University of Massachusetts Amherst

ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst

Tourism's social impact on a local community: The case of a mountain ski town

Elizabeth A. Cartier
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Linda L. Lowry
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra

Tourism's social impact on a local community:

The case of a mountain ski town

Tourism based communities are impacted by the influx of travelers on an economic, environmental, and socio-cultural level. However, the study of the social and cultural influence of tourism has long been an area of examination where scholars (Deery, Jago, & Federline, 20123; Mason, 2009; Nash, 1977; Pernacky, 2012) agree that we have limited understanding as compared to the economic and environmental impact. Scholarship focused on the examination of social interactions that are connected to tourism development has produced limited research since Doxey's (1975) original Irritation Irridex focusing on the conflicted relationship of locals and tourists. Therefore, it has been suggested that there is a need for more research in developed societies (Nash, 2004) and research that focuses on the local perspective (Picken, 2006) to truly understand the holistic impact of tourism.

Concentrating on a developed society, a mountain ski town in the western US where tourism is becoming a main stream fixture in everyday life, we examined the social impact of tourism on the local community. Viewing tourism as a form of imperialism as suggested by Nash (1977, 2001) and coming from a critical constructionist standpoint, our aim was to qualitatively contribute to the understanding of how tourism development and consumerism can change the local community by concentrating on how the social relationships between the locals and tourists function. We accomplished this by emerging ourselves within the community using ethnographic approaches focused on social actions and processes that are occurring in one mountain ski community. We aimed to address the following question:

- What is tourism doing in this community, specifically to the locals and their relationships?

Literature Review

Previous research proposes that there is power embedded in tourism relationships (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Hollinshead, 1999; Hollinshead & Kuon, 2013; Urry 1990), suggesting that relationships between locals and tourists exhibit power struggles. Research also suggests that the tourism industry has the ability to control the tourist's consumption (Ponting & McDonald, 2013), suggesting that the tourism industry has power over other groups. These two collections of research, along with the host and guest interaction literature connected to the influential book by Smith (1977), has guided our contribution to the theoretical positions proposed by Doxey's (1975) Irritation Irridex and Nash's (1977, 2001) Tourism as Imperialism.

Methodology

We utilized an ethnographic approach taking an emic view (insider's viewpoint) that stemmed from 14 months in the field. Our lived experience consisted of a constellation of methods: engaging in participant observation, conducting semi-structured interviews, and collecting related documents. This process generated over 200 hours of field notes from participant observation, 25 written accounts of interviews, and over 100 secondary sources. The aim of this data collection process was to interpret/co-construct the view of the participants.

We simultaneously collected and analyzed the data using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014) allowing us the ability to work through and with the data on an intimate level in a rigorous cyclical process. Our systemic data analysis included capturing processes and actions through gerund coding and constructing and re-constructing the data through a series of coding and constant comparison processes until conceptual categories were saturated and a theoretical contribution could be made (Charmaz, 1990).

Results

Our deep embeddedness in the community, commitment to contributing to social theory, and utilization of grounded theory methodology and analysis situated in a construction and reconstruction of existing realities has given us the ability to examine, reexamine, and explain the changing fluctuations in social relationships within this mountain community. Our study presents new insights on the relationship between the tourist and local, suggesting tourism has the ability to define a place, give the community an identity, and create complications and conflict regarding the issue of ownership. In turn, this process has the potential to help the community better understand and reconstruct a less problematic way of interacting.

References

Charmaz, K. (1990). 'Discovering' chronic illness: Using grounded theory. *Social Science and Medicine, 30* (11), 1161-1172.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* London: Sage.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory,* 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Cheong, B. & Miller, M. (2000). Power and tourism: A Foucauldian observation. *Annals of Tourism Research, 27*(2), 371-390.

Deery, M., Jago, L., & Fredline, L. (2012). Rethinking social impacts of tourism research: A new research agenda. Tourism Management, 33(1), 64-73.

Doxey, G. (1975). A causation theory of resident visitor irritants: Methodology and research inferences. Proceedings from the *Sixth Annual Conference of the Travel Research Association*, San Diego, CA.

Hollinshead, K. (1999). Surveillance of the worlds of tourism: Foucault and the eye-of-power. *Tourism Management, 20*(1), 7-23.

Hollinshead, K., & Kuon, V. (2013). The scopic drive of tourism: Foucault and the eye of

dialectic. In O. Moufakkir & Y. Reisinger (Eds.), *The host gaze in global tourism* (p. 1-18). Wallingford: CABI.

Mason, P. (2008). *Tourism, impacts, planning, and management* (2nd ed.). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Nash, D. (1977). Tourism as a form of imperialism. In V. Smith (Ed.). *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism,* (1st ed.), (33-47). Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nash, D. (2001). On travelers, ethnographers, and tourists. *Annals of Tourism Research 28* (2), 493-496.

Nash, D. (2004). New wine in old bottles: An adjustment of priorities in the anthropological study of tourism. In J. Phillmore & L. Goodson (Eds.), Qualitative research in tourism: Ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies. (170-184). London: Routledge.

Pernecky, T. (2012). Constructionism: Critical pointers for tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research, 39* (2), 1116-1137.

Picken, F. (2006). From tourist looking-glass to analytical carousels: Navigating tourism through relations and context. *Current Issues in Tourism, 9* (2), 158-170.

Ponting, J. & McDonald, M. (2013). Performance, agency, and change in surfing tourist space. *Annals of Tourism Research, 43,* 415-434.

Smith, V., (Ed.). (1977). *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism.* Philadelphia, P.A.: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies.* London: Sage.