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"Managed evils" of hedonistic tourism in the Maldives: Islamic social representations and their mediation of local social exchange

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores resident attitudes toward tourism development in the Maldives. Findings from 50 semi-structured interviews and 200 household surveys collected in two island communities provide insights into the reconciliation of deeply held Islamic social representations with proximate hedonistic tourism. In the less tourism-affiliated island, religious affinity and social exchange were central as to how residents viewed tourism as an 'evil' from which their community should be insulated. In the more tourism-affiliated case, social exchange and social representations influenced how tourism is rationalised as a 'managed evil'.

Introduction

High quality of life and resident satisfaction are recognised as core outcomes of sustainable destination development that serves the actual needs and demands of the local community (Ndivo & Cantoni, 2016; Zuo, Gursoy, & Wall, 2017) while sustaining local tourism itself through political support, cultures of hospitality, and enthused and effective employee participation (Weaver & Lawton, 2013). The inevitability of such desirable reciprocity, however, is challenged by tourism's association with a complex of potential economic, socio-cultural and environmental costs and benefits. There is ongoing debate on the feasibility of tourism-led economic growth as a strategy for achieving development goals (Bojanic & Lo, 2016; Cárdenas-García, Sánchez-Rivero, & Pulido-Fernández, 2015), but economic outcomes such as revenue, employment and affiliated multiplier effects (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Pratt, 2015) are often posited by advocates as the primary rationale for pursuing tourism-centric development strategies. Collateral social benefits such as increased inter-cultural harmony and improved prospects for world peace are also often claimed (D'Amore, 1988; Kim, Prideaux, & Prideaux, 2007). Yet, because economic imperatives are usually prioritised (Weaver & Lawton, 2014), socio-cultural aspirations may be marginalised, and manifest ultimately as socio-cultural discord. Associated processes include cultural liminality, acculturation and cultural commodification (Cole, 2007; Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Park, 2016).

Opportunities for such discord, and consequent resident disaffection, are amplified by the presence of potentially destabilising factors such as cultural and linguistic disconformity, external control, host–guest living standard discrepancies, rapid place change, elevated guest-to-host ratios, and reliance on expatriate labour (Davidson & Sahli, 2015; McKercher, Wang, & Park, 2015; Shakeela & Cooper, 2009; Wortman, Donaldson, & Westen, 2016; Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). Additional complexity is introduced when 'religiosity' and religious differences are brought into this equation, given religion's ingrained and privileged status within diverse socio-cultural contexts (Bloch, 2017; Brown & Osman, 2017). Religion and tourism are strongly and integrally connected in the host–guest nexus, yet despite recommendations for religion and other personal values to be integrated into resident perceptions and other tourism-related research (Wong, McIntosh, & Ryan, 2013), this faith dimension is still only marginally engaged.

Inclusion of religious beliefs is a major contribution of this paper, which identifies resident perceptions of and support for tourism

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in two communities of contrasting tourism intensity in the Maldives, an Islamic country dependent on tourists with hedonistic motivations. As such, the Maldives can be situated within an emergent "Islamic pleasure periphery" where attendant social exchanges are mediated by deeply held faith-based social representations as well as economic pragmatism. Following a literature review that examines resident perceptions of local tourism and affiliated social theories, the case study communities and mixed methods research approaches are described. Discussion of theoretical and practical implications follows presentation of the findings.

Literature review

Solicitations of resident perceptions and attitudes about local tourism impacts indicate ambivalent relationships between tourism and host communities (McKercher, 1993). Diverse tourism, tourist and resident contexts, often associated with specific destination 'life cycle' stages, yield various findings with regard to factors that generate satisfaction or disaffection. Disapproval has been associated for example with place attachment, sense of place identity connected to long-term residency (Huh & Vogt, 2008; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004), and perceived tourism-related cost-of-living increases (Del Chiappa & Abbate, 2016; McKercher et al., 2015). Income erosion induced by shifts from high wage manufacturing to lower wage hospitality employment has also created negative perceptions of tourism employment (Casado-Diaz & Simon, 2016; Lacher & Oh, 2012), leading to low and/or non-participation (Tosun, 2002). Tourism's facilitation of heritage conservation is recognised, but concerns about heritage loss (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Tucker & Carnegie, 2014), diminishing social capital (Diedrich & Aswani, 2016; Okazaki, 2008), negative environmental impacts (Kaltenborn, Andersen, Nellemann, Bjerke, & Thrane, 2008; Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009), and tourism's interference in daily life and crowding effects (Teye, Sonmez, & Sirakaya, 2002) all foster negative sentiments. Emotional solidarity with tourists, however, affiliates with positive perceptions (Hasani, Moghavvemi, & Hamzah, 2016; Li & Wan, 2017; Woosnam, 2011).

