
Editorial

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Tourism for islands was always considered one of their main economic activities. Islands' unique features (i.e., idyllic environments, remoteness, rich natural and cultural heritage characteristics, etc.) were traditionally seen as favourable attributes for attracting tourists (Boukas and Ziakas, 2013; Carlsen and Butler, 2011; Croes, 2006). In this regard, island destinations have valued in tourism a series of benefits and opportunities, such as diversification and enrichment of their socioeconomic background, wealth, and developmental growth (McElroy, 2003). The embracement of tourism therefore by islands counterbalanced their – by nature – limited potential (i.e., resources, space, goods for export) to compete other larger places, and boosted their economies, contributing hence to the welfare of their residents. As such, tourism for many islands has become a strong economic sector, as well as a core source of income, employment, economic independency, and self-sufficiency.

Nonetheless, island destinations face also a series of challenges in regards to their tourism development. Their limitations such as lack of raw materials, skilled labour, and/or technology, dependency of the rest world, segregation (Apostolopoulos et al., 2002; Bojanic et al., 2016; Niles and Baldacchino, 2011) create structural problems and have an impact on their competitiveness. As such, in highly globalised environments more and more islands need to find ways to deal with significant competitive forces, and at the same time protect their genuine character without compromising their attractiveness, and thus maintaining their tourism appeal (and its accompanying benefits).

In this regard, island destinations endeavour to develop special forms of tourism with the aim to diversify and enrich their tourism product, acquire a competitive edge, and ultimately rejuvenate their tourism industries (Spilanis and Vayanni, 2003; Valentine, 1993). With evident traces that the current global trends require islands to be competitive but also sustainable for their future development (Bojanic et al., 2016), emphasis needs to be given on issues regarding how efficiently and effectively niche tourism is managed and how this, can influence in expansion the prosperity of local residents. Moreover, in a time where niche forms of tourism seem to counterbalance the misruled mass tourism development of the last decades (Marson, 2011), the practices about how island destinations are planned and projected are questioned in terms of their effectiveness and/or adverse impacts on their sustainable development in economic, environmental, and sociocultural terms, and mostly on their residents' well-being (Boukas and Ziakas, 2016). An important theme that emerges therefore, is to identify how niche forms of

tourism developed in island destinations may affect the overall prosperity of islands' inhabitants.

The specific issue of *International Journal of Tourism Anthropology*, entitled 'Niche tourism and residents' well-being in island destinations' gives us the opportunity to consider ideas and methodologies concerning various types of niche tourism, their contribution to maximising the tourism potential of islands, as well as their residents' well-being, and to introduce strategies and measures for their long-term sustainable development. In this respect, the aim of this special issue is to examine specific forms of niche tourism developed on islands, how these could be sustainably established in an era of global changes, intensive competition and various types of crises (environmental, economic, political, social), and mainly, how they can amend the overall well-being of indigenous people.

Specifically, the first paper of the special issue by Butler discusses birdwatching as a form of tourism on Fair Isle, Britain and examines the impact of slowly increasing tourist numbers on the well-being of the island residents. Using a longitudinal methodology, the author identified that in 50 years the attitudes of island residents towards tourism have remained positive, while the numbers, location, and nature of tourists and tourism are identified as key factors in the positive relationship between residents and visitors. The author concludes that the nature of tourism developed on the island, even though not perfect, tends to be closer to sustainability than in most destinations, and achieves a measure of symbiosis with both the human and non-human environment with positive effects upon resident well-being.

The second paper in the issue by Skinner and Soomers deals with the development of spiritual tourism in the resort of Arillas on the Greek island of Corfu. Due to spiritual tourism the physical aspects of the place, but also the societal mix of long-term visitors, permanent residents, and the tourist population, has been shaped and changed, in a positive but also negative manner. For instance, it has led on the one hand, to positively manage the decline in fortunes experienced by many other resorts on Corfu, but on the other hand it has created distrust and hostility among local residents and business community. The authors conclude that the destination is framed as a contested space where residents' well-being needs to be considered not only in financial terms, but also considering the impact of both the physical and societal changes brought about by these developments to all stakeholders.

The third paper by Swanson and Cavender studies the generational perceptions of prosperity on the niche tourism island destination of Ikaria in Greece. To do so, the authors investigate a cross-generational sample of residents of Ikaria, that are involved in niche tourism and their perceptions of prosperity against the backdrop of an evolving niche tourism industry. The study identifies five emergent themes (dimensions of prosperity), that explain how residents conceptualise prosperity: community, means to an end, connection to place, change, perceived impact of tourism, and illustrates that variables such as influences of family, friendship, cultural values, ideals, and health are considered as the strongest indicators for the island's perceived perceptions. The authors conclude that the deep attachment of the island to its cultural heritage that is passed from generation to generation is strong enough in order to allow tourism development to change its character. As claimed in their study, protecting and preserving cultural heritage will also let future generations to enjoy prosperity generated by niche tourism.

Finally, the last paper of the special issue discusses rural tourism development and well-being in Cyprus. In this paper, Boukas employs a qualitative research approach

and identifies that rural tourism on the island mainly takes the forms of agricultural tourism, cultural and religious tourism, nature-based tourism, and event tourism. While rural tourism is recognised as a sustainable niche form of tourism, by the island's stakeholders, several challenges such as its fragmented nature, inappropriate management, lack of knowledge, and micro-interests hinder its full appreciation and overshadow opportunities, such as that it tends to be more sustainable and is much more recognised by tourism policy, in comparison to the past. The author concludes that the following strategies can enhance the sustainable development of rural destinations that will lead to the islands' competitiveness as well as residents' well-being: the integrated rural tourism, the valorisation and application of social entrepreneurship, and the identification and utilisation of rural destinations' capitals.

All the papers in the special issue provides a significant analysis of how niche tourism, can have a momentous impact on island residents' well-being. Insights presented in the papers of the issue underline the importance of niche tourism for island destinations' long-term development and suggest that, under the appropriate consideration and management, these forms could help them move towards sustainability enhancing their residents' well-being. Though, the dynamic environment characterised by turbulent external and internal forces, as well as the continuous changes in tourist motivation, behaviour, and advances, dictate the continuous monitoring of the well-being of islands' residents in the tourism context, while necessitate the incorporation of holistic approaches in tourism planning and policy making. These approaches should focus on the one hand, on the provided tourist experience, but also on the other hand, on the overall contribution of tourism to the quality of life of islands' residents. After all, in the era of intense competition among destinations, niche tourism forms could be probably the key issue for their long-term sustainable competitive advantage, in several dimensions: environmental, economic, and socio-cultural ones.

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