

Residents of Copenhagen less welcoming to immigrants than Houstonians are

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Residents of Copenhagen, Denmark, are more likely than Houstonians to believe immigration threatens their country's culture. That's one of several findings in a new survey from Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research.

For the second year in a row, the Kinder Institute Copenhagen Area Survey draws comparisons between Houston and Copenhagen, two cities that are drastically different in many ways, yet roughly equally ranked on global city scales. These scales measure a metropolis's centrality in the global system of cities based on economics, cultural influence, political power and human capital. Michael Emerson, a fellow at the Kinder Institute, and Kevin Smiley, a Rice doctoral candidate affiliated with the Kinder Institute, developed the survey. "We compare these two cities to better understand two different but successful approaches to urban life," the researchers said.

Ethnic relations

The study's key finding revealed that ethnic relations in Copenhagen are generally perceived to be worse than they are in Houston. Less than a third of Copenhagen [residents](#) (29.5 percent) rated relations between Danes and non-Western immigrants as "excellent" or "good." In contrast, 48 percent of Houstonians said ethnic relations in their city were "excellent" or "good." And more Copenhageners than Houstonians gave those relationships a "poor" rating—21 percent compared with 12.8

percent, respectively.

Emerson said that in Copenhagen, residents believe "it's fine to have immigration, but only a small amount. ... Otherwise, there's a fear they'll lose the life they've developed."

Emerson noted that more than half of Copenhageners believe immigration threatens their national culture, but the majority of Houstonians feel the opposite: 63.3 percent of Houstonians believe immigration strengthens American culture, and only 36.7 percent believe immigration threatens it.

Safety, security and trust

Despite a high-profile [terrorist attack](#) in Copenhagen just weeks before the survey was administered, less than 9 percent of Copenhageners said they were "very" or "somewhat" worried about a terrorist attack.

Emerson said the residents' attitudes might be due to the way the February 2015 shooting was publicly discussed.

"Despite the religious overtones of the crime, politicians in Denmark did not characterize it as a terrorist attack," Emerson said. "Instead, they framed it as a psychological issue involving a single person."

In addition, only 19.2 percent of Copenhageners said they're "very worried" or "somewhat worried" about crime. In contrast, 70.4 percent of Houstonians are "very worried" or "somewhat worried" about lawbreakers in their city.

When it comes to trust, the overwhelming majority of Copenhagen residents—84 percent—said most people can be trusted. Less than 36 percent of Houstonians felt the same way about their fellow residents.

Emerson, who has lived in both cities, said the different dynamics are profound.

"I can feel the difference, living in these two cities," he said. "In Houston, you come from the perspective that somebody's always trying to get something. You're always cautious. The opposite assumption is true in Copenhagen."

Smiley added, "Trust between citizens greatly shapes what cities can get done, and the extent to which people will interact with each other."

Housing and transportation

By a ratio of almost 3-to-1, Copenhagen residents prefer to live in mixed developments rather than in collections of single-family homes. Houstonians are evenly split on this issue. Nearly 90 percent of Copenhageners have a bicycle, and more than two-thirds of them had used it at least once in a month's time. These numbers are much higher than those for Houstonians. Only 37.1 percent of Bayou City residents own a bicycle, and only 9 percent had used it at least once in a 30-day period.

Smiley noted that Houston's heat, size and roadway structure have all rendered bicyclists a small (albeit growing) portion of the city's population.

While Houston is regarded as one of the most automobile-dependent cities in the U.S., a majority of Copenhagen residents—63.9 percent—favor imposing a car limit in the central city. When asked about their primary mode of transportation for commuting, only 36.5 percent of Copenhageners said they drive, compared with 82.8 percent of Houstonians.

Environmental issues

When it comes to concern over general environmental issues, 85.9 percent of Copenhagen residents and 77.3 percent of Houstonians were "very" or "somewhat" worried. However, Copenhageners expressed less concern over air pollution than Houstonians. While only 13.2 percent of Copenhagen residents indicated they were "very worried" about the impact of air pollution on their family's health, nearly three times as many Houstonians—38.2 percent—cited this as a matter of great concern. (According to the report authors, Copenhagen has set a goal is to be the first carbon neutral city in the world by 2025, which may explain why its residents are less likely to be concerned about air quality.)

When questioned about the cause of climate change, 78.4 percent of Copenhagen residents blamed human activities, compared with 57.7 percent of Houstonians. And 64.8 percent of Copenhageners identified protecting the environment has a top priority, compared with 43 percent of Houstonians.

About the survey

The Kinder Institute Copenhagen Area Survey is the first study focusing on the Danish city's economy, population, life experiences, beliefs and attitudes. Epinion, a Copenhagen-based market research firm, administered the 2015 survey online over a period of several weeks in spring 2015. Of 1,058 respondents, 61 percent were from the centrally located municipalities of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg, with the rest living in the Copenhagen suburbs. The Houston findings come from the 2013, 2014 and 2015 Kinder Institute Houston Area Surveys. The study was funded by the Kinder Institute.

To download a copy of the report, visit <http://bit.ly/1FTddTt>.

Provided by Rice University

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