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Introduction

A projected sixty-eight percent of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050 (United Nations, 2018). The remaining thirty-two percent of the world's population will subsequently be amalgamated into "rural communities." Indices of population density, distance from large urban centers, and economic specialization help define and measure rurality (Deavers, 1992). But social transformations have also evolved the meaning of rurality. For example, during the United States' (US) "rural rebound" in the 1980s, urban transplants amenable to commuting to urban centers exported urban expectations to their rural homes inducing "rural gentrification" further diversifying the portfolio of the rural non-farm economy to service and manufacturing sectors (Abay et al., 2020; Hazell et al., 2007; Li et al., 2019).

The rural service sector's entrepreneurial venture into peer-to-peer accommodations (P2PAs), such as Airbnb and HomeAway, has gained continuous momentum in rural U.S. communities all the while providing benefits such as regional economic development, small business word of mouth (WOM) and e-WOM marketing, and conservation of natural resources (Airbnb, 2020a; Battino & Lampreu, 2019; Gimmer, 2017; Jialiang, 2018). In June 2020, rural Airbnb hosts in the U.S. earned a collective \$200 million since nine out of ten dollars earned by rural Airbnb hosts for June trips were made outside the ten most populated U.S. cities (Airbnb, 2020b).

While this number appears to suggest that there is a tremendous economic potential offered to rural communities that develop P2PAs, it is unclear what motivates P2PA hosts to engage in hospitality, much less how P2PAs can contribute to diversifying and sustaining rural non-farm economy. Developing a better understanding of the functionality of P2PAs in rural community development is a pathway to building rural community resilience to many changes that it faces (e.g., out-migration, conversion of organic to technology crops) (Battino & Lampreu, 2019; Bevk et al., 2020; Li et al., 2019). Therefore, this study investigates whether residents of rural tourism destinations perceive the disruptive impacts of P2PAs in their communities.

Literature Review

P2PAs & Resilience

Sustainable communities have been shown to include P2PAs and these have been conceptualized as disruptions in community systems (Yeager et al., 2020) and viewed through an ecological systems and destination life cycle approach (Costanza, 1992; Butler, 1980) to provide hypothetical trajectories of development within the context of all other community system components (see Figure 1).

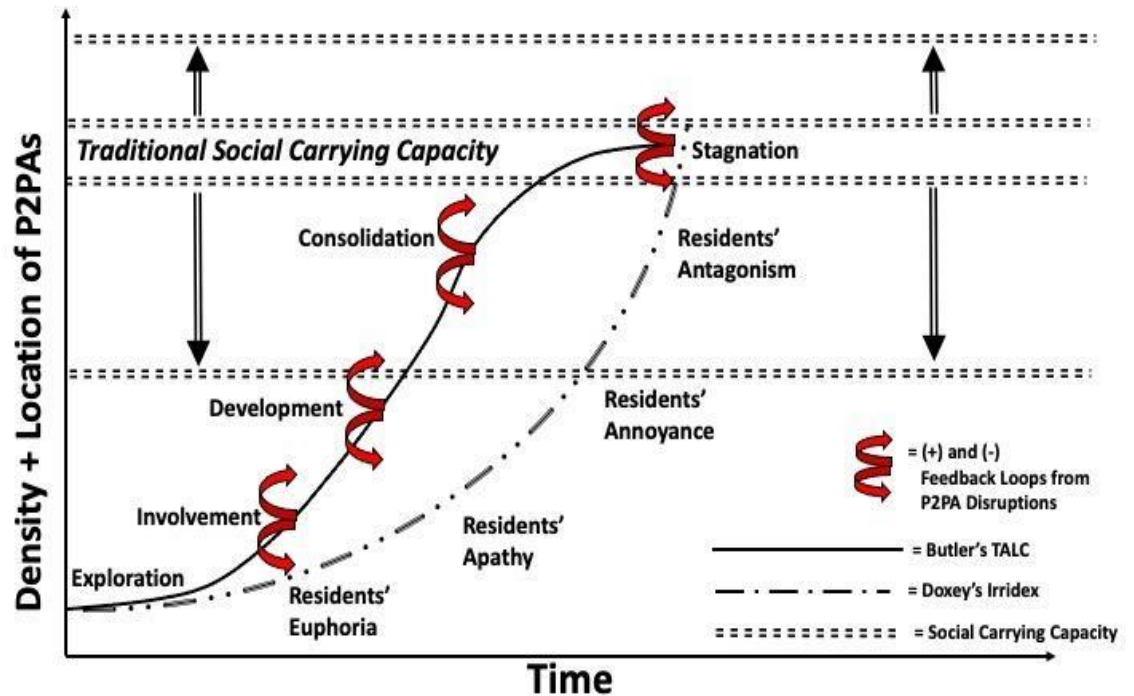


Figure 1. A theoretical P2PA management model from Yeager et al., (2020, p.2) that combines Doxey's Irridex (1975) with Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which suggests that non-host residents' attitudes toward P2PAs are a function of density and location of P2PAs.

