

ISLAND TOURISM AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

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Abstract: *The present study examines islands and island tourism in relation to their specific characteristics as well as the impacts that tourism development has on islands. According to previous studies, many of the factors that constitute the touristic appeal of islands also represent challenges to the longer-term success of tourism related development policies. In addition, the development of tourism has positive and negative economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts, that in the case of islands become more significant, since tourism is often more important for small islands than for mainland destinations.*

Keywords: Islands, Island Tourism, Impacts of Tourism

Introduction

'Who does not love islands? To be surrounded by the sea, lapped by the tide and shaded by palm trees and sandy outcrops of rocks and grass. How lovely! And to be safe behind moat which separates us from our neighbours. Who does not feel comforted by the security of an island home?'

(Muhlhausler and Stratford, 1999, p.216)

The concept of island tourism has attracted tourism researchers for ages who tried to examine islands' characteristics (Lockhart and Drakakis-Smith, 1997), focusing on development within an economic and social context (Lockhart et al., 1993), sustainability (Briguglio et al., 1996) and effective management (Keane et al., 1992; WTO, 1994). Especially, in the last decades, with the developments in the infrastructure and the introduction of new air and sea connections, islands became easier accessible and more favourable by tourists (Lockart, 1994). As Baum (1995) states 'the physical and climatic characteristics of islands create a particular allure to ever-increasing numbers of tourists'. It is this reason, that makes islands, and particularly small islands significantly depended on tourism and as such, tourism has greater economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts on them than on the mainland (Ioannides et al., 2001). But what is an island and which are its characteristics?

Island Tourism

Definition

The concept of the island has received attention by geographers and academics. The geographer Marshall (1991, p.190) for instance, gives

the following definition: 'and then there are the islands...many are microstates...vulnerable because of an isolation that produces poverty and instability'. Whereas, from the academic point of view, King (1993, p.14) notes that islands are the 'most enticing form of land. Symbol of the eternal contest between land and water... islands suggest mystery and adventure; they inspire and exalt'. Butler (1993, p.71) moreover, highlights the characteristics of separateness and difference of islands: 'Their appeal may relate to the very real feeling of separateness and difference, caused in part by their being physically separate...and given people's desires for the different while in pursuit of leisure, different climates, physical environments and culture can all be expected to further the attractiveness of islands as tourism destinations'. Finally, from an economic perspective, the WTO (2002) defines small island countries in terms of the economic size: countries like Australia, Indonesia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, Taiwan, United Kingdom and Ireland with Gross Domestic Product of more than US\$ 50 billion are excluded.

Why study island tourism - what makes islands so attractive?

Island tourism is not a recent phenomenon; the Romans used the Isle of Capri as a holiday destination two thousand years ago (King, 1993). As Conlin and Baum (1995, p.4) state, 'the allure of islands, be they in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic or the Pacific, as places where people go for relaxation and rejuvenation has a long tradition which continues unabated'. According to Keane (1992) small islands are attractive for tourists to visit as they create feelings of remoteness and isolation, peace and quiet and sense of timelessness.

But many of these factors that constitute the touristic appeal of islands also represent challenges to the longer-term success of tourism related development policies (MacNaught, 1982; Bastin, 1984; Wilkinson, 1989; Milne, 1992; Lockhart et al., 1993; Conlin and Baum, 1995; Briguglio et al., 1996). Islands commonly face a number of structural handicaps arising from their isolated and peripheral location, and their smallness in terms of population and area (Ioannides, Apostolopoulos and Sonmez, 2001; Connell, 1988; Royle, 1989, 1997). Among the most serious problems characterizing many of these environments are their limited resource base, tiny domestic markets, diseconomies of scale, poor accessibility, limited infrastructure and institutional mechanisms, and a high degree of dependency on external forces (Britton, 1982, 1990; Connell, 1988; Pearce, 1987; Wilkinson, 1989; Hall and Page, 1996; Abeyratne, 1999). Considering such problems, it is hardly surprising that islands have long attracted the attention of social scientists such as anthropologists, economists, geographers and sociologists (Lockhart, 1993). In fact, tourism is often more important for small islands than for mainland destinations, since tourism is invariably a larger and more significant part of the island destination's economy (Conlin and Baum, 1995 p.5). As such, the ability to understand tourists' needs and to attract a large volume of them is of great importance for the residents, as well as the knowledge of the impacts resulting from tourism on their islands.

