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## Research Paper

## Using destination community wellbeing to assess tourist markets: A case study of Magnetic Island, Australia



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## ABSTRACT

Small island destinations face a number of issues related to tourism and its sustainability. Recent discussions of destination development and marketing have suggested that new approaches to tourism management and marketing are needed to address these sustainability issues and that these should be centred on the concept of destination community wellbeing (DCW). This paper examines these issues in the context of a small island destination in Northern Australia. The history of tourism development on Magnetic Island (MI) since the 1980s is a troubled one, with extensive community conflict over various proposed developments and ongoing issues with trust and damage to social capital. A program of engagement was conducted to determine current perceptions of how tourism might contribute to, or detract from, community wellbeing at this destination. While this program identified a number of tourism planning options, only limited attention was paid to the potential markets to support these options. The present paper considers how destination marketing could be used to support more sustainable tourism development for small island destinations. It demonstrates a different approach to tourist market segmentation using a survey of actual and potential visitors to MI to identify and assess tourist markets in terms of their potential to make positive contributions to the DCW of MI. This market segmentation process, which uses tourist characteristics consistent with the DCW elements, needs and aspirations of the MI community, is compared to more traditional market segmentation techniques, showing the value of a sustainability focussed segmentation strategy.

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## 1. Introduction

There is a growing literature that critically analyses traditional approaches to tourism planning, development and marketing and consistently identifies a number of issues related to the failure of tourism to make long term improvements to the quality of life of communities, especially in smaller, peripheral regions (Bramwell & Lane, 2013; Hall, 2011; Jamal, Camargo, & Wilson, 2013; Jovicic, 2014; Moscardo, 2009). Of particular concern is the tourism first or tourism centric nature of typical tourism planning and marketing approaches which assume that tourism is a desirable development tool and focus on the needs of existing tourism businesses and tourist markets (Saarinen, 2013; Moscardo, 2011). In such approaches, the main concern is how to make tourism successful with little detailed examination of how tourism contributes to the quality-of-life or wellbeing of the destination community (McCool & Moisey, 2008; Saarinen, 2013). In this traditional process the

destination community becomes a resource for tourism rather than tourism being explicitly considered as a resource to assist destination residents to achieve their wellbeing needs or aspirations (Moscardo, 2008).

Many of these challenges to tourism as a socio-economic development tool are particularly relevant to small island destinations (SIDs). Discussions of SIDs describe them as being places with unique and fragile natural environments attractive to tourists seeking coastal resort, sun and sand, or cultural heritage experiences. SIDs are typically dependent on tourism as they are usually too small to conduct or compete in other economic sectors – with a high proportion of residents involved in, or exposed to, tourism – and they often have a number of features typical of peripheral regions (Briguglio, 2008; Croes, 2011; Lim & Cooper, 2009; Moyle, Croy, & Weiler, 2010).

A common theme in discussions of SIDs is that tourism development has often been associated with significant negative impacts despite some economic benefits (Dodds, 2012; Moyle et al., 2010; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Discussions of tourism impacts and issues for SIDs often conclude with calls for new approaches to tourism development for SIDs that encourage greater sustainability and competitiveness (Croes, 2011; Dodds,

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2012; Lim & Cooper, 2009; Scheyvens, 2011).

New approaches to tourism planning and marketing are required for SIDs and this paper argues that the emerging literature on tourism and destination community wellbeing (DCW) offers some ideas on what these new approaches might involve. More specifically, the current paper extends this discussion on tourism, sustainability and DCW into destination marketing, to examine the changes required to tourism marketing when DCW is explicitly used as a framework for tourism planning and development. In particular, this paper reports on a study that sought to identify and profile tourist markets to a SID based on variables linked to the wellbeing features identified by the island community.

## 2. Sustainability, tourism and destination community wellbeing

Some recent studies of SIDs have explicitly examined the links between tourism, different forms of capital and the quality of life or wellbeing of residents (Nawijn & Mitas, 2012; Petrosillo, Costanza, Aretano, Zaccarelli, & Zurlini, 2013). This is consistent with a renewed focus on wellbeing or quality-of-life (QoL) in the wider sustainability literature (Bandarage, 2013; Costanza, 2009; Jaba-reen, 2008; Scott, 2012). Costanza (2009) has argued for a shift in the way we consider the global economic system, arguing that we need to remember that the goal of economic activity is to improve all aspects of wellbeing/QoL. In response, discussions of sustainability and wellbeing have centred on the need to understand and manage impacts on all forms of capital including natural, social, human, financial, built, cultural and political (Bandarage, 2013; Costanza, 2009; Scott, 2012). Two aspects of this wellbeing approach to sustainability are particularly important to recognise. Firstly, there is a growing recognition that economic growth does not often result in equitable or widespread improvements to the other forms of capital that make up wellbeing (Costanza, 2009; Redclift, 2005). Secondly, there are increasing calls to move from a weak to a strong approach to sustainability (Springett, 2010). A weak approach assumes that all forms of capital are equal and easily inter-changed, while a strong approach argues that the forms of capital cannot be easily substituted (Dietz & Neumayer, 2007). In particular, a strong approach to sustainability gives highest importance to natural capital, as it can rarely be replaced, and underpins many of the other forms of capital (Springett, 2010).

