

Is Toowoomba (Australia), “Challenging the Limits”?

Community perceptions of tourism and economic development

Char-lee McLennan^a,

Lisa Ruhanen^a

Tien Pham^a, and

Brent Ritchie^a

^a**School of Tourism**

University of Queensland, Australia

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Abstract

Understanding and monitoring social norms and cultural beliefs is important for appropriately directing the tourism transformation process. This paper presents the results of an online survey which was administered to 115 stakeholders of Toowoomba, Australia, during August 2009, and builds on literature relating to community perceptions and attitudes of tourism activity and development.

In assessing whether Toowoomba has been “Challenging the Limits” of its tourism transformation, this paper argues that, based on the community’s perception, tourism in Toowoomba still has capacity for growth and development. Results suggest that the community considers Toowoomba’s point of differentiation to be its country atmosphere and laid back lifestyle, along with its beautiful gardens and quality urban facilities. However, the community had mixed opinions about economic development and tourism activity, which suggest there is potential for a paradox of transformation to arise. This study determined that these mixed opinions occur on three levels: 1) by different tourism activities, 2) by respondent for a single tourism activity, and 3) by respondent for economic development more generally.

Introduction

Social norms and cultural beliefs are critical to the tourism transformation process which indicates that resident attitudes and perceptions need to be understood and monitored (Johnson, Snepenger & Akis, 1994; Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). This paper reports on a preliminary investigation into social values and perceptions of tourism and economic development in the case study of Toowoomba, Australia. The aim was to obtain a measurement system for social norms and community perceptions to inform a broader, more detailed study into the tourism transformation process. Transformation theory is about structural change that results from modifications of human institutions (Seliger, 2002). Institutions are collective human-designed action, such as government strategies, plans, policies or laws, business or industry norms, social norms, cultural beliefs or the general patterns of consumer behaviour (Mantzavinos, North & Shariq, 2004). Review of the literature indicates that there is a lack of knowledge surrounding the dynamic interaction of structures and institutions and the reciprocal relationship they have with tourism, particularly at a local level (Agarwal, 2002; Scott, 2003; Rodriguez, Parra-Lopez & Yanes-Estevez, 2008). As the transformation process is intertwined with human institutions, a detailed model of the process must consider both structure and institutions; yet many structural models omit institutional factors and this has been considered their greatest weakness (Williamson, 2000). This paper primarily focuses on measuring social norms and cultural beliefs relating to economic and tourism development and discusses findings in the context of Toowoomba.

Literature

The theoretical framework underpinning the measurement system devised for this study derives from a well developed and established body of tourism literature relating to community (host) perceptions and attitudes of tourism activity and development (see Pizam, 1978; Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Cohen, 1984; Long & Allen, 1986; Liu, Sheldon & Var, 1987; Milman & Pizam, 1988; Ap, 1992; Ross, 1992; Madrigal, 1995; Lindberg & Johnson, 1997; Ap & Crompton, 1998; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Weaver & Lawton, 2002; Davis & Morais, 2004; Easterling, 2004; Harrill, 2004; Ritchie & Inkari, 2006; Zhong, Deng and Xiang, 2007; Moyle, Croy, Weiler, In Press). This body of literature recognises the separation between structures and institutions, although they have been labelled objective and subjective indicators (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006).

Institutions and perceptions are an important element of transformation (Mwangi, 2006), so it is appropriate that the dynamics of tourism transformation have been frequently investigated using resident perceptions of the industry (Allen, Long, Perdue & Kieselback, 1988; Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Andriotis, 2005; Ap, 1992; Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Besculides, Lee & McCormick, 2002; Harrill, 2004; Horn & Simmons, 2002; Johnson, *et al.*, 1994; Perdue, Long & Allen, 1990). These studies have often been undertaken for two primary reasons: to overcome barriers to successful and sustainable tourism development (commonly termed paradoxes) and to provide insight into the level of impact tourism has on the community (Diedrich & Garcia-Baude, 2009).