Islands' characteristics and their relation to tourism

Smallness has an important effect on the structure of tourism on islands. In particular, a small island usually implies a less diverse natural resource base. According to Rajotte (1982), the main resources affected by the competition of tourism seem to be land, water and energy supply, which is considered expensive to produce or

import (Ioannides and Holcomb, 2001; Manologlou, Tsartas and Markou, 2004). Moreover, a small population means a limited domestic market. This in turn gives rise to a heavy reliance on foreign trade based on a limited number of products and a narrow range of markets (Pearce, 1987, p.154). Similarly to Pearce, Smith (1996) argues that climate and geographic isolation works against an economic well being of the islands. More precisely, the lack of diversity of resources to attract a broad range of international tourists has as a consequence the development of seasonal movements of visitors on the island destinations (Baum, 1993; Keane et al., 1992; Baum and Mudambi, 1995, p.115).

The lack of accessibility as another island characteristic may cause higher transportation cost (Farrell, 1985), decrease in visitors, lack of supplies, high prices of products and problems in the public services (Butler, 1993; Riley, 1995; Sharpley, 2001; Weber et al., 2001; Alipour and Kilic, 2005; Cross and Nutley, 1999). According to Wing (1995), if an island is not accessible to the outside world, especially in the main tourist trigger countries by air and sea transport, then the development of tourism can only take place on a small scale. That is why many islands are underdeveloped and still have a stagnant socioeconomic structure. However, in the last decade air transport has positively contributed to the opening of new markets (Abeyratne, 1999; Brookfield, 1980; 1992; Hernandez, 2004).

A common phenomenon in small islands is their undiversified economies. Islands that have one-or two-industry economies (agriculture, fishing, mining, tourism) typically do not have the ability to make substantial investments in tourism marketing or in the creation of a more comprehensive range of products. This has a negative impact on their ability to compete with the thousands of other destinations (Poetschke, 1995).

In fact, as Connell observed (1988, p.62) 'for island states that have very few resources, virtually the only resources where may be some comparative advantage in favour of are clean beaches, unpolluted seas and warm weather and water, and at least vestiges of distinctive cultures'. Indeed, since their ecosystems and natural and scenic beauty are some of their main advantages, islands need to preserve them in order to remain competitive in the tourism industry. This may require that islands place further constraints on travellers, in that they may not be able to do all of the activities that they could do at some other destination. However, protecting the ecosystem makes it potentially more difficult to satisfy the traveller's sense of value (Poetschke, 1995).

Main impacts of tourism on islands

Tourism has been instrumental in the development of peripheral, remote, and insular regions, like islands, which are commonly characterised by peripherality, isolations, fragility, scarcity of resources, limited labour force and transportation cost, all being competitive disadvantages (Jenkins and Henry, 1982; Coccosis, 1987; Britton, 1990; Conlin and Baum, 1995). Due to the popularity of island destinations, their development is an important and inevitable matter (Wing 1995) and thus, many islands are using tourism as their major economic growth tool (Lockhart, 1997).

Taking into consideration the importance of tourism, Riley (1995, p.472) identified some main issues regarding the development of tourism on islands. 'These are, first the question of tourist demand

versus protection of the environment; second, determining the role of government and its agencies; third, sustaining the economic health and supporting infrastructure; fourth, the problem of material supplies and the implications for imports; fifth, the important issue of population increase or decline and finally there is the question of sustaining the indigenous population'. Despite its necessity or not, the development of tourism has positive and negative economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts that need to be further analysed.

