

# 8

## The Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism

### Introduction

When discussing the socio-cultural impacts of tourism there is a need to first understand the terms *society* and *culture*. The concept of *society* is studied, in particular, within the subject of *sociology*. Sociology is largely concerned with the study of society and focuses on people in groups and the interaction of those in groups, their attitudes and their behaviour. *Culture* is a similar concept to society and is about how people interact as observed through social interaction, social relations and material artefacts. According to Burns and Holden (1995), when discussing culture within the context of tourism, they indicate that it consists of behavioural patterns, knowledge and values which have been acquired and transmitted through generations. Burns and Holden (1995:113) provide more detail when they indicate that “culture .... includes knowledge, belief, art, moral law, custom and any other capabilities and habits of people as members of society”

### Key perspectives

The focus in this chapter is on the study of the impacts of tourism on people in groups. The specific groups are those who are residents of tourism areas (such people are usually referred to as *hosts*), but also the tourists themselves. Socio-cultural impacts are concerned, in addition, with impacts on the culture of the local residents, (or host population) and also with any effects on the culture of the visitors themselves. The study of socio-cultural impacts also involves ways in which culture can be used to promote tourism, and this frequently involves reference to how aspects of culture are packaged to ‘sell’ to tourists. The resulting effects this has on the culture itself are also topics investigated.

There are a significant number of cultural factors that can act as tourism attractions. Of particular importance, according to Ritchie and Zins, (1978) are:

- Handicrafts
- Traditions
- Gastronomy
- Art and music

- History of the area/including visual reminders
- Types of work engaged in by residents
- Architecture
- Language
- Religion (including visible manifestations)
- Education systems
- Dress
- Leisure activities.

## The nature of the impacts

Before proceeding with a discussion of specific socio-cultural impacts, it is worth considering once again the influences on the impacts of tourism which were presented in Chapter 6. All the factors discussed there are important in relation to socio-cultural impacts, however, of particular importance are the following:

- Who is involved
- What activities are engaged in
- Where tourism is taking place.

The scale of tourism can also be an important factor in terms of socio-cultural impacts, and the length of time tourism has been an activity in a particular location may significantly affect the nature of this type of impact.

However, in addition, the nature of both the visitors and the host population can be very influential in relation to the nature and extent of these types of impacts. For example, the culture of each of these two groups may be very similar, or very different. Visitors may come from, for example, a wealthy European country and the local population be poor residents of a Pacific island. These two groups may or may not speak the same language. They may, or may not, have the same religion, share the same beliefs, enjoy the same food or like the same music. Whether there are similarities or differences, the interaction of the two groups will be a major issue in affecting the types of impact. Nevertheless, as Burns and Holden (1995) argued, if there is a large contrast and major differences between the culture of the receiving society, or host population, and the origin culture of the tourists, then it is likely that socio-cultural impacts will be greatest. Page (2003) concurs with the point about impacts being particularly significant when cultural differences are great. Drawing on the work of Douglas and Douglas (1996), Page (2003) states that the interaction between the two groups is dependent on the following:

- The nature and extent of social, cultural and economic differences between tourists and hosts
- The ratio of visitors to residents
- The distribution and visibility of tourist developments
- The speed and intensity of development
- The extent of foreign and local employment

As with the environmental impacts and economic impacts of tourism, it is possible to categorize these effects as positive or negative. The more major positive impacts of tourism on society and culture include the following:

- The creation of employment
- The revitalisation of poor or non-industrialized regions
- The rebirth of local arts and crafts and traditional cultural activities
- The revival of social and cultural life of the local population
- The renewal of local architectural traditions
- The promotion of the need to conserve areas of outstanding beauty which have aesthetic and cultural value (Mason, 1995).

It is also the case that in some developing countries in particular, tourism can encourage greater social mobility, through changes in employment from traditional agriculture to service industries, and may result in higher wages and better job prospects.