Some common paradoxes of transformation are cited within the literature. One occurs when tourists are attracted to the unspoiled nature of a destination, but their increasing visitation transforms the destination and traditional lifestyle into a more urban or globalised one (Bruner, 1991; Dahms & McComb, 1999; Agarwal, 2002; Zhong, *et al.*, 2007; Gartner, 2004). This paradox, however, does not occur consistently and often development is deliberately cultivated by the community (Gonen, 1981). Another paradox occurs where tourism is initiated to facilitate economic and social development, but the tourists are separated as an elite social class (Macaulay, 1994).

Paradoxes often occur if tourism is adopted simply for the economic benefits it can provide, such as employment opportunities, increased income and standards of living and improvements in infrastructure (Archer & Cooper, 1998; Lindberg, 2001; Liu & Var, 1986; Allen, Hafer, Long & Perdue, 1993) as it can also have negative impacts, such as inflation, leakage of tourism revenue, changes in value systems and behaviour, crowding, littering and water shortages (Buckley, 2001; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996; Mathieson & Wall, 1982). It has been suggested that community involvement and collaboration in tourism planning is essential to ensure the success of the destination and to overcome paradoxes (Cook, 1982; Murphy, 1985; Jamal & Getz, 1995).

When considering tourism planning, a key concern in the tourism transformation literature is the role and responsibility of government (Haung, 2004; Briedenhann & Butts, 2004; Pavlovich, 2003; McLennan, 2005). The literature indicates that clusters require leadership to grow and that direction can originate from government, as well as from the private sector (Pavlovich, 2003; McLennan, 2005). It is often postulated that local or regional governments should self-direct and play a greater role in tourism development because structural changes and impacts have the greatest effect and can be more readily observed at the local level (Adams, Dixon & Rimmer, 2001; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Pavlovich, 2003; Haung, 2004) and, at this level, institutional modifications and planned intervention are more likely to be effective (Roberts, 2004; McLennan, 2005; Sebastian & Rajagoplan, 2009).

Arguably, tourism can deliver socio-cultural transformations (Ratz, 2000; Sebastian & Rajagopalan, 2009). For example, Saarinen (2004) argued that a destination's image, knowledge, meanings and natural and cultural features over slowly stereotype and modify over the course of the transformation process, resulting in a loss of differentiation between destinations. This implies that destinations further progressed in tourism development would be considered less 'unique' than a region in which tourism has just commenced. A number of other studies have linked community perceptions towards visitors with the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model (Butler, 1980), giving rise to concepts of carrying capacity and management across the triple bottom line (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Coccossis, 2002; Diedrich & Garcia-Buades, 2009).

This literature indicates that a region's social impacts and sensitivity can be measured by monitoring local community perceptions of tourism through social impact assessments or evaluation surveys (Fredline, Deery & Jago, 2005; Delamere, 2001; Delamere, Wankel & Hinch, 2001; Delamere, 1997; Reid, 2006; Petrosillo, Zurlini, Grato & Zaccarelli, 2006). Indeed, this has been extended to suggest that resident perceptions can be an indicator of destination decline (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Diedrich & Garcia-Buades, 2009). It has been argued that more rapid and intensive tourism development can result in less beneficial impacts for the community than small-scale development (de Kadt, 1979; Pearce, 1989; Ratz, 2000). Diedrich and Garcia-Buades (2009) demonstrated that as tourism increases and impacts more heavily on a region, the residents' perceptions of the impact of tourism also increases. Other studies have revealed that tourism development can become less favourable beyond a certain threshold where the perceived benefits no longer outweigh the negative impacts (Long, Perdue & Allen., 1990; Ap, 1992).

