



Journal of Marine and Island Cultures

www.sciencedirect.com



The mutual gaze: Host and guest perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism: A case study of the Yasawa Islands, Fiji

Supattra Sroyetch

School of Business, Khon Kaen University (Nong Khai Campus), 112 M.7, T. Nong Kom Koh, Muang, Nong Khai 43000, Thailand

Received 8 March 2016; accepted 30 September 2016

KEYWORDS

Perception;
Backpacker tourism;
Socio-cultural impacts;
Less-developed countries;
Fiji

Abstract The mutual gaze enacts both hosts and guests. This paper expands the literature relating to the impact perspective of backpacker tourism. It investigates how hosts and backpackers perceive the socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism on local communities in less-developed countries; specifically the Yasawa Islands of Fiji. The discussion is based on data collected via surveys and a series of interview with hosts and backpackers in 2011. The results suggest that hosts and backpackers significantly perceived the socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism differently. While backpackers are generally neutral in their perceptions regarding their own impacts on the destination, the hosts are notably more aware. This knowledge is fruitful as it can inform destination policymakers in their deliberation on further sustainable tourism practices.

© 2016 Institution for Marine and Island Cultures, Mokpo National University. Publishing services by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

While links between “perceptions of tourism” and “stakeholders” have been highlighted in the tourism literature (Moufakkir and Reisinger, 2013, p. xiii), there is a dearth of understanding on tourists’ perceptions of their impacts on visiting destinations. Past studies on tourism impact perceptions have predominantly paid attention to the perceptions of hosts; focussing largely on residents’ perceptions, whilst little emphasis has been on the perceptions of their guests. Challenging that narrow unilateral approach, this paper borrows from the concept of “mutual gaze”, that proposed by Maoz (2006). She notes the importance of recognizing that the gaze,

and hence the perception generated is garnered through more than a single lens – only a one-way gaze. Rather, a reciprocal gaze is at play and thus, a “mutual gaze” of tourist to locals, locals to tourists, and tourist to tourists, all have constant influences on perceptions. This mutual gaze contributes to the tourist/host encounter and each gaze has a consequential effect on the other (Maoz, 2006). It is important to therefore incorporate the tourist gaze into tourism impacts literature. Van Winkle and MacKay (2008) pointed out that tourists will not adjust their behaviour in order to diminish their negative impacts on a destination if they are unaware of their own generation of these impacts. As such, the research that investigated how both hosts and tourists think about tourism may be considered as important as it can facilitate how a destination develops towards greater success and sustainability (Moyle et al., 2012).

E-mail address: srosup@kku.ac.th

Peer review under responsibility of Mokpo National University.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2016.09.004>

2212-6821 © 2016 Institution for Marine and Island Cultures, Mokpo National University. Publishing services by Elsevier B.V.

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Please cite this article in press as: Sroyetch, S. The mutual gaze: Host and guest perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism: A case study of the Yasawa Islands, Fiji. *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2016.09.004>

Within backpacker tourism literature, there is a research gap concerning hosts' and guests' perceptions of the impacts of backpacker tourism. According to some researchers (Richards and Wilson, 2004b; Scheyvens, 2002), there is a limited knowledge on the impacts of backpacker tourism on local communities in less developed countries (LDCs). The extant literature on the impacts of backpacker tourism is significantly based on the perspectives of outsiders (researchers and scholars) (Hampton, 2009), whilst the crucial perspectives of hosts and backpackers themselves have been relatively overlooked. Additionally, most of the extant studies have focused on the economic impacts of backpacker tourism whilst other dimensions of impact are still under-explored. This paper reduces the current knowledge gap, shedding light on the understanding of the socio-cultural impacts of backpacker tourism from the perspectives of both hosts and guests.

The term 'backpacker' usually refers to a budget-minded international traveller who generally travels with a rucksack to several destinations, taking longer trip duration than conventional tourists, has a flexible itinerary and often utilize backpacker infrastructure such as public transport and budget accommodation (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Sørensen, 2003). Drawing on this definition, "backpacker" as defined in this study is characterized as an international traveller staying in budget accommodation, travelling away from his/her residence for at least one month, and having a flexible and extended travel itinerary.

