

Summary

Customers of window prostitution

Window prostitution in Amsterdam

Window prostitution exists in three areas of Amsterdam. The largest of these areas is situated in the North Easterly quarter of the old city along and around the Oudezijds Achterburgwal (Red Light District) and the Oudekerksplein: the Wallen. Window prostitution also exists in the Spuistraat and Singel, and adjoining streets. The final area where there are windows is known as the Pijp, situated in the Oud-Zuid district at Ruysdaelkade.

Image The three areas in Amsterdam where window prostitution exists



Until mid-2007 there were approximately five hundred windows in total in Amsterdam: three hundred and eighty in the Wallen, ninety in the Singel area and thirty in the Pijp. The city council has drawn up a strategic vision for the city centre (post code area 1012). This vision includes plans to purchase prostitution buildings and to close down half of the windows. The aim is to restrict window prostitution mainly to the area alongside and around Oudezijds Achterburgwal and Oude Nieuwstraat. There are no plans to close any windows in the Pijp.

During 2007 and 2008 the city council did in fact purchase a section of prostitution buildings. The prostitution windows in these buildings have been given alternative (temporary) uses. Many ex-window brothels have, for example, been turned into fashion studios: Red Light Fashion.

The city council wants to know what effect closing buildings has on the demand for window prostitution. In addition, several specific questions have been raised about customers. DSP-groep conducted this study by means of a literature study, interviews with customers and conversations with prostitutes and exploiters.

Questions and answers in brief

At the core of this study were five specific research questions. These questions are answered briefly below. More extensive answers, with greater refinement and explanation, are provided in the body of the report (in Dutch). Our knowledge of prostitution customers, and the relationship between supply and demand, was also expanded on by reviewing national and international literature.

- *How many customers of window prostitution are there in Amsterdam?*
The number of window prostitution customers in Amsterdam is probably about 200,000 per year. This estimate is derived from three different estimation methods (see Chapter 4).
- *What are the characteristics (age, country of origin) of Amsterdam's window prostitution customers?*
The majority of customers of window prostitution in Amsterdam (90%) are between 25 and 45 years. More than half of all customers in the Wallen are foreign. Dutch customers make up a comfortable majority in the Singel area and the Pijp (see Chapter 5).
- *Which language can best be used to approach customers in connection with campaigns such as *Schijn Bedriegt* (Appearances can Deceive) and *Meld Misdaad Anoniem* (Report Crime Anonimously)?*
The principal language of the Wallen is English, also for Dutch customers. In the Singel area and the Pijp Dutch is the principal language. If a choice has to be made, however, English is preferred (see Chapter 5).
- *Should the minimum age for customers be raised from 16 to 18 years of age?*
At the moment hardly any customers are under the age of 20. There is no need to increase the minimum age therefore. A further reason for not doing so is that it is very difficult to enforce a minimum age (see Chapter 5).
- *What will happen to the demand for prostitution if the number of windows in the Wallen and the Singel area is halved?*
The demand for window prostitution is unlikely to fall significantly. Most customers who visit window prostitutes do so because of a certain inner drive (push-factors). Compared to other cities, Amsterdam will still be attractive to these customers even if it is decided to reduce supply by fifty percent. Customers of window prostitution have a strong preference for this form of prostitution above, for example, escorts or sex clubs. They will therefore probably sooner move to other window prostitution areas than convert to other forms of prostitution.
The group of customers which is sensitive to changes in supply (pull-factors) will become smaller. However, this group forms a very limited proportion of all visitors and is responsible for a very small proportion of visits (see Chapter 6).

- *Are customers aware of potential offenses in prostitution, such as human trafficking and forced prostitution, and to what extent can and will they play a role in alerting and tackling these problems?*

Most customers are well aware of the offenses that occur in the world of prostitution and disapprove of them. Underage prostitution, for example, is convicted unanimously. Customers' views on forced prostitution are more varied: most customers recognize that this is a problem but very rarely encounter any signs of it. When customers do come across signs of forced prostitution they tend not to take any action. Most customers consider it to be the job of the police, regulators and social workers to detect forced prostitution and act against it.

Customers believe that making customers criminally liable for illegal prostitution will lead to fewer offenses being reported to the authorities. It is reasonable to question, however, whether this would make any difference: after all, at the present time only a limited number of customers act on offenses.

- *What effect do customers think closing the windows has on forced prostitution?*

The customers who participated with the Internet questionnaire think that reducing the number of windows is not a good way to deal with forced prostitution. In the view of customers, window prostitution is a form of prostitution which is ideally suited to prevent offenses because it is much more visible than, for example, escorting or private visits. Window prostitutes are relatively easy to access by the government, police, regulators and social workers. Many customers expect an increase in offenses if the windows are closed, as some prostitutes will go underground. Customers also expect competition between women to increase, prices to go up and the relaxed atmosphere on the street will be lost.

Recommendation: involve customers in policy making

Customers of prostitutes possess information that is of interest to the city council, police and social workers. They have direct contact with prostitutes and therefore know the consequences of the policy implemented. Some customers can even compare policies in different countries and can thus provide information on the expected effects of policy changes.

For this reason we recommend that the city council constructs a (consultation) panel in which customers are able to participate anonymously. Communication would flow in two directions: customers would inform the city council of what they come across and the city council would give customers information which they can then spread to other customers verbally or via the Internet. There is definite interest among a section of customers to actively help combat offenses in prostitution. The city council could utilize this by taking them seriously and supplying them with relevant information. Customers could also be encouraged to make anonymous reports of abuses more often.