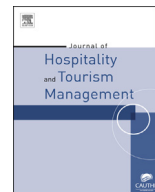




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management

journal homepage: <http://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-hospitality-and-tourism-management>

Building small destination resilience to the impact of bushfire: A case study



Joanne Pyke*, Terry De Lacy, Alexandra Law, Min Jiang

Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 17 May 2016

Keywords:

Nature-based tourism

Vulnerability

Resilience

Bushfire

Community engagement

Sustainability

ABSTRACT

This article draws on the findings of a recent study undertaken to investigate the impact of bushfire on the tourism economy of Harrietville, a small town in North East Victoria, Australia. The study had a particular focus on the impact of the 'Harrietville Fire' that burnt for 55 days in early 2013. While the fire did not actually cause a loss of lives or property within Harrietville, road access to the town was closed for effectively three months of 2013 due to both the fire and post-fire flooding. Informed by a visitor survey and in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders, the Destination Sustainability Framework (DSF) was applied to reveal adaptations necessary for the town to minimise the economic effects of future fire events. The need for tourism planning and improved stakeholder communications emerged as key priorities. This article illustrates the application of the DSF in one small destination, explores the value of the framework in terms of bringing community perspectives on risk and recovery to the foreground, and provides insights that might be applied to similar small destinations in Australia reliant on nature-based attractions to underpin the tourism economy.

© 2016 The Authors.

1. Introduction

In common with much of the Australian state of Victoria, the North East region of Victoria has been severely impacted by bushfires. Recent fire events (2002/03, 2006/07, 2009 and 2013) have caused loss of life, property and livestock as well as destruction of extensive protected areas. One of the impacts has been disruption of the tourism industry which is a major economic driver in the region and one that is sympathetic to the extant agricultural, lifestyle and natural environmental values of the area.

The most recent fire had a particularly harsh impact on Harrietville—a small village with a population of 403 (Easterbrook, 2013). While the fire was named 'the Harrietville Fire', the fire was ignited by lightning at 'Smoko'; a locality four kilometres to the north-east and then travelled around Harrietville to within 100 meters of Mt Hotham and across the Great Alpine Road. The fire burnt for 55 days and combined with post-fire flooding, resulted in at least partial road closures to Harrietville for 10 weeks of the first three months of 2013 (Mt Hotham Resort, 2013). Further road

closures also took place in November 2013 for road maintenance. As a result, the town lost income from visitors or transit tourists for three months of 2013.

Harrietville is located on the Great Alpine Road between the regional centre of Bright and Mt Hotham. The town is bordered by the Alpine national park and state forest, rivers, ski-fields and iconic touring routes for walkers, cars, motor-bikes and cyclists. With a capacity of approximately 1000 beds, camping facilities, two pubs, restaurants and a general store, the town functions as a holiday destination in its own right, serves as a base for both tourism employees and visitors to the ski-fields at Mt Hotham and Dinner Plain, offers 'overflow' accommodation for visitors to Bright in peak periods, is a base for bushwalkers to Mt Feathertop and provides a rest stop for transit tourists. The local community is largely dependent on tourism, either directly through property, employment and/or business interests, as well as indirectly through an investment in the character of the locality. Consequently, the road closures had a harsh economic impact.

This paper draws on research undertaken to assess Harrietville's economic vulnerability to bushfire and to identify options for increasing resilience. The research was guided by the Destination Sustainability Framework (DSF) (Calgaro, Lloyd & Dominey-Howes, 2014) as a holistic and place based theoretical lens and analytic framework. While the DSF has been applied in destinations

* Corresponding author. Tourism, Hospitality, Music and Events Disciplinary Group, College of Business, Victoria University, PO Box 14428 Melbourne, Vic 8001, Australia.

E-mail address: Joanne.Pyke@vu.edu.au (J. Pyke).

throughout the Asia/Pacific region (Jiang & DeLacy, 2014; Klint et al. 2012), the Harrietville research applies the model to a small destination that is arguable unique, yet shares characteristics with other small destinations which are similarly reliant on tourism. This paper illustrates and assesses the value of applying the DSF for small destinations such as Harrietville.

2. Destination vulnerability and resilience

As a coupled human–environment system, the vulnerability of tourism destinations to external risks, and particularly climatic shocks and stressors, is widely recognised in the literature (Becken & Hay, 2007; Calgaro & Lloyd, 2008; Cioccio & Michael, 2007). While risk and natural hazards represents a key research strand which contributes to vulnerability research, tourism researchers are increasingly interested in understanding and addressing impacts of climate change as triggers of tourism destination vulnerability (Calgaro, Dominey-Howes & Lloyd, 2014; Jiang & DeLacy, 2014). Referring to “the ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organisation, and the capacity to adapt to stress and change” (IPCC, 2007, p. 880), resilience is an expression of the strength of a coupled human–environment system (Carpenter, Walker, Anderies, & Abel, 2001). From a vulnerability/resilience approach, tourism adaptation theory helps to explain the complex interactions between external risks and changes and the affected system's conditions. Based on such an understanding, tourism destination sustainability may be achieved by reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience.