Despite this, it has been observed that community perceptions may not always be negative in mature tourism destinations (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997; Liu & Var, 1986) and so determining carrying capacity through community perceptions is not a precise science. Pearce and Moscardo (1991) and Weaver and Lawton (2002) argued that stage-progression models cannot fully describe resident perceptions of tourism as change is inevitable and the applicability of carrying capacity for a destination is dependent on time and space. Furthermore, while residents may identify environmental and social impacts of tourism, they often indicate that the positive imaging and economic impacts of tourism development outweigh the negative impacts of development (Getz, 1994; Huang, Wall & Mitchell, 2007; Diedrich & Garcia-Buades, 2009), particularly if tourism is the dominant economic sector (Tooman, 1997). Indeed, Campbell (1999) indicated that positive support for tourism development was for economic development more broadly, rather than tourism specifically.

Since the paradigm shift to sustainable tourism, tourism development has been increasingly considered across the triple bottom line (Mbaiwa, 2004; Gezici, 2006; Sebastian & Rajagopalan, 2009). Reflecting this, community perception studies have often investigated the perception of tourism development and impact across the triple bottom line (Byrd & Gustke, 2006). However, Lundie, Dwyer and Forsyth (2007) argued perception studies make it difficult to draw firm conclusions about the impact of tourism on a destination and suggest that there is a need to improve environmental impact assessments in tourism. However, perceptions of environmental issues are commonly used as indicators for state of the environment (Environmental Statistics Team, 2002), indicating a close relationship between structures and institutions.

A number of studies argue that perception is not homogenous, but is instead dependent on socio-demographic factors such as how long the resident has lived in the region and how much tourism benefits them personally, particularly economically (Jurowski, Uysal, Williams & Noe, 1995; Besculides, *et al.*, 2002; Williams & Lawson, 2001). Weaver and Lawton (2002) identified three distinct groups of residents: supporters associated with the sector, neutrals who generally concede that the benefits of tourism outweigh the costs and the opponents who have minimal contact with tourists and are less positively disposed towards tourism. Weaver and Lawton (2002) found that residents are attached to the uniqueness of their region and do not want it to change. Likewise, Byrd & Gustke (2006) identified three key groups (local worriers, moderates and active supporters) and determined that a key variable for determining the groups is activities such as bird-watching and gardening.

The literature also generally indicates that there are four types of stakeholders: the tourist, the business, the community and government (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2002; Byrd & Gustke, 2006). Stakeholder surveys have been conducted extensively to assess perceptions of tourism development across these stakeholder groups, with many studies utilising perception statements often rated along a five-point Likert scale (Byrd & Gustke, 2006; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Maddox 1985; Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Vincent & Thompson, 2002; Faulkner, 2002; Williams & Lawson, 2001; Huang, *et al.*, 2007; Weaver & Lawton, 2002; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Ap & Crompton, 1998; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Semi-structured in-depth interviews are also commonly used to explore local perceptions of tourism (Campbell, 1999). A number of tools have been employed for analysis, although cluster analysis and decision tree regression tend to be popular (Davis, Allen & Consenza, 1988; Schroeder, 1992; Ryan & Montgomery 1994; Madrigal 1995; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Weaver & Lawton, 2002).

Study Site

Settled for over 150 years, Toowoomba has a reputation for being the 'Garden City' (Toowoomba City Council, 2001). Located approximately two hours west of Brisbane, it is the largest inland city in Australia (Local Government Association of Queensland, 2008). Toowoomba acts as a regional centre for the Darling Downs region in Queensland (Toowoomba City Council, 2005) and is a key growth area, mainly due to migration by retirees seeking a more affordable place to live and students from rural areas seeking better education. Observing this phenomenon, Holmes, Charles-Edwards and Bell (2005) argued that Toowoomba is perhaps the only Queensland example of a 'sponge city'; which are large inland centres that absorb residents from rural settlements in their vicinity.

