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Tourism impact on gender and minority equality: comparison of survey, census, and industry data

Introduction

The scholarship on tourism industry impact on gender and minority equality is contradictory. For instance, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) states that "tourism can empower women in multiple ways, particularly through the provision of jobs and through income-generating opportunities" (UNWTO, 2015). This point however was heavily criticized by others who argue that the process frequently results in a loss of control over their lives and in fact reinforces gender discrimination (see the book edited by Cole, 2018 for a thorough discussion) with a "hijacked neoliberal conceptualisations of economic improvement" (Ibid, pg. 9). The UNWTO (2010) has formulated five major goals for promoting gender equality in tourism that go beyond the purely economic considerations. Those goals include the following: (1) Create equal opportunities for women working in tourism; (2) Inspire women's tourism entrepreneurship; (3) Advance women through tourism education and training; (4) Encourage women to lead in tourism; and (5) Support women in community and home-based tourism enterprise. Thus, the goals follow the common themes of providing employment, boosting entrepreneurship, encouraging education, inspiring leadership, and supporting community. For each of the goals the UNWTO formulated a list of indicators: e.g., the entrepreneurship goal is conceptualized as percentage of women employers in the hospitality and recreation sector. Following the developed framework, the UNWTO conducted a quantitative overview on women in tourism (UNWTO, 2019), which provided a general mapping of gender equality in tourism industry worldwide.

Despite the outlined existence of the macro-level outlook on the tourism industry role in promoting gender equality, the micro-level quantitative studies are apparently missing. Less is known about the tourism industry role in promoting minority equality, even though the UNWTO women in tourism goals are organically extendable to other protected groups. We posit that the micro-level analysis would reduce variability driven by legal, cultural, or economic differences between the territories, allowing better emphasis of the tourism industry presence pattern. **Hence, the goal of this study is to investigate the relationship between the development of tourism sector and progress towards the postulated UNWTO goals on a smaller scale of one US state with the objective of comparing the available indicators of gender and minority equality on a county basis.**

As a case study, we selected Florida. Florida is the largest tourism destination worldwide. In 2019, Florida received over 131 million visitors who added over \$89 billion to its economy. Tourism industry supports 12.7% of employment in the state (1.5 million jobs), including almost 1 million direct jobs such as in the hotel, food, entertainment, recreation, and transportation sectors (Visit Florida 2018). This data does not include the in-state tourists which are invisible to the official statistics, however the social media data hints that they increase the number of travelers by 65% (Kirilenko et al., 2019). Despite the enormous development of the tourism sector with almost 10,000 attraction points, it is also highly concentrated with 24% of all tourist reviews coming from just one popular destination, the city of Orlando (Ibid.) This spatial heterogeneity of the territory in terms of tourist industry presence makes Florida an ideal candidate for investigation of tourism industry impact on local communities.

The study was organized as follows. The UNWTO (2010) global indicators were adjusted based on applicability to micro-level analysis and data availability. Then, the objective data on tourism industry and on women and racial minority presence in hospitality and recreation was acquired from the official statistics and industry data. In addition, we conducted a survey for four tourism dependent communities to learn local voices on the diversity and equality issues. Finally, the collected data was joined in a database and analyzed with the goal of finding the relationships between the tourism industry development, indicators of gender and minority equality, and local perceptions of the tourism industry impacts on gender and minority equality.

Literature Review

Tourism industry exercises multiple impacts on local communities, “contributing to changes in value systems, individual behavior, family structure and relationships, collective lifestyles, safety levels, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organizations” (Pizam and Milman 1986:29). Scholars identify three major impact groups (Wall and Mathieson, 2006): economic, environmental, and socio-cultural. This study deals with the latter one.

