

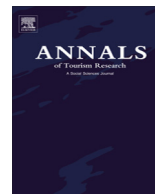


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Social impacts as a function of place change

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that both impacts felt by and attitudes to tourism are a function of place change. Destinations are comprised of three types of place: tourism, non-tourism and shared. It is believed attitudes are generally positive when stasis exists among the three types, but deteriorate during periods of rapid place change. Likewise, impacts are felt when place changes, especially when non-tourism place is transformed into either shared or tourism place. This proposition is tested through a meta-analysis of more than 90 journal articles examining social impacts of tourism. Nine types of place change were identified as well as a relationship between place change and lifecycle stage.

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Introduction

More than 140 academic papers have been published examining the impacts of tourism on host communities (Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013). Deery, Jago, and Fredline (2012, p. 65), though, note that much of this work is derivative, leading them to conclude “research into the social impacts of tourism appears to be in a state of ‘arrested development,’ [where] there is a sense that the advances in understanding the impacts of tourists on host communities is incremental at best, or potentially circular.” The causes are twofold: much of the research is descriptive and atheoretical; and most studies adopt similar methods, metrics and analytic techniques (Nunkoo et al., 2013). Essentially, the literature demonstrates that attitudes are a function of impacts felt. When the impacts

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of tourism are seen to be beneficial, attitudes are generally positive and when impacts are perceived to be detrimental, attitudes are negative.

These conclusions raise two fundamental questions that are not answered well in the existing body of research. The first is 'what causes impacts to be perceived as positive or negative?' Impacts are not absolute. Instead they reflect emotive responses to some action. The literature does not provide a deep understanding of what causes a factual condition or event (such as increased traffic) to be perceived as negative (congestion) or positive (rejuvenation brought about by new visitors). The second question is 'why do attitudes change over time, when the underlying triggering event may not change?' As shown in this paper, when the body of literature is examined holistically, attitudes are generally positive during the pre-development and early lifecycle stages, decline during periods of rapid growth and then return to being positive in the maturity and late maturity stages, even though the initial trigger event remains unresolved. The best explanation offered is that residents get used to these changes. But, the process of adjustment is rarely explained convincingly.

This paper proposes that the answer to both questions may be found in the concept of place and the evolving social structure of destinations brought by place change. Place is a socially constructed idea, scripted with certain rules of accepted behaviour (Crang, 2004; Tuan, 1979) that must be adhered to in order for the occupant to feel he or she belongs. Because place is dynamic (McCabe & Stokoe, 2004; Urry, 2001), it becomes a site of negotiation, as movements by individuals and social groups through and use of place ebb and flow (Shaw & Williams, 2004). Since tourism is recognised as an agent of change in destinations (Deery et al., 2012), then it follows it is also be an agent of place change.

The study has three broad objectives. First, the authors argue that destinations consist of three types of dynamic place that sometimes exist in equilibrium and sometimes are subjected to sudden change. 'Tourism Place' is signalled and signposted as locations where tourists are welcome. Both tourists and locals coexist in 'Shared Place,' while 'Non-tourism Place' is designated exclusively for residents and where tourists are not welcome. Changes in the balance among the three types of place can disrupt local communities. The second objective is to determine if an association exists between place change and tourism impacts. The third objective is to determine if changes in attitudes across the destination lifecycle are related to place change and/or place change adjustment. Here we refer to Butler's (1980) work. These propositions are tested through a meta-analysis of 92 journal articles that examine the impacts of tourism on host communities.

Place and place change

Historically space and place have been theorized as bounded geographic entities (Tapsell & Tunstall, 2008). However, a series of studies illustrate that while both are related, geographic space is also clearly differentiated from social place. Tuan (1975) popularized the idea of place by arguing that while space contains both physical and social dimensions, the socially constructed meaning people ascribe to space transforms it into place and gives it value. As Tuan (1975, pp. 164–165) states space "lacks content; it is broad, open, and empty. . . Place, by contrast, is the past and the present, stability and achievement."

The associated concept of sense of place explains the emotional tie between people and place (Mahon, 2007; Montgomery, 1998). Sense of place has three interrelated elements: place identity, place dependence, and place attachment (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Place identity involves dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity through a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals and behavioural tendencies (Proshansky, 1978). Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) identified four features of place identity. The first is distinctiveness, which summarizes the continuity of self and establishes that person as having a place-referent relationship with his/her home environment. The second feature, continuity, is a reflection of an individual's desire to preserve some type of connection over time, for having control over the maintenance of continuity is important for psychological well-being. The third element of self-esteem relates to feelings of worth or social value. The last element, self-efficacy, can be maintained if the environment facilitates or at least does not hinder a person's everyday lifestyle. Place identity can be threatened if any or all of these dimensions are compromised.

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