Positive impacts

The development of tourism in many islands comes as a natural consequence; 'it seems like a common agreement among islands, especially the tropical ones, that they have little economic choice but to accept traditional tourism development and mass tourism as a fact' (Wilkinson, 1989). Many scholars of tourism believe that tourism has become an important vehicle in islands that help them to overcome their size constraints (Conlin and Baum, 1995; Apostolopoulos and Gayle, 2002; McElroy et al, 1993; Ritchie, 1993; Wing, 1994; Wanhill, 1997; Wilkinson, 1989).

Income- balance of payment- foreign exchange

Many studies have shown that tourism has become a vital ingredient in many islands' economies (Britton and Kissling, 1984). In the island of Antigua for example, tourism receipts account for 58 per cent of the Gross National Product (GNP) (Cooper et al., 1998) and in the Canary Islands tourism also accounts for approximately 50 per cent of the GDP (Gil, 2003). Moreover, tourism is also important for many island states because it is a source of foreign exchange (Harrison, 2003).

Employment

In addition, perhaps as important as income generation is the employment created by tourism (Harrison, 2003). For instance, in Western Samoa 10 per cent of the jobs are tourism related (Smith 1996), and in the Falkland Islands tourism increased the household income by providing part-time jobs (Riley, 1995). However, most of the jobs for the islanders are usually low on the social and economic scale.

Development- diversification of the economy

Despite what the critics say, several small islands now use tourism development as a growth strategy to achieve greater economic and development performance (Croes, 2005, p.2), as well as to diversify their economies. As Legarda (1984) argues, tourism should at times be increased or even introduced into an economy as a route to diversification, like in the case of Mauritius, where the World Bank urged the expansion of tourism industry in order to ease the country's over-dependence on sugar cane production (Kissling et al, 1990).

Tourism also improves the standard of living and the infrastructure of the islands; 'it is the infrastructure that supports tourism, which also supports the social life of the islands. In this sense tourism has upgraded both' (Riley, 1995). In his study in Northern Cyprus, Lockhart (1994) related the progress in upgrading the infrastructure and the economic diversification with the expansion of tourism. Likewise, Bull (1997, p.137) states that 'the quality of life and opportunities in the islands may be so poor that many of their inhabitants decide to leave. Tourism, in theoretically

providing a mobile and constantly renewable resource, may offer a way of solving some of these problems'.

Socio-cultural impacts

From the social point of view, according to Briguglio and Briguglio (1996, p.163) tourism also contributes to small islands' 'renewed interest in local arts and crafts, improvements in educational, leisure, communication, medical and other facilities in the host countries, and a broadening in the outlook of the islanders'. This is also supported by Dann (1996) in his study in St Lucia, where residents regarded tourism as a catalyst for the awakening or revitalization of local culture. Finally, according to Kousis, (1989) and Andriotis (2002) tourism activity is a medium for heritage and environmental preservation, cultural communication and community welfare.

Environmental impacts

As the economic potential of tourism has become widely recognised, the preservation of the physical environment has come to be viewed as an investment (Pearce, 1985; Milne, 1992). Thus, on the positive side, tourism 'can be credited with extending environmental appreciation and providing an incentive for conservation policies; many island governments are placing greater emphasis now on "clean up" campaigns, as in the case of Tonga and the Cook Islands (Milne, 1992, pp.200-201).

Negative impacts

Tourism is not a panacea for all the problems of the islands and apart of the positive effects there are also other adverse impacts of tourism development. As Wenkman (1975, p73) suggested, 'the general problem essentially is one of too many tourists who provide jobs for too many residents on a group of islands too small to lodge everyone'. McElroy and Albuquerque (1998, p164) in their study in the Caribbean islands noticed that 'the older more affluent and successful destinations have sacrificed social and environmental stability in favour of tourism, and the newer destinations seem bent on the same non-sustainable mass tourism path'.

