

# *The Impacts of Tourism*

By Glenn Kreag



*For a tourism-based economy to sustain itself in local communities, the residents must be willing partners in the process. Their attitudes toward tourism and perceptions of its impact on community life must be continually assessed. (Allen et al. 1988)*

**Sea Grant**  
Minnesota

## Introduction

The long-term sustainability of tourism rests on the ability of community leaders and tourism professionals to maximize its benefits and minimize its costs. This fact sheet tabulates 87 tourism impacts within seven categories and divides the sources of tourism impacts into touri causes and destination-based causes. This information, v was distilled from recent tourism research, provides framework for discussions, directions, and developmen regarding tourism. Formally addressing the impacts of tourism facilitates planning that helps a community create a sustainable tourism industry.

## Overview

For decades tourism industry growth has been a major contributor to increased economic activity throughout the U.S. and the world. It has created jobs in both large and small communities and is a major industry in many places. It is the dominant economic activity in some communities. Yet, the impacts of tourism to a community are not widely understood – even where tourism is growing dramatically and should be of the greatest interest or concern.

Most people think of tourism in terms of economic impacts, jobs, and taxes. However, the range of impacts from tourism is broad and often influences areas beyond those commonly associated with tourism. Leaders as well as residents who understand the potential impacts of tourism can integrate this industry into their community in the most positive way.



The impacts of tourism can be sorted into seven general categories:

1. **Economic**
2. **Environmental**
3. **Social and cultural**
4. **Crowding and congestion**
5. **Services**
6. **Taxes**
7. **Community attitude**

Each category includes positive and negative impacts. Not all impacts are applicable to every community because conditions or resources differ. Community and tourism leaders must balance an array of impacts that may either improve or negatively affect communities and their residents. Leaders must be sensitive and visionary, and must avoid the temptation of glossing over certain difficulties tourism development creates. Tourism leaders must also balance the opportunities and concerns of all community sectors by working against conditions where positive impacts benefit one part of the community (geographic or social) and negative impacts hurt another.

Conversely, community sensitivity to tourism means avoiding undue burdens on the industry that could thwart its success. Local leaders should not expect tourism to solve all community problems. Tourism is just one element of a community. While creative strategic development of tourism amenities and services can enhance the community or correct local deficiencies, tourism, like all business development, must assure that its products (attractions and services) attract customers. Overbearing rules and restrictions, and overburdening taxes can make tourism businesses less attractive or competitive.