As noted, Figure 1 is a theoretical P2PA management model consisting of Doxey's Irridex (1975) placed on top of Butler's (1980, 2008) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) that suggests that non-host residents' attitudes toward P2PAs are a function of density and location of P2PAs. In this model, the social carrying capacity signifies the threshold of residents' negative attitudes toward P2PAs that, when exceeded, might result in opposing behaviors toward P2PAs. A strength of this model is that it acknowledges that humans are an inherent part of the natural system which reinforces the conceptualization of both positive and negative feedback loops brought about by P2PA disruptions as opportunities to produce community benefits (Yeager et al., 2020).

However, this framework relies on theoretical propositions and has yet to be empirically tested by investigating the perceptions of rural destination residents toward the possible roles of P2PAs in diversifying their economy. Further investigations are also needed to strengthen the conceptualization of rural tourism development because the capacity for communities to plan and adapt to these potential disruptions depends upon a community's ability to adapt to change. Furthermore, the capacity for adaptation is built upon community resilience, which requires an assessment from a social, institutional, economic, and ecological perspective (Holladay & Powell, 2013). For example, communities exhibiting high levels of resilience via this framework might have a greater capability for maximizing the benefits of P2PAs as an innovation in the

local, rural system rather than a disruption that undoes their progress toward a sustainably developed community. Residents also play a major part in shaping the path of rural landscape development as they hold voting rights and tax responsibilities in their community. Moreover, the path of the general public's vote is determined by support for a particular action, in this case, allowing for the development and management of P2PAs.

As previously noted, a destination's inclination toward revitalization in light of P2PA impacts can be contingent upon residents' views on the issue. Furthermore, continued P2PA growth depends upon a community's abilities to adapt to economic, environmental and social changes in the destination's system. Residents' capacity to deal with chaotic activities such as the exponential development of P2PAs can be considered through a resilience framework. Taking full advantage of disruptions, such as P2PAs, requires community stakeholders to have social, institutional, economic, and ecological resilience, according to Holladay & Powell (2013).

Actor-Network Theory

Multiple lenses can provide insights into potential P2PA impacts and disruptive innovations such as P2PAs tend to induce rapid change in a system (Assink, 2006; Davidson & Infranca, 2016). A case in point is that within the context of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 2008), research presents contradictory rural destination development trajectories (Davis & Morais, 2004; England & Albrecht, 1984; Perdue et al., 1999), mainly due to the contextualizing destination idiosyncrasies. For example, residents of rural destinations without infrastructure or superstructure to support a sudden influx of P2PA visitors may initially present and protest P2PAs in their community (Perdue et al., 1999; Chandler, 2019). Conversely, rural destinations seeking diversification of their economic portfolio may welcome P2PAs with open arms (Davis & Morais, 2004; Hospitality Net, 2021). A commonality between these seemingly contradictory trajectories is that they are premised on resident attitudes toward P2PAs in their community. Yeager et al. (2019) quantitatively assessed residents' attitudes toward P2PAs through Social Exchange Theory (Ap, 1992) and Weber's Theory of Formal and Substantive Rationality (Kalberg, 1980), which supports a range of intrinsic and extrinsic costs and benefits revealed by their sample. However, personal impacts do not necessarily reflect impacts felt by the community.

As noted, numerous lenses can offer insights into potential P2PA impacts. This study uses Actor Network Theory to understand perceived community impacts from multiple stakeholders who represent distinct components of the community and local tourism economy because it can provide a meaningful way in which to investigate interconnections. The foundation of Actor Network Theory is to explore and conjecture about how networks come into existence, to find out what associations occur, how they change, how actors become part of a network, how parts of a network create an entire network, and how networks attain transient stability or instability, such as why some new networks are formed that are unstable (Callon, 1986; Doolin & Lowe, 2002; Mclean & Hazzard, 2004). The premise behind Actor Network

Theory is that if an actor in a system is removed from or added to a network that the entire network is impacted and changed (Doolin & Lowe, 2002).

