

The Influence of Tourism on the Subjective Wellbeing of Host Communities

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Abstract

Depending on prior circumstances within the host community and the nature of the experiences being offered, tourism may deliver either net benefit or harm. As a global indicator of such balance at the level of the whole community, Subjective Wellbeing (SWB) is a sensitive indicator. However, the effective use of SWB for this purpose depends on understanding its nature, as a psychologically managed, normal, positive mood state. It is managed around a 'set-point', which is genetically determined, with the aim of keeping people feeling positive. The management system is called Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis and its purpose is to keep the perception of SWB stable and positive, even though the person may be experiencing stress and anxiety. This is why SWB measurement usually reveals considerable resilience within the measured population. Due to homeostasis, increasing levels of stress will not decrease SWB until the level of challenge exceeds the threshold of the homeostatic system.

This also explains why SWB measurement is such an important diagnostic tool. SWB data that lie below the normal range reveal homeostatic failure, which is associated with a felt loss of positive affect and a high probability of depression. Consequently, the measurement of SWB within host populations will allow the detection of clinically important change, either positive or negative, as a consequence of tourism activity.