as the creation of a hyperlocal MapGuide<sup>43</sup>. Other common DSC goals were to create trails that help educate about the history of the area<sup>47,48</sup>. Plans also included addressing resident concerns over traffic and parking issues<sup>47</sup>. This subject falls under the goal of maintaining resident quality of life, which was considered in the Hawaii and Charleston DSCs<sup>45,38</sup>.

**Table 1.** Destination Stewardship Council Comparison Across Locations

<b>Location</b>	<b>Name of group, Number of Members, When Established</b>	<b>Resident Survey? when? Sample size?</b>	<b>Specific Council Goals. Tourism pledge?</b>
1. Crown of the Continent: Rocky Mountains; Alberta, British Columbia, Montana	Geotourism Council, 8-10 Executive Committee members, 1 project coordinator. 2006.	No.	Creating relationships with indigenous communities.
2. Big Bay Michigan	Big Bay Stewardship Council (BBSC). Community organization. 9 members. 2020.	Yes. Scoping study n.d Not public.	Leave No Trace. Frequent meeting to maintain and measure progress
3. Savannah, GA	Tourism Advisory Committee (TAC).	Yes. 2017. 900 respondents.	Savannah safe pledge (for COVID-19 safety)



	10 members, start year not available.		Restructure TAC to reflect neighborhoods, preservation, and tourism industry
4. Charleston, SC	Tourism Management Division appointed by the mayor. 14 voting members. Star year not available	Yes. 2014. 487 respondents	Disperse tourism. Livability Court for Ordinance violations related to quality of life
5. Columbia Gorge, OR	The Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance. 9 voting and 4 non-voting members. 1990.	No.	Leave No Trace, Disperse tourism
6. Sedona, AZ	Sustainable Tourism Action Team (STAT). 20 members. 2019.	Yes. 2022. 590 respondents.	Disperse tourism, Leave no trace, Sedona Cares Pledge
7. Travel Oregon	Oregon Tourism Commission (DMO). 9 members. 2003.	Yes. 2020. 1245 respondents	Racial equity plan, Partner with resource management agencies to mitigate visitor impacts
8. Hawaii (Honolulu, Maui County, County of Hawai'i and County of Kaua'i)	Hawaii Tourism Authority, 12 members appointed by the governor of Hawaii. 1998.	Yes. 2022. 1955 respondents. (Conducted in fall and spring, since 1999).	Increased number of partners/organizations joining the Hawai'i Green Business Program, fund other agencies to manage tourism in natural and cultural sites.
9. Park City, Utah	Destination Stewardship Council. 21 members. (Temporary only spring of 2022, now disbanded).	Yes. 2022. 2610 respondents	Made a sustainable tourism plan.

When evaluating the design of DSCs, it is important to make note of their accomplishments as they can indicate which methods are effective for achieving success. For instance, the Crown of the Continent council's goal on creating relationships with indigenous communities has been

successful, as they now have a partnership<sup>43</sup>. Multiple councils such as Big Bay and Columbia Gorge have worked with Leave No Trace to promote sustainable tourism practices<sup>49,48</sup>. The commonly voiced concern regarding the high concentrations of tourists in areas was addressed by Savannah Georgia's, Columbia Gorge's, Sedona's, and Charleston's DSCs<sup>38,49,50,51</sup>. Each council was able to disperse tourism through different methods, one example being Charleston's Tourism Ordinances<sup>38</sup>. This ordinance created standards for tourist operations in the Charleston area.

In addition to council successes, learning about how each DSC interacts with their community can be valuable. Community engagement can help with support and participation for initiatives. A common method used for public presence was holding meetings. Councils from areas such as Big Bay, Columbia Gorge, Sedona, and Charleston would hold frequent meetings that were open to the public<sup>38,48,49,50</sup>. One way resident participation was encouraged was in the Crown of the Continent's DSC. They partnered with Natural Geographic to create a MapGuide which made resident participation mandatory<sup>43</sup>. Another unique example would be the creation of Livability Court in Charleston South Carolina, where common issues regarding quality of life can be brought into court by residents<sup>53</sup>. This program helps solve community problems that would otherwise not be addressed in a timely manner. Engagement with the community also happened through the support of events such as summits. This was done by the Crown of the Continent DSC and the Columbia Gorge DSC<sup>43,49</sup>. Both Hawaii and Sedona participated in festivals that supported local businesses and DSC partners<sup>45,50</sup>. Work from Travel Oregon compared to other cities DSCs was mainly focused on the tourism industry, whereas the DSCs prioritized resident needs.

