

Factors affecting locals' attitudes towards cruise tourism in the early stage of TALC

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ABSTRACT

In 21st century, cruise tourism is so developed in the Mediterranean Sea that some destinations already show a certain degree of hostility towards it. In order to identify the reasons for these negative attitudes and minimize their negative impacts, it is crucial to understand what the main threats to sustainability of this type of tourism are in the individual stages of its development. There is little research on how the local community's attitudes change with cruise tourism development. The paper therefore aims to determine which factors affect locals' attitude towards cruise tourism in the early stage of TALC. In this study, the residents of Koper, a small town in the north Adriatic where the first cruise boats moored only ten years ago, were asked to express their perceptions of a set of externalities caused by cruise tourism and their general attitude towards them. Ordinary least square regression was afterwards employed to identify how these distinct factors shaped local people's overall attitude. Although findings suggest that the local people's attitude in this early stage of cruise tourism development is quite positive, it is suggested that the local DMO should tackle the negative impacts if the local community's support for further cruise tourism development and its sustainability are to be preserved.

Keywords: Cruise tourism, Sustainability, Locals' attitudes, Factors

INTRODUCTION

Tourism may significantly influence the everyday life of local residents (Andereck & Nyaupane & Nyaupane, 2011). Despite the abundance of literature, researches and experiences in the area of tourism development many destinations fail to recognise the main threats to sustainability on time (Middleton and Hawkins, 2001; Nasser, 2003). Virtually for all destinations, “success and sustainability of any tourist development crucially depend on acceptance of tourists and tourist-related plans by the local community” (Bimonte & Faralla, 2016, 200; Yoon et al. 2001). Within the community tourism research, scholars are addressing also the measurement of local residents’ reactions to tourism (Gu, H. & Ryan, C. 2008, Nepal 2008).

According to Doxey’s Irridex, in the initial stages of tourism development locals are generally inclined to support it, but their attitude tend to evolve through time and eventually becomes dissenting if negative effects prevail (Reisinger, 2009). These tend to compound over time as a tourism destination matures (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017), therefore it is crucial to identify problematic issues as early as possible and try to neutralize or at least alleviate their impacts. Management tackling with the cruise tourism development is, due to its gigantism, concentrated nature and high dynamism, particularly sensitive matter (Stefanidaki & Lekakou, 2014). Following this view, the purpose of the paper is to explore the perceptions and attitudes of the local community towards the cruise tourism in the early stage of tourism area life cycle (TALC).

CRUISE TOURISM IMPACT ON LOCAL COMMUNITY

We have been witnessing incredibly fast development of cruise tourism in Europe. The number of passengers has doubled in the last decade, reaching almost 6 million passengers per year (Chiappa, Lorenzo-Romero & Gallarza, 2016). The Mediterranean region has gained almost 8% of the share in only five years reaching 20.4% in 2014 in the global market (Stefanidaki & Lekakou, 2014).

Cruise tourism is in many cases an important driver for development, but has as well negative impacts on the host destination. In academic debates, these impacts are typically dealt with through the sustainability pillars - environmental, economic, (political) and socio-cultural (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Brida, Chiappa, Meleddu, Pulina, 2014; Klein, 2011). Each group can induce positive or/and negative impacts that affect local residents’ attitude, and they all need to be taken into account in order to secure sustainable development (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

Sustainability concept has arisen “as an alternative management philosophy” (Choi & Murray, 2010, p. 576) and cannot be implemented without the involvement and support of local community (Gursoy et al. 2010; Gursoy & Rutherford 2004). Liu & Wall (2006) argue that if local residents perceive that tourism brings benefits in their everyday life, their support of tourism will increase and of course on contrary if they do not see any benefit they will not. Their perceptions and participation is thus essential for sustainable development of tourism (Gursoy et al., 2010; Dyer et al. 2007). Origins of the theoretical framework for such evaluation of local residents’ attitude

toward tourism can be found in the social exchange theory (Andereck et al., 2005). According to this theory, residents are prepared to participate in the exchange if they consider that it provides them more benefits than costs (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

