

Case study

The economic consequences of community support for tourism: A case study of a heritage fish hatchery

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ABSTRACT

Although tourist attractions are the drivers of tourism to many communities, and local citizens' support of these attractions is vital to their viability, the economic outcomes of such support have never been assessed. To help fill this information void, the authors examined the unusual case of a historical attraction that was closed in 1983 by the federal government agency operating it but resurrected the following year by local citizens who considered it indispensable to their town's identity, cultural heritage, and tourist appeal. Since the attraction would not exist but for this intervention, the current value of the community's resuscitation of it in 1984 was inferred from the economic impacts it currently generated. In 2007 these were estimated to be about US\$1.6 million in direct attraction-related expenditures in the town, US\$2.1 million in business revenues, US\$629,000 in personal income, US\$141,000 in local and state taxes and fees, and 27 new jobs.

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1. Introduction

The success of tourism in any community requires the support of that community's residents (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Such individuals are an integral part of the tourism product and the hospitality they extend or do not extend to visitors directly affects visitors' satisfaction, expenditure levels, and propensities to visit again and recommend the destination to others. Consequently, support for tourism among members of host communities cannot, without consequences, be assumed or taken for granted.

Since attractions drive tourism to many destinations, community support for tourism must extend to existing or proposed attractions in these destinations. The importance of such support is amply illustrated by what can happen if it is absent. To cite a couple of extreme examples, in 1994 the Walt Disney Company canceled a \$625 million, 1215-ha American heritage theme park ("Disney's America") it had proposed for Prince William County, Virginia because of fierce opposition from local residents concerned about potential urban sprawl, traffic congestion, pollution, increased taxes, encroachment on a nearby Civil War battlefield, and

"imagineering" of the historical record (Hawkins & Cunningham, 1996; Zenzen, 1998). Similarly, in the 1980s foreign developers of the Anuha Island Resort in the Solomon Islands failed to consult with the indigenous Melanesian community with respect to their development plans and ignored the natives' traditions, especially with respect to customary rights to land. The result was hostile confrontations, the complete dismantling of the resort, repossession of the island by the local community, and a diplomatic row between Australia and the Solomon Islands (Sofield, 1996).

Community support of tourist attractions often involves directly aiding their operations, especially when the attractions contribute significantly to the economic vitality, cultural heritage, and/or brand identity of the area (LaPage, 1994; Pritchard, 1980; Swarbrooke, 1999). In some cases, such support takes the form of wealthy benefactors "adopting" the attraction; in other cases, it crystallizes more broadly as "friends groups" whose members contribute their time and/or money to the operation of the attraction. Regardless of its manifestation, community support is sometimes critical to an attraction's sustainability because of the severe fiscal constraints facing attraction managers (Malcolm, 2011).

Although numerous studies conducted over many years have estimated the economic impact of attractions (e.g., Bergstrom, Cordell, Watson, & Ashely, 1990; Bowker, Bergstrom, & Gill, 2007; Canadian Outdoor Recreation Research Committee, 1975; Cela, Lankford, & Knowles-Lankford, 2009; Choi, Ritchie, Papandrea, &

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Bennett, 2010; Dean, Getz, Nelson, & Siegfried, 1978; Kim, Wong, & Cho, 2007; Mayer, Muller, Woltering, Arnegger, & Job, 2010; Montenegro, Huaquin, & Herrero, 2009; Mules, 2005; Shackley, 2006; van Beukering, Cesar, & Janssen, 2003; Var, Cheng, & Oh, 2004; Viu, Fernandez, & Caralt, 2008), no studies to date have specifically focused on the economic value of *community support* of attractions, based on thorough searches of the SCOPUS and EBS-COhost Hospitality & Tourism Index literature databases. Thus, from an economic perspective, these labors of love are worked in darkness. Yet community members are much more likely to support tourist attractions if they clearly understand the benefits they derive, and not just the costs they incur, from such facilities.

The purpose of this article is to shed some light on this phenomenon by reporting on a case study, the unusual circumstances of which permitted an economic valuation of community support of an attraction that would not exist today but for such support. The lack of literature specifically dealing with this phenomenon, the heavy commitments of resources that communities sometimes make in sustaining key attractions in their areas, and the heightened possibility that an increasing number of communities will be forced to aid or even assume the operation of attractions in their vicinities as economic stagnation shrinks government budgets in many parts of the world, justify the study.

In the next section a conceptual framework of community support of tourist attractions, within which the study was delimited, is presented. This is followed by sections on the background of the case, the nature and scope of the study, methods, findings, conclusions, and suggestions for further research.

2. Conceptual framework

Although no consensus exists on the definition of a “tourist attraction” (Swarbrooke, 1995), most authors (e.g., Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Swarbrooke, 1999; Weaver & Lawton, 2010) include events in their conceptualizations of attractions. However, the focus of this article is entirely on attractions that are sites as opposed to events. Clearly, both types of attractions lure tourists to most communities but events differ fundamentally from sites because visitation is concentrated within narrow temporal and spatial boundaries. Moreover, community support of sites requires longer-term commitments of resources than does events. For these reasons, the word “attraction” hereinafter refers strictly to sites.