### 3.2 Tourism Management in the City of Asheville, NC

This section presents the results of research regarding the functioning and history of the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority (TDA). Tourism in Asheville, North Carolina is managed by the TDA which oversees the Explore Asheville Convention and Visitors Bureau<sup>54</sup>. The TDA board is made up of 11 members; four of which are appointed by Asheville City Council, four by the Buncombe County Commission, and one by the Asheville Area Chamber of Commerce. There is one vacation rental owner or management owner to represent the accommodations that collect tax. Two of the members represent non-lodging, tourism related businesses with one executive from a ticketed tourist attraction and one restaurant, brewery, distillery, or wine owner, or executive director of a ticketed arts organization. Lastly, one member of both the Buncombe County Commission and one member of the city council who both serve as non-voting members.<sup>55</sup> The role of Explore Asheville is to advertise and market the city to potential visitors, maintain public relations, and group sales plans<sup>54</sup>. They gain funding through the collection of an occupancy tax, which is 6% on gross receipts derived from the rental of any room, lodging or accommodation furnished by a hotel, motel, inn, or similar place within the county, including registered rentals such as Airbnb<sup>56</sup>. The highest percentage allowed in North Carolina for occupancy tax is capped at 6%, meaning Asheville is collecting the highest amount possible<sup>57</sup>.

For the 2023 fiscal year, the occupancy tax fund for the TDA is 46 million dollars<sup>58</sup>. In 2022 the Buncombe County TDA board passed a 30.6 million dollar operating budget<sup>59</sup>. Money from the occupancy tax dedicated to marketing and public relations is spent by the TDA. Asheville's public relations and social media outreach is managed by the Asheville Convention and Visitors

Bureau (CVB). Overseen by the TDA, the CVB describes themselves as “a media outlet”<sup>60</sup>. They maintain several social media accounts for the city, including Facebook, Instagram, twitter, Pinterest, and youtube<sup>60</sup> as well as maintain media relationships with newspapers and other media outlets. The CVB enacts a yearly advertising campaign “designed to create awareness and encourage overnight visitation”<sup>61</sup>. According to Explore Asheville in 2018, the city's primary audience for marketing tourism is “elite empty nesters”<sup>62</sup>, with a median household income of \$100,000 and up.

Past campaigns include advertisements on travel websites, Pinterest, online photo catalogs, and videos<sup>61</sup>. A recent project of Explore Asheville would be in 2022, when they became the official tourism partner for the U.S Open tennis tournament, where the cost of advertising for the tournament was \$1.3 million<sup>63</sup>.

As of 2022, revenue from the occupancy tax goes to Buncombe County Tourism Destination Authority and is divided into 66% toward travel promotion and 33% towards community capital projects, formerly 75% and 25%<sup>58</sup>. The 33% dedicated to community capital projects is divided into two categories: the Tourism Product Development Fund (TPDF) and the Legacy Investment from Tourism (LIFT). The TPDF is a grant program for businesses in the tourism industry and is operated by a nine-person committee. It was created as an “outgrowth of a business decision by the local tourism industry to find a way to attract more overnight visitors to the area”<sup>64</sup>. As of 2015, the fund no longer considers for-profit entities eligible for funding. The “Legacy Investment from Tourism” program committee uses its funding to “provide financial assistance for nonprofits tourism-related projects that are designed to (i) increase patronage of lodging facilities, meeting facilities, and convention facilities by attracting tourists, business travelers, or both and (ii) benefit the community at large in Buncombe County.”<sup>65</sup> Projects under LIFT are not just tourism-related, and include restoration, maintenance, enhancement of natural resources, and necessary infrastructure.<sup>65</sup>

As of 2023, the Buncombe County TDA has several active community projects such as: the African American Heritage Trail Project, Festivals & Cultural Events Support Fund, Superstar Awards, Tourism Product Development Fund, and Wayfinding Signs Program<sup>66</sup>. As of 2023, the Buncombe County TDA dedicated over \$90,000,000 to local events and festivals<sup>67</sup>. In addition to community projects, the TDA lists several sustainability practices, including a partnership with “Leave No Trace,” affordable housing, fundraising with “Pledge for the Wild,” encouraging corporate responsibility, sustainability messaging, and stakeholder events<sup>68</sup>. As part of their sustainability messaging campaign, the TDA is a member of the GSTC where they provide sustainability opportunities and information to their partners<sup>68</sup>.

