



Disadvantage in English seaside resorts: A typology of deprived neighbourhoods



Sheela Agarwal^{a,*}, Steven Jakes^a, Stephen Essex^b, Stephen J. Page^c, Martin Mowforth^b

^a Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Faculty of Business, Plymouth University, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, UK

^b School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Science and Engineering, Plymouth University, Drake Circus, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, UK

^c Hertfordshire Business School, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK

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ABSTRACT

Socio-economic disadvantage experienced by residents of English seaside resorts has been growing over the last decade, and academic and practice-based research is providing better insights into the causes, internal dynamics and appropriate policy responses to these issues in coastal communities. This paper examines the nature and extent of disadvantage in English seaside resorts through analysis of a specially devised spatial and temporal database, which draws together various publicly available sources beyond the population census and Index of Multiple Deprivation. Using univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses of this database, a new typology of highly deprived resort neighbourhoods has been devised, with clear implications for the formulation of more targeted policy responses. The results also indicate the persistence, complexity and distinct spatial clustering of deprivation, which establishes a case for a much stronger geographical emphasis in future research and policy agendas, including third sector partnerships.

1. Introduction: poverty, multiple deprivation and coastal areas

English seaside resorts have experienced a significant period of restructuring in recent decades and many are suffering from a range of economic and social problems, which are more readily associated with inner-city areas than quaint holiday destinations (Agarwal & Brunt, 2005, 2006; Shared Intelligence, 2008; Walton & Browne, 2010) and locations associated with high levels of well-being (Page et al., 2017). Despite recognition of these problems, many policy debates continue to suggest that tourism could be a panacea to solve all the ills of regions and localities, typically as a major generator of employment (see British Hospitality Association, 2017; Johnson & Thomas, 1990; Penrose, 2011; Walton & Browne, 2010). Industry studies herald tourism as the fourth largest employer in the UK, with considerable potential to generate further employment growth in the future (Deloitte & Oxford Economics, 2013). Yet within the context of many coastal communities, long-term tourism development has been a poisoned chalice because the unskilled, low paid and seasonal nature of employment in the sector has fashioned a major societal issue of poverty and deprivation. In some cases, this social problem has damaged the image of resorts, with negative representations featuring in the media. For example, in Lupton's (2003) *Poverty Street*, one of the 12 most deprived areas in the UK was a

coastal resort in England. Meanwhile, popular media television programmes such as *Benefits by the Sea* aired in 2015 illustrate the impact of deprivation in coastal communities: namely, unemployed migrants in receipt of benefits (e.g. see Davies, 1994) housed in hostels converted from bed and breakfast and hotel establishments as a result of declining visitation.

Although much has been written within the academic and policy literature about the socio-economic problems associated with many coastal destinations, surprisingly, detailed understanding of the causes and the factors driving social disadvantage in these environments is scant. There has been limited debate on the effects of both seasonality (see Ball, 1989) and economic restructuring on deprivation in coastal localities with a significant visitor economy. Several studies in the 1980s and 1990s alluded to the apparent structural problems of employment and economic development in seaside resorts (e.g. English Tourist Board, 1991). Only the emergent critical debates in tourism geographies (e.g. Britton, 1991) have begun to challenge the policy rhetoric that tourism brings positive economic benefits to localities, building on the seminal studies of the 1970s (e.g. Bryden, 1973). It is therefore pertinent that this paper begins to expand the international debate on the costs and benefits of long-term tourism development in coastal communities and its impact on residents (Lindberg & Johnson,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: sagarwal@plymouth.ac.uk (S. Agarwal), steven.jakes@plymouth.ac.uk (S. Jakes), S.Essex@plymouth.ac.uk (S. Essex), s.page2@herts.ac.uk (S.J. Page), M.Mowforth@plymouth.ac.uk (M. Mowforth).

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1997). It is only relatively recently that structural changes, which have occurred in many coastal resorts since their perceived heydays of the 1950s and 1960s, have begun to be acknowledged. Beatty and Fothergill (2007), for instance, analysed patterns of coastal employment and the slow growth and restructuring that occurred in local labour markets. Such changes are likely to be reflective of the global shifts in capital (e.g. see Dicken, 2014) and behaviour changes towards cheap overseas holidays by air and sea (Urry, 1988).¹

Additionally, the lack of understanding of disadvantage within coastal communities is compounded by the fact that these localities have remained largely absent from major studies undertaken of poverty and deprivation. Such neglect is rather surprising given that this research is traditionally rooted within the social sciences and was stimulated by many of the seminal studies of the nineteenth and twentieth century in specific localities (Booth, 1888; Rowntree, 1901, 1941) and at a national scale (e.g. Lansley & Mack, 2015; Mack & Lansley, 1985; Townsend, 1979). The key focus within the trajectory of poverty and deprivation research in urban geography (see Johnston, 1991 for example) (and the emergent welfare geography – see Smith, 1974, 1977), and sociology (see Shildrick & Rucell, 2015) is on the use of multivariate analysis to understand the complexities of spatial and social patterns, and the causes of deprivation (see Shaw, 2015 for a review). Critics within radical geography and critical sociology, drawing upon Marxist interpretations, for example, argue that poverty and deprivation are a function of a capitalist system and the inequalities it generates (Peet, 1977). In contrast, neo-liberal attitudes believe in state intervention to target the dimensions of poverty and deprivation as a means of the redistribution of wealth through taxation and state spending.

