



Education and certification for beach management: is there a difference between residents versus visitors?

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ABSTRACT

Much of the literature surrounding beach management and pro-environmental behaviour focuses on social norms, certification and beach management and their relation to education, gender and age. Utilizing 1611 quantitative surveys from four Ontario beaches, this study builds upon past research to test three key hypotheses to understand to what extent education, certification, social norms and beach satisfaction are differentiated by the type of visitor. This research found that residents and older beachgoers were more likely to utilize environmental education programs. While residents were more likely to visit a beach with Blue Flag certification, they were less likely to support the notion of municipalities having to maintain the award. In contrast, those who were older, more highly educated, and/or female were more likely to support municipalities maintaining certification. Blue Flag, although relatively new to Canadian and Ontario beaches, may be a differentiator that helps to contribute to both environmental protection and marketing. As such, educating the public of the benefits derived from certification programs needs to be the focus of those looking for these programs to be utilized.

1. Introduction

From an environmental standpoint, beaches are unique and important coastal ecosystems that connect terrestrial and aquatic environments. Beaches provide habitats for an assortment of biota, many of which require very specific environmental conditions for nesting. These environmental conditions can be easily disrupted by beach development, often for tourism purposes, if development occurs without comprehensive beach management strategies. Beach development, however, is extremely beneficial from a socio-economic standpoint. Many coastal regions rely on beaches to attract tourists, who spend money on accommodations and recreational activities, pumping money into the local economy (Alves et al., 2014). Even though the need for beach management has been well documented (Roca et al., 2009; Oh et al., 2010; Shivilani et al., 2003), it is a difficult task for beach managers to identify the most effective management programs and strategies to promote pro-environmental behaviour (Kim, 2012) or the extent to which obtaining an environmental beach certification such as Blue Flag aids in education. A beach management strategy must account for many variables and they face a number of challenges. The needs of beach users differ between residents and tourists as these two groups have different intentions, values and expectations regarding a given beach destination (Roca et al., 2009). This study, therefore, builds on

Roca et al. (2009) and Oh et al. (2010) to examine the role that visitors versus residents play with regard to environmental education of beaches and to what extent having a beach certification influences their behaviour. This study also examined beaches within a different context – that of North America, specifically Canada, which boasts fresh water beaches rather than ocean beaches as well as beaches which, although popular, are less developed than those of Europe.

2. Literature review

According to Wolch and Zhang (2004), beaches are listed among the top five vacation destinations for tourism. The popularity of beach destinations can be attributed to tourists wanting to participate in beachfront recreation or escapism. Escapism is defined as an experience that allows one to break free from the unpleasantness of everyday life and this characteristic is often associated with undeveloped beaches (Lucrezi and Van Der Walt, 2016). Visiting undeveloped beaches allow tourists to appreciate and enjoy the natural environment as well as become more aware of their surroundings (De Ruyck et al., 1995). Conversely, tourists that select developed beach destinations often go to participate in many water-based activities and excursions, such as boating, snorkelling, fishing, that engages them with their surroundings (De Ruyck et al., 1995; Cervantes et al., 2008).

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The popularity of beach destinations emphasizes the need for beach managers to implement management strategies that seek to balance development and recreational activities with the conservation of natural resources. In order to achieve a balance between commercial development, a thriving tourism sector and environmental conservation, comprehensive beach management is essential. Beach managers also have to take into account the needs of both the residents and the tourists that visit a given beach destination, in order to avoid conflict. With so many variables that must be accounted for when developing a beach management strategy, beach managers often face a multitude of challenges. For example, the needs of beach users differ between tourists and residents, as these two groups have different values, intentions, and expectations regarding a given beach destination (Roca et al., 2009). According to Roca et al. (2009) of the Costa Brava in Spain, residents are primarily concerned with conserving the scenery and protecting the natural environment, while tourists are more concerned with the recreational facilities available to them during their stay. Oh et al. (2010) also found that tourists and residents have different views on the amount of commercial development on beaches. Tourists are interested in going to a beach with moderate commercial development, while residents are in favour of zero or minimal commercial development. Again, this difference is due to the length of stay; residents have a longer time commitment to a given beach than tourists (Oh et al., 2010).