While some of the actions listed above appear appealing to audiences, there is some discontentment among residents concerning how the TDA’s finances are spent<sup>69</sup>. Many residents in Asheville know tourism to be a source of problems, such as increased traffic, cost of living, overcrowding, and destruction of natural resources. Due to the TDA’s role of promoting tourism in combination with the amount of funding they receive, residents have begun to appeal for different usage of the TDA’s budget<sup>70</sup>. One group, called “Buncombe Decides,” is campaigning for funds from the TDA’s LIFT program to be used for affordable housing<sup>71</sup>. Their reasoning includes Asheville's current issues regarding unfit wages for workers, lack of affordable early childhood education options, and an understaffed school system, which could be helped using the TDA budget. The use of the revenue procured through the city's occupancy tax remains a heavily debated issue.

### 3.2.1 Local Tourism Resources: Hominy Creek Greenway and Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary Case Studies

To combat the development of natural areas, residents in Asheville have come together several times to protect areas the community considers important. Plots of land that hold significance due to their visitors, wildlife, or recreation use can lead to common ground for members of the community looking to get involved. This has been done through the creation of an Audubon chapter and the formation of VCOs. These groups begin with an idea and little financial backing yet are successful in their endeavors. Their ability to realize their goals without a prior organization or government institution at the helm is a result of their consistency and connections within the community.

The Hominy Creek Greenway is an exemplary illustration of the impact that residents can have on their community. Originally used by residents as an unofficial trail, the land has evolved into an official greenway in the middle of the city of Asheville. The establishment of the greenway began in 2006 when community leaders lobbied the city's greenway commission and raised funds to buy the land. In 2011, they received contributions from the city, county, and the organization Riverlink<sup>72</sup>. The greenway was purchased by the county in 2011<sup>73</sup>. The nonprofit group, Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway, formed in 2012 and completed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the city of Asheville to assist with land management and stewardship. Efforts by the Friends group include community outreach, social media, trail maintenance, and planning. One issue that the greenway group is facing is maintaining momentum. While it is normal to have fluctuations in community and board interest, as well as frequency of projects, the pandemic caused a drop in participation. I interviewed a member of the Friends Board who explained that the greenway remains a locally known location and does not receive an abundant amount of tourism. Because of this, he is not concerned about overtourism now, but said "it's something to look out for in the future." The Friends of Hominy Creek Greenway remain an essential group in the city of Asheville. They serve as a key example of a success story for community-based volunteer groups.

Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary was the first project of the Blue Ridge Audubon chapter, which was formed in 1987<sup>74</sup>. The creation of Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary was spurred in 1990 when development was proposed at the site, and the Blue Ridge Audubon Society purchased the surrounding land. To obtain this land that was already set for development, the group had to fundraise approximately \$400,000. While the chapter did fundraise for the project's purchase, the Lake View Park Commission has ownership of the land. Like the Hominy Creek Greenway organization, they have an easement in place. Both the Blue Ridge Audubon and the Commission have easements, which prohibit using the land for activities beyond a nature preserve<sup>75</sup>. A current project of Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary is "Lights Out! Asheville," run by The Coalition for a Bird Friendly Asheville<sup>76</sup>. The project's goal is to "Encourage all business owners, residents, and building managers to extinguish non-essential outdoor lighting between Midnight and 6AM during the Spring and Fall". The organization has created a pledge for both businesses and residents to reduce light pollution that can disrupt bird migration<sup>77</sup>. An additional way Beaver Lake has worked to improve the area is through providing accessibility. In 2013 the group completed a project to make the boardwalk accessible to people in wheelchairs. Other additions included new signs and fencing<sup>75</sup>. Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary has maintained its support from the community throughout the time it has been in operation and continues to be a thriving location for resident visitors and out-of-town tourists.

