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Themed touring routes: Residents' perceived benefits of wine trails in North Carolina

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Introduction

Themed touring routes (TTRs) refer to routes that link nearby tourism attractions in linearity under an overarching theme or product (Meyer, 2004; Rogerson, 2007). Different themes or products are used to develop TTRs in the U.S. and worldwide, examples of which include the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail (U.S.), Virginia Civil War trail (U.S.), Camino de Santiago (Spain), and Buddha's Footprint Pilgrimage (Thailand). TTRs are developed to expedite economic development in a given region by clustering services and attractions that complement each other (Rogerson, 2007; Russo & Romagosa, 2010). Past studies on TTRs are limited in number and scope, having most focused on visitors' behaviors and experiences (e.g., Denstadli & Jacobsen, 2011; Scott & Thigpen, 2003), impacts on local economic development (e.g., Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Rogerson, 2007), and developing a management plan for specific TTRs (e.g., Correia, Passos Ascencao, & Charters, 2004; Vasile, 2000).

Wine trails are one type of TTRs that have rapidly grown in the U.S. since the new millennium (Hardy, 2003). America's Wine Trail (2012) reports that there are 277 wine trails across the country. Studies on wine trails have primarily concentrated on marketing issues, such as identifying current and potential visitors and exploring marketing strategies for further development (Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003; Jaffe & Pasternak, 2004), and on evaluation of wine trails performance in terms of level of satisfaction and constraints from winery managers' perspectives (Correia, Passos Ascencao, & Charters, 2004). The extant literature reveals an overall scarcity of studies examining wine trails from the perspective of local residents.

Leaders of numerous TTR projects encountered a significant constraint of the lack of genuine community participation, due to residents' distrust and uncertainty about the meaning of tourism development (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). To involve and gain the support of local residents for tourism development, it is critical to understand their perceived benefits (Gursoy &

Rutherford, 2004), especially because residents' perceptions about the tourism development are one of the determinants of successful tourism (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004) and the goal of community and rural development (Lankford, 1994).

Literature Review

Studies on residents' perceived benefits from the tourism development and tourism impacts have been ongoing for more than three decades using various models (Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Ko & Stewart, 2002). Among these, Ko and Stewart's (2002) model on the relationship between residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and attitudes toward further tourism development is a widely adopted one. They suggest that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts could be categorized in six dimensions: positive/negative economic impact, positive/negative social and cultural impacts, and positive/negative environmental impacts. They also point out that residents must perceive tourism in overall positive terms to sustain tourism development, and thus community satisfaction is a useful concept for evaluating residents' support for further tourism development (Ko & Stewart, 2002). Although residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and community satisfaction appear to be important constructs for tourism development, further research is still needed (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011).

Previous studies suggest that several factors (e.g., residents' demographics, community dependence on tourism) influence perceptions of tourism impacts (Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; Lankford & Howard, 1994). However, these factors do not influence tourism impact perceptions directly, but are mediated through a set of personal benefits (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Purdue, Long, & Allen, 1990). Although several studies have examined the significance of personal benefits in tourism development (e.g., Wang & Pfister, 2008; Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011), further exploration is needed, especially to examine personal benefits as a predictor of the residents' perceptions of tourism development (McGehee & Andereck, 2004).

Existing studies also suggest that geospatial factors may influence residents' perceptions of benefits (Harrill, 2004; Harrill & Potts, 2003; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004; Raymond & Brown, 2007). However, those findings are not comprehensive because they all have used nodal areas (e.g., Mount Rogers National Recreation Area) or towns (e.g., Charleston in South Carolina, the coastal town of Manteo, NC) as study sites. Therefore, it is still yet to examine residents' perceived benefits along linear routes.

Methods

To address such gaps in the literature, a study will be conducted in the Piedmont region of NC to investigate perceived benefits toward tourism and TTRs development, and to visualize the spread of residents' perceived benefits along wine trails. A survey will be conducted to collect information on perceived economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits as well as personal benefits from residents along six wine trails. The survey instrument will include a revised perceived positive tourism impact scale (Ko & Stewart, 2002) combined with a revised personal benefit scale (McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Wong & Pfister, 2008; Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). Wine trail and tourism information will be retrieved from the NC Department of Commerce website and NC county government website to help identify the target wine trails in the study (e.g. the tourism-related services and amenities offered by the wineries in the trails).

Implications

Besides advancing the scientific understanding of TTRs and wine tourism, examining residents' perceptions towards tourism and TTRs developments is important to help stakeholders have a better understanding of the role of TTRs in local development, and gain residents' support for future TTRs development efforts. This study can also serve to frame future studies on other wine trails and different types of TTRs.

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