Blurred Boundaries: The Implications of New Tourism Mobilities for Destination Community Well-Being

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Introduction

"Tourism is traditionally treated as an escape from everyday life and tourism theory is concerned with extraordinary places. Tourism and everyday life are conceptualized as belonging to different ontological worlds." (Larsen, 2008, p. 27). According to Hall (2004), this approach to defining tourism as something outside the ordinary life of both tourists and destination residents has meant that tourism researchers have paid little attention to the "new mobilities paradigm" (NMP) described by Sheller and Urry (2006). Adopting the NMP in tourism research means rethinking a number of assumptions made about, and theories used to explain, different aspects of tourism. This paper will examine how new forms of mobility can be connected to new types of tourist, new relationships between tourism and residence, and, through these, to different ways in which tourism can be connected to sustainability. For this paper sustainability is being defined within a destination community well-being framework.

This examination is based on the qualitative analysis of a series of semi-structured interviews conducted with destination community stakeholders in three regional locations in the tropical regions of Australia. The paper will begin with a brief review of the NMP and how it changes the way tourism is defined and understood with a particular emphasis on models for explaining tourism impacts in host communities. It will then present the results of the stakeholder interviews highlighting the different ways in which new types of tourist, distinguished by different mobilities, contribute to and/or detract from destination community well-being (DCW). The paper will conclude by identifying some challenges for sustainable tourism planning and management created by these new tourist and resident mobilities.

The new mobilities paradigm (NMP)

In 2006 Sheller and Urry introduced the idea of a new social science paradigm based on the concept of mobility as a major characteristic or foundation of modern society. While the idea of movement as a key feature of modernity was not new to sociology, Sheller and Urry's (2006) paper identified a series of converging research themes and questions and argued that social science needed to recognise the importance of actual and virtual global mobility as a critical feature of modern social life. In making this argument they noted that tourism was one social phenomomen closely connected to the nature of modern society. Despite this importance of tourism in the development of the NMP, few tourism researchers have explored or applied the NMP to tourism (Larsen, 2008; Larsen, Urry & Axhausen, 2007). The idea of movement or mobility has been discussed in the context of sustainable transport in tourism (c.f. Verbeek & Mommaas, 2008), but this is only one dimension of mobility and generally takes a very literal perspective on what is meant by the NMP.

Two themes within the NMP are of particular importance for tourism research. The first is the challenge that the NMP presents for many traditional social science theories that assume that it is stable, desirable and normal for people to find one specific home place and stay within that place for most of their lives, that people seek and develop a strong connection to this single place and that this place contributes to personal identity and defines social networks and interactions (Cresswell, 2010; Larsen et al., 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006). In the NMP, movement is not only a common feature of modern life, it is necessary for the production and maintenance of social networks and individuals' identities are linked to these social networks rather than places. Further, places are defined by the different mobilities that connect them (Cresswell, 2010; Larsen et al., 2007; Sheller & Urry, 2006). Tourism has often been defined and analysed within these traditional social science model as being something extraordinary and temporary, contrasted with the ongoing everyday world, as being about pleasure and liminality as opposed to order, rules and conventions, and as being about escape and the exotic rather than a necessary element of modern social life (Edensor, 2007; Larsen, 2008). The second major challenge is that of the production and maintenance of social networks as a driving force for behaviour (Sheller & Urry, 2006). Typically tourism research and theory has assumed tourists are away from their social networks and conceptualised them as independent units with little connection to the places they visit and clearly distinct from residents. If these assumptions about tourism are not valid then it may be necessary to rethink the way we define and understand all aspects of tourism.

Implications for understanding tourism impacts and sustainability

One area of tourism research and theory that has assumed a clear distinction between tourists and residents is that of understanding tourism impacts, especially research into resident perceptions of tourism impacts and attitudes towards tourism. Understanding and managing tourism impacts on destinations is an important element of improving the sustainability of tourism (Moscardo, 2009). Most of the concepts and models proposed to explain both actual impacts and resident perceptions of impacts assume tourists are clearly distinct from residents and are outsiders, guests and strangers (Pearce, Moscardo & Ross, 1996). Resident attitudes towards tourism impacts are typically measured by surveys which ask residents to rate tourists and tourism on various scales assuming that the respondents and researchers share the same concepts of tourism and tourists. McCabe (2005) challenges this and other assumptions made about the concept of a tourist. One of the few studies that examined how residents define tourists suggests that they tend to see tourists as coming from other countries and cultures, staying for a short time, and focussed on pleasure and holiday activities (Lea, Kemp & Willetts, 1994). If residents do not see domestic visitors, business travellers, people staying for longer time periods and those visiting friends and relatives as tourists, then their responses to the tourism impact surveys are limited to only a certain type of tourist. Not surprisingly most explanations of tourism impacts then are limited to this archetypal tourist giving an incomplete picture of the consequences of tourism. Without a more complete understanding of tourism consequences it is difficult to assess and improve tourism sustainability.