Evidently, the majority of tourism scholars concentrated on the economic impacts of tourism. Easterling (2004) provided a review of over 30 publications investigating positive and negative economic effects of tourism development including providing new economic opportunities, improved standards of living, new investments in infrastructure and precipitation of the growth to other sectors of economy. At the same time, scholars noted that tourism elevates costs of living and prices, increases economic inequality, generates temporary seasonal employment, and leads to economic instability (Ibid:51). The socio-cultural impacts are less investigated; scholars noted the positive impacts such as increased understanding of different cultures, promoting cultural exchange, creating leisure and cultural activities, more opportunities to socialize, improved quality of life, greater pride in community, revitalized traditional practices and arts, and preserved cultural identity (Ibid.) On the negative side, more tourism leads to increased prostitution, crime and gambling, cultural clashes and deterioration of moral values, weakening community relationships and character, intensification of labor burdens, loss of authenticity, and others (Ibid.)

The practical framework to quantify the socio-cultural impact of development originates from the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) rooted in the early 1970s attempt to predict the social impacts of environmental projects (Vanclay, 2003; Vanclay et al., 2015; McCombes et al., 2015). SIA is the “processes of analyzing, monitoring and managing the intended and unintended social consequences, both positive and negative, of planned interventions and any social changes processes invoked by those interventions so as to bring about a more sustainable and equitable biophysical and human environment” (Vanclay, 2003:6). The SIA postulates that the basic principles of development are promotion of equity, inclusion, and diversity (Vanclay, 2003; 2006) and prevention of social exclusion such as the “involuntary exclusion of individuals and groups from society’s political, economic and societal processes, which prevents their full participation in the society in which they live” (Marlier and Atkinson, 2010: 285). Hence, the relevant measures include economic resources, employment, income, poverty, education, health, security, justice, and equality according to the UN Human Development Report and Millennium Development Goals (Atkinson and Marlier, 2010). As an application example, Crofts and Holland (1993) in their study of impact of rural tourism on Florida local communities utilized the SIA to estimate not only the economic impacts, but also the socio-cultural effects including the social equality.

Methodology

The objective data on tourism industry impacts on local community was acquired from the US census and industry data (str.com and TripAdvisor) and generalized to a uniform scale to represent 67 Florida counties. The tourism industry presence was initially characterized with four indicators: number of hotels (STR and TripAdvisor), room inventory (STR), and the number of hotel reviews (TripAdvisor). We however found those indicators to be highly correlated ($R=0.95 - 0.99$) and merged all indicators into the tourism industry presence index.

Based on the SIA and UNWTO frameworks discussed in the Introductory and Literature review sections and following the data availability criteria (UNWTO, 2010), we concentrated on the entrepreneurial possibilities for women and minorities associated with tourism and hospitality. Specifically, we quantified the fine-granularity gender and minority equality in tourism dependent Florida communities with the ratio of female- and minority- owned business in accommodation and restaurant industry, respectively. The data was acquired from the Survey of business owners (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/sbo.html>). In addition, we estimated the overall economic inequality using the ratio of household income at the 20th and the 80th percentiles with data acquired from the American Community Survey (<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>). The spatial distribution of indicators is presented on Figure 1.