Discussions of QoL and wellbeing also exist in the tourism literature. Consistent with the criticisms of tourism planning and development processes outlined at the start of the paper, the existing literature has mainly considered the wellbeing of tourists (Genc, 2012) and tourism businesses (Zhao, Ritchie, & Echtner, 2011). Only recently have there been studies examining the links between tourism and the wellbeing of destination residents or communities. This research has established links in destination communities between the various forms of capital and wellbeing, and between tourism and changes to these capitals (Andereck & Nyuapane, 2010; Mai et al., 2014; McGehee, O'Bannon, Lea, & Perdue, 2010; Rivera, Croes, & Lee, 2016; Tyrrell, Paris, & Biaett, 2013; Yu, Cole, & Chancellor, 2014) and also suggested some ways in which different styles of tourism and different approaches to tourism planning and development could have different impacts on DCW (Croes, 2012; Moscardo, 2012; Moscardo, Konovalov, Murphy, & McGehee, 2013; Pirnar & Gunlu, 2012). To date, these suggestions have not often been translated into tourism planning practice and have not been extended beyond policies and planning to incorporate changes to destination marketing.

## 3. Sustainability marketing

In the introduction to a special issue of the Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science on Sustainability, Hult (2011) notes the growth in concerns about sustainability amongst businesses and their stakeholders and outlines the need for a convergence between sustainability and marketing. Attempts to incorporate marketing and sustainability are evident in the emergence of societal marketing, social marketing, ecological marketing, green marketing, environmental marketing and, most recently, sustainability marketing (Belz & Peattie, 2009). Belz and Peattie (2009, p. 31) define sustainability marketing as 'building and maintaining sustainable relationships with customers, the social environment and the natural environment', which requires 'the planning, organizing, implementing and controlling marketing resources and programmes to satisfy consumers while considering social and environmental criteria'. They go on to outline the key elements and processes that need to change in marketing to support sustainability. In their list of key elements, understanding consumer behaviour is second after understanding the major social and ecological problems that have to be addressed.

Research aimed at understanding consumers and sustainability can be classified into three main types. The first includes examinations of consumer values in relation to consumer awareness of, and consumer attitudes towards, sustainability in general and specific sustainability issues (Balderjahn, Peyer, & Paulssen, 2013; Peattie, 2010), while the second includes studies that analyse the gaps between awareness and concern and action (Newton & Meyer, 2013). The third type of research comprises studies to identify, profile and assess the size of both general sustainable consumer markets (Akehurst, Afonso, & Goncalves, 2012) and markets for specific sustainable products (Verain et al., 2012).

There are three key findings from this research of relevance to the present discussion. Firstly, there is widespread and growing consumer awareness of, and interest in, buying products that are more environmentally and socially responsible (Sheth, Sethia & Srinivas, 2011). Secondly, despite overall growth in sustainable consumption there continue to be large gaps between consumer concern and action (Luchs, Brower & Chitturi, 2012). Thirdly, studies of the factors that contribute to these gaps consistently identify a lack of information about the specific behaviours that are required of consumers, problems with a lack of opportunity to engage in sustainable consumption or sustainability behaviours, and concerns about the quality and cost of responsible products as being major issues that prevent higher levels of consumer action (Luchs et al., 2012; Newton & Meyer, 2013; Peattie, 2010).

As with many other aspects of sustainability, discussions of sustainability and marketing in tourism are both recent and uncommon (Pomeroy, Noble & Johnson, 2011; Hall, 2014). While there has been little examination of how the principles of sustainability marketing might be applied to destinations, there are studies that attempt to understand tourists and sustainable action especially in relation to resource use (Barr & Prillwitz, 2012) and climate change (Gössling, Scott, Hall, Ceron & Dubois, 2012) and to identify and profile responsible, eco- or sustainable tourism markets. The most extensive work on identifying sustainable tourist market segments has been conducted by Dolnicar and colleagues, who have segmented tourists by their reported pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours at home and while on holidays (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008a,b), by willingness to pay for environmentally responsible tourism products (Dolnicar & Long, 2009), and their environmental footprint (Dolnicar, 2010). This work and recent studies by Boley and Nickerson (2013), and Del Chiappa and Lorenzo-Romero (2014) suggests that it is possible to identify tourists by characteristics that can be linked to more sustainable actions at destinations.

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