



Island Tourism

What is the issue?

Islands have clear borders and a coastline that encloses them within a body of water. These sharp boundaries make them easy to conceptualize, which makes humans feel secure and at home. Many people travel to indulge in the “island experience” and many island communities have been looking at this type of tourism as a major economic alternative to traditional livelihoods such as fishing and agriculture. There are many issues however when only focusing on tourism as a base for economic growth. Many islands that focus mainly on tourism as their only means of economic gain run the risk of not being diversified. If there are major natural or man made disasters affecting tourism, a massive economic downturn can result. The focus can lead to over-tourism and a disruption to an islands carrying capacity.

What is the research about?

This research uses the theoretical context of political ecology as an in-depth way to examine and offer insight into factors affecting island economies. In some island economies, tourism contributes more than 50 per cent of GDP and is a key source of direct employment and government revenue. The case of Gili Trawangan, Indonesia illustrates an island that has a mono focus on tourism related development, leaving a highly exposed, tourism-dependent economy. Gili Trawangan had always been a vehicle-free island but recently there is discussion of allowing motorbikes on the island. Due to this rapid and unplanned development, the local population has become increasingly concerned with the state of their environment. Many stakeholders are resistant to change because of the costs associated with improved environmental management, the potential loss of income through restrictions on their activities, and a general lack of knowledge or disregard about the impact of their actions on the environment. The local community in Gili Trawangan created a not-for-profit organisation to manage the issues on the island.

Another case illustrated in this chapter is Cape Breton, Canada. Cape Breton’s main industries are coal and steel. Historically, there were numerous towns employed in Cape

Breton for their serviced mines. But recently, their tourism and economic related development focuses more on scenic tours and, marine recreation . Many locals in Cape Breton had money via well-paying jobs, so the tourism industry saw visitors coming and going and infrastructure investment, but not really much interest in working in the industry. Now, without those steel and coal industries, there is widespread unemployment and poverty, yet still not much interest in working in the service industry of tourism, due to an expectation of higher wages. One positive aspect of growth is around Mi’kmaq cultural tourism; On Cape Breton Island there are the award-winning attractions at Membertou Heritage Park. as well as the Eskasoni Cultural Journeys. Combined with individual success is the growing collaborative success secured with the new Unama’ki Tourism Association which, amongst the five Mi’kmaq communities on Cape Breton Island, is more productive than Destination Cape Breton, with regards to community development and shaping a multicultural narrative.

Why is this research useful?

This chapter illustrates that most of the challenges faced by islands are heightened because of their geographic nature. Due to their size and isolation, historical marginalisation and resource limitations, islands can face significant challenges to the sustainable development of their tourism industry. For many islands, tourism is seen as the key economic base; a diversification of what may have been a single or multiple sector development of the past. In addition, solutions for these challenges must result in long-term strategies put into place to deal with increasing and detrimental environmental impacts but also to changing market trends. Islands must constantly innovate to maintain and grow their position in a changing global marketplace.

About the Researcher

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