The Toowoomba community, at round 155,000 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b, cat. 3235.0), is relatively diverse and multicultural (Local Government Association of Queensland, 2008). Reflecting the type of people who migrate to the City, the population is more highly composed of younger people aged less than 20 or older people aged over 60 years, than the Queensland average (Toowoomba City Council, 2005). Toowoomba also has a well established tourism sector, with approximately 500,000 overnight visitors and 1.3 million domestic day trippers visiting the region in 2008 (Tourism Research Australia, 2009). With the influx of short and long-term migrants, issues surrounding quality water supply and availability have become a key issue

for the City (Toowoomba City Council, 2001; Toowoomba Regional Council, 2008). Another characteristic of its rapid growth and service centre nature is that Toowoomba's economy is mainly composed of property and business services (24%), construction (17%) and retail trade (14%; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

Methodology

This paper reports on a preliminary investigation into social values and perceptions of tourism and economic development by multiple stakeholders in Toowoomba, Australia. Transformation theory involves the interaction between structures and institutions, the study also sought to measure the social structures of the region which implied a need to assess factors such as health, crime and community cohesion. A self-completed questionnaire was devised by incorporating questions that would allow the data to be weighted and by drawing on methodologies and or indicators from previous research, such as social assessments (Fredline, *et al.*, 2005), environmental indicators (Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development, 2008) and a community value surveys (Gladstone Regional Council, 2008). Combining the various sources supplied a measurement system for community perceptions. During drafting, statements were carefully devised so they provided alternative positive and negative wording to avoid yea-or nay-sayer bias (Alreck and Settle 1995; Weaver & Lawton, 2002). The survey aimed to collect demographics, information about the region and tourism, perception indicators of economic, social, environmental and tourism structures and provided a number of open-ended questions that allowed respondents to provide their opinion about economic and tourism development.

The online survey was set up in Survey Monkey and administered to 115 multiple stakeholders of the Toowoomba region during August, 2009. The study utilised multiple panels (Cape, 2007) to improve sample sizes and responses were merged using a weighting method by population. The first panel method employed a panel provider, who distributed 1600 invitations and received 107 responses. This panel was determined by the panel providers existing opt-in lists of Toowoomba city residents. The second panel involved collecting all email listings in the online White Pages Government, Business and Residential Directory for businesses and government organisations in every suburb of Toowoomba based on the Australian Standard Geographical Classification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008a, cat. 1216.0). The email addresses were ordered alphabetically by business name and systematic sampling was used to select cases (Foreman, 1991). For this panel, 90 invitations were sent out via email and 19 responses were received.

The literature reports that response rates to online surveys are generally between 25% (Hamilton, 2003) and 40% (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000). However, this study found response rates to be slightly lower, with the panel provider achieving a 7% response rate and the primary researcher achieving a 21% response rate. This low response rate for the first panel was most likely due to the consulted panel provider and possible attrition from their panel. The response rate for the second panel method may have been higher as it employed snowball sampling and offered an incentive of \$100 to encourage survey participation (as suggested by Cook, *et al.*, 2000). Despite the low response rate, the online survey method was found to be extremely effective as responses are received almost immediately and it is less labour intensive, generally less costly and delivers the data directly in electronic format.

The data from Survey Monkey was downloaded in Excel format and then read into STATA SE v11.0 (StataCorp, 2009) for cleaning, weighting and analysis. To reduce sampling error and bias the sample was stratified and weighted by age and sex to match the Toowoomba population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008b, cat. 3235.0). The data was mainly analysed using descriptive statistics, correlations and t-tests. This study is limited by being based on resident perceptions, having only a small sample, not surveying children under the age of 15 years and having potential researcher bias, such as misinterpretation.

Results and Key Findings

The majority of the community respondents surveyed for this study had lived in Toowoomba for more than six years (58%). Around 22% of the respondents owned or managed a business and 11% worked for a government department. Of all the respondents almost 30% worked in a tourism related position. Similar to findings by Campbell (1999) and Weaver and Lawson (2001), this study determined that there was no significant difference in respondent's perceptions about the economy, society, environment or tourism by gender and age. It also found no significant difference by stakeholder group (i.e. business, government or community).

