

Title - Developing analytical skills: assessing impacts on tourist destinations

Keywords - Sustainable Development

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Institution - University of Gloucestershire

Group - Level 2 students on the Tourism Management programme at University of Gloucestershire

Activity - This example describes a module examines the positive impacts (benefits) and negative impacts (costs) that tourism activities have on host environments, economies and societies. With a strong emphasis on interdisciplinarity, this module introduces a number of methods useful for the identification and assessment of these impacts. The core tenet of the module is that the aim of sustainable tourism is to minimise costs and maximise benefits.

Aim - This module aims to raise students' awareness of the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourist activity on destinations. It also seeks to help develop specific analytical and evaluation skills. On completion of this module students should be able to: i

- identify and evaluate the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism on a specific location, through a cost-benefit analysis;
- understand how local communities, tourism managers and other decision-makers are all involved in sustainable tourism development;
- have a critical understanding of the research methods used to undertake effective impact assessment;
- have a critical understanding of the professional research protocols used to investigate tourism impacts.

Context / Background - The module has been an integral part of the Tourism Management programme at this university since its inception in 1994. It was decided to include it on the basis of the need for a critical analysis of tourism from the point of view of a number of different stakeholders, not just the industry. In the context of sustainable development generally, and tourism in particular, tourism managers need to be acutely aware of their responsibility for good practice in that field. It forms part of a holistic approach to tourism development, focussing on the interconnected nature of the economic, environmental and socio-cultural dimensions of tourism. The module content was revised in 2004 to include a greater emphasis on different impact assessment methods as a way of providing positive solutions to addressing tourism impacts and on the importance of value systems and political

dynamics in assessing impacts. The latter elements enhance the critical and questioning approach to the issues at hand.

Example - This module considers the magnitude and significance of environmental, economic and socio-cultural impacts on tourism destinations and gives a critical introduction to impact research and analysis techniques. In so doing, it aims to move students on from the more descriptive work required at Level 1, to using and demonstrating a greater range of analytical techniques and approaches.

It critically reviews the impact of tourism politics at a local and national level and uses case studies from a diversity of tourism destinations to illustrate all of these impact issues.

Topics that are covered in the lecture programme include:

- Social change and the growth of tourism
- Economic / Environmental / Socio-cultural impacts
- Impact analysis and assessment – planning frameworks, carry capacity, auditing etc
- Political issues in impact assessment
- Realities of tourism decision-making processes at destination level

The teaching approach is based on a combination of PowerPoint presentation, including the use of images to transmit the issues of impacts, OHP, videos, constant lecturer-class interaction and discussions, use of personal student experiences, group work, pair work and case studies.

The module includes one scheduled class tutorial, through which students are encouraged to prepare for the assignment in Week 10 by selecting the destination on which they will focus, and raising questions on issues from the lectures and readings.

The module is assessed by a report (50%) to be completed by Week 10, and a final, 1.5 hour exam (50%). The report requires students to identify a specific tourism destination and provide a detailed analysis of the effects that tourist activity has had. Students are required to consider economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts, and an assessment of the significance of these impacts with reference to relevant assessment techniques. They are encouraged to choose a destination that they may have personal knowledge of.

In line with the aim described above, the marking criteria are weighted towards analysis (30%) and evidence of research and reading (25%) to ensure that students make use of the analytical techniques provided. The exam requires students to complete two essay questions from a choice of five, on aspects covered across the module, eg:

- Evaluate the legitimacy of labelling tourism as a form of colonial imperialism

- Critically discuss the use of carrying capacity as useful tourism impact management tool.

Results / Feedback - Student feedback so far has been very positive indeed. Positive comments address teaching styles, class activities, discussions, opportunity to choose destination for assignment, learning how to critically evaluate the benefits of tourism. Effective learning occurs in class activities and the application of theory to their chosen destination in the assignment.

Further Information - For future module runs, it is envisaged to use guest lecturers and WebCT to complement lectures. The possibility of a field trip will also be explored.

Students on this module are usually very interested and committed and therefore it is a pleasure to teach it.