

7

Consequences of Visitation at the Contemporary Destination

Chapter objectives

After reading this chapter you will:

- Be able to appreciate some of the positive and negative perceptions of tourism's effects, including the concept of overtourism.
- Appreciate that although the destination is a focal point of attention to the impacts of tourism, effects occur over all stages of the geographical tourism system.
- Understand that the consequences of tourism are *contextual* and *situational*.
- Understand the potential significance of change for the consumption and production of tourism.
- Be able to identify some of the key factors that affect the assessment of the effects of tourism.

Introduction

Being aware of the consequences of visitation is not just important in terms of community, environmental and social responsibilities but also in terms of good business practice (Gössling et al., 2009; Coles et al., 2011, 2013). As has been stressed throughout this book the multiple layers of the tourism product, especially with respect to the destination product, means that consideration needs to be given to the people and environments that are packaged as part of that product as otherwise the various qualities of a place that make it attractive to visit will be eroded. Therefore, an appreciation of the effects of tourism has long been recognised as

being vital to understanding the contemporary business environment of tourism as well as tourism's relationship to destinations and tourist behaviour (Weeden & Boluk, 2014). Nevertheless, in recent years the sheer growth of tourism has led to increasing concerns that some locations are beginning to suffer from 'overtourism' with considerable opposition emerging from local populations towards large numbers of tourists even if they do recognise the economic benefits of tourism to a destination as a whole (World Travel & Tourism Council [WTTC] & McKinsey & Company, 2017). In the case of the WTTC and McKinsey & Company (2017) report, for example, the focus was on overcrowding, with five main challenges associated being identified:

- Alienated local residents
- Degraded tourist experience
- Overloaded infrastructure
- Damage to nature
- Threats to culture and heritage.

Although these issues are clearly important at a local or site specific scale in many instances, the consequences of tourism are actually much more widespread and dispersed, although as a result they are also often not quite as visible. In addition, it is important to point out that the issue of overcrowding in tourism is nothing new. What may be new though is the substantial growth in opposition to tourism by locals in destinations as diverse as Barcelona, Venice, Iceland and New Zealand, even given the importance of tourism to the economy.

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant debates in contemporary tourism centres on the positive and negative dimensions of tourism development (Hall et al., 2015). For many years tourism was generally seen in a favorable light and regarded as having a benign influence on destinations. However, with the advent of a new generation of jet aircraft in the late 1960s and early 1970s and a consequent massive year on year growth in international travel which continues to the present day (see Chapter 3), tourism has now come to be seen as possibly having a range of undesirable effects for destinations in addition to its potential economic benefits (Rutty et al., 2015).

This chapter discusses some of the effects of tourist visitation. These impacts are discussed under various headings, but the chapter emphasises that these are not discrete categories. The chapter first examines some of the positive and negative dimensions of tourism, before going on to outline some of the issues that arise in assessing tourism. These issues are important because they represent an important step in being able to accurately assess the consequences of tourism on people and places. The chapter then concludes by outlining different forms of the relationship between tourism and its various environments.

The positive and negative consequences of tourism

One of the significant dimensions in assessing the consequences of tourism is that its effects are often seen differently by different people at different times. For example, increases in property values as a result of tourism development are often regarded positively by property owners and municipalities who gain income from property taxes, but negatively by those who rent properties as they often lead to increased rents as well as making it more difficult to buy into the property market. Similarly, the emergence of Airbnb may be regarded as a positive for people wish to rent their properties or a spare room, but it may have negative effects on the cost of rental properties for permanent residents. In addition, differences in perceptions and understandings of the consequences of tourism will also be different between destinations because of the history of a destination and its economic development trajectory, the different attitudes that exist towards tourism, the type of changes that occur, and broader values in society. This therefore makes it extremely difficult to generalise about the positive and negative effects of tourism without providing some sort of context.

Within the tourism literature the impacts of tourism have usually been divided into three main categories: environmental (referring to the physical environment), social, and economic (e.g. Matheson & Wall, 1982; Hall & Lew, 2009). These categories are not mutually exclusive and have a significant degree of overlap but they serve as reasonable semantic devices by which to discuss tourism's effects (Figure 7.1).

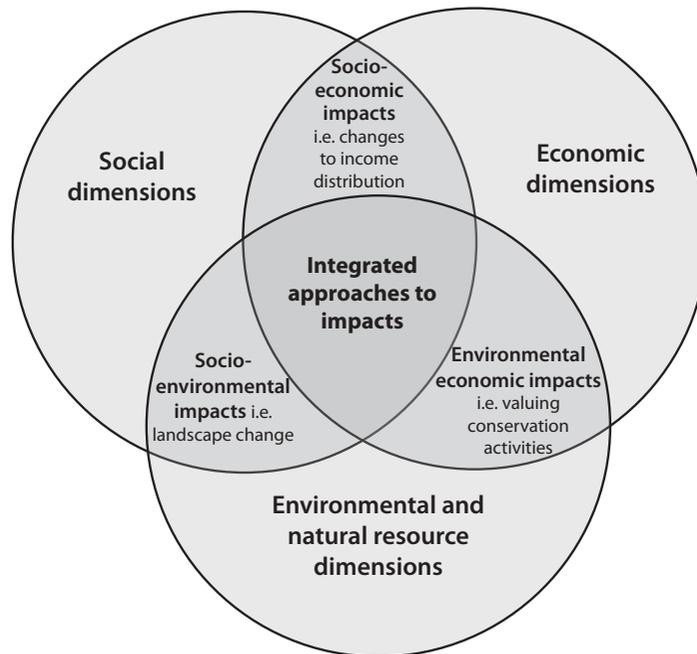


Figure 7.1: Interrelationships between traditional categorization of tourism's impacts