Overdependence on tourism

Island tourism development is widely considered to be 'typified by, amongst other factors, small geographical size, distance and isolation from metropolitan centres, a limited economic base, a lack of resources and, frequently, a lack of revenue for imports' (Sharpley, 2001 p.65). As a consequence island economies often become dependent upon a dominant tourism sector (Bastin, 1984; MacNaught, 1982; Milne, 1992) which is controlled by overseas tour operators, airlines and hotel chains (Sastre and Benito, 2001). This situation is often referred to in the literature as neo-colonisation (Britton, 1982; Cooper and Buhalis, 1992; Bianchi, 1994; Hall, 1994). For instance, Cazes (1997, p.154) claims that out of sixty world destinations where tourism receipts are highest relative to total national revenue, the top fifteen are islands, and such evidence highlights the level of dependency on tourism experienced by small island states.

Other economic dangers especially important in small islands due to their relatively large dependence on tourism include seasonal unemployment and a rapid increase in the price of land, often accompanied by land speculation (Briguglio and Briguglio, 1996b, p.164), as well as the fact that small island states have to rely

intensively on international development assistant, mainly for infrastructure development expenditures (Shareef and Hoti, 2005).

Leakages

Leakages is a major problem of the islands' economies; Wilkinson (1989) states that the smaller and more remote islands have a higher leakage ratio because they often lack the skill and capital that is needed. Import leakages are inevitably high in small island economies with little indigenous manufacturing, as for example in Taquile island in Peru (Mitchell and Reid, 2001), or in Lakshadweep Islands in India (Kokkranikal, McLellan and Baum, 2003, p440) where 'except for coconut and fish, most items consumed by tourists are imported from the mainland'. The import of luxury goods to cater to the tourist trade constitutes a relatively large foreign-exchange outflow (Briguglio et al., 1996b).

Moreover, many foreign multinational companies, whose investment helps develop and promote tourism, tend to squeeze the tourism earnings from the small nations, and this results in relatively large leakages of economic benefits (Briguglio et al., 1996b). In addition, in some small states a considerable proportion of employment in the industry goes to expatriate labour working for multinational companies, again leading to income leakages.

Seasonality

Many islands are developed by the tourism sector only for seasonal tourism. Lockhart and Drakakis (1997) studied the tourism in Malta and Cyprus and found that there were characterised by seasonal fluctuations in arrivals due to climate and the holiday periods in the countries where visitors originate. These seasonal fluctuations result in seasonal employment (Page et al., 2001), under utilisation of the facilities (Cooper et al., 1998), overcrowding (Witt et al., 1995) and stresses upon the transport system and the public services (Robinson, 1976).

Competition for resources, land and labour

Latimer (1985) argues that tourism in the islands has taken resources of land, labour and capital away from other sectors. More precisely, the tourism industry in islands tends to grow at the expense of indigenous economic activities like fishing and agriculture (Edington and Smith, 1992), often leading to their abandonment; 'the impact of excessive water demand by tourism on agriculture in Phuket, Thailand, is one illustration of this' (Conlin and Baum, 1995, p.6). Moreover, in his study in Key West, Schittone (2001) claimed that the local fishing industry 'lost out in the competition for space' with tourism, as well as in the case of the Aegean Islands in Greece, where according to Buhalis (1999), there is a competition between tourism and agriculture for the limited resources of the islands. In addition, tourism inflates the price of land and housing in resort areas, as well as basic consumer products. Bryden (1973) states that 'in the Leewards and the Northern Group, particularly Antigua and Montserrat, agricultural decline has been a direct result of the competition for land by tourism real estate development'. Similarly, the competition for labour by tourism is strong; many islands according to Kakazu (1994) have reached the stage where growth exceeds local labour supply. Finally, as Winpenny (1982) argues 'tourism displaces existing sectors of the economy, and makes it more difficult for new ones to develop'. However, the balance needs to be reached between tourism and other industries.

Competition for infrastructure

Because of the high dependence of the tourism industry on transportation and other infrastructure, greater priority is often given to the development of major transportation networks, such as coastal highways, airports, ports etc mainly for tourists (Thaman, 1982).