Researchers into tourism impacts, especially in the social domain, have also been challenged to develop stronger theoretical frameworks (Saarinen, 2006; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). In response to this challenge more recent papers have looked to the literature on community well-being, the idea of multiple forms of capital and the relationship between well-being, capitals and sustainability as a way to better understand the changes associated with tourism (Andereck & Nyuapane, 2010; Macbeth, Carson & Northcote, 2004). According to Moscardo (2009) and McGehee, O'Bannon, Lea and Perdue (2010) a better way to understand tourism impacts is to identify the ways in which tourism and/or tourists effect different forms of capital available to destination communities. This argument borrows from Lehtonen's (2004) and Vermuri and Costanza's (2006) approaches to assessing and understanding sustainability which define sustainability in terms of how different activities, such as tourism, impact on different forms of capital. Flora's (2004) community well-being framework extends this approach to sustainability and provides a framework for understanding dimensions of sustainability for communities. Flora (2004) argues that community well-being is made up of cultural, social, human, political, natural, financial and built capital. This destination community well-being (DCW) approach provides a new way

to identify and think about the relationships between tourism and destinations and identify in more detail how tourism detracts from or contributes to sustainability for destination regions.

The Research Process

The research reported in this paper was part of a larger project aimed at examining the links between different forms of tourism, different characteristics of tourism development and different aspects of destination community well-being. The project was informed by the literature on sustainability and community well-being with Flora's different capitals as a starting conceptual framework. The project was not initially about mobilities. Issues of mobility arose from the preliminary analysis of the data. The research consisted of semi-structured interviews with 25 key informants from three regional communities in Tropical Australia. As the main goal of the project was to explore perceptions of tourism and DCW from outside the tourism sector the interviews were conducted with informants from public health, charitable organizations, transport organizations, government planning agencies, local government, economic development agencies, primary industries, the finance sector, the arts and culture sector, and natural resource management groups, as suggested by Flora's (2004) work on community. Websites and directories of organizations in each region were used as a way to contact potential participants.

The interviews had an average length of 90 minutes with two of the research team present to guide and record the informal conversations. The basic interview schedule consisted of four sections: an opening question asking informants to talk about their personal history with the community and what contributed to their personal quality of life as residents of these communities; a question asking them to talk about their experience with tourism/tourists generally; a question asking them to think about how tourism/tourists impacted on their community; and a final question asking them to reflect on the future of their community. In the discussion of tourism impacts informants were free to pursue whatever aspects of the community they wished, but after their initial answer they were prompted to consider specifically aspects of community well-being that they might not have mentioned in their first responses. These prompts were guided by Flora's (2004) five forms of capital as previously listed.

The research took a qualitative approach guided by the recommendations of Maxwell (2005) and DeCrop (2004). The transcriptions from the interviews were content analysed following Denzin and Lincoln (1994). After the initial analysis revealed the importance of mobilities in defining both tourists and the nature of well-being in these communities, the interview transcripts were content analysed again to determine the different types of tourist that informants identified and these became major categories for the next round of

analysis. Within each of these major categories the transcripts were then examined in more detail to identify the ways in which these tourist types were linked to different mobilities and to aspects of DCW.

Experience of community and tourism

The aim of the sampling was to elicit perceptions from informants with a variety of different roles in, experiences of, and connections to, the study communities and not directly involved in tourism. The sample had extensive experience of the region with nine of the respondents having lived in the community for their entire life or since they were young children, six had lived there for 20 years or more, and three had lived in the community for less than five years. More than half (15) played multiple different roles in the community combining different jobs, business interests and community service activities, giving most of the informants links to extensive networks within, and multiple perspectives on, the communities. In terms of connections to tourism, only three was extensively involved in tourism at the time of the interviews either directly through their own work or through having a family member running a tourism business, two had worked in tourism when younger and 11 dealt with either tourism businesses or tourists as part of their work or business but did not consider tourism to be a major element of their daily lives. The remainder encountered tourists on an irregular basis as they moved, socialised or recreated in the region.

