

Chapter 4

Impacts of the Tourist Activity and Citizens' Evaluation About the Necessity for Resting Periods

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ABSTRACT

Tourism's interactions with local communities and natural environments originate economic, social, and environmental impacts both positive and negative. The local community's assessment of these impacts is key to guarantee their support for tourism development since the planning process is subject to their opinion. Tourism seasonality can intensify these effects due to the influx of tourists during peak periods and generate periods of rest and recovery during the off-peak season. In this research, the locals' opinions on the need for a period of seasonal rest is studied, even if this period interrupts the economic activity linked to tourism. Using a group of Spanish touristic destinations shows that the residents in coastal destinations prefer the annual continuity of the activity and that they are much more critical of the environmental effects than social ones. On the contrary, the inhabitants of urban and rural destinations would rather enjoy resting periods.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5835-4.ch004

INTRODUCTION

As any other economic activity, tourism interacts with the environment in which it is developed. The manifestation of these interactions takes place in the so-called tourism impacts (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). The first studies on tourism impacts were focused on the analysis of the positive economic effects, while the negative effects of this activity, both environmental and sociocultural, were only studied later (Keogh, 1989). Several studies have identified the environmental effects that tourism has. Negative impacts linked to an increase of the environmental pressure on the one hand; and positive ones derived from a more conservationist approach on the other (Puczkó & Ratz, 2000). The negative effects on the environment and the life of the local communities are intensified in destinations with a high concentration of visitors at certain times of the year since this generates periods of high pressure on the natural resources (Martin, Jimenez, & Molina, 2014). This phenomenon, known as tourism seasonality has therefore, the capability to aggravate the negative effects of tourism (Camilleri, 2018a). Besides the interferences with the environment caused by a period of peak activity, tourism seasonality implies an accompanying effect, the existence of off-peak seasons in terms of tourist arrivals. When evaluating these “off-peak seasons”, there are very different and controversial opinions, because as explained further on, many authors point out the damages derived from a period of less activity whereas others present the possible beneficial effects (Lusseau & Higham, 2004).

This study proposes an analysis that starts off with the citizen assessment in order to weight the advantages of a period of less activity or no activity at all. This evaluation considers the benefits for the environment and the community that a resting period implies but it also weights the potential harms an off-peak season causes on the regional economy. To evaluate this process of exchange we use the theoretical framework proposed by the Social Exchange Theory (SET) as a reference, according to which, locals shape their attitude towards tourism comparing the potential benefits with the costs associated of the activity itself (Ap, 1992). To evaluate the seasonal resting period is somewhat complex, while for some citizens it might be beneficial, for others it can generate heavy losses. With the ultimate aim of overcoming this problem, a non-forced oriented fieldwork has been formulated. In this fieldwork based on neutral questions, the citizen is offered the possibility to rank every impact on a positive-negative scale.

This analysis is of great importance during the development of tourist destinations planning processes and when defining growth strategies for said processes; given that to guarantee the success of a certain destination the support and commitment of the local community are required (Gursoy, Chi, & Dyer, 2010). In this sense, understanding the attitudes of the citizens towards the need for a seasonal resting

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