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A Qualitative Study of Immigrants' Engagement in Park Planning: The Case of the Proposed Rouge Urban National Park in Canada

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Introduction

Although community participation in tourism planning has been extensively studied, efforts for enhancing community participation have been mostly focused on core community members and the fringe has received less attention. In particular, immigrants' engagement in tourism planning has been rarely studied. The purpose of this research is to understand the experience of immigrant engagement in tourism related planning and decision making initiatives from the perspective of both immigrants and planners and to investigate how they create meaning around their experiences.

Literature Review

Community participation in tourism planning has been an area of research and interest for several years. Murphy (1983) argues that tourism is a "community industry", using the analogy of a corporate that "represents the interests of the whole community" (p.181). Community members are considered key components of the "hospitality atmosphere" in destinations (Simmons, 1994, p. 98). Jamal and Getz (1995) introduce a "collaborative community-based planning process" as a way to increase destination competitiveness and to move towards sustainable tourism development (p.200). Drawing on Jamal and Getz's study, Sheehan & Ritchie (2005) indicate that DMO managers perceive residents among stakeholder groups that can be highly influential in both positive and negative ways (through collaboration or by acting as threats). In a more recent study, Bornhorst, Ritchie, and Sheehan (2010) advocate "community support" as one of the three determinants of tourism success for both destinations and Destination Management Organizations. There is an increasing interest in establishing "bottom-up decision making processes" in tourism planning (Wu, 2008, p.52).

Community participation and support is specifically important in the context of protected areas and national parks because both tourism and conservation issues should be addressed in planning and management of these sites, requiring high levels of community participation (Jamal & Stronza, 2009). According to Gobster (2002) managing a park becomes even more challenging when it has a racially and ethnically heterogeneous clientele (p.143). In traditional models of governance, government was the dominant power in charge of managing parks and protected areas. However, in more recent models government's role has changed from the "controller" of the process to the "facilitator" (Eagles et al. 2012, p. 2). Eagles (2009) compares eight commonly used models for managing parks and protected areas based on criteria developed by the UNDP (1997) and Graham et al. (2003)¹. According to this study, management models that are based on "non-profit public involvement", including the national park model, are more compatible with criteria of good management. The national park model emphasizes shared vision and consensus building and engages the broadest range of stakeholders in the planning and management processes compared to other models. Local stakeholders' participation is considered a key factor in "successful long term protection" of parks (Mannigel, 2008, p. 499).

Despite the valuable contributions to the literature on community participation in tourism planning in general and planning for parks and protected areas in particular, there are some areas that have received less attention. Among those is the fact that community is not a homogeneous group (Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Okazaki, 2008) and not all community subgroups have equal opportunities to participate in tourism related planning and decision making activities.

Immigrant communities are among segments of the host community that are relatively less engaged in public decision making initiatives including tourism planning processes. Immigrants' input in policies is one of the criteria that is being used for ranking countries based on their success in integrating immigrants (Huddleston, Niessen, Chaoimh & White, 2011). Previous research indicates that many immigrant groups, especially those that do not speak English at home, have lower levels of civic engagement compared to native Canadians (Baer, 2008). It has also been indicated that "ethnic minority status, immigrant status, belonging to a minority religion and speaking a non-official language" have negative impacts on the level of people's participation in recreational activities (Aizlewood, Bevelander & Pendakur, 2006, p. 22). Based on the traditional approach to stakeholder participation, which has been dominant in the tourism planning field for many years (Lew, 2007; Mair & Reid, 2007), immigrants may not be considered as salient stakeholders. However, as mentioned by Reed et al., (2009), stakeholders' level of interest or power can increase over time. Today's newcomers will form the future host community and will influence the tourism industry in different ways: as residents who are part of the place identity and engaged in the co-creation of experience with tourists (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011) or as employees and owners of the different tourism related businesses.

¹ Public participation, consensus orientation, strategic vision, responsiveness, efficiency, accountability, transparency, equity and role of law

Methodology

This research is focused on the engagement of immigrants, as a subgroup of the broader host community, in the establishment process of the first Canadian urban national park. The research questions are as follows:

- What are planners' experiences with immigrants' engagement in planning and decision making activities?
- What are immigrants' experiences with engagement in planning and decision making activities?

A qualitative case study approach has been adopted for this research. The main data gathering method is individual, semi-structured, in-depth interview with planners and immigrant community leaders. Planners are defined as managers and experts of public, private and non-governmental organizations directly involved in the planning process for the Rouge Urban National Park in Canada. Data on immigrants' perspective will be gathered from immigrant community leaders. Participants' observation and document analysis have also been used as methods for becoming familiar with the study context as well as identify potential inconsistencies in data. Data analysis is informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006) .

In order to ensure the quality of the research the following strategies have been adopted: data and methods triangulation; self reflexivity by keeping a reflexive journal; theoretical and snowball sampling; constant comparison between data gathered overtime and through different methods by conducting interviews in small clusters and doing an initial analysis on each cluster before starting the next round of interviews; getting participants' feedback by sending them interview transcripts and also by presenting tentative results to them in specific milestones throughout the process; and detailed documentation of research methodology as it evolves.

Expected Results

Answers to the research questions will support the development of underlying principles for establishing a more inviting engagement process for immigrants as an attempt to broaden and enrich stakeholders' involvement in tourism planning.

Engaging immigrants in tourism planning is important from both normative and instrumental perspectives. From the instrumental point of view, the engagement of immigrants is critical for planners to acquire accurate knowledge about the future host community and to be proactive and innovative in their planning. From the normative point of view, in a democratic society, all attempts should be made to engage all stakeholders in the decision making process and ensure that less powerful groups have not been "marginalised" (Reed, Graves, Dandy, Posthumus, Hubacek, Morris *et al.*, 2009, p.2420). In the context of protected areas and parks, Jamal and Stronza (2009) emphasize the importance of providing equal opportunities for engaging and empowering "those most disadvantaged and least capable of receiving fair treatment" in the planning process (p.174). Because education and empowerment are main elements of community engagement, it will facilitate immigrants' transition to their new life and

will help them to become active members of the society by becoming more knowledgeable about different aspects of their new country.

This research will contribute to the existing literature in three ways: first, by bringing attention to immigrants as an important but less studied tourism stakeholder group; second, by emphasizing the importance of considering ongoing changes of the host community as a key factor in tourism planning, with immigrants accounting for a major proportion of this change; and third, by empirically researching the host community as a heterogeneous group.

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