



UNDERSTANDING URBAN TOURISM IMPACTS: AN AUSTRALIAN STUDY

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Objectives of Study

As of 30 June 2009, Australia's major cities were home to more than two-thirds (69%) of the population (ABS, 2010). In contrast, just 2 per cent of the total population lived in remote or very remote areas of Australia and 29 per cent lived in regional areas. In addition to housing the bulk of Australia's population, Australia's capital cities are also key gateways for international tourism and significant destinations for domestic tourism. For 2008, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane respectively rated as the top three regions for expenditure by domestic and international visitors.

Tourists constitute a 'transient population' using cities either as gateways to other destinations or as a home for ephemeral periods of time contributing to the rise and fall of urban populations as each new wave of visitors replaces the last. During their stay, tourists interact with the host destination and impacts may arise from this interaction. Edwards, Griffin and Hayllar (2008) have argued that a dialectic engagement takes place in cities between host and visitors—they question whether cities, originally designed to accommodate permanent residents and concentrations of economic and physical activity, face their own set of consequences that differ to regional contexts.

The process of maintaining the liveability of cities for the communities who reside there and the attractiveness for people who visit needs to be informed by an understanding of fundamental relationships between the structural elements of urban tourism (transport, accommodation, attractions, entertainment) and the interests of the various stakeholders with an interest or stake in tourism. For tourism destination management to be effective, a comprehensive understanding of these interrelationships is required. The focus of this project is to assess the urban residents' perceptions of tourism, the challenges that tourism presents for urban local governments, and, in particular, how tourism affects social qualities of cities.

The key objectives of this study were:

- to understand the perceptions and attitudes of urban host communities towards tourists and tourism in their local area.
- to identify the impact issues that are of most concern to host communities.
- to understand the impact of tourism on local government and the implications of this for the sustainable development of tourism within and across local government areas.

- using the outcomes of this project and previous work on urban tourism undertaken by the project team, to develop a destination auditing 'tool' that can be used by managers in urban destinations.

The study was undertaken in Australia's three major urban destinations—Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane—and a 'tourism-intensive' amalgam of the Sydney local government areas (LGAs) of Manly, Waverley and Randwick LGAs. Manly, Waverley and Randwick LGAs are considered tourism-intensive as they contain significant tourist attractors, such as beaches, and concentrations of accommodation especially catering to Sydney's backpacker market.

Methodology

The study aimed to gain an understanding of how residents in urban communities—comprising the cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, and an amalgam of (Sydney's) Manly, Waverley and Randwick LGAs – perceived tourism, and the impacts of tourism in their local area.

The data collection methods used in this study included a literature review, focus groups and resident surveys. The aims of the focus groups were: to elicit council opinions regarding the impacts of tourism on local government and their constituent communities; the perceived net costs or benefits of these impacts; and how these impacts are currently addressed. The outcomes from the focus group and understandings gained from the literature review were then incorporated into the questionnaire for the resident survey.

The questionnaire involved residents assessing whether 27 specific tourism impacts occurred in their area, and the level they perceived each of these had on their area. Respondents were recruited by a random mailout to 9,000 residential addresses located throughout the four study regions, using a resident impact survey. Residents were invited to complete the 15-minute survey either online, or by contacting the research team for a paper survey form. To boost response rates, respondents went into a draw to win retail gift vouchers with a total prize pool of \$3,000.



Key Findings

The study set out to better understand the perceptions and attitudes of urban host communities toward tourists and tourism, and to understand the impacts that were of most concern to these communities in major cities. Outlined below is a summary of key findings from the local government focus groups and community survey.

Focus groups

For Brisbane, it was about identifying its character such that it differed from Melbourne and Sydney. Transport and signage were seen in Sydney as major drawbacks to the LGAs accessibility. Melbourne was concerned about the pressures tourism placed on authenticity, increased rents squeezing out interesting, but low-income, commercial operations (such as artist studios), and managing the diverse expectations of visitors, business, residents and government.

