Research Paper

Collaborative tourism planning and subjective well-being in a small island destination

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A B S T R A C T

This paper employed a case study method to examine how a tourism planning process was utilized to discuss resident and community subjective well-being. Sitka, Alaska, a small island community, embarked on a collaborative tourism planning effort as an activity to guide and manage tourism development, particularly development from nonlocal interests that was perceived by some as threatening well-being and quality of life. A general interview guide approach was used and 27 interviews with key informants conducted. The plan document was also consulted as a source of additional insight into the processes, the structure, and their interaction. The research focused on how subjective well-being was defined; how length of residency, livelihood, and role in the community influenced well-being; and how tourism development and concerns over well-being fueled tourism planning.

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1. Introduction

Small island tourism destinations are uniquely positioned to be both sensitive to and proactive about tourism development in their communities (Carlsen & Butler, 2011; Jordan, Vogt, Kruger, & Grewe, 2013). As distinct locales with well-defined geographic boundaries, separated from the mainstream/mainland, and with small populations, small island destinations create and sustain tight-knit protective communities with distinct cultural identities (Cross & Nutley, 1999). The isolated nature of island destinations makes it difficult for residents to ignore or avoid potential tourism development impacts (Hamzah & Hampton, 2013; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). Decisions regarding small island destination tourism development and resulting impacts have the potential to affect the subjective well-being of residents living in island tourism destinations (Douglas, 2006).

Subjective well-being is the sum of an individual's perception of their life and their 'living' environment comprised of social, economic, and environmental factors (Diener, 2000). Psychologists further describe subjective well-being as an individual's cognitive evaluation of their own life as positive, and can include pleasure, the absence of negative emotions, and high satisfaction with life (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2009). Subjective well-being is not a static state, as individuals and groups continually evaluate their interaction with their environment (Luhmann, Hofmann, Eid, & Lucas, 2012). Subjective well-being is central to residents' perception and evaluation of their local quality of life and other environmental factors such as their living environment or shared space with tourists. The perception of subjective well-being by tourism destination residents implies that as individuals, and as part of the greater community, they enjoy their life with tourism activities and do not perceive tourism development as a threat to the environment, quality of life, community well-being, or economic opportunity. One approach individuals take to manage external influences on subjective well-being is through participation in community activities designed to shape the social and physical community (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008). Within the context of small island tourism destinations, residents may choose to address tourism development proactively through tourism planning designed to manage growth and maintain subjective well-being (Jordan, 2015).

Collaborative tourism planning has received significant attention as a way to proactively manage growth and development in a variety of destinations (Byrd, 2007). The collaborative tourism planning process allows for the many stakeholders in tourism destinations to consider tourism development and how their well-being will be affected by no, slow, or rapid growth (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Collaborative tourism planning is different than other types of planning in that it allows for the participation of greater numbers of stakeholders, likely resulting in great variations in perception of well-being. Through collaborative planning, perceptions

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of well-being serve to guide the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the plan to manage tourism development using a broader community framework (Jamal & Stronza, 2009).

Despite significant potential for impacts in small island tourism destinations, little is known about how tourism development and collaborative tourism planning affect residents' perceptions of well-being. This study aims to begin to fill this knowledge gap by examining the relationship between collaborative tourism planning and the perception of subjective well-being using a case study of a community that used collaborative tourism planning to guide tourism development. This study shows how collaborative tourism planning in Sitka, Alaska a small island tourism destination, provided an opportunity for residents to consider their own definitions of well-being and manage tourism to promote well-being at the community level. The case study examines the individual characteristics that influence the meaning and perception of subjective well-being, and highlights the relationships between tourism development and subjective well-being through the collaborative tourism planning process. The applied purpose of this research is to enrich tourism practitioner understanding of the influences on collaborative tourism planning processes and their outcomes.

2. Literature review

This literature review focuses on subjective well-being as a cognitive state held by residents of tourism destinations, tourism development in small island destinations, and collaborative tourism planning.