Around 82% of respondents considered Toowoomba to be unique or different from other Queensland regions. A third of the respondents indicated that Toowoomba was unique because it has a nice country-town atmosphere and laid back lifestyle. This was followed by its 'Garden City' characteristics such as its nice gardens, parks and landscapes (29%), its quality urban amenities (22%) and its friendly, family orientated community (21%). Notably, 18% stated that it was Toowoomba's *"Country feel, in a city environment"* (Toowoomba Community Respondent, 2009) that made the City unique, with 80% of respondents who indicated that Toowoomba has quality urban amenities also indicating it is unique for its country atmosphere and laid back lifestyle. This suggests that it is not so much its urban amenities which sets Toowoomba apart from other regions, but rather its country atmosphere combined with its urbanised nature. However, while the laid back lifestyle was viewed positively, it was also perceived as a negative. As one respondent pointed out: *"We have a very laid back attitude that holds us back and therefore we are falling behind other areas of Queensland..."* (Toowoomba Community Respondent, 2009).

Table 1. Top 10 reasons why the community think Toowoomba is unique

1	Nice country-town atmosphere and laid back lifestyle	33%
2	Garden City – it has nice gardens, parks and landscapes	29%
3	Quality urban amenities	22%
4	Friendly / family-orientated community	21%
5	Weather / climate	19%
6	Carnival of Flowers	18%
7	Close to Brisbane	11%
8	Clean and tidy	9%
9	Located on top of a mountain / range	9%
10	Interesting activities or attractions	8%

Economic Impacts

The majority of the respondents considered the Toowoomba region to be economically large (63%) with very urban facilities and activities (62%) and everything they want and need (53%). Despite this, 69% indicated that they thought Toowoomba's economy has scope for growth, with 62% of respondents indicating that it should be further developed. Interestingly, in regards to whether they considered Toowoomba to have urban facilities and activities, there was a significant difference between those who have lived in the area for five years or less and those who have lived in the region for more than six years ($p = 0.003$). Generally, those who had lived in the region for longer, believed that Toowoomba had more urban facilities and activities than those who had not. This may be reflecting the migration flow from larger more urban regions towards Toowoomba.

About 73% of respondents considered tourism to be a significant industry in the local economy, with 60% indicating that tourism provides many jobs for Toowoomba. The majority (53%) agreed that tourism is an important industry for Toowoomba. However, a number of respondents (37%) were either neutral or did not know if there were factors limiting or stimulating tourism growth in Toowoomba, which indicates a lack of awareness amongst the community about tourism planning and development initiatives. People who worked in tourism were significantly ($p = 0.011$) more likely to believe that tourism provides many jobs (81%) compared to those who did not (49%). Those working in tourism were also significantly ($p = 0.007$) more likely to feel that tourism increases their social awareness and involvement (68%) than those who were not working in tourism (46%). Furthermore, those working in tourism were also more likely to disagree with the statement that tourists deny residents access to public facilities (96%) than those who do not work in a tourism position (75%).

Social Impacts

Around 62% felt Toowoomba has a close knit community, however the respondents indicated that community is multicultural, accepting and welcoming, for example the open-ended questions revealed that *"The community is welcoming to people of all nationalities..."* and *"Being the central township for all surrounding rural communities Toowoomba provides so many different needs and wants from all different types of the community"* (Toowoomba Community Respondents, 2009). About 62% indicated that they were happy with their current lifestyle and do not want it to change. The respondents felt that Toowoomba is *"Clean, tidy and affordable"*, *"A nice place! Less traffic, good values..."* and *"It's great because it's a city... you have everything you need, without the pollution, traffic and crowds"* (Toowoomba Community Respondents, 2009).