Furthermore, the reality of networks is that they are constantly changing (Law, 1998) and are often only noticed when things malfunction, remaining unnoticed when they function well (Law & Hassard, 1999). Tourism networks can also be viewed via Actor Network Theory, and are seen as very complex (Johannesson, 2005; Dedeke, 2017), for tourism is viewed “as multidimensional spatial practice, involving cultural, material and social elements (Johannesson, 2005, p. 147). Plus, Actor Network Theory allows researchers and practitioners to redesign essential components of tourism, including tourism objects, spaces, destinations, economies, entrepreneurship, and sustainability (Van der Duim et al., 2013).

Study Area

This study aims to explore the roles of P2PAs in rural community development in Beaufort County, North Carolina (NC), U.S.A. The NC Department of Commerce classifies counties based on economic distress indices of average unemployment rate, median household income, percentage growth in population, and adjusted property tax base per capita. Economic distress designations range on a scale of Tier 1 to Tier 3 with Tier 1 signifying the most economically distressed counties. Out of the 41 counties comprising eastern North Carolina (ENC), 29 of them classify as Tier 1 (NC Department of Commerce, 2020). Despite this designation, in 2019, two Tier 1 ENC counties made the list of top seven Airbnb earnings in ENC – Hyde County and Beaufort County (Tamarov, 2019). Of the two counties, Beaufort County has reported a decade of increasing tourism expenditures and in 2018, Beaufort County, NC Airbnb hosts earned a collective \$264,000 (Tamarov, 2019; Visit NC, 2019). This is particularly interesting juxtaposed to the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service’s County Typology system which characterizes Beaufort County as a place with low employment, persistent related child poverty, and manufacturing as the primary source of employment (United States Department of Agriculture, 2017).

The 92 Airbnbs in Beaufort County and a 70.4% home ownership rate suggest that individuals are beginning to capitalize on their home as a resource for entrepreneurial ventures (Airbnb, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Even more, adjacent to Beaufort County is Pitt County, the home of East Carolina University which provides \$37,950,659 of income and outputs worth \$75,877,626 to Pitt County. Abay et al. (2020) identify a range of rural economic opportunities to peripheral communities such as those within Beaufort County that includes tourism and recreation business activities.

Methods

The following categories of stakeholders were identified as representatives of five main areas of community life touched by P2PAs: P2PA hosts/owners; government planning officials; government economic development officials; resident non-hosts/property owners; and local business

owners. Twenty semi-structured interviews lasting ~60 minutes each were conducted with stakeholders from these groups in Summer 2019. Eighteen semi-structured interviews lasting ~60 minutes each were conducted with participants from the original 2019 sample in Fall and Winter 2021. Member checks were conducted with participants from both rounds of interviews (Creswell, 2013) and all interviews were recorded using an iPhone and a digital recorder.

Analysis

Using Grounded Theory (Corbin et al., 2014), interview transcripts were analyzed with open coding and then axial coding using NVivo. Thematic analysis was then conducted with identified axial codes which all related back to the rural resilience framework and agent network theory (Cox & Medaugh, 2017).

Results

Through the lens of Actor Network Theory, interviews reveal that P2PAs can indeed positively and negatively impact rural and small-town communities. And, that these communities can also influence the nature and growth of P2PAs in their communities. These findings build upon Yeager et al. 's (2020) model for P2PA impacts in a tourism system in that it demonstrates that P2PAs do not hold the sole power or disruption. Rather, communities can maximize this disruption to their benefit. Moreover, interview results amidst the COVID-19 pandemic reveal that tourism disruptions must contend with other non-tourism disruptions in a community.

As with any research, this study possesses limitations that are important to acknowledge. Although focusing on Beaufort County offered us the opportunity to be immersed into the lived experiences of rural community residents in an economically impoverished county, future studies can explore the disruptions caused in wealthier destinations and located across broader geographical areas (Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014). Future research can also take on a feminist perspective by investigating the potential impacts of P2PAs in providing women with a mean to be socially and economically empowered in their communities (Arroyo, Knollenberg, & Barbieri, 2021).

In conclusion, rural community residents value P2PAs to diversify their economy, foster social networks, and create an awareness of the importance of preserving the natural environment.

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