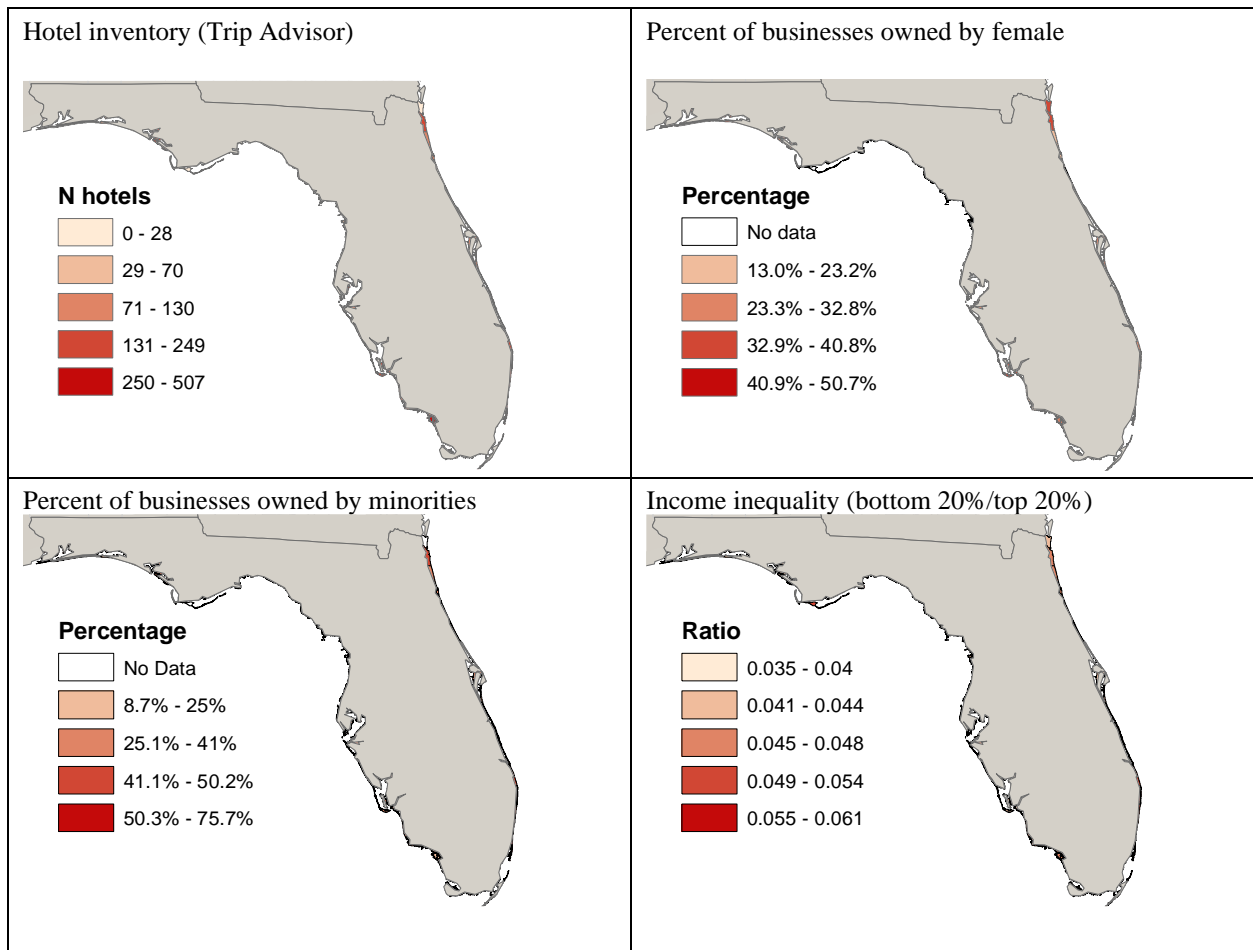


Figure 1 Spatial distribution of tourism industry presence (measured as the number of hotels present on TripAdvisor) and societal equality measures.

Finally, to learn local perceptions of tourism impacts on equality and inclusion goals, we conducted a survey in four communities representative of various type of Florida’s tourism offer: Orlando, Miami, St. Augustine, and the coastal zone of Florida Panhandle (Figure 2). Orlando represents the amusement park tourism; Miami is internationally famous for beach and urban tourism; St. Augustine is representative of a small size tourism dependent community hosting a large number of domestic tourists as the oldest city in the continental US; finally, Florida Panhandle coastal communities are popular as a budget family-friendly beach and fishing tourism destination. In addition to questions on tourism and hospitality impacts on their communities, the participants were asked about their perspectives on gender equality and minority equality in ownership of tourism and hospitality businesses. We also asked the participants about their opinion on tourism industry impact on education opportunities, environment, and health. The survey data were collected at a zip code level through Qualtrics Market Research Services over the period of June 15 to July 10, 2020. After the quality filtering of 1688 responses, we obtained 1236 surveys (73% return rate). Among the respondents, 61.9% resided in the research area for at least ten years, making their views especially insightful. Finally, 70% of respondents were female. Between the races and ethnicities, 21.6% of respondents were Hispanic/Latino, 14% Black/African American, and 15% represented other minorities (note that a respondent could check multiple races or ethnicities).