Carić & Mackelworth (2014, 350), however, warn that due to its rapid growth, flexibility, sporadic and very concentrated activities cruise industry is “extremely difficult to monitor and control with regards to pollution”. Although several methodologies for cruise carrying capacity measurement have been developed (Stefanidaki & Lekakou, 2014), these have been often breached as the negative impacts occur concentrated in a short span of time. Klein (2011) claims that in case of cruise tourism inclusion of directly impacted local communities in the determination of sustainability cannot be taken for granted and may be quite complicated. Some analyses in fact show that environmental cost are as much as seven times higher than the financial benefit to the local community (Carić & Mackelworth, 2014) but the local community still does not react. For cruise tourism development, it is thus crucial that all the stakeholders in a given destination successfully communicate and share information among each other (Dabphet et al., 2012; Reimann et al., 2011). In this vein, Chiappa & Abbate (2012, 18) advocate “the pivotal role of internal marketing and communication operations” aimed at improvement of residents’ knowledge about and attitudes toward tourism.

Therefore, constant measurements of impacts, flow of information and evaluations of local residents’ attitude toward cruise tourism development (Sheldon & Abenoja 2001) as well as perception of tourism impacts are essential for sustainability (Lawson et al. 1998).

MUNICIPALITY OF KOPER

Municipality of Koper is with its 51140 inhabitants the fourth largest municipality in Slovenia. As it lies in the very north of Adriatic Sea its port presents one of the most important logistic entrance-points for the central Europe. While beside the port, car industry and agriculture were leading economic activities in the past, trade, forwarding and finance services and, especially lately, tourism have been gaining leading position in last three decades.

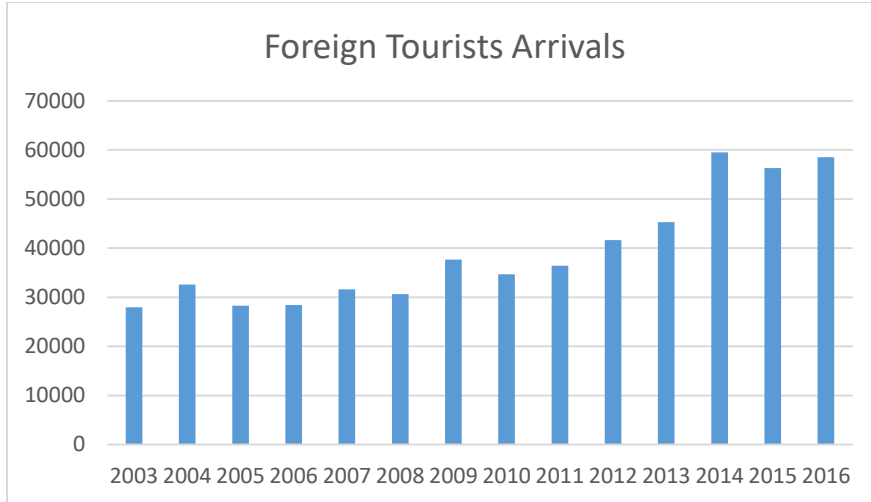


Figure 1: Foreign Tourists Arrivals

In the last 15 years, the amount of foreign tourists has almost doubled (SORS, 2017). Nevertheless, there are huge unexploited potentials for further tourism development, mostly in the hinterland, which is included as a strategic priority in the municipality development documents. In fact, the DMO which operates within the municipality administration is very active with projects aiming at dispersion of tourist flows towards rural areas.

Thus, as it can be seen from the figure 1, we can claim Koper is still in the development phase of TALC (Butler, 1980).

In 2005, a new passenger terminal was opened in the very center of the historic town, by which tourism gained new momentum in its development. The number of passengers increased from 1100 in the first year to 80000 in 2016 (Port of Koper, 2017). Comparing to similar towns with longer tradition of cruise tourism (e.g. Olbia hosts approx. 140.000 cruise tourist per year; Brida et al., 2014) that is still relatively low number, which is, however, expected to rise in the future. Perhaps at the moment the most unpleasant aspect of this type of tourism, beside the immediate proximity of the quay to the residential district and the main square (see Figure 2), is that the vast majority of passengers, who do not take part in organised trips to other towns, is concentrated in the small old town center. For this reason, it is sensible to measure the attitude of local community towards cruise tourism and to identify possible reasons for and prevent potential conflicts or resistance already in this early stage.