Participants in Brisbane would like the city to develop a distinctive identity, one that could be differentiated from Sydney and Melbourne. Transport and signage were seen in Sydney as major drawbacks to the accessibility of the LGA. A significant issue raised by a number of participants was that of managing impacts from what they termed as 'creep'. These are impacts that are subtle at first—and then one day 'one' notices that the 'mojo' has gone. The argument was that impacts could be slow, occurring over long periods of time. As an example, Melbourne and Sydney were both concerned about the pressures caused by tourism over time that result in increasing rents which squeeze out interesting, but low-income, commercial operations such as artist studios or small, family-owned businesses.

However, focus group participants felt that the benefits of tourism outweighed the costs. They were mindful of managing the diversity of needs within their communities, but felt constrained by a lack of funds, research and information in this area. One participant made the comment that 'tourism is interrelated to so many other areas—where do you start?' It was pleasing to note that, apart from a friendly rivalry, each of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane agreed that differentiation and the development of attractive destinations were critical to the overall attractiveness of Australia as a tourist destination.

Urban community perceptions of impacts

The majority of survey respondents believed tourism provides economic benefits to their local area by generating spending, attracting investment, and creating business and employment opportunities. Residents would like to see tourism contributing to improvements in their area, especially the provision of services and cultural activities. The largest socio-demographic differences were due to gender, where women had stronger opinions than men regarding the impact of the anti-social consequences of tourism. For example, women were more concerned about tourism encouraging excessive drinking/drug use, crowding public spaces, and increases in anti-social behaviour.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the occurrence of a range of impacts and to rate the positive or negative effect each might have on their community.

Impacts perceived to have occurred

The most positive impacts that respondents agreed to have occurred from tourism are:

- tourism increases recreational and leisure activities for residents
- tourism increases the quality of shops
- tourism improves the quality of public spaces
- tourism provides incentives for conserving the natural environment
- tourism provides incentives for cultural preservation
- tourism increases the range of shops and services.

The most negative impacts that respondents agreed to have occurred from tourism are:

- tourism encourages excessive drinking/drug use
- tourism makes the area less safe for residents
- tourism increases litter
- tourism leads to increase in anti-social behaviour
- tourism diverts money from community projects
- tourism leads to conflict over land-use zoning
- tourism increases the cost of goods and services
- tourism encourages sexual behaviour.

Impacts perceived not to have occurred

- Some respondents agreed that tourism could result in positive impacts, but didn't feel that these had occurred. Non-occurring impacts that were perceived as most negative were:
- tourism provides incentives for conserving the natural environment
- tourism improves the quality of public spaces
- tourism encourages higher standards of local planning
- tourism provides incentives for cultural preservation
- tourism increases the range of shops and services.

Finally, there were impacts that could be perceived as negative, but respondents did not agree that they occurred and were pleased that they had not. Non-occurring impacts perceived as most positive were:

- tourism increases noise
- tourism increases litter
- tourism increase in anti-social behaviour
- tourism crowding of public spaces
- tourism makes the area less safe for residents.



Future Research

Important recommendations from this research for local government include:

- Local governments should understand that the same impact could be perceived in different ways by residents. Residents may differ in their perceptions based on location, stage of development, or their socio-demographics. It is important for local governments to heighten their understanding of the concerns residents have of tourism. Data such as this can provide a basis for future comparison following planning and management interventions.
- Recognising that 'great places to live are great places to visit', means that managing the needs of local communities will lead to positive experiences for tourists. This includes maintaining the local character and feel of a destination, minimising noise, managing litter, minimising excessive drinking/drug use and anti-social behaviour, ensuring places are safe for residents, and maintaining funds for community projects.
- A clear action plan that articulates a vision, goals and objectives representing an overall agreement between stakeholders, who have an interest in tourism at the LGA level regarding its tourism development, is seen as important to meeting the sustainable development of tourism in urban destinations. It is desirable that such a plan is complementary to and integrated with tourism plans at the state and federal levels.

Recommendations for further analysis and future research include:

- Future analysis that segments (through cluster analysis) groups of residents based on their perceptions and outlines their membership details including socio-demographics and location. This will help identify and target key groups through strategies and communication materials to address the negative impacts and highlight the positive.
- Factor analysis that can identify the underlying dimensions to this range of impacts.
- An examination of the 'predictors' of overall support for tourism development in cities.
- An identification and examination of the 'interventions' which can assist in avoiding the 'creep' of tourism impacts, while taking advantage of the positive effects that can be realised from tourism.