The three destination communities

The three communities were the Atherton Tablelands, Bowen and the Airlie Beach/Proserpine corridor, all located in the tropical North-eastern region of Australia. The Atherton Tablelands is a rural area located in the hinterland to the west of the tourist resort destinations of Cairns and Mission Beach. Bowen is a small coastal town located midway between Townsville and Mackay on the eastern coast. The Airlie Beach/Proserpine corridor serves as both a major coastal resort tourist destination and the main gateway to the island resorts of the Whitsundays group. Both the Atherton Tablelands and Bowen can be seen as peripheral regions meeting all the criteria described by Moscardo (2008) of being geographically remote from major population and political centres, having traditional primary industries in decline, having a declining and/or aging population, and facing challenges in maintaining and developing both hard and soft infrastructure. Tourism has long history in the Atherton Tablelands and its location adjacent to a major coastal resort contributes to steady stream of day visitors, but generally tourism has a low profile with limited accommodation and service facilities for tourism. Bowen has had only limited tourism but in recent years has undergone rapid changes associated with major

construction of shipping and processing facilities for mining concerns in the hinterland region. Airlie Beach is a well-established high profile tourist destination with a corridor of development between it and Proserpine primarily aimed at supporting the coastal and resort tourism. Proserpine is also an agricultural centre sharing some of the features of the Atherton Tablelands. Thus the three study communities vary in their geography, level and type of tourism and their economic activities.

Results and Discussion

The content analyses of the interview transcripts revealed a number of relevant themes related to tourists, mobilities and DCW and these can be organised into two main categories – the existence of different types of tourist based on different patterns of mobility and connections between these tourists and their impacts on DCW. Included in the tourist types was a category that could be defined as archetypal tourists such as those usually assumed in tourism impacts research. Given the space restrictions for the present paper this group will not be included in the following sections. Instead the results and discussion will focus on the other types of tourist identified and discussed by the informants.

New tourist types

The informants often distinguished between different types of tourist when describing different ways in which tourism intersected with community well-being. Five alternative tourist types were described – Grey Nomads, Backpackers, Seasonal/temporary workers, Green Nomads and Amenity Migrants. Grey Nomads, also known as Snowbirds in North America, are older retired couples who spend several months, usually in winter, each year travelling in an RV, campervan or caravan in their own country, typically to warmer regions (Onyx & Leonard, 2005). In the Australian context two distinct patterns can be seen in their behaviours – some engage in continuous touring staying at multiple locations, while others travel to a specific location and spend several months in that place (Onyx & Leonard, 2005). Regardless of the pattern these tourists often return to the same places each year developing strong social networks both amongst their fellow Grey Nomads and with local residents, and they avoid high profile tourist destinations because of the perceived faster pace and higher costs of living in these locations (Onyx & Leonard, 2005). All three study destinations were visited by the Grey Nomads with a touring pattern. Bowen was also a place where the single destination Grey Nomads were likely to stay for extended periods.

The next most commonly discussed group were backpackers. Loker-Murphy and Pearce (1995) defined backpackers as being younger independent travellers who prefer to stay in budget accommodation, spend considerably more time travelling around Australia than the average visitor, and independently organize their travel. All three study communities play

host to these longer stay travellers but they are a dominant group in Bowen, where they often take on temporary jobs in agriculture and construction, and Airlie Beach, where they are typically engaged in more social activities. Both Backpackers and Grey Nomads sometimes act as seasonal and/or temporary workers in all three locations. In addition all three regions host seasonal workers as part of the agricultural production cycle. The level of tourism development in Airlie Beach also supports a group of temporary workers in hospitality and tourism service.

Grey Nomads and Backpackers also sometimes act as volunteers in these communities – working on environmental projects, in community service and for events. As with the temporary workers described above, there are also people who come to these regions to act solely as volunteers and several informants used the phrase "Green Nomads" to describe this group. This group fits Wearing's (2001, p. 1) definition of volunteer tourism which emphasises that it is "an organised way to undertake holidays". This is not a large phenomenon and was more common on the Atherton Tablelands, but informants in all three areas saw this as desirable type of tourism that could bring important resources to the communities.