The exotic "Other" or the authenticity of places and people is a crucial part of backpacking for the development of their cultural knowledge (Cohen, 1982; Desforges, 2000; Elsrud, 2001; Young, 2005). Accordingly, backpackers are inclined to avoid touristy destinations and wander away from the well-trodden tracks (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2003). They believe that the real experience from travelling is gained by practising an "anti-tourist" mode. They therefore avoid, as much as possible, travelling patterns performed by conventional tourists (Loker-Murphy and Pearce, 1995; Welk, 2004). As Maoz (2005) claims, backpackers can empower local communities as they pay attention to the authentic "Other" which encourages them to interact with and patronise locally-owned enterprises. Therefore, the growth of backpacker tourism in such circumstances is beneficial at the local level. Despite the apparent correlation, the context of host-guest encounter in backpacker tourism literature has scarcely been discussed (Hampton, 1998; Scheyvens, 2002; Wilson, 1997).

Host and tourist perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of tourism

A number of previous studies have investigated host perceptions of socio-cultural effects brought by tourism (Besculides et al., 2002; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Haley et al., 2005; King et al., 1993). Those studies tend to report that hosts are more likely to perceive the socio-cultural impacts as rather negative (Brunt and Courtney, 1999). This supports Kousis (1989) who notes, tourism has often been blamed for the disruption of socio-cultural spheres of the local community. Concerning its positive side, tourism is perceived by hosts as a device for revitalizing cultures (Besculides et al., 2002; Wang et al., 2006), creating more recreation choices for locals (Brunt and Courtney, 1999), providing prospects for women to participate in its informal sector activities (Shah and

Gupta, 2000), and increasing residents' concern on their heritage resources (Andereck et al., 2005). As regards the socio-cultural costs, the issue of crime (robbers and burglars) has been highlighted by a number of scholars as the perceived negative effect of tourism amongst host residents (Belisle and Hoy, 1980; Long et al., 1990; Milman and Pizam, 1988; Pizam and Pokela, 1985). Other researchers found that hosts seem to perceive tourism as leading to an increase in drug use (Andereck et al., 2005; Belisle and Hoy, 1980; Pizam, 1978), alcoholism (Milman and Pizam, 1988; Pizam, 1978), prostitution and sexual permissiveness (Ap, 1990; Ap and Crompton, 1998; Carter and Beeton, 2004).

Amongst a relatively limited research that focuses on the socio-cultural tourism impacts perceived by tourists, Petrosillo et al. (2007) indicate that tourists at an Italian marine protected area are more aware of its negative social effects such as overcrowding at the destination. Similarly, Manning et al. (2000) found that the perceived social tourism impacts amongst visitors in the US Acadia National Park often involve the irritations of crowding caused by other visitors and that these reduce the quality of their tourism experience. Such findings support Farrell and Marion (2001) who indicate that tourists frequently recognise the impacts that directly affect the quality of their tourism experiences. Furthermore, Suntutikul (2007) found that tourists who visit Muang Sing Village in Laos express concerns about the development of tourism that may harmfully affect the locals' way of living. The negative impacts of tourism perceived by tourists are associated with changes in the locals' lifestyle.

There are a relatively limited number of studies that pay attention to the perceptions of both hosts and tourists towards the impacts of tourism in a single destination or community. The majority of the previous studies have found differences between the perceptions of the two parties (Byrd et al., 2009; Canavan, 2013; Dowling, 1993; Holden, 2010; Holdnak et al., 1993; Ismail et al., 2011; Kavallinis and Pizam, 1994; Lucas, 1979; Puczkó and Rátz, 2000; Sánchez Cañizares et al., 2015; Saremba and Gill, 1991; Simpson, 1999). Amongst the studies that have focus on how hosts and tourists perceive the socio-cultural impacts of tourism, Ismail et al. (2011) found that hosts and tourists significantly perceive the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the small Malaysian islands differently. The hosts are shown to explicitly express more positive views than their guests on the issues that tourism generates welfare (e.g. more variety in recreational facilities, improves public infrastructure) for their communities. Holden (2010) found different perceptions towards the effects of tourism in the Annapurna Conservation Area in Nepal between hosts (lodge owners and tour guides) and tourists (trekkers). The hosts were more concerned on the socio-cultural effects of tourism than their guests. The social benefits brought to the community perceived by the hosts such as increased educational opportunities for children and improved households' hygiene and sanitation and helped in revitalizing the local culture. The negative impacts of tourism included introduced begging habits of children, increased drug (Marijuana) usage, and changes in locals' dress code, hair and lifestyle. In contrast, tourists were concerned more on the economic contribution of tourism to the locals and the environmental issues of the destination.

Canavan (2013) found that whilst tourists in the British Isle of Man pay more attention to the issues of natural surround-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7535126>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7535126>

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