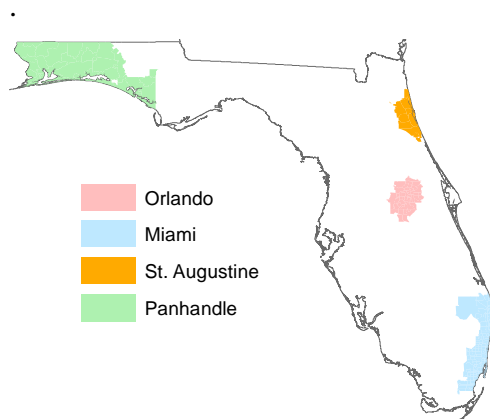


Figure 2 The survey focus area in Florida, USA.

Results

The dependence of the social equality measures on accommodation industry performance is best represented with a U-shaped curve (Figure 3). That is, the counties with sparse presence of tourism and accommodation industry, which incidentally are also characterized with low population density and low median income have a higher percentage of female- and minority- owned businesses. We speculate that the high percentage for female owned businesses is related to a necessity to have a second household income, usually in a form of a small family restaurant, in absence of better permanent employment opportunities. At a moderate level of accommodation industry presence, representation of female and minority-owned businesses falls down, which we connect with better employment opportunities and higher incomes. Finally, the areas with significant presence of tourism which we arbitrary defined the top ½ of all Florida counties in

terms of tourism presence gender equality and minority equality indicators are moderately and positively correlated with indicators of accommodation industry presence. Fitting the quadratic regression model to power transformed STR hotel inventory data returns the coefficient of determination $R^2=0.48$ for the female ownership model and $R^2=0.43$ for the minority ownership model (for Trip Advisor hotel inventory data, $R^2=0.41$ and 0.33 , respectively; for STR hotel room inventory, $R^2=0.50$ and 0.50 , respectively). Notably, we did not find significant association between tourism development and income inequality in the communities ($R=0.02 - 0.04$).

