Drowning with Tourism? Stakeholder Perspectives from Tuvalu

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Abstract

Climate change and its impacts on nations, regions and populations as well as its anthropogenic causes have become one of the prevailing issues of global society and, hence, subject to ongoing debates among e.g. the natural, political and social sciences. Due to both considerable contributions in accelerating global warming and the severe impacts (to be) faced with, the tourism industry has increasingly been paid attention to. Accordingly, studies focusing upon the implementation for adaption strategies to mitigate effects upon destinations and possible causes for barriers encountered during the process have been carried out to a greater extend. Likewise, this study will examine impediments for resilience to adaption taking the tourism industry of the small island state Tuvalu as an example. Tuvalu has been frequently described as highly susceptible to any changes in climate, not only due to its low-lying islets and fragile natural environment, but also due to overall small-scale and fragmented developments within the private sector. So has pro-activeness for adaptive measures yet been limited within Tuvalu's tourism, although the industry is recognized to drive future economic growth.

Subsequent to a brief non-participatory examination of climate change sense-making by other Tuvaluan stakeholders, i.e. by the government, the community and the media, semi-structured interviews have been carried out with the National Tourist Office and with tourism service providers. Key drivers for a set of responses of tourism actors have been investigated and further elaborated within an organizational cultural framework. Herein, focus has been put upon the investigation of assumptions (of artifacts, symbols and values) held about global warming underlying possible reactions as well as on specific external stakeholder pressures influencing the action-taking process. Cultural Theory and its proposed typologies (e.g. Douglas and Wildavsky 1982) serve then as a tool to identify reaction groups prevailing in the context of adaption to impacts of climate change.

Referring to the literature reviewed upon Tuvaluan stakeholders' responses, assumptions for constrained (pro-)activeness for adaptation within the tourism industry evolved that sense-makings of climate change predominantly manifested Tuvalu as a victim of global warming and of the international political tug-of-war on agreements for GHG reductions. Motivation for change has therefore been predominantly low. The examination of underlying assumptions hold by tourism

stakeholders revealed a variety of dynamic adaptation reactions such as retentiveness due to denial of impacts of climate change or enhanced pro-activeness steered through government collaboration.

Results may be critical for understanding the extent of adaptive responses to the impacts of global warming in Tuvalu underlain by different stakeholders of tourism. In turn, exploring the different perspectives of stakeholder individuals and groups may then help to inform how to better facilitate adaptation and thereby achieve a closer consensus amongst all of these stakeholders.

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