A model of the antecedents, manifestations, and outcomes of community support of tourist attractions is presented in Fig. 1. The model serves to illustrate the complexity of this phenomenon, delineate which aspects of it were investigated in this study and which were not, distinguish the present inquiry from other economic impact studies, and help identify topics for further research in this area.

The various antecedents, manifestations, and outcomes are denoted by character strings that begin with letters; the influences they exert upon one another are denoted by numbers. These symbols are referenced in parentheses below. Model elements described in a plain font with a dark gray background were documented by the historical record of the case (Ross, 1996; *The History of the Booth Society*, 2010; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2011a); elements described in a plain font with a light gray background

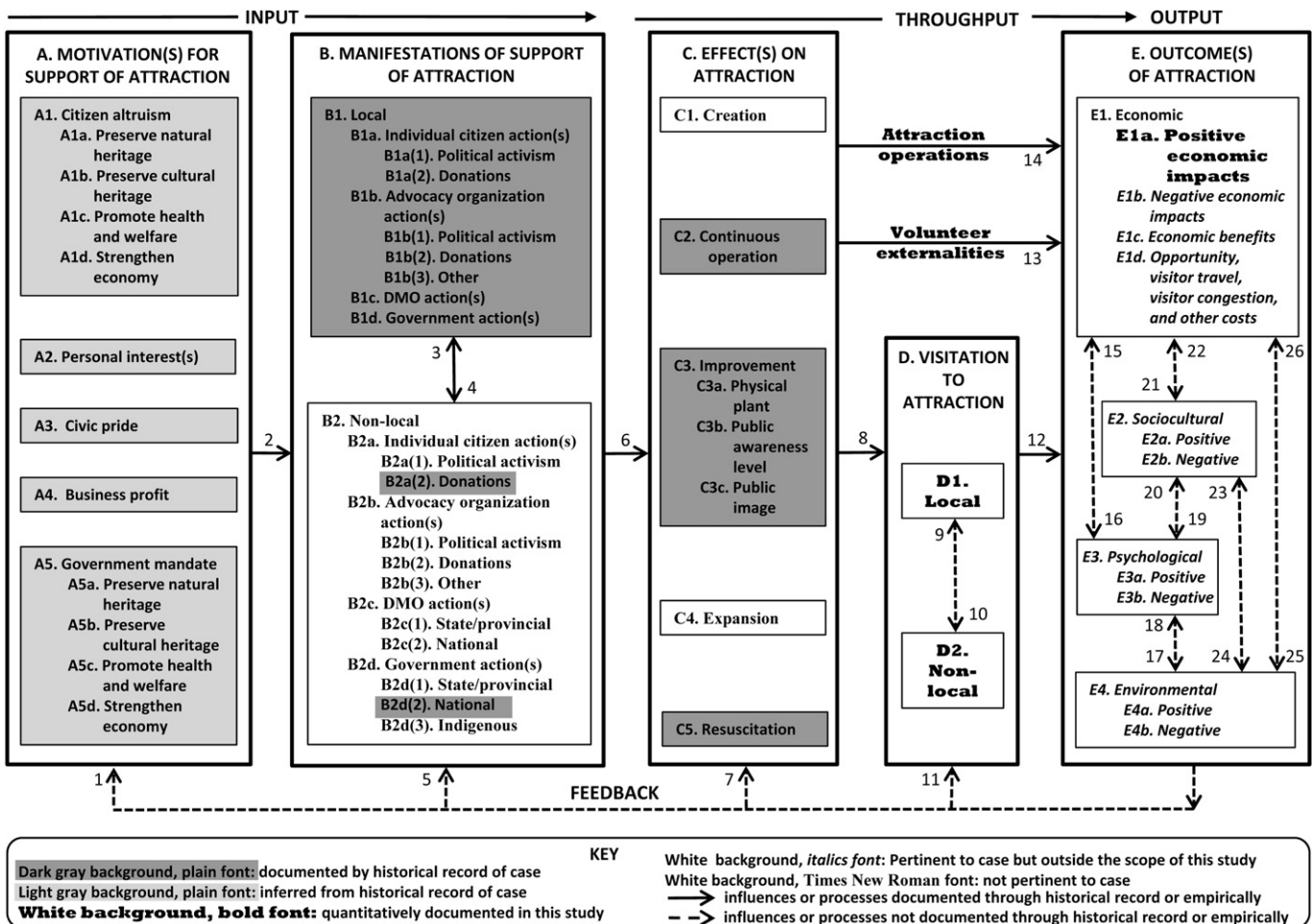


Fig. 1. A conceptualization of the antecedents, manifestations, and outcomes of community support of tourist attractions.

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