The vast majority of respondents were positive about tourism, which is a similar conclusion to Campbell (1999). Campbell (1999) argued that this was because residents focus on the economic benefits rather than the social and environmental repercussions of tourism. This study determined that only 7% of the respondents thought tourism negatively impacts on their way of life. Respondents felt that tourism activity benefited them by increasing their social awareness and involvement (51%), although 34% also indicated that they were neutral or did not know. Respondents considered tourism to be vital for the development of Toowoomba (76%). Around 83% believed tourism helps to promote a better opinion of Toowoomba and encourages future tourism and/or business investment, with only 3% of respondents disagreeing with the statement. The negative impacts of tourism appeared to be relatively low (or underrepresented by perception scales) in Toowoomba. Around 80% of all respondents did not think tourists denied local residents' access to public facilities (with only 1% indicating that they did) and 70% did not think tourism activity and visitors were the cause of a higher rate of local crime. Respondents were divided over whether there were enough cultural or leisure activities in Toowoomba and were also in disaccord over whether there were better shopping, dining and recreational opportunities in Toowoomba because of tourism. However, 72% felt that tourism promotes the development and better maintenance of public facilities (i.e. roads, parks, sporting facilities and transport).

Only 2% agreed that they would like to see less tourism in Toowoomba. Likewise, only 2% disagreed while 71% agreed with the statement that they are happy with the way tourism is developing in Toowoomba and would like to see it continue to grow. Around 62% of the respondents did not agree with the statement that they were happy with the way tourism is developing in Toowoomba but do not want it to grow any more. Those residents who had lived in Toowoomba for less than six years were significantly ($p = 0.012$) more likely to disagree with the statement with a mean of 3.9 compared to 3.5 for longer term residents, suggesting they would be in favour of tourism development. This supports the literature which has determined that the longer the resident has been in the region, the less likely they are to be positively inclined towards tourism (Jurowski, *et al.*, 1995; Besculides, *et al.*, 2002; Williams & Lawson, 2001). However, unlike these studies, the results did not conclude that there was a significant difference ($p = 0.181$) between residents who came into contact with

or were economically benefited by tourism activity and those that did not. To the people of Toowoomba, tourism is perceived as benefiting them economically and socially.

Environmental Impacts

The key environmental issue for Toowoomba was freshwater quality and availability with an overwhelming 99% of respondents considering this an environmental issue. This supports the Toowoomba Regional Council's (2008) postulation that a quality water supply is a key issue for Toowoomba and their strategic focus in this area. Notably, if people lived in the region for more than six years they were more likely to consider fresh water quality and availability an issue than those who had just moved to the region. Other key environmental issues for Toowoomba included waste generation and disposal (59%), along with climate change (53%).

Clearly, there are environmental issues and concerns in Toowoomba, however, for the tourism industry it was less obvious whether there were environmental issues associated with the activity. Indeed, 60% of respondents indicated that they did not think tourism was negatively impacting on the local environment, with only 7% indicating that it was. Around 50% were neutral or did not know and 38% believed that tourism was positively impacting on the local environment. The majority of respondents (58%) did not think the number of visitors to Toowoomba was so high that they are negatively impacting on the environment, while only 4% thought that they were. Investigation into Toowoomba's water consumption by sector indicated that the majority of water (71%) is consumed by residential customers (Toowoomba City Council, 2006). The fact that water is viewed as the major environmental issue for Toowoomba, but tourism is not seen as negatively impacting on the local environment suggests that residents are attributing impacts appropriately.

Perceptions of local government and policy

The respondents were asked a series of questions about how they perceived the local council. Close to 53% indicated that council is practical and working towards a stronger future for the region. Around 43% indicated that Council does not accept responsibility for the community impacts of its decisions with a further 43% indicating that they were neutral or did not know. Forty-two percent of respondents indicated they were neutral or did not know whether council is mindful of community issues and working towards resolving these wherever possible, however more respondents agreed (35%) with the statement than what disagreed (23%). Similarly, 42% also indicated that they did not know if council is transparent with open decision making practices and communication processes, however more agreed with the statement (48%) than what disagreed (10%). The majority (54%) indicated they did not know if council is bureaucratic and focused on rules, regulations and processes. Furthermore, when asked if there were environmental strategies in place in Toowoomba, 50% of respondents stated they were neutral or did not know, while 47% indicated that there were. Only 33% indicated that there were effective environmental strategies in place in Toowoomba, with 57% stating they were neutral or did not know whether these were in place. This indicates that many community members in Toowoomba are unaware of the council's activities and is supported by open ended responses such as: *"My knowledge of the activities of council are limited"* (Toowoomba Community Respondent, 2009).

