

Assessing Whose Quality of Life: A Critical Examination of the Benefits of Travel for Tourists

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Introduction

Almost all the academic literature on tourism impacts has focussed on the consequences of tourism for the destination and its residents. Very little attention has been paid to the impacts of tourism on tourists. Virtually all cost-benefit analyses related to tourism have sought to balance the costs and benefits of tourism for destinations. While there has been a growing awareness of the costs of tourism for the environment beyond the destination through examinations of the contributions of travel to greenhouse gas emissions (Gossling et al., 2005), little attention has been paid to the costs and benefits of travel for the tourists themselves.

The paper will argue that any complete analysis of tourism and quality of life needs to consider the impacts of tourism on the destination, on the larger environment, on the generating regions and on the tourists themselves. This paper is driven by the larger question of is tourism worth it at all? The paper will focus particularly on the impacts of tourism on the quality of life of tourists and asks the question can we justify any negative impacts from tourism if the benefits of travel for the tourist are at best limited, transient, and able to be achieved elsewhere, or even non-existent? To answer this question the paper will firstly review the concept of social representations and suggest that critical examination of tourism impacts may be limited by the social representations of tourism that academics hold. It will then report on the results of a qualitative analysis of alternative social representations of tourism. Finally, the paper will use concepts from the broader literature on quality of life and positive psychology to suggest a framework for conducting a more complete analysis of tourism's contribution to quality of life.