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Emotional solidarity: Transcending the Superficial Relationships between Resident and Tourists

The relationship between residents and tourists in particular communities has been characterized by an imbalance of power, superficial interactions, an exchange of goods for money, and the dichotomy of ‘self’ versus ‘other.’ What has been neglected within the tourism literature is the embrace of an emotional component within the relationship between the parties. The purpose of this work is to offer emotional solidarity as a viable framework to explain the deeper, affective connections residents and tourists possess with one another. Three “real world” examples of emotional solidarity are presented to indicate its existence. The remainder of the paper includes a call for greater exploratory research of the construct.

Key words: emotional solidarity, resident and tourist, social interactions

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Opening

The economic relationship between the “host” and the “guest” has been well documented throughout the literature. Such relationships that result from visitors exchanging money for services with host community businesses are characterized as superficial (Sutton, 1967), short-lived, unequally balanced (Mason, 2006), and involving businesses providing commercial activities (de Kadt, 1979; Jafari, 1989).

Viewing the relationship between host and guest as one in which resources are exchanged takes the social component out of the relationship and treats all residents as service providers (Mason, 2006). This however is not the case. There are some individuals within the “host” community who do not actually provide services to visitors. It is argued that since such locals do not view residents in terms of money, they may be more slated to transcend the typical superficial relationship and actually possess an emotional connection with some tourists (Wearing & Wearing, 2001).

In fact, what has been lacking in the tourism literature is an examination of the emotional component residents and tourists feel with one another (McIntosh, 1998; Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000; Prentice, Witt, & Wydenbach, 1994; Wearing & Wearing, 2001). The framework of emotional solidarity is a viable option to explore the emotional connections between residents and tourists. Durkheim (1995) characterized the construct forming from the presence of three variables possessed by the group: shared behavior, shared beliefs, and interaction. The purpose of this paper is to provide three “real world” examples of emotional solidarity and call for an examination of the topic within the tourism field. Three examples follow; two of which are from my own life experiences (one as a resident and the other as a tourist) and the other is informed from stories I have heard from my wife.

Banner Elk, North Carolina

In 2004 I had the pleasure of living in the mountainous region of western North Carolina in Valle Crucis. The area is one of the most visited by tourists throughout the year in the Southeastern U.S. with its fall leaf colors, winter skiing, and quaint shops. During my year stay I worked for Grandfather Mountain (a local park) as a backcountry ranger, at Ski Beech (a downhill ski resort) as a lift operator, and at a general store as a shoe salesperson. Needless to say I had countless jobs, but all were connected to encounters with tourists to the area. I realized quickly on that many of the visitors shared the same perspectives of the area—being in awe of the natural beauty, wanting to take it all in and protect it for future generations. I, like the tourists, began hanging out at popular spots in the area for canoeing, rafting, fly-fishing, hiking, and putting local outfitting stickers on my car (I even got a canoe rack for my car to transport my canoe).

I began to recognize some of the same tourists and second homeowners after months of interactions, sharing conversations, shopping together, and attending local festivals. By the end of the year, I was hiking to the top of Calloway Peak at Grandfather Mountain nearly every day with many other locals and repeat tourists (that would ask for me at the ranger station) to take them to the top so we could talk about natural and cultural history of the area as well as other local outdoor recreation opportunities.

I identified with the tourists and knew we had more in common than sharing an area where they would stay for a brief period and leave. Many things my wife and I did were just as novel to us as it was for tourists, so that is one reason I felt a connection. It was almost like we had this connection that words could not express; a common feeling of reverence for the area where we shared those beliefs about protecting the area, shared behavior in visiting local

attractions, and interacting daily. Upon leaving Valle Crucis I realized I had made just as many friends at work as I had with tourists and second homeowners in the area—at least that is what my rolodex shows.

Emerald Isle, North Carolina

A second example of a sense of emotional solidarity comes from my experiences as being a repeat visitor to Emerald Isle (part of the Crystal Coast) in North Carolina. Prior to my in-laws buying a house on the island in 2005, as a family we would spend one week renting a house near the ocean (typically in the spring or fall to avoid the major tourist rush). Now our vacations are more frequent throughout the year knowing we have our own home to spend time at.

Emerald Isle is fairly small with approximately 3,000 residents, which makes it easy to interact with locals. Many of the shops are locally owned such as those with arts, crafts, collectables, and eateries. The beauty of the area, quaint shops, and social interaction with local residents are what appealed to the whole of us from the beginning.

During the second year, we started going to church at Chapel-By-The-Sea, which is a small non-denominational church on the island. There we met four families that were permanent residents on the island as well as three other families who were second homeowners spending a good portion of the year on-island. Our relationships grew through the love we all had for the coast and our similar religious beliefs. Actually one of the second homeowners actually took us on his boat countless times for fishing and rides. We liked it so much so that my father-in-law bought his own last year. Currently we get together with our friends on the island for aquarium trips, holiday cookouts, kayaking, and birding. We schedule trips to the coast now to ensure our friends will be there so we can spend time together. It has been an ongoing process, but over

time I feel like I identify with residents of Emerald Isle and would argue that our friends there feel the same about us.

Jerusalem, Israel

The idea of pilgrimages has existed for thousands of years—primarily in the context of religion. Each year individuals travel to distant places such as Mecca, Nepal, Vatican City, India, Jerusalem, and other holy lands in search of a firsthand, up-close experience with the origins of their faith. My wife Margaret made such a journey some ten years ago to Jerusalem while being enrolled in an undergrad Religion Studies course.

During her stay Margaret said she toured many of the local attractions with locals (as she said the Christians and Jews that lived there also felt the reverence for Jerusalem as did vacationers) both inside and outside of the Wall surrounding the old from the new as well as the “Wailing Wall,” the Dead Sea Scrolls, and countless museums, churches, and synagogues. My wife commented that through the interactions with others in her daily travels, she did not know whether some individuals were local or tourists as everyone was outgoing and friendly with one another (many of whom spoke English). While in the city, Margaret met one family of missionaries. After a lengthy discussion, the family took the time to show her and her friend around the town and even had them over for traditional meals. It was through the shared beliefs of fellow Christians, common behaviors of touring similar attractions, and interacting with local residents that Margaret began to feel like she identified with some of the residents in Jerusalem.

Closing

The above three “real world” examples show how emotional solidarity can exist within a tourism context between residents and tourists. While there is little mention of the concept within the tourism literature, studies need to explore the phenomenon to determine the degree to

which both residents and tourists feel such a connection with one another. By embracing such a perspective of the relationship between resident and tourist, researchers and practitioners can begin to move past the ‘self’ versus ‘other’ dichotomy (Wearing & Wearing, 2001) or ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality (Evans-Pritchard, 1988) that has been perpetuated throughout the years in tourism literature. The field would benefit from qualitative exploration of emotional solidarity in beginning to understand how the process of the phenomenon occurs. Specifically, case studies involving international visitors will be necessary. Such studies will aid in bridging the divide between visitors from developed countries and residents of developing countries.

As mentioned before, it is much easier to see tourism as an industry where locals provide services to visitors and maintain superficial relationships and interactions. However this perspective does not do justice to the potential emotional connections between residents and tourists. It was de Kadt (1979) who claimed that encounters between host and guest can occur where both meet and share ideas and information with each other. While it is not emphasized, I believe it can occur and perhaps involves the emotional solidarity that members of each party experience with one another.

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