Spatial, temporal and psychological dimensions also affect perceptions. Geographically, Belisle and Hoy (1980) allege that negative perceptions tend to increase with distance from high impact tourism spaces, while McKercher et al. (2015) invoke a historical perspective, similar to the tourism area life cycle (Butler, 1980), to implicate the transition of 'non-tourism' places into 'shared' or 'tourism' places as a factor underlying disaffection. Psychologically, studies on place attachment and sense of place further indicate long-term residents as more negatively inclined towards tourism development (Almeida-Garcia, Pelaez-Fernandez, Balbuena-Vazquez, & Cortes-Macias, 2016), key reasons being the creation of contested spaces and decreased local enjoyment of available resources (Buckley, Guitart, & Shakeela, 2017; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Peel & Steen, 2007).

Tourism planning and development, moreover, are political processes (Hall, 1994) which spawn conflict among groups with differing interests and agendas. Destinations with a colonial past are especially implicated (Park, 2016), with World War II Japanese atrocity sites in China, for example, helping to mobilise patriotic sentiments and antagonism toward an 'unapologetic' and resurgent Japan (Weaver et al., 2017). Selected elements of colonial history here and elsewhere are manipulated for both political and economic purposes (Wong, 2013). In Nazareth, Israel, Muslim residents feeling alienated and disenfranchised were less supportive of religious/heritage tourism development and less likely to value associated economic contributions (Uriely, Israeli, & Reichel, 2003). An overt racial element is apparent in regions of colonisation such as the Caribbean where a "plantation" mode of resort tourism displaces export agriculture but retains similar white/black, master/slave relationships in a neo-colonial context (Weaver, 1988). Sex tourism in such contexts also reflects highly racialised interactions between host and guest and influences respective perceptions of the 'Other' (Herold, Garcia, & DeMoya, 2001).

As with Caribbean beach resorts, type of tourism development (Pérez & Nadal, 2005; Wan, 2012) is influential, (Freitag, 1994, p. 551) alleging that the "enclave resort is not designed to promote economic linkages at the community level", while Naidoo and Sharpley (2016) ascribe fewer positive outcomes for local communities from same due to the privileging of élites. Tourist type (Bimonte & Punzo, 2016; Stoeckl, Greiner, & Mayocchi, 2006) and behaviour (Monterrubio, 2016) are also implicated, with perceived sexual permissiveness of foreign tourists spawning resident discontent in Ghana (Teye et al., 2002). Unconstrained and disruptive revelry among partying high school graduates during the annual Schoolies Week, similarly, was criticised by residents of Australia's Gold Coast (Weaver & Lawton, 2013).

One conclusion from this diverse body of research is rejection of simplistic assertions, apparent in models such as the Irridex (Doxey, 1976), that increased tourism development associates neatly with increased resident dissatisfaction. Rather, communities in any type or stage of tourism development seemingly recognise affiliated costs *and* benefits, arraying along a bell curve where, beyond small groups clearly demarcated as supporters or opponents, most residents broadly support tourism but acknowledge costs. This ambivalence typically entails recognition of economic benefits but also accompanying socio-cultural costs that collectively are outweighed by the former (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Ap, 1992; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). This is significant in that recent research has established a positive correlation between perceived net benefits of tourism development, satisfaction and quality of life (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015), and a direct connection to support for the industry (Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Sharma & Gursoy, 2015; Stylidis & Terzidou, 2014).

These assessments resonate in social exchange theory, wherein "interaction between persons is an exchange of goods, material and nonmaterial" (Homans, 1962, p. 279), driven by desire to effect trade-offs between perceived benefits and costs (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). The literature is replete with illustrations of the affiliated dynamics. Faulkner and Tideswell (1997), in one variant, applied altruistic surplus concepts to the Gold Coast and found that individuals tolerated negative tourism impacts because they concurrently recognised wider community benefits. Weaver and Lawton (2013) observed the same in Gold Coast resident perceptions of Schoolies Week. Despite recognition of high-risk anti-social participant behaviour, most tolerated the event as a matter of revenue generation and social forbearance over short-term and highly localised social disruption (Weaver & Lawton, 2013). Tourist excesses were similarly justified as "necessary evils" in an English tourist-historic city (Bahaire & Elliott-White, 1999, p. 272). In the insular

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