

3

Impacts of tourism

Introduction

An impact is considered to be the change in a given state over time, resulting from an external stimulus. It is important to distinguish internal and external stimuli: a change in state from internal drivers, e.g. the maturing of an ecosystem and the successional changes in species (e.g. from grasses to trees) as a result, would not be considered an impact, under that definition.

To best understand the impacts of tourism, it is easiest to examine economic, social and environmental impacts as separate categories from each other. The caveat here, is that the boundaries between categories are generally fuzzier in any given tourism context. As we become better at understanding tourism impacts, we will start to see relationships between social, environmental and economic impacts.

For example, increased tourism development might generate more waste, use more natural resources, and impact negatively on biodiversity, at the same time as generate more jobs and a higher standard of living. When these negative environmental impacts and positive economic impacts are weighed up against each other, what is the likely outcome on social, e.g. wellbeing, outcomes? Those are the types of questions that impacts studies of tourism seek to answer, and that sustainability initiatives will seek to address.

This chapter will therefore outline each different category of impact, highlighting both negative impacts and positive impacts, then move on to an example where one researcher has incorporated all these different impacts into a model, where the relationships between these can be assessed both in terms of their strength and their direction with a more realistic, holistic system. In addition, in taking a systems approach, it also becomes clear that it is difficult to separate the impacts of tourism from other activities and events that occur within destinations and tourism-generating regions. This chapter will open with this point so that a realistic understanding of impacts can be developed.

Key words and concepts

- Fuzzy boundaries
- Multiplier effect
- Leakage
- Linkage
- Cultural commodification
- Authenticity
- Cultural appropriation
- Front and backstage
- Emotional labour
- Irridex model
- Demonstration effect
- Culture shock
- Interpretation

3.1 Issues of with identifying tourism impacts

Because of the nature of tourism and its fuzzy boundaries, as well as the scale issues discussed in Chapter 2, our ability to understand tourism impacts and attribute impacts them to specific actions can be a challenge. Even more so, as the study of impacts only has a 40 year history or so (the equivalent of the professional lifetime of one researcher), and is even more recent in tourism research. Furthermore, tourism impact research tends to focus on destinations, and at very localised levels, e.g. an attraction, and often in very similar environments, e.g. recreation ecology as a sub-discipline devoted entirely to the scientific study of environmental impacts arising from recreational activities in protected natural areas, has been developing since the 1960s.

Another issue of understanding tourism impacts is that they cannot easily be distinguished from impacts of other activities. With the exception of tourism development undertaken as part of a growth strategy, tourism itself is often one element of a suite of development initiatives. This means that infrastructures such as roads and airports may be constructed for the purpose of transporting cargo as well as facilitating tourism. As another example, are changes in gender roles or fashion tastes related to a so-called demonstration effect of outsiders visiting a community and their behaviours and possessions leaving a marked effect on local culture, or can these changes be attributed to what is shown on TV and other media within those same host communities?

Moreover, for cities and towns, the traits that make the place appealing to tourism may also make it appealing to live in, and so issues such as crowding, rising amenities costs, increased pollution, even increased petty crime may be attributed to both the presence of more tourists as well as the growth of a city or town through inward migration. The relationships between tourism and place are complex and interwoven, not easily separated into distinct categories.

Indeed, as tourism is best understood as a system of interrelated elements, and tourism impacts will general transcend various sectors, activities and categories. Hall and Lew (2009) present a Venn diagram of impacts, showing

overlaps between economic, social and environmental areas (Figure 3.1). By way of example, environmental economic impacts would include a changes in the valuation of biodiversity, while socio-economic changes could be changes to income distribution as new tourism-related jobs are created.

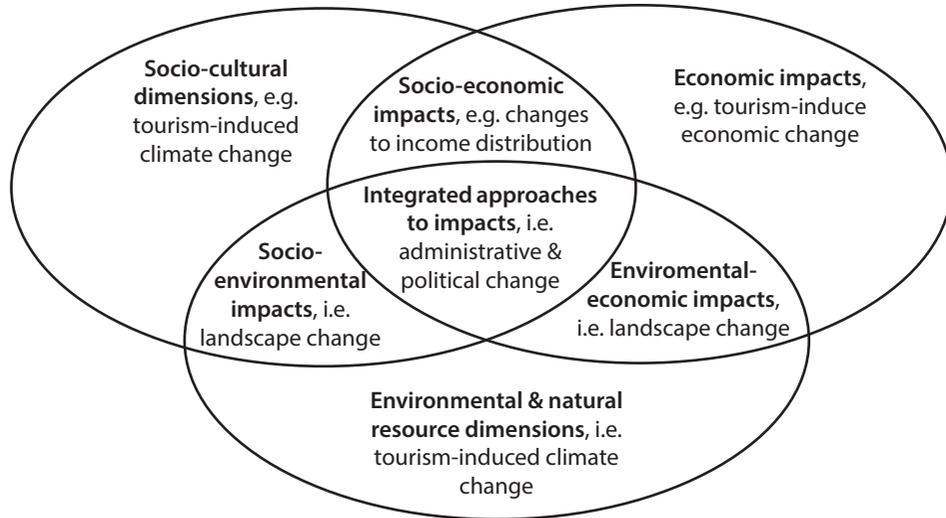


Figure 3.1: The overlaps between the three pillars of sustainability, their goals and how these overlap.

To anyone wanting to study impacts, it is important to understand whether impacts can be related to sub-systems within tourism, i.e. relationships between elements which are only weakly tied to the broader, open tourism system. This will help to determine the scale of analysis required. It is also important to understand the relationships between elements as flows (people/tourists, goods, capital and resources/energy), causal relationships and feedback loops.

A final issue that will need to be carefully considered is that we have little understanding of the progression of impacts. To start with, we have relatively few longitudinal studies of tourism impacts. In cases where changes over time can be identified from a range of sources, the different methodologies used to collect data and the different metrics used to measure impacts can make direct comparisons difficult. We also have little idea of baseline data – what was a place like before tourism, compared to now.

3.2 Economic impacts of tourism

In Chapter 1, I introduced the various platforms of tourism. One of these was the Advocacy platform, where tourism is seen as a means of economic development for areas where other industries are in decline, generate low returns or simply do not exist. It is certainly a large economic sector, accounting for