Figure 2: Koper Passenger Terminal (source: Zurnal24, Port of Koper, 2011)

RESEARCH

Our research was carried out as a field survey among residents of municipality of Koper in winter 2016/17. The main research questions were: how does local community perceive the presence of cruise tourism and which impacts influence their perceptions. In addition to the questions on perceptions of impacts of cruise tourism on local community and their lives and usual socio-demography, respondents were also asked about their residence, whether their professional activity is connected to tourism and if they were informed about plans on cruise tourism before it occurred. We based our list of impacts (independent variables) on the one developed by Brida, et al. (2014). This list was chosen as the two destinations in question (Olbia and Koper) are relatively similar in terms of the size and character. Two variables were added, however, which were often mentioned in Koper by the local media: “Positive effect on town image” and “Increase of air pollution”.

METHODOLOGY

Due to strong multicollinearity among the independent variables we decided to use the stepwise linear regression of the statements on the perceived “overall impact of cruise tourism on local community” for exploration of causalities. Besides, *F*- and *t*- statistics were used to check for possible differences between the sub-samples. For all variables/statements (see Table 1) five point Likert type scale was used – from 1 (“don’t agree at all”) to 5 (“I agree absolutely”). Data collection

was performed on seven locations: main square, two malls, marketplace, promenade, and two main streets, by 55 undergraduate students of tourism under supervision of the researchers. They were instructed to address passers-by of different ages. Each of them did 7-10 surveys.

Before the analyses the data were checked for possible outliers, but none was detected. Furthermore, by Glejser test for heteroscedasticity and Shapiro–Wilk test for normality of residuals we confirmed adequacy of data for OLS analysis.

RESULTS

The final sample comprised 443 adult residents of Koper municipality. 45.2 % were men and 54.8 % women. Their age structure was: 17-34 - 34.7 %, 35-49 - 22.0 %, 50-64 - 22.9 % and 65+ - 20.4 %. The obtained structure somewhat differs in favour of younger people from the actual structure of the population, which is 21%, 28%, 27% and 24%, respectively. In Table 1 descriptive statistics of the statements grades for the whole sample is presented.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.
Positive effect on the town image	4.18	0.81
Overall impact of cruise tourism on local community	3.82	0.73
Conservation and valorization of the historic patrimony	3.74	0.97
Increase of congestion in public and recreational areas	3.71	1.19
Increase in job opportunities	3.60	1.11
Valorization of local tradition and authenticity	3.54	1.00
Increase in disposable income	3.51	1.07
Increase in quality of life	3.39	1.05
Increase of environment and marine pollution	3.38	1.18
Increase in public investment and infrastructure	3.36	1.06
Increase of waste	3.35	1.24
Cruise activity forces change in actual standard of life	3.35	1.03
Public service improvements	3.32	1.00
Enhancement of other cultural and communities knowledge	3.31	1.11
Urban and rural gentrification	3.23	1.11

Increase of air pollution	3.14	1.23
The benefits from cruise activity end to external entrepreneurs	3.10	1.11
Deterioration of the eco system	3.07	1.19
Increase in costs of living for the local community	2.77	1.15
Cruise development has a crowding out effect on other relevant projects	2.58	1.00
Micro-crime increase	2.39	1.07
Increase in traffic and road accidents	2.27	1.10

Before the arrival of the first boats, 33% of the interviewees were well informed, 20.8 % partially informed, and 46.2 % not informed at all about the new type of tourism coming to the area. By the time of our survey 58.4 % of the interviewees already personally encountered tourists from the cruise boats, while 41.6 % did not. Almost a third (30.5 %) of them were employed in one of the sectors influenced by tourism.

In Table 2 the statistically significant results of the stepwise regression are shown.

Table 2 Stepwise regression results

Variable	B	Sig.
Positive effect on the town image	0.33	0.00
Increase in disposable income	0.14	0.00
Valorization of local tradition and authenticity	0.14	0.00
Increase of air pollution	-0.09	0.00
Increase in job opportunities	0.07	0.01
The benefits from cruise activity end to external entrepreneurs	-0.06	0.02

ANALYSIS

The mean value of the “overall impact of cruise tourism on local community” (3.82) shows that local community accepts it very positively at this stage of development. By far the most important factor for such attitude seems to be its positive effect of the town image ($B=0.33$). On the other side, increase of congestion (3.71) was graded the highest among the negative impacts. Surprisingly, this factor did not turned out to have a significant impact on the overall perception of cruise tourism. The eight statements with the lowest mean values are denoting negative impacts on local community, confirming the positive externalities prevail. The regression results suggest that aside from image increase, also “Increase in disposable income” ($B=0.14$) and “Valorization of local tradition and authenticity” ($B=0.14$) are relatively important positive factors affecting the overall perception. On the other hand, “Increase of air pollution” ($B=-0.09$), “Increase in job opportunities” ($B= 0.07$) and “theft” of business opportunities by non-locals ($B=-0.06$) have statistically significant but less intensive impact on the dependent variable.