2.1. Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is defined as an individual's feelings and thoughts about life circumstances as they proceed through their life (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Similar concepts include satisfaction with life, quality of life, and happiness (Costanza et al., 2007). While the general term of well-being is inclusive of love, pleasure, or quality of life, subjective well-being enables individuals to create and maintain their own definition and perception of what constitutes a good life (Schalock, 1997). The processes that link being happy with well-being are thought to play an important role in perception of well-being (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 1999). As such, a myriad of individual characteristics like personality, socioeconomic status, and geographic location play a role in how individuals perceive well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006).

The experience of subjective well-being has been negatively linked with poor health outcomes, meaning those who perceive high levels of well-being generally experience fewer depressive symptoms, anxiety, and physical health issues (Diener & Chan, 2011). An individual's level of participation and perception of influence in local development, including tourism planning and development, is also related to their perception of tourism and their sense of well-being (Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel, 1999). Madrigal (1995) specifically posited increased participation in local planning activities, and greater perceived influence on community tourism decisions, reinforced the belief that tourism communities provide high quality of life.

2.2. Small island tourism development

Tourism development includes any actions by public or private organizations aimed at facilitating the visitation of tourists. Pearce (1989) defined tourism development as 'the sum of dynamic processes, activities, and outcomes originating from the relationship between the actors … involved in the tourism phenomenon, with the ultimate goal of endowing the residents of a destination with the freedom to decide on their own development.' Tourism development has long been viewed as a driver of economic growth for small island destinations with resources that are viewed as attractive to potential tourists (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008b; Shareef & McAleer, 2005). Tourism development is often touted as an economic panacea for many tourism destinations, and small island destinations are no different. In contrast to many contexts, this relationship has been found to hold true to some extent in small island destinations, with tourism development enjoying a bi-causal relationship with overall economic growth (Seetanah, 2011). Tourism development also has the potential to affect sense of community in small island tourism destinations through changes to social systems and natural resources (Lim & Cooper, 2009). Social systems might be the ability to navigate downtown areas during peak tourism times also known as traffic congestion or garbage collection and disposal from residents' and tourists' waste (Green, 2005). Nature resources are impacted in many ways, including the construction of infrastructure and superstructure. These types of impacts are often particularly visible to residents of small islands because of their small geographical footprint (Hamzah & Hampton, 2013).

When faced with the prospect of tourism development, small island destinations with control over tourism decision making are challenged to determine levels of change that are acceptable to the greater community (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008a). For instance, some communities may be open to the redevelopment of a downtown area, while others may wish to maintain the existing downtown character. Sense of community is one element in the decision-making process that often plays an important role in individuals' subjective well-being (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). While there are many structures within which tourism planning can be undertaken, one type of tourism planning that allows for a great deal of community input and discourse about community well-being is collaborative tourism planning (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Jordan et al., 2013).

2.3. Collaborative tourism planning

In general, planning is an essential activity for communities seeking to integrate tourism into their economic, environment, and social endeavors (Gunn, 1988). Tourism development has often been viewed as an imposed action, done with little input from the majority of community residents or non-tourism sectors (Moscardo, 2011). Tourism development, however, needs to adhere to local land-use plans and zoning ordinances, may need environmental impact assessments required by government agencies, and should adhere to local development plans and economic development strategies (Go, Milne, & Whittles, 1992). Resident input on tourism planning matters should be collected and applied with great care. Citizen input may be from a layperson's point of view and may lack some of the background and technical knowledge needed later in decision-making. Any planning process, including collaborative, uses human judgment to select the best time to solicit resident input and then apply that input into a planning document and ultimately practice (Ritchie, 1993).

Collaborative theory indicates that 'collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain' (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 146). Jamal and Getz's (1995) *Proposition 4* states that 'collaboration for tourism destination planning will depend on encompassing the following key stakeholder groups: local government plus other public organizations having a direct bearing on resource allocation; tourism industry associations and sectors such