### 3.3 Effects of Tourism on Communities

A tourism-dominant economy has many effects on a community. Along with the opportunities for growth of businesses and the economy, tourism can lead to changes in existing cultures because of commodification. Another result from tourism is freeriding of businesses who benefit from advertising paid for by the city. Communities who use tourism as a source of income receive its benefits, but also undergo the associated costs.

#### 3.3.1 Tourism Freeriding

Possible solutions for freeriding would be the creation of new taxes (e.g. restaurant tax). One issue brought up when suggesting taxes as an equalizer was identifying what groups should be paying. In Asheville, NC, there is an occupancy tax, where the revenue from goes to Buncombe County Tourism Destination Authority. If the creation of taxes for tourists does not apply residents and helps to equilibrate the number of tourists to minimize overtourism, then it could be a successful approach. Freeriding in relation to marketing, explains how the issue of free riding led to the creation of public goods, with many enjoying the benefits of the good but few wanting to pay. This leads to a tax-funded good. Revenue from the tax goes back into promoting the tourism industry by the TDA, which leads to industry participants benefiting without paying. The problem with this is that the tourism industry are the ones who are benefiting from the tax, therefore it is recommended that authorities should hesitate to donate to local destination marketing<sup>79</sup>. Freeriding is present in all fields of tourism and needs to be considered when making decisions for policies and approaches, making sure to include residents who face the issues caused by freeriding.

One type of freeriding relevant to Asheville would be horizontal freeriding, which is when “parties at the same level in the supply chain share the use of a single asset. The free riding problem arises because the parties do not internalize the benefits from actions taken toward maintaining this asset.”<sup>32</sup>. In Asheville, the creation of hotels was temporarily halted due to rapid growth and resident outcry. The hotel moratorium began in September 2019 and ended in February 2021<sup>80</sup>. After the end of the moratorium, new hotel regulations were adopted including an updated design review process. Freeriding in tourism benefits the industry at the cost of resident quality of life, and when addressed can limit the negative impacts it has on a city.

#### 3.3.2 Commodification of Culture

The city of Asheville is known for its extensive arts and cultural heritage and is a major driver in visitation, specifically, the city's proximity to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. The market in Asheville for Cherokee products such as art and pottery are substantial<sup>81</sup>. The marketing of Cherokee arts and culture in Asheville officially began in 1914, when the first Indian fair was held to develop the economy<sup>82</sup>. The advertising and selling of Cherokee products began the promotion of the sale of a culture we see in the tourism industry today, with many of the products marketed toward tourists not being authentic to Cherokee culture. The result being the commodification of culture to appeal to tourists at the expense of the Cherokee. Other involvement the Asheville tourism industry has is with the Cherokee is the renaming of locations with their original Cherokee names. Currently there are movements globally to rename places with their indigenous names. This includes landmarks and natural features in the greater Asheville area. For example, recognizing Cherokee place names such as Kuwohi (mulberry

place) instead of Clingmans dome<sup>84</sup>. This can serve as a mode to educate tourists on local history. Areas may promote cultures as selling and marketing points to tourists, rather than learning opportunities. Thus, depending on methods of involvement, this can have either positive or negative impacts on tourism.

### 3.4 Resident Surveys

Due to the far-reaching effects of overtourism on local populations, cities have begun to collect data regarding resident attitudes toward tourism through surveys. Surveys are typically contracted through an outside agency in partnership with the tourism authority in place<sup>85</sup>. Questionnaires are sent throughout the local community using randomized methods and contain questions and or statements that are both generalized and specific to the area. Frequently used statements participants either must agree or disagree with are “Tourism is good for the economy”<sup>85</sup> or questions such as “How long have you lived in the area?”<sup>85</sup>. Specific questions included cities' popular locations, for example Jackson Hole in Teton County, Wyoming<sup>86</sup> or satisfaction with current management practices in their city. Surveys had statements with varying levels of agreement and disagreements as the stylistic majority, with less overall questions. Areas that have been experiencing the effects of overtourism for a considerable time have typically adopted resident surveys for a longer period, such as Hawaii, whose resident sentiment survey has been active for over two decades<sup>88</sup>. Common characteristics of resident surveys include lack of knowledge on the roles of their tourism authority, remaining concern regarding COVID-19, traffic congestion, lack of parking, agreement that tourism benefits the community, and issues with affordability<sup>89</sup>.

