



Gross happiness of a 'tourism' village in Fiji

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ABSTRACT

For small island developing states, tourism is often seen as a passport to development and modernisation, resulting in economic and social growth. In Fiji, this was recognized in the 1960s, which resulted in large-scale tourism development. Yet the links between tourism development and higher quality of life and wellbeing for residents of tourist destinations are at best ambiguous. Tourism can bring both positive and negative social impacts, yet few studies have attempted to assess whether tourism contributes to holistic quality of life: in short, does tourism make residents happy? Validated measures exist to measure broader wellbeing. This study measures the Gross Happiness Index of two Fijian villages, one of which has a high dependency on tourism income and the other has very little contact with the tourism industry or tourists, to compare the levels of wellbeing. The findings indicate that, despite the 'tourism' village being materially wealthier, the non-tourism villagers are happier across a significant number of life domains. The implications for tourism research and destination management are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Tourism has long been recognized to bring both benefits and costs to host communities (de Kadt, 1979; Krippendorf, 1987). Tourism development can herald economic modernization leading to employment creation, injection of income through the multiplier effect, improved local business viability, regeneration and restructuring of economies in towns and cities where traditional industries are in decline, and the stimulation of inward investment (Page & Connell, 2009). The negative economic impacts can include: inflation, seasonality, forgone opportunity costs, low-paying jobs, and potential over-dependency on tourism (Andereck, Valentine, Vogt, & Knopf, 2007). These economic restructuring processes can lead to social changes in communities, and research has often focused on the detrimental effects of tourism on communities, including: changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationships, collective lifestyles, traditional ceremonies, or community organization (Milman & Pizam, 1988, p. 191). However, there are recognized problems in trying to assess the direct effects of tourism on social systems and communities. Social impacts are often indirect consequences, incremental and slow to develop over time. Additionally, there is a recognized link between economic

dependency on tourism and positive attitudes towards it amongst residents (Liu, Sheldon, & Var, 1987), in what Harrill (2004) calls growth theory, which suggests that those people in the community who have most to benefit from tourism will have the strongest support for its development.

The growth-machine perspective has, however, been challenged (Woosnam & Norman, 2010), and whether impacts are perceived to be positive or negative is generally determined by a range of factors including: the relative level of economic development in relation to working in or owning a business in tourism or a related industry; the distance of place of residence from areas of high tourist activity; the level of contact with tourists; the shared use of facilities by residents and tourists; and the proportion of tourists to residents (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012). Whereas early research on the subject sought to scope out the range of social impacts and to assess the connections between different contexts (Ap, 1990, 1992; Ap & Crompton, 1993), more recent research has advanced the discussion to examine the broader sets of dimensions that have enriched work in this area (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). The majority of studies are based on social exchange theory, which postulates that individuals are likely to judge the outcomes of an exchange according to their perceptions of the associated benefits and costs (Ap, 1990). This has, however, been criticised for being too narrow to explain complex social relations (Moscovici, 1981). Woosnam and Norman, (2010) argue that perceptions of impacts might be influenced by the extent of emotional solidarity

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felt towards tourists by residents, and suggest that more needs to be done to explore the extent of similarity and shared understanding between tourists and residents.

The study of social impacts of tourism on host communities is therefore rich yet inconclusive. On the one hand the field is mature and subject to a number of major reviews (Easterling, 2004) and on the other it is perceived to be in a state of ‘arrested development’ (Deery et al., 2012, p. 66). In a recent review, Deery et al. argue that social impacts research has taken on a circularity of focus on measurement issues and debates concerning the constructs and variables to be considered. This review points to the need for further, more detailed and wider-ranging studies. Indeed, it is only through a better understanding the effects of tourism on individual and communities that policy and management can be effective in ensuring that the optimal levels and types of tourism activity can be implemented (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013).

One of the most fruitful avenues of research on the social impacts of tourism development has been consideration of the quality of life for residents accruing from tourism (Long, Perdue, & Allen, 1990). Many studies across a range of contexts such as social, cultural and environmental factors have examined the links between tourism and perceived quality of life. However, in reviewing this body of work, Kim, Uysal and Sirgy (2003), note that many of these studies capture the effects of tourism’s impacts using objective measures such as poverty, per-capita incomes, crime rates, and pollution. Accordingly, the question remains whether residents perceive there to be an impact from tourism and, if so, whether those impacts influence their sense of wellbeing across a range of life domains. Their study showed that positive perceptions of the economic impacts of tourism significantly influenced material wellbeing, which in turn influenced life satisfaction, but that social and cultural impacts were less substantive influencers of satisfaction. However, whilst recent attempts have probed the links between tourism development and residents’ quality of life, there are recognised limitations to the existing methods used (cf. Kim et al., 2013). Additionally, there are many indicators of wellbeing, and research is needed that introduces some measure of control to examine the direct impacts associated with tourism development.