The research aim was to undertake a vulnerability and resilience (V/R) assessment of the tourism economy, informed by both primary and secondary data gathered over the course of the project. This analysis was framed by the Destination Sustainability Framework (DSF) developed by Calgaro (2010) and Calgaro, Lloyd, et al. (2014) (See Fig. 1). The DSF was originally applied in Thailand in the context of tsunami (Calgaro, Dominey-Howes, et al., 2014), and in a number of Pacific destinations in the context of climate change (Jiang & DeLacy, 2014; Klint et al. 2012). The previous applications of the DSF in small tourism destinations have demonstrated that the framework, with an explicit tourism orientation and a holistic and system-oriented approach, has enabled in-depth analysis of destination vulnerability and resilience.

The DSF comprises six main elements: (i) the combination of shock(s) and/or stressor(s) that affect destinations, (ii) three interconnected dimensions of vulnerability – exposure, sensitivity, and system adaptiveness, (iii) the dynamic feedback loops that express the outcomes or consequences of actions taken (or not taken) in response to the shocks and stressors, (iv) the contextualised root causes and drivers that shape places (including destinations) and their characteristics, (v) the scale, and (vi) multiple timeframes within which social–ecological change occurs.

The analysis began with the identification of shocks and stressors, or *what* the tourism destination is vulnerable or resilient to and the factors which expose vulnerability or resilience rather than being the cause of vulnerability in itself. Shocks and stressors are also differentiated given that they have different implications for prioritising adaptation strategies. In Harrietville's case, the shocks include the actual fire events and related events such as post-fire flooding. Stressors include factors that have exacerbating effects, such as environmental degradation.

The analysis undertaken is primarily concerned with the exploration of three interconnected dimensions of vulnerability and resilience: exposure, sensitivity, and system adaptiveness. Exposure refers to the destination's physical characteristics while sensitivity relates to the economic, social, political and

environmental conditions that shape how the destination is affected by the shocks and stressors. System adaptiveness is concerned with how the system responds. Through an overview and assessment of these characteristics, ways in which tourism stakeholders can adapt to change are revealed. According to the IPCC definition, adaptation refers to a process of adjustment to actual or expected climate, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities (IPCC, 2011). This was the purpose of the analysis – to inform a process of adaptation to withstand future fire events.

3. Method

A case study approach was employed to gain a multifaceted understanding of the town's context as well as to generate insights that can be applied at similar destinations (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As Yin (2003) emphasises, a case study is a research strategy rather than a method in itself and is useful for providing explanations (how and why) for a given phenomenon. To conduct the case study, a mix of methods was implemented in order to gather relevant primary and secondary data. Methods included a visitor survey, in-depth interviews and the analysis of national and international visitor data. These were chosen to explore both how and why the system is vulnerable or resilient and so both qualitative and quantitative methods were required. The visitor survey revealed quantitative values of what is vulnerable or resilient (for example, visitor behaviours, demographics and spending), while in-depth interviews gathered qualitative insights from stakeholders.

The visitor survey was designed with reference to the relevant literature including the National Visitor survey (Tourism Research Australia, 2014) and related tourism research (Sanders, Laing, & Houghton, 2008). The survey included 22 questions across three sections: purpose, motivations and behaviours when visiting Harrietville; knowledge, understanding and response to bushfire risks; and, demographic details. The survey was administered over the 2014 Easter period in Harrietville. The survey was paper based, self-completed and left at eight visitor points (cafes, general store, the Easter Fair, the trout farm, hotels, caravan park). Tourism operators and ‘roving’ researchers invited visitors to complete the survey and return to a secure box. A total of 285 usable surveys were completed and analysed using SPSS.

One survey limitation was the timing as bushfire is highly unlikely during Easter and visitor characteristics are likely to differ from summer visitors. Given the time constraints, however, Easter was the only practical option of data collection. The findings therefore need to be interpreted as being inclusive of the views of visitors at that particular time of year which may vary from the visitor profile at other peak times such as at Christmas holidays.

A particular interest of the research was to estimate visitor spending and the survey included a question on estimated spending on the holiday and activities. To support this estimate, national visitor data was obtained from Tourism Research Australia. This data was disaggregated and compared to the visitor survey findings to arrive at an estimate of visitor spending in the area.

Twenty-five face-to-face in-depth interviews were also conducted with tourism stakeholders selected to ensure representation across tourism stakeholder groups. Eleven interviewees were from the tourism industry (operators, planners, event organisers), five were community members, and nine interviewees were government officers from across tourism related sectors such as parks management. The interviews were semi-structured to yield a structured sequence of findings, but designed to be open enough to allow for adaptation for each interviewee and encourage deeper qualitative insights (Mason, 2006). The interviews included 12 questions relating to experiences of fire events, impacts, fire management and recovery, Harrietville's resilience to fire,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1011374>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1011374>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)