The first survey on resident attitudes towards tourism in Asheville occurred in 2019. It was conducted by Explore Asheville alongside Strategic Marketing and Research Insights (SMARinsights) to aid in the development of a long-term tourism and investment plan<sup>85</sup>. There was a total of 468 surveys collected, with 189 in the city of Asheville and 279 in the remainder of Buncombe County. There was also an opt-in option where residents who did not receive the survey could complete it, with over 2,200 responses. The attitudes towards tourism expressed in the opt-in survey contained more negative responses than the randomized. In 2022, there was a second survey conducted by MMGY Travel Intelligence using random sampling to survey residents from Buncombe County. There was a total of 382 surveys collected, with 156 respondents from Asheville<sup>90</sup>. Questions from the 2019 study were repeated along with additional questions not given in the first survey.

Key findings from Asheville resident surveys include opposition to TDA advertising, concerns over tourism impacting the culture of Asheville, traffic and parking concerns, and threats to the natural environment<sup>85,90</sup>. The majority of Asheville residents believed that there are parking problems because of people visiting the community, that Buncombe County's economy is too dependent upon tourism, short-term/vacation rentals for visitors leave fewer options for year-round residents, and that tourism contributes to the loss of green space and damages the environment. It was found that there was a significant decrease in agreement for beliefs on parking and traffic problems since 2019 but remained the two highest percentage majority opinions.

Positive characteristics of surveys included frequent collection of data, follow up surveys to identify community priorities and sentiment, and the creation of long term plans using data

collected with follow ups on their progress. Undesirable aspects of surveys include one-time surveys, leading questions, and lack of follow ups.

Results of resident surveys from destinations are presented in Table 2. Although each destination is a different population size than Asheville, there are lessons to be learned about tourism management approaches through this comparison.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Tourism Destination Resident Surveys

<b>Location and Date of Survey</b>	<b>Number of people surveyed, who conducted survey, and how</b>	<b>Key findings</b>	<b>How can it be applied to Asheville?</b>
Georgia -- Savannah  2015 <sup>89</sup>	405 responses. University of South Carolina Beaufort (USCB) Lowcountry and Resort Islands Tourism Institute (LRITI). Residents. Registered voters list randomly selected. Mailed surveys. sent to 2695 residents, 15% completion rate.	infrastructure issues, less accessibility to local businesses. Tour buses, trolleys -- misinformation, under-representation of historic areas.	Having accessible information about the responsibilities and roles of the TDA City planning with consideration for local business locations and accessibility.
Hawaii – (Maui County, O‘ahu, Hawai‘i Island, Kaua‘i)  2022 <sup>88</sup>	1,955 responses. Omnitrak Group, Inc. Residents. stratified sampling by region. Telephone and online surveys.	Support for tourism is increasing. Positive perception of Hawaii’s Tourism Authority.	Creation of indicators to measure and predict future resident sentiment for surveys.
Indiana -- Clark-Floyd Counties  2021 <sup>95</sup>	409 residents. Convention Tourism Bureau, Longwood international. self-completion online survey via social media.	Tourism as an alternative to environmentally damaging practices. Support use of public funds for a river park/greenway. Uninformed on tourism effects.	Educating residents and tourists about how tourism affects the costs of living. Measure resident support for land preservation.
Montana -- statewide  2020 <sup>96</sup>	1,834 residents. University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation. In	More concern about visitors since COVID-19.	Include questions regarding COVID-19 into surveys.