Economics also play a significant role in beach management strategies, as maintenance costs must be taken into consideration. If adverse environmental effects accumulate as a result of ineffective beach management, eventually the area won't be able to maintain ecosystem functions, biota will be driven away or die off, and tourists will no longer be drawn to the destination for escapism purposes (James, 2000; Budeanu, 2007). Shivilani et al. (2003), however, suggests there is some debate over who should be responsible for paying to clean and maintain the beach; the government or the beach user. On one side of the argument, beach users should pay the maintenance fees since the beach is a source of recreational opportunities for them. On the other hand, some feel that the government should shoulder the costs since beach destinations rely on tourism to support the region's economy. Shivilani et al. (2003) suggests for those beaches that charge an admission or parking fee, there should be two different fees in place depending on whether an individual is a tourist or resident. Oh et al. (2010) found that tourists are more willing to pay an admission fee since they are travelling great distances to experience the beach.

2.1. Drivers of pro-environmental behaviour amongst beach users

In addition to understanding the needs of residents and tourists and effectively generating money for beach maintenance, it is important for beach managers to also understand the behaviours of beach goers and what drives these behaviours. Behavioural analysis of beach users can help beach managers identify what motivates individuals towards pro-environmental behaviour. The understanding of which can help managers try to propagate these motivations to help conserve the natural beach environment (Mainieri et al., 1997; Kim, 2012; Alves et al., 2014). Pro-environmental behaviour is defined as individuals making decisions and acting in a way that benefits the natural environmental, or at the very least making decisions that do not result in adverse environmental impacts (Kim, 2012). In regard to taking a holiday, and/or visiting a beach destination, pro-environmental behaviours can center around selection of the destination, transportation, accommodation, choice of activities at the destination, purchases made at the destination, and generation of waste (Budeanu, 2007).

Upon review of existing literature on beach users' behaviours, and motivations behind pro-environmental behaviours, the following

drivers of pro-environmental behaviour amongst beach users have been identified: demographic profiles, environmental attitudes, environmental awareness and education, social norms, and beach certification programs (Mainieri et al., 1997; Wolch and Zhang, 2004; Tudor and Williams, 2006; Roca and Villares, 2008; Lee et al., 2015). These drivers interact with and can influence one another, leading individuals towards a certain behaviour (e.g. pro-environmental behaviour) (Mainieri et al., 1997). Each of these drivers is discussed in detail below.

2.1.1. Demographic profiles of beach users

Demographics of beach users, such as gender, age, race, class and education, contribute to their selection of a beach destination and whether they behave in an environmentally responsible way while visiting said destination. Wolch and Zhang (2004) found that Caucasians were more frequent beach users compared to Latinos and African Americans. The researchers also found that younger individuals and individuals without children are more likely to visit a beach.

Alves et al. (2014) surveyed 681 beach goers in Cadiz, Spain and found that older individuals with higher education levels were more willing to pay admission fees that would go towards beach clean-up and resource conservation. They also found that local residents, over tourists were more willing to pay these fees. Similarly, Leonidou et al. (2015) found that age and level of education strongly effect pro-environmental behaviour amongst tourists. Pro-environmental behaviours were exhibited more in older individuals that were highly educated. The researchers also found that women were more likely than men to i) participate in the study, and ii) engage in pro-environmental behaviours while visiting a destination.

2.1.2. Environmental attitudes

Environmental attitudes are the feelings associated with and evaluation of the physical environment, as well as products and services concerning the environment (Leonidou et al., 2015). The attitudes individuals form are the antecedents of their behaviour; therefore, positive environmental attitudes are critical for shaping pro-environmental behaviour. Leonidou et al. (2015) indicated that often individuals with altruistic values (i.e. selfless) show greater intent to visit eco-friendly destinations or attractions. In 2011, the researchers surveyed 234 tourists in the Republic of Cyprus and found that individuals with positive environmental attitudes are characterized by the following traits: moral, law abiding, and politically active. These researchers also demonstrated that environmental attitudes were significantly associated with pro-environmental behaviour.

2.1.3. Environmental awareness and education

Environmental awareness and education are also significant drivers of pro-environmental behaviour. Awareness is often thought of as the first step in the pathway to behaviour because individuals must first be knowledgeable of an environmental issue to be able to make an informed decision on the matter (Lee et al., 2015). For example, educating individuals on the value of a beach's natural resources and biota, or relevant environmental threats may help positively influence their behaviour.

Regarding beaches, it is important that beach managers make information and educational tools concerning beach conservation readily available to the public, and present it in a way that effectively engages tourists. Lucrezi and Van Der Walt, 2016 surveyed 496 beach users at six beaches in Cape Town, South Africa, and discovered that residents and habitual beach users were more aware of education on conservation initiatives and were willing to participate in volunteer beach conservation programs. Interestingly, the majority of respondents reported that they thought the environmental and ecological quality of beaches to be dependent on the economic resources available to beach

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