The following study aims to address this omission through the application of the concept of gross national happiness (GNH) as an overall measure of community wellbeing. Specifically, our aim was to answer the question of whether the presence of tourism in a community influences residents’ sense of happiness, using a holistic measure of wellbeing. The GNH index was applied to two villages: one where tourism has become a firmly established and integral component of the economic and social fabric of the community, and another that is dependent on traditional subsistence economy with very little exposure to tourism.

The context for this research is Fiji, which is a developing country and highly dependent on tourism for its economic development. It has also been the subject of previous research on the social impacts of tourism, where resident were found to support tourism development even though they expressed concerns about negative social and cultural consequences associated with it (King, Pizam, & Milman, 1993). The tourism village was chosen because it is located directly adjacent to an international four-star resort and a high proportion of the local community is employed by the Resort. The ‘non-tourism’ village was chosen for its geographical location (away from the main developed tourism areas) and its traditional lifestyle. Moreover, both villages were chosen because the researchers had good access to potential respondents.

2. Tourism, quality of life and happiness

The links between tourism and quality of life, wellbeing and happiness have been the focus of increasing research in recent

years (Kim et al., 2013). A main impetus for this interest is the recognition that wealth gain does not automatically lead to increased quality of life (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2012). The deficiencies of gross domestic product (GDP) as a measure of welfare have long been recognized. Yet it continues to be used because it provides a standardised measure that allows comparison across countries and provinces. It is also relatively easy to collect because it is universally reported. GDP is defined as the market value of all final goods and services produced within a nation’s geographic borders during a period of time (Layton, Robinson, & Tucker, 2012). Yet higher incomes do not necessarily translate to increased happiness or wellbeing. In economic parlance, the diminishing marginal utility of income means that after a certain level, increased income adds very little incremental happiness (Helliwell et al., 2012, p.5). Across cultures and time, happiness is deemed as something which is to be fostered and pursued as the primary goal of policy makers (Andrews, 1974).

Researchers from a range of disciplines from economics, philosophy, and psychology have sought to examine the relationship between life satisfaction and a range of economic, socio-demographic, institutional, and other variables. It is beyond the scope of the current paper to rehearse these debates, particularly given recent contributions. The concept of wellbeing is important since perceptions of one’s sense of well-being have been linked to higher productivity and a greater engagement in civic life at one end of the scale, to stress, depression and therefore higher welfare costs at the other (Kahn & Juster, 2002). Therefore the presence of tourists within a community, the numbers of tourists, and the scale of tourism development activity could have material as well as subjective effects on residents’ perceptions of wellbeing. However, concepts such as happiness, wellbeing, quality of life, and life satisfaction are often used synonymously in tourism research (Bimonte & Faralla, 2012; Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Cliff, 2012).

The majority of studies that have been conducted into the effects of tourism on residents have applied quality-of-life (QOL) indicators. The early work on QOL of residents at a tourism destination explored attitudes to tourism development in the contexts of satisfaction with various aspects of life and satisfaction with tourism (Bachleitner & Zins, 1999; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999). In this way, tourism development can be managed more effectively if there is satisfaction with the level of tourism in the community – a perception that it contributes to quality of life – and so satisfaction leads to greater community support. A range of different studies have explored the effects of different types of tourism development on quality of life, such as gaming tourism development (Perdue et al., 1999). Andereck and Nyaupane (2011) found that residents’ perceived higher quality of life arose out of specific tourism products such as festivals and attractions. The most recent research has used structural equation modelling to explore the causal relationships such as between tourism development, the perceived value of tourism to the community and quality of life (Kim et al., 2013; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015).

Wellbeing, on the other hand, has been constructed as a mix of objective and subjective assessments. Objective indicators include wealth (income), education, and housing, although the latter items can also be considered to be subjective indicators. Kahn and Juster (2002) note the weak relationships between objective and subjective measures. Many studies in tourism have conflated wellbeing with quality-of-life measures (e.g. Sirgy, 2010), whereas there are crucial conceptual differences. Quality-of-life indicators are based on an individual’s rating of satisfaction with specific domains of their life, whereas wellbeing aims to assess individuals’ perceptions of their lives as a whole, as well as the interactions between different areas of life, including satisfaction, but in the context of the psychological resources needed to achieve an

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