Finally, a number of the informants also talked about the role of tourism in encouraging amenity/lifestyle migration. Nine of the informants had themselves been tourists visiting the region before deciding to move there, although this was rarely the sole motivation for their relocation. Discussions of amenity migration were consistent with the academic literature highlighting the role of tourism both in showcasing the region to potential new residents and in providing the services and facilities that these migrants expect for everyday life and that help them to maintain their family and social connections (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009). Informants also talked about the importance of tourism being the impetus to provide infrastructure and amenities that could support the growing mobility of existing resident populations. This applied both in general to all residents, with one informant noting that the existence of nearby international airport made it easier for regional residents than those in the state capital to travel, and especially to younger residents – *"we need ways to maintain the connections and keep them [younger generation] coming back and bringing the skills and innovation they learn elsewhere with them"*.

For these informants the tourist resident boundaries were blurred and types of people one might find in the community at any given time were varied. This idea of multiple forms of residence and blurred distinctions between locals and visitors has been described elsewhere. Halfacree (2012) identified 14 different categories of rural populations that varied on multiple dimensions of both mobility and economic instrumentality. As with Halfacree's (2012) work the present study found that these new or alternative types of tourist varied on a number of dimensions of mobility – not just length of stay in the region.

They were also distinguished from each other and traditional tourists by regularity of residence in the destination, their patterns of movement and uses of spaces within the destination, the pace or tempo of their movements, their adoption of multiple patterns of mobility, and the nature of their social networks and connections. The social realities of our informants were consistent with the proposals of Cresswell (2010) and Sheller and Urry (2006) that mobility is much more than simply movement or transport.

New tourist types and their impacts on DCW

While each of the tourist types that were identified in the interviews could be linked to specific impacts, these were could be seen as manifestations of the same underlying themes. This section will, therefore, focus on the three main underlying themes of tourists as a resource for the destination community, the physical presence of tourists in public/local spaces, and social engagement issues and opportunities associated with new mobilities.

Typically respondents first described types of tourists in terms of the resources they brought with them to the destination community. At the simplest level the informants provided numerous examples of how all types of tourist provided income for destination businesses, with most reporting more benefits for a wider range of local businesses associated with the new types of tourists. *"Grey nomads stay in the area for 3 to 4 months, so they contribute a lot and spend more widely versus [tourists who have] a two night stay at a four star resort where the only thing they participate in are free national park walks"*. Whilst recognising the importance of tourist income, most informants concentrated more on the value of the new tourist types, especially those working or volunteering in the community, in providing necessary labour and skills. As one informant noted "*400 backpackers work in local horticulture and the industry could not survive without them*". These resources were particularly important as the study communities had smaller populations and seasonal agricultural production cycles that required intensive but temporary labour support. Amenity migrants were also seen as bringing entrepreneurial skills and innovations to the destination communities. *"A core issue [for tourism] here is the desire from these communities to attract skilled workers and their families to live in the region – both as a source of new ideas and skills, as well as combating the issue of an aging demographic"*.

While these tourists had the potential to enhance DCW through the resources they brought with them to the communities, their physical presence was not without its problems. A common theme reported for all the tourist types was their use of publicly funded services such as health, and facilities, such as camping grounds, without a clear and direct contribution to the taxes that supported this infrastructure. *"From a council point of view tourist use creates greater demand on public facilities – with no direct income stream into the rate base [local government property tax] to cover costs"*. With the exception of the

amenity migrants, many of these tourists exist outside the traditional system of taxes and local government charges as they do not own property and often seek to avoid standard commercial tourism accommodation through the use of budget accommodation. This can result in the crowding of cheap accommodation where health and safety issues are routinely ignored creating undesirable enclaves. "*During the growing season there are 3200 workers here, mostly backpackers and they give tourism a negative vibe. Fifteen of them will live in a 5 bedroom house*". This problem has been associated with backpackers elsewhere (Wilson, Richards & McDonnell, 2008). Many informants expressed concerns about the development of these and other types of alternative tourist spaces. For some informants this issue was expressed as a problem of competition for spaces for recreation and non-tourism economic activities. For others the main concern was about whether or not these new tourist types could be trusted to act as responsible citizens in various public spaces. "*Young high school kids see backpackers wandering around, doing whatever they like wherever they want, drinking, having sex, etc ... the kids don't realise that they [the backpackers] will probably go home and settle down with a job and family and if they [the high school students] behave the same way it could ruin their lives*".