	person on an iPad, at rest stops and gas stations	Residents in more visited regions held more concerns for crowding.	Compare length of residence in the community
North Carolina -- Asheville & Buncombe County 2019 <sup>85</sup>	2,200 residents. Strategic Marketing & Research Insights (SMARInsights), online surveys	Confusion about funding from tourism occupancy tax. Concerns over traffic, parking, homelessness, costs of living. Want local business and infrastructure support.	Using resident sentiment toward tax spending to aid in deciding how to divide occupancy tax money
North Carolina -- Asheville and Buncombe County 2022 <sup>90</sup>	382 residents. MMGY Travel intelligence, Explore Asheville. Online surveys	Residents say it's important to disperse tourism from peak season and outside of downtown through the county.	Using TDA funding to advertise tourism in the off season. Advertising areas throughout Buncombe County
Oregon - statewide. 2020 <sup>97</sup>	1,245 responses. Driftline Consulting, Travel Oregon, and 7 RDMOs. Residents through email and open URL on Travel Oregon's website.	Support developing visitor experiences that enhance local livability. Grants and funding resources top priority.	Be cognisant of resident populated areas when developing tourism attractions. COVID-19 safety a priority.
South Carolina - Charleston 2014 <sup>87</sup>	487 completed. Mailed questionnaire to 2,500 resident households randomly. Department of Planning, Preservation and Sustainability, City of Charleston, by the Office of Tourism Analysis, School of Business, and College of Charleston	Concerns over congestion from cruise ships and rented bicycles. Overcrowding and accelerating growth harming quality of life. Want a tourism plan.	Creation of tourism ordinances to address a broad number of issues e.g. traffic, tours, business practices, sound pollution.
South Dakota -- American Indian Wacipis (powwows).	936 responses. Center for American Indian Studies, School of Travel Industry Management, and University of Hawaii.	Avoid generalized plans. Plans should include the public participation. Native people interviewed felt they	Invest in relationships with the Cherokee population and focus on equity for residents.



2011 <sup>98</sup>	Attendees of three powwow events, intercept surveys.	were being exploited by the tourism industry	
Wyoming -- Teton County 2022 <sup>86</sup>	4,777 residents. International Institute of Tourism Studies George Washington University, and Confluence Sustainability. Online survey.	No consistent visitor education, lack of affordable housing, and demand for end of advertising for Jackson Hole	Stop advertising over-visited locations. Create a widely accessible educational tool for tourists

## 4.0 Discussion and Conclusion

### 4.1 How can overtourism be addressed?

One of the methods used to address overtourism is degrowth. Sustainable degrowth is a socially sustainable process of downscaling society's metabolism and throughput<sup>29</sup>. One approach is demarketing. In relation to degrowth of tourism, this is described as discouraging customers in general or a certain class of customers on either a temporary or permanent basis<sup>28</sup>. Methods that have been successfully used are having a wait time for admission or a maximum number of visitors per day to match the visitor carrying capacity. Visitor carrying capacity is defined as “The maximum level of visitor use and related infrastructure that an area can absorb before the values of the place are diminished to an unacceptable degree”<sup>31</sup> and is used when determining the limits of tourist attractions. When locations exceed their visitor carrying capacity, they experience overtourism.

Forms of tourism management in cities include VCOs, data collection and monitoring, DSCs, and DMOs. VCOs are effective in small scale tourism management where a location can be reasonably managed by a small resident group. Currently, cities’ main form of tourism management is DMOs. While some DMOs are changing from Destination Marketing Organizations to Destination Management Organizations, many do not have the capability to do so. This leads to the question: Could the roles of a DSC be fulfilled by a DMO? The answer is no as they would not be able to accomplish one of the main goals of a DSC: addressing resident and community needs in the tourism industry. While DMOs can make sustainable tourism one of their objectives, it is not their focus as a group. The roles of DMOs act in favor of tourist and tourism needs for the economy. Their priorities prevent them from meeting the needs fulfilled by a DSC. There are efforts to evolve DMOs in the general direction of destination stewardship, including the UNWTO DMO certification that includes a self-assessment, improvement plan, and an audit of the DMO<sup>91</sup>.

### 4.2 Recommendations for Asheville

The creation of tourism ordinances in Asheville would help establish standards that would be widely applied throughout the industry. One example of this would be from Charleston, where

residents expressed concerns over the information that tour companies were using. The city addressed this in their Tourism Ordinances, regulating tour companies through the knowledge they used, the historic areas they visited, and requirements of certifications for guides<sup>87</sup>. Regulations concerning knowledge delivered to tourists is an effective way to prevent inaccurate history from injecting itself into educational settings as well as preventing misinformation to the public. This would address concerns found in the resident surveys about threats to the character of Asheville and traffic and parking issues.

