



# Does residents' perceived life satisfaction vary with tourist season? A two-step survey in a Mediterranean destination



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## HIGHLIGHTS

- The paper merges two research lines on tourism and economics of happiness.
- It addresses an intriguing issue: is tourism beneficial for hosts and guests alike?
- It empirically investigates the relationship between tourism, residents' attitudes and perceived life satisfaction.
- It tests for differences in residents' attitudes and perceived well-being before and during the tourist season.
- It demonstrates that tourism has a hidden cost in terms of residents' happiness.

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## ABSTRACT

Recent attention has been dedicated to the relationship between tourism and subjective well-being, however studies have mainly focused on the tourist side. Since residents are an indispensable partner for the success of any tourism program, understanding whether and how tourism affects residents' perceived life-satisfaction is a crucial issue. However, scant attention has been paid to this theme and the majority of studies are cross-sectional. Here we develop a two-step survey, conducted in a seaside resort before and during the tourist season to test for significant differences in residents' perceptions of tourism impact and overall life satisfaction. The results confirm the hypothesis that perceived tourism impact and life satisfaction vary with the tourist season, and that tourism has a hidden cost in terms of perceived life satisfaction.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is commonly acknowledged as a major driver of local economic growth and development. Macroeconomic data confirm this statement (WTO, 2014; WTTC, 2014). However, its fast past and forecasted growth, together with the many social and environmental problems caused by its often uncontrolled expansion, has led many authors to advise caution with regard to tourist development (Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Northcote & Macbeth, 2006; Saarinen, 2006; Saarinen, Rogerson, & Manwa, 2011).

Tourism was also recently acknowledged as one of the largest self-initiated commercial enterprises for creating happiness on the planet (Pearce, 2009; Pearce, Filep, & Ross, 2011) but if this may

seem to be true for those who travel, i.e. tourists (the guests), it is a questionable claim for those who receive tourists, i.e. local communities (the hosts).

There is currently an evident and surging interest in tourism as specific individuals' life satisfaction domains. Unfortunately, this new line of investigation has a discernible bias towards tourists. Various studies investigated the relationship between perceived life satisfaction and tourism. They have shown the contribution of tourism to individuals' well-being, testing the association between travel experiences and overall life satisfaction (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 2004; Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007; Sirgy & Su, 2010; Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011), analyzing potential change in vacationers' feeling over the course of a vacation (De Bloom, Guerts, and Kompier 2012; Milan, 1997; Nawijn, 2010; Nawijn, Mitas, Lin, & Kerstetter, 2013), comparing pre- and post-trip appraisals (Besser & Priel, 2006; Gilbert & Abdullah, 2004; McCabe & Johnson, 2013) or different types of tourist and activities (Bimonte &

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Faralla, 2012; 2015).

On the contrary, only few papers have focused on residents or hosts (Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013; Nawijn & Mitas, 2012; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015). In other words, scant attention has been devoted to the relationship between development of tourism and residents' subjective well-being. This is unfortunate, because as emphasized in the literature on sustainable tourism, scholars increasingly agree on the fact that the success and sustainability of any tourist development crucially depend on acceptance of tourists and tourist-related plans by the local community (Bimonte, 2013; Bimonte & Punzo, 2011; Lee, 2013; Lepp, 2007; Pérez & Nadal, 2005). A shared vision of tourist development is required to avoid the sometimes disastrous effects of competition (Bimonte, 2008; Getz & Timur, 2005; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Simmons, 1994).

According to Snaith and Haley (1999), "happy host" is fundamental to the successful development of tourism. Therefore, monitoring residents' attitude to tourist development and understanding how and whether tourism affect locals' perceived life satisfaction is a mandatory task for any policy maker and for the success of any tourist development plan. Only mutually beneficial development can prevent latent conflicts and opposition to tourism.

While much research and analysis on residents' attitudes to tourism and factors that may influence them have been carried out (e.g. Ap, 1990; 1992; Aguiló & Rosselló, 2005; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Gursoy et al., 2002; Harrill, 2004), little attention has been paid to the relationship between attitudes and life satisfaction and, more in general, between tourism and overall life satisfaction (Kim et al., 2013). Moreover, according to Sharpley (2014), scant attention has been paid to mainstream tourism destinations, such as the Mediterranean, and although residents' attitudes can change over time, few studies have taken a diachronic or longitudinal approach. Most just examined the effects of tourism at one point in time (Uysal, Sirgy, Woo, & Kim, 2015).