There were mixed opinions about economic development and tourism activity. This appeared to occur on three levels. The first was by different tourism products, for example, one respondent noted that *"I feel tourism is good, with one exception... the Easter disaster... THAT festival is the most disruptive and needs to be moved to a new location that can deal with the chaos..."*. The second was by respondent for a single tourism product. In this regard, the results suggested that there were some people who wanted development (*"Toowoomba is so conservative..."*) while in contrast others preferred the destination to remain smaller (*"I have a general dislike for cities..."*). The third level was by respondent for economic development more generally. This level arose in consideration of Toowoomba's restrictions on Sunday trading (Toowoomba City Council, 2005), particularly in the open ended questions. Again, there was mixed opinions on whether Sunday

trading should be introduced. Those that argued for it suggested that it is making Toowoomba less competitive, would attract more visitors over the weekend and would benefit the community by providing convenience and local access to goods and services. As one respondent pointed out *"We need Sunday trading here to be competitive – save people driving down to Brisbane on a Sunday..."* (Toowoomba Community Respondent, 2009). However there were arguments against Sunday trading which suggested that Toowoomba is a more family oriented place without it. Respondents argued that *"The limited Sunday trading makes Toowoomba a family friendly place"* and *"I love the limited Sunday trading. It makes for a family oriented weekend"* (Toowoomba Community Respondents, 2009). This supports the view in the literature that communities do not perceive tourism development homogenously and that communities can be heterogeneous in their opinions of tourism development even prior to the development occurring (Mason & Cheyne, 2000).

Conclusions

So, has Toowoomba been "Challenging the Limits" of its tourism transformation? Results from this study suggest that, based on the community's perception, the tourism industry in Toowoomba has opportunity for growth and development. Toowoomba's point of differentiation was found to be its nice country-town atmosphere and laid back lifestyle. Despite this, the community indicated that Toowoomba's economy has opportunity for further development and that this should be pursued. However, community respondents had mixed opinions about economic development and tourism activity, which suggests there is potential for a paradox of transformation to arise. This study determined that mixed opinions occur on three levels: 1) by different tourism activities, 2) by respondent for a single tourism activity, and 3) by respondent for economic development more generally. Further research could be conducted into mixed opinions of community respondents and whether they change before and after tourism development as this may provide pre-emptive indicators of tourism initiatives that may cause future institutional paradoxes.

Generally the respondents were positive about tourism and considered it to be an important industry in Toowoomba's economy. Most supported tourism development and were satisfied with the way tourism is currently developing and would like to see it continue to grow. Toowoomba's community indicated that tourism benefits them socially and, despite recognising that there are environmental issues in Toowoomba, they did not link this to tourism activity with most believing that tourism does not have a negative impact on Toowoomba's environment. In contrast to previous studies, this paper found that while respondents who worked in a tourism related position were significantly more likely to believe it provides many jobs and increases their social awareness and involvement than those who do not, there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their support for tourism development.

However, a large proportion of respondents were unaware of factors stimulating or limiting tourism development which may suggest a lack of awareness amongst the community about tourism planning and initiatives. Furthermore, this study indicated that the community also lacks an awareness of the activities of the local council, which could be a limitation of using community perceptions as a sole indicator of tourism transformation. This is because government can often play an important role in the tourism industry by supporting growth and providing direction or limiting development and this may influence how particular regions grow their tourism industries (Madrigal, 1995; Pavlovich, 2003; McLennan, 2005). Despite this possible limitation, this study supports the use of perception studies if they are interpreted with care and part of a broader, more holistic view to tourism development. One potential study that could emerge in Toowoomba is to investigate whether a change occurs in community perceptions should the contentious Sunday trading be introduced.

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