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Editorial

Connecting tourism development with small island destinations and with the well-being of the island residents



This special issue discloses the connectedness of three constructs: tourism development, small island destinations, and the well-being of the island residents. This connectedness has been conspicuously lacking in the tourism literature – perhaps resulting from the capricious state of the concept of well-being and the means to effectively connect the three constructs; albeit the connection does exist. For example, as tourists are demanding more unique experiences in making their destination choice, the interaction with the local population could become crucial in defining and imbuing meaning to those experiences. Thus, locals providing warm and welcoming feelings of friendliness to tourists, as well as a willingness to include and interact with tourists according to the locals' everyday life could ascribe powerful and intangible attributes of the destination and its people to the tourists. These attributes, secured only by actual tourists' experiences, could ultimately characterize the value of the destination's uniqueness.

The residents' willingness to engage with tourists and the quality of that engagement is founded in the manner in which each resident perceives tourism development as it impinges on his or her well-being. Yet, because well-being cannot be disentangled from a person's experience, the same set of objective variables, such as income and jobs, which has been traditionally used to measure well-being, may induce different experiences across different people. Therefore, approaching a person's well-being from an objective list of conditions may lead to serious misinterpretations of a person's actual well-being. Thus, it appears that including a subjective approach in measuring well-being may be a more lucrative bridge to aid in the understanding of the connectedness between tourism development, well-being, and small island destinations.

1. Defining the constructs

Tourism development refers to a dynamic process which integrates resources and assets to provide a sense of place and identity to potential tourist markets. Tourism development requires the organization and coordination of a number of stakeholders and businesses that, together, should provide a sense of unique attractiveness through the creation of an experience (the *what*), the effective management of the creative process of the experience (the *how*), and the understanding of the determinants of that experience. Tourism development means that residents should know which experiences (products) are best suited for their environment, should engage in the best production

processes, and should know which experiences are enjoyed by the tourists. Due to the ever-changing conditions of production processes and preferences, tourism development is dynamic in nature and is essentially embedded in constant societal learning regarding the production of experiences that are more appealing in less expensive ways. This constant learning process hinges upon the residents' feelings and perceptions that are spawned by tourism development.

Viewed from this perspective, well-being is the foundation of any successful tourism development. However, in the absence of a happy and satisfied people, a society resolute on possessing a chosen state of well-being cannot be promoted, supported, or sustained by a discontented people. Subjective well-being is thus a crucial consideration in tourism development (Nawijn & Mitas, 2012). Subjective well-being includes its *eudemonia* roots and is defined as a fulfilling and meaningful life. Well-being has been objectively defined for a long time according to income. This perspective is embedded in the welfarist approach, which posits that economic growth would lead to improving well-being (Atkinson, 1999). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has been considered as the only measure of well-being and development, and its use is still widespread.

However, over time, it has become clear that income is an inadequate metric for defining and providing meaning to life. This is partly due to the manner in which economic growth can increase the welfare of some in society while at the same time abating the welfare of others. It is also important that measurement of well-being via income assigns a tangible precept without due consideration for the intangible characteristics that constitute and propel one's freedom to defining one's own well-being. In addition, the relationship between income and well-being may be mediated by the values and circumstances as they are distinctive to the individual. In other words, it is not possible to estimate a person's well-being on the basis of his or her income alone.

Consequently, the non-welfarist framework ascertains that resource (income) is not an adequate metric with which to assess well-being (Atkinson, 1999). Sen's capabilities approach is an important offspring from the non-welfarist approach (Sen, 1986). Sen's approach highlights the person as the ultimate objective of development and defines development as the process of enlarging people's choices and opportunities in life (Croes, 2012). Well-being seen from a multidimensional perspective is an important step forward in understanding well-being as inclusive of people's conditions to exist, to function, and to act on that which they value. This conceptualization of well-being implies that

individuals should have: (1) a range of choices, (2) the freedom to choose according to their awareness and aspirations, and (3) the resources to realize their aspirations.

However, the welfarist and non-welfarist approaches are embedded in objective life conditions that eschew life experience as an important life domain. Both approaches neglect to take into account a person's life experience and how that person thinks about his life experience. All this information is neglected when assessing well-being, because the employed criteria in that assessment is either imputed or presumed. For example, several studies indicated that while a person may objectively be considered as non-poor, the life experience of the person might dictate otherwise (Gasparini, Escudero, Marchionni, & Olivieri, 2009; Rojas, 2008; Croes & Rivera, 2016). That person may feel poor, socially excluded, and embarrassed of his or her social status. Therefore, a person may be in a better position to judge and assess his or her life conditions and opportunities. Moreover, an individual's predilections about his own well-being would be gauged as opposed to what could be a misleading or misinterpreted objective measurement of his well-being.