The main objective of this paper is to contribute filling the above mentioned gap. To do this we developed an empirical analysis to investigate the issue. We report the findings of a two-step survey that measured changes in residents' perceived well-being with the start of the summer holidays. In particular, we explored whether (and how) the tourist season at the seaside affects residents' sense of well-being in various life domains and life satisfaction. The survey was carried out in Follonica, a mass tourist Mediterranean destination on the southern coast of Tuscany. A key question was whether the start of the peak tourist season had a negative impact on residents' self-reported happiness and which aspects (domains) of subjective well-being were affected in particular. We also sought to understand the specific and contextual factors that impinge on residents' subjective well-being assessments.

Although differences exist, the term well-being is often used as a synonym of subjective happiness, life satisfaction or quality of life (Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015; Easterlin, 2004; McGillivray & Clarke, 2006; Veenhoven, 2007). Andereck and Nyaupane (2011) evidenced that more than 100 definitions for *Quality of Life* exist in literature. Whatever the term, it is normally conceived as being the degree of how one views one's life as a whole, or some particular domain of one's life, as favorable (Powdthavee, 2007, p. 5). Considering the aim of the paper, we will conform to this practice and use these terms interchangeably. We do not enter this debate or the theoretical debate on happiness. Useful insights may be found in some basic references (for example Woo et al., 2015; Bruni & Porta, 2007; Frey, 2010; McCabe & Johnson, 2013; Veenhoven, 2007; Filep & Deery, 2010; Kahneman, 2003; Kahneman, Wakker & Sarin 1997).

## 2. Literature review

In the last decades, plentiful literature flourished on resident perceptions and attitudes of tourism. According to McGehee and Andereck (2004), it has become one of the most systematic and well-studied areas of tourism. A number of reviews exist in the literature (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012; García, Vázquez, & Macías, 2015; Harrill, 2004; Nunkoo, Smith, & Ramkissoon, 2013; Sharpley, 2014; Uysal et al., 2015).

In line with claims of the Tourist Area Life Cycle (TALC) (Butler, 1980; 2006) and the Irridex model (Doxey, 1975; Fridgen, 1991), most studies on residents' attitudes to tourist development show that locals are initially inclined to have positive attitudes to tourism, but their perception of impact and their level of acceptance tend to evolve as tourism increases (Teye, Sonmez, & Sirakaya, 2002), though not necessarily in a deterministic and generalizable way (Gursoy, Chi, & Dyer, 2010; King, Pizam, & Milman, 1993; Monterrubio-Cordero, 2008). Many of these studies are framed in Social Exchange Theory (SET), their main aim being a cost-benefit appraisal to determine local citizens' inclination to participate in exchange with tourists and to endorse tourist development in their own community (Ap, 1992; 1990; Ap & Crompton, 1993; Gursoy & Kendall, 2006; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; Kayat, 2002). They focus on the perceived impact of tourism, distinguishing socioeconomic, cultural and environmental impacts (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Harrill, 2004; Jafari, 1986). Other influential intergroup theories, such as Integrated Threat Theory, the Unified Instrumental Model of Group Conflict and Intergroup Emotion Theory, have been largely overlooked (Ward & Berne, 2011).

Much of the literature has focused on identifying and measuring those variables that may influence the way in which tourism related impacts are perceived. Harrill (2004) identified three main categories: socioeconomic variables, spatial factors (i.e. availability of and proximity to tourism facilities and activities) and economic dependence. Others focused on personal factors, such as age, gender, income and length of residence. The latter were found to play a role in determining residents' attitudes to tourism (Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990). Males and older residents were found to be less concerned about impact and more tolerant to the presence of tourists in the area (Harrill & Potts, 2003; Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Tomljenovic & Faulkner, 1999). Interestingly, length of residence was negatively correlated with positive attitude to tourism (Williams, McDonald, Riden, & Uysal, 1995), even if the results were not completely constant in all studies (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993). In general, mixed results have emerged when testing the correlations between these variables and resident attitudes towards tourism. Greater agreement exists on the relationship between residents' attitudes and two important variables, like closeness to tourist activities and economic dependence on tourism (Devine, Gabe, & Bell, 2009; Gursoy & Jurowski, 2002; Haley, Snaith, & Miller, 2005; Martin, McGuire, & Allen, 1998).

Depending on the specific host community, geographical area and type of tourist considered, a number of additional variables were also investigated, such as environmental and esthetic impact, community attachment, services, as well as aspects impacting the quality of life, such as crime and overcrowding (e.g. Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Ap & Crompton, 1998; Bimonte & Punzo, 2011; Cavus & Tarrisevdi, 2002; Cecil, Fu, Wang, & Avgoustis, 2010; Murphy, 1981; Smith & Krannich, 1998). Variables describing the characteristics of visitors and the cultural background and moral values of host communities were found to be important (Monterrubio-Cordero, 2008; Vargas-Sánchez, Porrás-Bueno, & Plaza-Mejía, 2011). All these factors have been categorized and analyzed in terms of extrinsic or intrinsic dimensions (Faulkner &

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