In the context of coastal resorts, Agarwal and Brunt's (2006) study utilised the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) (2000) to depict higher levels of deprivation that existed in 87 English seaside resorts. The research built on advances in social science, as more sophisticated government data were assembled and made publicly available for analysis based on measures of income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education skills and training, and barriers to housing and services. As Deas, Robson, Wong, and Bradford (2003, p. 883) argued, these data-sets represented 'a commendable advance in terms of the development of techniques to quantify deprivation'. Although Agarwal and Brunt's (2006) study was the first of its kind to draw attention to deprivation within the English seaside, it was limited by data availability and did not focus exclusively on resorts or their neighbourhoods. Moreover, Beatty and Fothergill (2003: 9) referred to seaside resorts as 'the least understood of Britain's "problem" areas', a statement that was later reinforced by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) *Select Committee on Coastal Towns* (House of Commons CLG, 2007, p. 42). More recent scholarship has advanced ongoing debates surrounding coastal communities and deprivation focusing on different elements of the problems that impact upon the multi-faceted causes and contributors to multiple deprivation. For example, studies of housing (Sage, Smith, & Hubbard, 2011; Smith, 2012; Ward, 2011, 2015), in-migration (Beatty & Fothergill, 2007; Leonard, 2015; Sage et al., 2011), race (Burdsey, 2016), regeneration (Forte, 2009; Leonard, 2014), crime and youth (Tickle, 2014) were undertaken within particular coastal towns. Yes individually, these studies do not provide an overarching analysis of the experience of disadvantage at a national scale.

In light of these shortcomings, this paper provides an updated detailed examination of the nature and extent of disadvantage within English seaside resorts based on the latest Census data from 2001 to 2011. More specifically, it undertakes a micro-level analysis of

disadvantage within the resorts containing the most deprived neighbourhoods and investigates the factors that may explain the causes of such deprivation. The study is couched generally within the scholarship on urban disadvantage and is conceptually underpinned by the related theories of multiple deprivation and social exclusion, which have evolved in an interdisciplinary context within social science. This paper draws on a unique seaside resort database constructed from the IMD (2010) and a wide range of socio-economic variables drawn from the Census and other publicly available sources (2001–2011). A combination of univariate, bivariate and multivariate empirical analyses elucidate the differential incidence and spatial distribution of disadvantage within resorts. The study findings reveal that various facets of population composition and place factors impact differentially on manifestations of deprivation within seaside resorts. The paper advances the understanding of deprivation in seaside resorts by focusing upon the micro-geographies within coastal communities and proposes a new typology of deprivation comprising four types of highly deprived resort neighbourhoods.

The paper begins with a general introduction to disadvantage and moves on to examine its links with multiple deprivation and social exclusion. These terms have become operationalised to move from generic analyses of poverty to more specific societal questions that the public sector has popularised to achieve a greater degree of fairness and redistribution of resources to disadvantaged groups, socially and spatially. This analysis is followed by discussion of the relevance of disadvantage to the English seaside, the socio-economic problems being experienced and the causes of such difficulties. The third part of the paper details the methodology and research methods employed, followed by the presentation and discussion of the study results in the fourth part. The paper ends with consideration of the implications of the findings. This study seeks to make a significant contribution to policymaking by identifying the internal dynamics of resort change in relation to disadvantage, specifically, patterns of socio-spatial disadvantage and the way in which place- and population-based factors influence the outcome. Such knowledge is applicable to other post-mature coastal resorts globally, which are experiencing similar difficulties (English Tourist Board, 1991; European Tourism Universities Partnership, 2000).

2. Disadvantage and the English seaside

Disadvantage is widely understood to refer to combinations of socio-economic and socio-demographic attributes, which expose people to the risk of living in poor social and economic conditions (Whelan, Maître, & Noble, 2007). Disadvantage has many forms and may be absolute or relative, as emerged in many of the seminal studies of poverty (e.g. Mack & Lansley, 1985; Townsend, 1979). It can, for example, include having limited family assets, a poorer standard of education, a lower paid job or insecure employment (i.e. seasonal employment in resorts and zero hour contracts), living in housing of a poor standard and trying to bring up a family in difficult circumstances (i.e. an absence of income and reliance upon foodbanks and payday loans). The longer people live in stressful economic and social circumstances, the greater the physiological and psychological attrition that they suffer. Given its links to the distribution of financial material resources, the study of disadvantage has traditionally focused on poverty which then evolved into the study of relative deprivation (e.g. Townsend, 1979) through to the more sophisticated analysis of multiple deprivation (Millar, 2007; Walker, 1997) once more overarching government datasets became available. However, more recently, it has been incorporated into studies of social exclusion, which focus on disadvantaged groups or disadvantaged areas amongst whom, or within which, the incidence of disadvantage is disproportionately high.

¹ The English Tourist Board (1991) *The Future for England's Smaller Seaside Resorts* report outlined the scale of decline in visitation as a result of consumers shifting to overseas holidays. Based on their analysis of four resorts (Weymouth, Bognor Regis, Skegness and Morecambe), the study found that at least 50% of the staying market had declined since the 1970s.

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