These concerns about the public activities and behaviours of the alternative tourist types were linked to a wider set of comments around the social engagement of the new tourist/resident types. An informant on the Atherton Tablelands noted that traditional day trip tourists were preferable to others because they stayed only briefly and didn't move much beyond the established commercial tourism centres, thus leaving the residents in peace after hours. Another informant in the Airlie Beach/Proserpine group noted that "*if you [a resident] don't want to see tourists, you only need to come back over the hill*" referring to the physical boundary that demarcates the main tourist hub. But the new tourist types stay in and move about spaces beyond the established tourism centres bringing them into much closer contact with traditional residents.

Many informants also described the positive benefits of such contact, in particular noting the opportunities for a more varied and interesting social life. The opportunity to meet and socialise with the younger tourists associated with seasonal workers, Green Nomads and backpackers was reported by both younger informants, who described this as directly improving their personal quality of life, and older informants, who saw it as a way to balance out the aging nature of community populations and provide an incentive for younger residents to stay or return. But it was not just the younger tourists who offered the social benefits. For one older informant the seasonal return of Grey Nomads to the community revived her husband's interest in golf as these tourist provided a much wider pool of players.

Not all the contacts between traditional residents and these new tourist types were positive. Complaints ranged from the new tourists being poor drivers through stories of culturally inappropriate or insensitive behaviours to concerns about the introduction of drug use and sexually transmitted diseases to local residents. Many informants recognised the existence of these problems but also saw them as partly resulting from the failure of the resident communities to think about developing socially inclusive practices and policies. "*There is not a strong connection to tourists, we could extend activities like the annual neighbourhood centre meet and greet*".

Implications for Tourism Research and Practice

The interviews revealed a number of ways in which new patterns of mobility associated with new types of tourist created challenges for traditional planning approaches – both for tourism specifically and regional communities more generally. Sometimes these were explicitly recognised and described by the informants. But often they were implicit in the concerns that informants expressed. For example, one informant talked about the problems of managing the school children of temporary workers in tourism who often came for only part of the school year. State school teacher numbers were determined by the number of students enrolled in classes at various reporting points throughout a year and so late enrolments and early departures from classes meant constant changes in teacher employment causing disruptions for permanent students and problems in attracting and retaining good teachers. This example highlights the problems associated with government policies and actions that assume a largely sedentary population imposed on a much mobile reality.

The discussions of tourist resident interactions also highlighted the challenge that new mobilities present for traditional views of responsible citizenship. Typically a citizen is a long term mostly sedentary resident whose primary set of public responsibilities or social obligations exists in relation to their permanent places of residence. The new blurred tourist-resident categories revealed in this study suggest that there may be a need for new models of citizenship that recognise different patterns of obligations and responsibilities for these new categories of population. While Coles (2008) has discussed the ways in which new tourism mobilities in Europe are challenging ideas about the rights and freedoms of citizens, most discussions in the tourism literature either ignore the responsibilities of tourists or present them as a variation of responsible consumers with a broad global responsibility to be more sustainable (cf., Verbeek & Mommaas, 2008).

To date very little tourism research has considered what exactly are the responsibilities and obligations that tourists, particularly these new forms of tourist, have to the communities they visit. Responsible citizenship also brings right and privileges (Coles, 2008) and there

has been no explicit discussion in the tourism literature of the responsibilities that destination communities have towards tourists. Explanations for resident perceptions of tourism impacts often use simple models, such as a view of social exchange theory that focusses solely on financial exchange. The present research suggests that tourism impacts and, therefore, tourism sustainability, are linked to much more complex patterns of social interaction between tourists and residents that are mediated by the different patterns of mobility of both groups. This research also provides evidence that the impacts of tourism vary for different types of tourist, casting doubts about the value of research based on surveys that ask residents to describe tourism or tourists in general. Finally, many of the tourist activities related to impacts occurred outside the traditional tourist spaces and could be linked to different patterns of mobility.

Concluding Remarks

The study reported in this paper was not aimed nor designed to examine mobilities. What was particularly striking was that the interviews revealed the importance of mobility for both residents and visitors in the study locations. While the informants were not aware of the academic literature about NMP they were very much aware of the social realities of new forms of residents based on different patterns of mobility, the importance of mobility for modern life, the challenges that new patterns of mobility created for traditional planning models, and the opportunities that these new mobilities also offered for improving DCW. This preliminary examination highlighted complex interactions between different types of tourist mobility and different tourism impacts, both positive and negative. The informants in the present study had very detailed theories of tourism and its impacts that could be described as more complex than many of the frameworks currently used in the tourism literature. The results presented here clearly indicate a better understanding of tourism sustainability might be developed with guidance from both the new mobilities paradigm and frameworks and concepts from the community well-being literature.

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