In line with the results of previous researches, comparisons between subsamples showed that information, actual contacts with tourists and professional interest positively affect peoples’ attitude towards cruise tourism in its early stage. Statistically significant differences ($F=4.99$, *sig.* 0.01) were found between the mean values of “Overall impact of cruise tourism on local community” of the three groups being informed: well (3.95), partially (3.84) and not at all (3.69). Those who have encountered tourists from the boats graded the overall impact more positively (3.95) compared to the rest of the sample (3.63; $t=4.69$, *sig.* 0.00). And, as expected, people working in tourism and sectors connected to tourism graded the cruise tourism impact as more positively (3.93) comparing to the rest (3.77; $t=2.19$, *sig.* 0.03). Interestingly, no significant differences were found between the age groups and the subsamples living in different areas of municipality.

CONCLUSIONS

In line with theory (Reisinger, 2009), the findings of this study indicate that local residents have overall positive attitude towards tourism in the early stage of TALC. They are also congruent with several research findings dealing with “general” tourism impact on the community. In fact, Andereck et al. (2005) claim that members of community having or expecting some economic benefits from tourism, those who are well informed and those who have more contact with tourists are more likely to have positive attitudes regarding tourism.

Perhaps the most surprising finding is the striking importance the respondents assigned to the “positive effect on the town image”. Obviously, people are proud of the fact their town has become visible on the international tourism map and are keen to show their customs and heritage to visitors. As Murphy (2013) points out, the pride, sense of community and belonging which can be enhanced through tourism can considerably influence the overall attitude of locals towards tourism. This

finding, however, carries inside a latent threat. The enthusiasm over the fact tourists like our destination is usually not long-lasting, and once that becomes something self-evident the general attitude might change very quickly for worse. Because of that, it is important that DMO identifies and promotes more “durable” and “tangible” benefits for local community on time if it wants to achieve a sustained support of cruise tourism. Having regard to results of the regression, promotion of local tradition and authenticity and education of local people on how to valorise them in tourism, which have already been carried out by the DMO, turned out to be a sensible decision.

Furthermore, the results suggest the systematic informing of local community can considerably improve the attitude towards cruise tourism. Several authors (e. g. Dabphet et al., 2012; Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010) emphasise the importance of information and varieties of channels for communicating and sharing of proper information to the key stakeholders. These should beside the mass media include interpersonal communication channels as well. Social interaction itself enables the local community to be more involved in tourism. Surprisingly, almost a half of respondents claimed they were not informed at all about the fact cruise ships would start coming. Bearing in mind a straightforward influence of this variable on the perception of the impact of cruise tourism, we believe much more effort should be put by the DMO in the communication with general public in the future. Including, of course, awareness raising about the (possible) negative (perhaps hidden) long run impacts of cruise tourism, especially on environment.

The reasons why residents of the town centre, who are directly affected by negative externalities such as air pollution and crowd, support cruise tourism to the same extent as the rest of the sample can be basically sought in two directions. Firstly, as distinct from the rest of municipality population they can actually see that tourists spend their money in shops and restaurants and on this wise support local economy; and secondly, they can enjoy in cultural events and shows organised (mostly) for tourists. Maybe, a third explanation could be added, which is hard to be proven, inhabitants are already used to a certain degree of noise, pollution and traffic crush (because of trucks) caused by the port operations and perceive cruise tourists just as an additional “product” of the port.

To conclude, despite quite intense negative impacts of cruise ships on locals’ everyday lives the community after twelve years still supports cruise tourism development and perceives that its positive effects prevail over the negative ones. The local DMO seems to have good insight into the developments and does its activities in the right direction. It needs, nevertheless, to put more emphasis on systematic information and internal marketing in order to keep cruise tourism sustainably acceptable for local community.

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