Socio-cultural impacts

Regarding the socio-cultural impacts of tourism, social polarization, demonstration effects, inflation of social values and an increased cost of living, are the most common problems. 'Tourism development often contrasts sharply with the protection of uniqueness, as it implies modernisation, change in culture, urbanisation and exploitation of resources' (Coccosis, 1987). As Conlin and Baum state (1995, p.6) 'The phenomenon whereby locals begin to mimic the culture of their visitors, thereby diminishing the importance and permanence of their own culture and heritage, is well recognised as a cultural impact concern'.

Furthermore, young people see tourists as role models, arts and crafts become commoditised, songs and dances are geared to commercial performance, changing to cater for tourist taste and meet the constraints of the tourist itinerary (Harrison, 2003, p.11). In his study in two Greek islands, Ios and Serifos, Tsartas (1992) noticed that young people consider the local traditional feasts outdated and suitable only for the older generation. Also, on her study in Crete, Kousis (1989) concluded that tourism had some drastic modifications to the social family life.

Likewise, in the Aegean islands, commercialisation of history, cultural traditions and human relations are also evident, together with increased crime rate during the tourist season, and impacts on the attitudes and personalities (Briassoulis, 1993). Many times, 'locals overwork during the summer season, altering or even neglecting their social, family, religious and cultural obligations' (Castelberg-Koulma, 1991 as cited in Buhalis, 1999). Finally, tourism is also blamed for increased levels of crime, prostitution and other undesirable activities. Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996), in their study in the island of Samos found that residents believed that drugs addiction, vandalism and crime were perceived to worsen as a result of tourism.

Ecological - environmental impacts

One of the most popular subjects in island tourism is the impact of tourism on the islands' environment, and many authors like Briguglio et al. (1996), Kousis (2001), Ioannides et al., (2001) and Riley (1995) have focused on environmental problems caused by tourism on islands. Tourism very often destroys the serenity and beauty of islands through congestion, traffic, and unpleasant development. Small islands have small social and environmental carrying capacities, and so the adverse impacts of tourism tend to be more severe in these places than in the large mainland countries. The fragility of their ecosystems arises as a result of a low level of resistance to outside influences. Although these effects also occur on non tropical islands (e.g. islands in Greece), tropical environments according to Travis (1980) are even more fragile.

As Harrison (2003, p.11) states, tourist development on islands leads to 'destruction of native forests, flora and fauna during airport, port and hotel construction and damage to beaches; Moreover, once established, hotels and other tourist sites may pollute lagoons and

water through the discharge of waste and sewage, and the activities of tourists themselves may prompt further damage'. More precisely, coastal pollution, water shortages, sewage treatment, waste disposal, traffic congestion, noise pollution, overbuilding, and aesthetic degradation are some of the impacts that different studies found in the Greek islands, the Balearic Islands, the Caribbean, the Galapagos and the Channel Islands (Leontidou, 1991; Van den Bergh, 1993; Romeril, 1985; Barker and McGregor, 1995; de Albuquerque and McElroy, 1995, 1998; Battle, 2000; Groot, 1983).

According to Aguilo, Alegre and Sard (2005), the deterioration of former attractions and natural resources and the social and environmental costs of overcrowding all exceed the admissible limits for today's tourist in the Mediterranean destinations. In his study about Gozo, Boissevain (1979, p.84) observed that some residents were afraid that 'each tourist's step is slowly but steadily destroying the natural beauty of the island'. The solution, according to Battle (2000) and Briguglio et al. (1996) is sustainability and tourism planning.

Conclusion

The current study encapsulated the main characteristics of island tourism and presented the impacts that tourism development has on the islands worldwide. Tourism on islands is not a simplified subject. Islands are frequently characterised by smallness, insularity, undiversified economies and fragile ecosystems, and thus they face particular disadvantages for tourism in this competitive environment (Poetschke 1995). Moreover, as the decision to visit an island is influenced by conditions outside of the control of the island itself, islands are vulnerable to often minor fluctuations in world market conditions and their economies have tended to be heavily distorted and unstable.

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