

Social and Cultural Distance: Its effect on host tolerance of tourism

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Abstract

New Zealand receives a large number of tourists in terms of visitors per capita of resident population. Over the past year there has been an increase in visitor numbers, particularly from our Asian markets, who are steadily recovering from the Asian crisis in 1997-1998. Along with the recognition of the importance of the tourism industry to New Zealand, has come the understanding of the importance of sustainable tourism management. Sustainable tourism management relies on the support of the host community for the tourism industry, therefore there has been increased research undertaken on resident perceptions of the tourism industry and tourism development. The majority of such research has focused on attributes of the host and how these may impact upon their attitudes and opinions towards tourism, for example, whether they are employed in the tourism industry. This thesis investigates how the characteristics of the actual tourist whom the host receives into their community will also impact upon resident attitudes. Specifically it addresses the impact of the nationality of the tourist. As such, it incorporates ideas from the field of sociology, regarding cross-cultural contact and the influence nationality has on the acceptance of other people. This concept has not been covered before in a tourism context.

The methodology for this thesis consisted of constructing a social distance scale and testing it empirically with residents of New Zealand. A social distance scale measures the sympathetic understanding that exists between people. In this thesis it measured how desirable respondents believed New Zealanders would find specific situations between themselves and a certain tourist nationality. In addition to this, a conjoint analysis was undertaken to calculate the most influential factor (between the nationality, age and type (backpacker versus bus tourist) of the tourist) in determining the type of tourist New Zealand residents prefer. A cluster analysis was also undertaken, to indicate varying support for tourism, amongst residents. This was based on responses to a number of attitude/opinion statements towards tourism. These cluster groups were linked back to the social distance results to see if residents with varying degrees of support for tourism, also differed in terms of social distance towards tourists (particularly those of quite different nationalities).

The results of this thesis are that the concept of social distance is important in studying attitudes towards tourism, and that resident attitudes towards tourism are related to the nationality of the tourist. Residents who were less accepting of tourism and tourism development, showed higher degrees of social distance, particularly to those tourists of quite socially/culturally different nationalities to their own. The implications of this thesis look particularly at internal marketing strategies, such as informing and educating the host community of tourism development, and potential target markets. Such strategies should be undertaken to ultimately encourage sustainable tourism development and management.