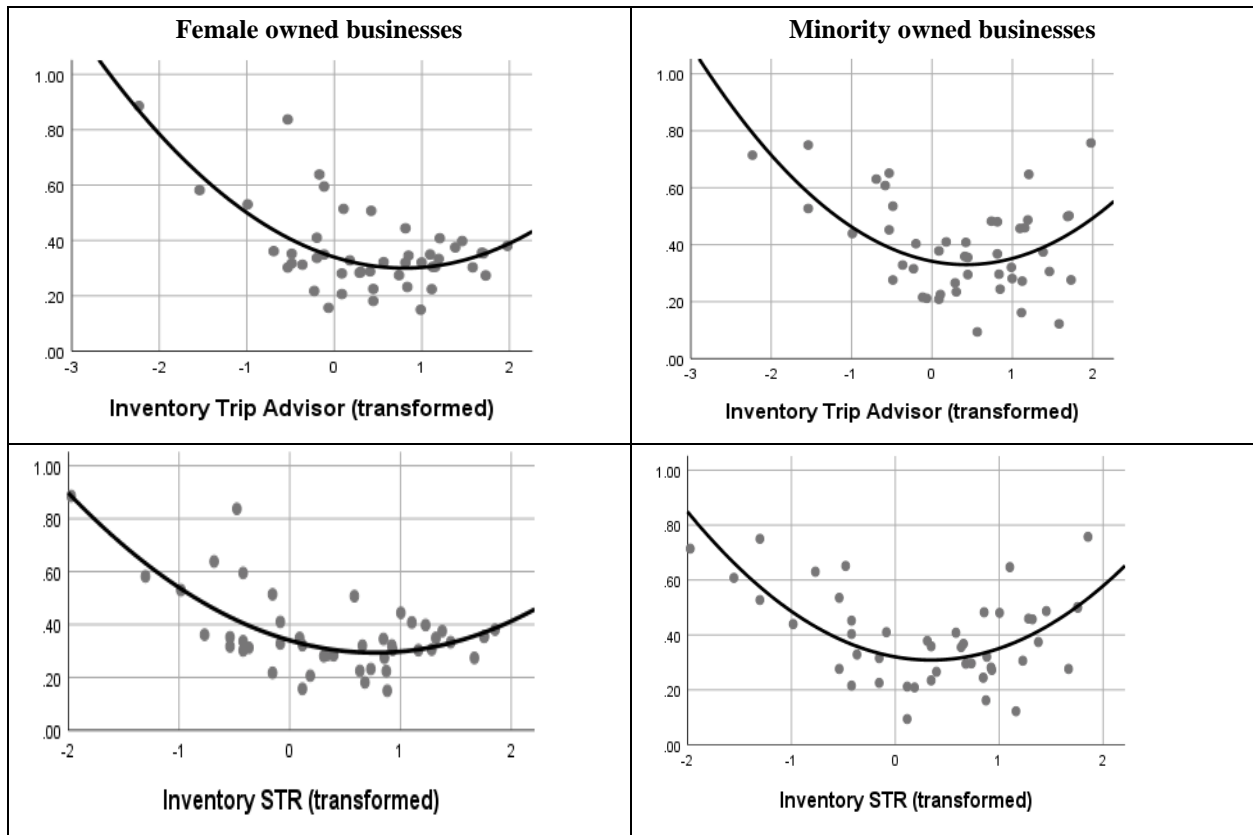


Figure 3 Gender and minority equality indicators as a function of power transformed hotel inventory (top) and hotel room inventory (bottom). The indicator represents the ratio of female/minority owned businesses to the overall number of businesses. A parabola is used for the best fit curve.

Overall, the survey data confirms the finding obtained from the industry data. Study participants from all four survey target areas (all of which are on the rising part of the tourism benefit curves on Figure 3) positively perceived the impact of tourism on gender and minority equality. A detailed analysis of different demographic groups however demonstrates a more intricate opinion landscape. The gender, race, and age (but not education) of respondents significantly affect their perception of tourism role in promoting equality goals. In terms of gender, female Floridians tend to have significantly less positive perceptions on tourism impact on equality ($p<0.001$). They are also less optimistic in their assessment of tourism role in creating education opportunities and more concerned about environmental and health impacts.

Similarly, we found that the race of respondents affects their perception of tourism industry in their area. Notably, White ($p=0.005$) and Hispanic/Latino ($p=0.001$) Floridians do perceive positive

impacts of tourism industry on promoting the diversity as well as on education and health of their communities, while this effect in Black population is only marginally significant ($p=0.071$). Finally, the age of respondents affects their perception of the benefits of tourism for promoting gender and minority equality ($p=0.023$). The age group diversion in perception of tourism benefits is especially strong for Floridians younger than 25 years old who have the least positive perceptions of tourism impact on minority and gender equality.

Conclusion and Discussion

The famous inequality hypothesis formulated by Simon Kuznets in the 1950s posits that economic inequality as a function of industrial development follows a U-shaped curve. That is, as the economy develops in the industrialization process, the inequality increases. In the highly developed economies, however, the inequality is hypothesised to decrease again with more equal income across all population groups and democratization of the governing. While the Kuznets curve remains highly contested hypothesis in economics with over 15,000 citations, it provided an inspiration for scholars from multiple scientific fields. The most well-known of those derivative hypotheses is the Environmental Kuznets curve, formulated for conceptualization of industrial development effects on environmental protection (Grossman and Krueger, 1991) and re-formulated for tourism development by De Vita et al. (2015).

Similarly to those fields, multiple investigators proposed applicability of the Kuznets' or similar type curve for description of economic development impacts on gender equality (Boserub, 1970; Goldin, 1990; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2006 – cit. Eastin and Prakash, 2013). Eastin and Prakash (2013: 156) suggested that the Kuznets' inspired non-linear approach to modelling the economics-equality relationship is a reasonable alternative to the negative trend proposed by feminist and critical scholars and the positive trend proposed by neo-liberal tradition.

Our findings hint that the Kuznets type model may be appropriate for explanation of tourism impact on gender and minority equality. The study however was limited with a relatively small area; more research in contrasting tourism related communities is required to test applicability of Kuznets' like models to tourism. Meanwhile, the combination of objective industry and the US Census Bureau data with outcomes of the survey of public perceptions on tourism suggest the overall positive outlook of the local communities on tourism industry effects on gender and race equality. This positive outlook is however not fully shared by women, Black minority, and the youngest population, suggesting a need for a future focused study of those groups.

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