Along with tourism ordinances, Asheville should create a long-term plan for sustainable tourism practices. While Explore Asheville is creating a long-term tourism and investment plan and using resident surveys to accomplish it, its goals remain within the objectives and agenda of a DMO. The creation of a sustainable tourism plan using resident data would consider the needs of the community and its priorities. The creation of a sustainable tourism plan would use data gathered from surveys. Surveys should be conducted annually with continued updates, including specific questions regarding overtourism and quality of life. This can reveal gaps in programs, satisfaction with current practices, resident preferences, and arising issues.

While COVID-19 restrictions have depreciated over the course of the pandemic with the introduction of vaccinations and boosters, concerns over the dangers brought about by tourism remain within communities. It is important to note that research studies on how Covid-19 has changed populations attitudes towards tourism activities are relatively new. In a 2021 study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on resident support for sustainable tourism, researchers found that quality of life has a major influence on whether residents support sustainable tourism development<sup>92</sup>. By monitoring resident viewpoints towards tourism in a city in relation to the pandemic, parties such as tourism planners, destination management organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders can better improve tourism. If the positive results of tourism outnumber the negative, then residents will be more likely to support it. Consistently measuring resident sentiment over time to adjust practices and policies to best fit community needs should also be adopted by the city<sup>93</sup>.

Connecting back to the management style of degrowth, halting the promotion of the city for a given period of would be supported by residents, with around 80% of residents believing visitors would continue to visit Buncombe County if advertising stopped, which is around 10% more than residents in 2019<sup>85,90</sup>. Asheville is in a state of overtourism, and temporarily ceasing advertising the city would aid in controlling the issue. The action of temporarily halting tourism promotion is not unheard of in Asheville, as seen by the hotel moratorium, making this a feasible action that would be supported by the community.

Regarding the occupancy tax, revenue should be allocated to projects that benefit residents. As of now occupancy tax funding goes directly back into the tourism industry through marketing or tourism related projects. All residents should receive benefits from the tourism industry in the form of programs and services. Tourism affects the community, regardless of if one's profession lies within the industry, therefore residents should be receiving benefits. Possible uses for occupancy tax funds would be putting it towards affordable housing, which is currently being lobbied for by an organization called "Buncombe Decides."<sup>71</sup> One example of a change in the use of occupancy tax would be in King County Washington, which is divided into 25% for tourism promotion, 37.5% for affordable housing, and 37.5% for the arts<sup>94</sup>. This new distribution would be ideal if applied to Asheville, due to the importance the community places on the arts, the need for affordable housing, and a lessening emphasis on tourism promotion. As stated before, the tourism industry brings along a multitude of issues like resource depletion, harm to

green spaces, increased costs of living, and other quality of life issues; all issues that the funds could be diverted to helping. Locals must live within the conditions that the tourism industry produces and should be properly represented as stakeholders. To maintain a positive connection between residents and the city and its tourism industry, residents need to be considered in the delegation of tax revenue.

The creation of a DSC in Asheville would be able to address resident concerns mentioned in the 2022 Resident Survey done by Explore Asheville in ways the TDA would not be able to. The DSC should be an elected body with government involvement, as organizations that are nongovernment such as VCOs lead to funding and enforcement challenges. Having a council directly involved in the implementation of sustainable tourism practices in the city would benefit residents' quality of life, the tourism industry, and stakeholders such as local businesses. Specific examples that could be applied to Asheville would be the dedication of a group working on public parking problems, expanding public transportation to trails and popular tourist attractions, and working to disperse tourists to spread the benefits of tourism. The formation of a Destination Stewardship Council for Asheville North Carolina would cultivate long-term success for the community's residents and industries.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Tourism surveys are a great resource to include residents in an industry where resident needs are not typically considered a priority yet are affected greatly. Surveys work to educate both residents and DSCs, informing residents of DSC roles and DSCs of residents' attitudes and priorities. Resident surveys are an effective way to gauge the success of programs in place and determine future actions by DSCs. Frequent distribution of resident surveys will provide long term data that can be accessed in decision making processes as well. DSCs are proven to be an effective form of tourism management and will become increasingly necessary as overtourism spreads. Along with DSCs, VCOs are an effective tool in managing tourism resources that hold value to members of the community. In regards to Asheville, the creation of a DSC and implementation of frequent resident surveys would aid in creating a balance between community needs and the tourism industry. In addition, the halt of marketing and redistribution of tax resources from the occupancy tax would address Asheville resident needs effectively.

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