This strand of thought uses surveys in order to gauge how a person feels about a number of life aspects, such as income, reference group consumption, institutional quality, social trust, mobility, health, safety from crime, education, and employment. For example, respondents in general are asked: *All things being equal on a scale of one to ten: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with your life?'* Thereupon, subjective well-being suggests a new epistemology, which is conceived in accordance with the values of a person's life experiences, rather than in accordance with the constructs of an expert. Hence, it becomes crucial to understand how this life experience can be known and how tourism development shapes this life experience.

Subjective well-being is thus a relevant construct with which to reckon when considering development options and outcomes (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009). Despite the relevance of subjective well-being in understanding development, this topic has been regrettably neglected in small island studies, favoring instead the well-being of residents in developed or large countries. If well-being is the ultimate goal of development, then the understanding of its nature as revealed in the context of development in small islands is crucial for the socio-economic future of the destination, the residents, and tourism development. This understanding is critical because small island destinations do not have the luxury of too many trials and errors due to their scant resources and economic opportunities. Small islands are constrained by structural conditions imposed by the small size of their economies (Croes, 2011). These structural constraints have spawned apprehension in the literature about the survival chances of small islands. These constraints are related to market size, resources, labor, capital, and vulnerability, forcing small islands to look to the global economy in order to achieve economies of scale in the production of exports. Trade was seen as an opportunity for small islands to sidestep market constraints and hence improve the well-being of their citizens (Croes, 2013).

However, many small islands have few natural resources and have had only halting success with efforts to develop a light manufacturing base in textiles and agricultural exports. The small size of their markets have made them ill-suited for manufacturing goods because they lack necessary resources and are subject to high transportation costs for importing and exporting raw materials and finished goods. In addition, due to globalization effects, these small island destinations have witnessed the erosion of their traditional industries' competitiveness. Shares in the global markets have experienced a declining trend, and export shares have also declined. Trade preferences have not been able to generate growth, concealing inefficiencies and leading to misallocation of

resources. The phasing out of trade preferences in favor of agricultural products (e.g. sugar and bananas) has further compromised the economic performance of these countries (Croes, 2013). These failed development experiences have negatively impacted the scope of economic options available to small islands in addition to squandering scant resources.

International tourism has been increasingly used as a way to overcome market constraints and to supplant dwindling traditional export sectors. International tourism sidesteps scale problems because the demand for the product is essentially imported into the small economy. For example, consider an island of 100,000 inhabitants. This island may see its temporary population (and market size) increase by up to ten times that amount. Moreover, the temporary population of tourists will typically have an extremely high purchasing power. Tourists who have knowledge of the local market or whose preferences are aligned with the local market could have a positive impact on the island economy. Therefore, a local firm in the tourism sector will have a much larger market for its goods and services, and may begin to achieve economies of scale and efficiencies. In so doing, tourism could spur economic growth and improve the well-being of the residents of the island.

For the purpose of this special issue, small island destinations are defined as islands with less than 1.5 million inhabitants (in accordance with the definition afforded to small island destinations by the mainstream literature). This study further asserts that small island destinations are compelled, as it were, to get things right the first time in order to prevent further squandering of their scant resources. Understanding the relevance of subjective well-being of their residents, and how this is connected to tourism development, can prevent these islands from repeating costly development mistakes of the past.

2. Relevance of this special issue

The tourism literature is clear that tourism development spawns economic growth. This strand in the literature is grounded in the tourism-led growth hypothesis, which suggests that tourism stimulates the economy in the form of spillovers and externalities (Brida & Pulina, 2010). There is growing empirical evidence which reveals that small islands are not only growing economically, contrary to theoretical expectations stemming from mainstream economics, but that they are also growing faster than larger countries. Tourism growth seems to spawn positive terms of trade which has positive effects on the objective life conditions such as steady jobs, increased household incomes, and better access to education and health care, as well as higher human development indices (Croes, 2011; Ridderstaat, Croes, & Nijkamp, 2016).

The tourism literature has examined each one of these constructs extensively. Interestingly though, in all of the extant studies examining tourism development and well-being, very few have attempted to assess well-being from the perspectives of residents. And those handfuls of subjective well-being studies when conducted in connecting well-being and tourism development have largely ignored small island destinations. This connectedness remains an under-researched area; in other words, will tourism development improve the subjective well-being of the residents in small island destinations? Does tourism development matter for residents from these small islands? These are important questions for destination managers of these small islands due to the scarcity of resources allocated to tourism.

For example, if tourism development results in residents perceiving their jobs as positional goods, tourism development may hurt productivity with dire consequences to individual and social lives in small island destinations. Jobs perceived as positional

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