However, tourism has had, for at least 40 years, a reputation for major detrimental effects on the society and culture of host areas. So for example, where there are very large numbers of visitors, tourism can cause overcrowding in destinations. This is likely to result in stress for both tourists and residents. Douglas and Douglas (1996) claim the ratio of tourists to locals is important in terms of negative effects. Hence, it is usually the case that the larger the number of tourists to locals, then the higher this ratio and the greater likelihood of perceived and possibly actual detrimental impacts. As noted in Chapter 7, in relation to Waitomo Caves, New Zealand, assessment of overcrowding is a subjective activity, but when tourist number greatly exceed numbers of local residents, then negative consequences of tourism are likely to be recorded.

Where tourism takes over as a major employer, traditional activities such as farming may decline. In extreme cases, regions can become over-dependent on tourism, and this effect is considered in more detail in Chapter 9 which focuses on the economic aspects of dependency on tourism.

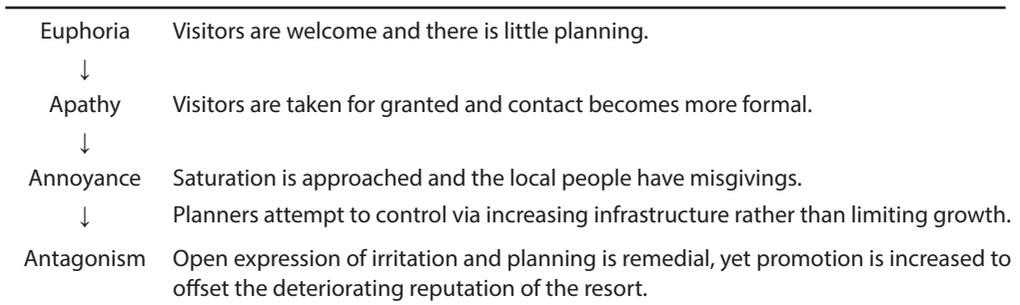
## **The reactions of the host community**

Residents may find it difficult to co-exist with tourists who may not only have a different set of values to theirs, but also unlike them, are involved in leisure activities, while they are working. This problem can be made worse where tourism is a seasonal activity and residents have to modify their way of life for part of the year. In countries with strong religious codes, altered social values caused by a tourist invasion may be viewed as nationally undesirable.

In the mid-1970s, at the time that there was growing concern about both the potential, and real, negative impacts of tourism on destination regions, an important theory was put forward on the possible effects that increasing numbers of tourists could have on a host population. Doxey (1975) proposed what was termed

an 'Irritation Index', or, in its shortened form, *Irridex*. Doxey's Irridex considered the relationship between tourists and locals. The main idea in Doxey's Irridex is that, over time, as the number of tourists increases, a greater hostility from locals towards tourists will emerge. The process by which this occurs is summarized in Figure 8.1.

Doxey's theory is built upon the premise that destinations will develop and grow over a period of time, although the length of time may vary from place to place. Nevertheless, Doxey suggested that whatever the time period it was likely that the process of locals' views changing from euphoria to antagonism would occur. An important implication of Doxey's theory, is that destinations may not have the ability to grow without check. Doxey's Irridex suggests that, over time, as locals become more hostile to visitors, visitor numbers will not continue to grow at the same rate as previously and may actually decline. Although regarded at the time as important, and still seen as adding to our understanding of tourist–host interactions, Doxey's Irridex was not based on any detailed empirical research, but mainly on conjecture at a time when researchers and commentators were considering seriously for the first time, the negative consequences as well as the benefits of tourism.



**Figure 8.1:** Doxey's Irritation Index

Several pieces of research have been conducted on socio-cultural impacts of tourism to apply major theoretical perspectives. One important study was conducted, in the Scottish Highlands, by Getz, who attempted to apply, in particular, Doxey's theory. The study is unusual, in that it is one of the relatively few attempts in tourism to conduct a longitudinal study. In reality, it was two 'snapshots' taken at different dates, as Getz investigated the Spey valley, in Scotland, in the late 1970s and then again in the early 1990s. As return visits to the same location are uncommon in tourism, the findings are particularly important. The sample size and questions used for Getz' studies of 1978 and 1992 were fairly similar, but the actual respondents involved on each occasion were different. Each of the studies used a sample of 130 households and the main findings were as follows:

- Residents were generally supportive of tourism on both occasions.
- Although on each occasion there were positive views on tourism, by 1992 there was much more of a negative feeling. This was attributed to tourism being perceived as less successful than had been hoped in the 1970s.