## *Understanding Tourism Conflicts*

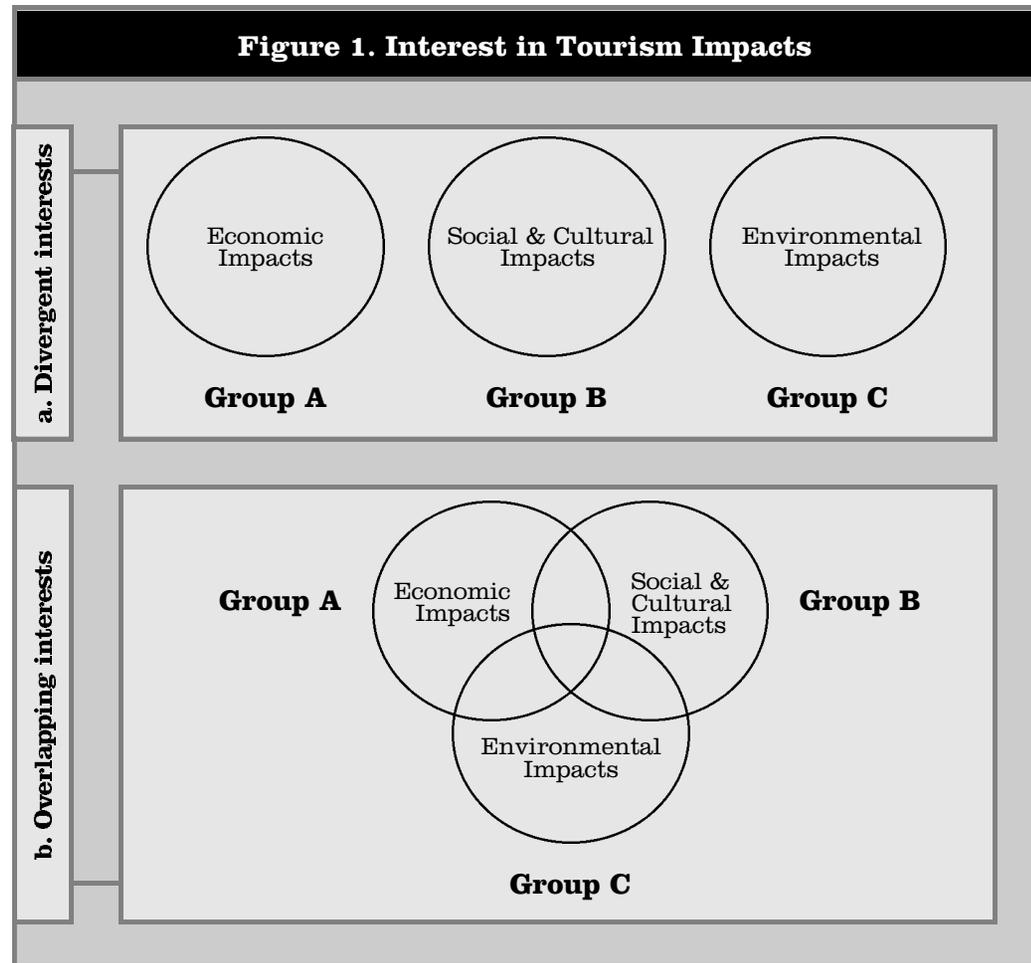
Different groups are often concerned about different tourism impacts. To generalize, where one group embraces the economic impacts of tourism, another group experiences social and cultural impacts, while another is affected by tourism's environmental impacts. In theory, the interests of each group could be completely separate, as in Figure 1a. For example, Group A could include the business community and people who are in need of the jobs offered by tourism. Group B might include residents who feel displaced by an influx of visitors. Group C could be local outdoor enthusiasts concerned about changes in natural resources. In such a case, each group would have

completely different outlooks on tourism. Ideally, all groups could be positively affected and would support the community's tourism efforts. However, when group interests are divergent, differing perspectives can make consensus on tourism development difficult.

In most cases, groups with interests in one area of tourism will also have interests or concerns about other tourism impacts as diagrammed in Figure 1b. In these situations, there are common areas of interest and a greater likelihood that each group will show more appreciation for the concerns of the other groups. Finding commonality provides a starting point for resolving tourism issues.

### *The Role of Planning*

Specific plans and actions can increase tourism's benefits or decrease the gravity of a negative impact. It is important for communities to understand the wide scope of impacts and endeavor to agree on what positive impacts to emphasize. It is wise to acknowledge and identify possible negative impacts so actions can be taken to minimize or prevent them. A clear statement of the community's vision of tourism should be an integral part of a community's comprehensive plan. Active planning directs tourism toward the goals of the community, clarifying tourism's role and uniting multiple interests.



Planning is not enough. Active implementation and management of plans and prompt attention to emerging tourism issues will maximize positive and minimize negative impacts. Monitoring and addressing community attitudes should be an ongoing part of the management effort. Good monitoring efforts can identify trouble areas and give leaders an opportunity to defuse community reactions and make timely changes before a crisis occurs. Unfortunately, few communities are so proactive.

## Tourism / mpacts

A goal of developing the tourism industry in a community is maximizing selected positive impacts while minimizing potential negative impacts. First, it is essential to identify the possible impacts. Tourism researchers have identified a large number of impacts. Grouping the impacts into categories shows the types of impacts that could result from developing tourism in a community. The following tables list a range of important tourism impacts in a concise format. Readers needing additional information about specific impacts should contact appropriate professionals or consult tourism texts and research papers.

A community will not experience every impact. Some are dependent on particular natural resource features (mountains, coral reefs) or development and spatial patterns (special "tourist zones"). Others relate to the social condition of the community, particularly the ability to culturally or socially connect with tourists. Still others relate to types and intensity of tourism developments, i.e., approval or hostility toward tourist activities. The following tables are extensive but not all-inclusive.

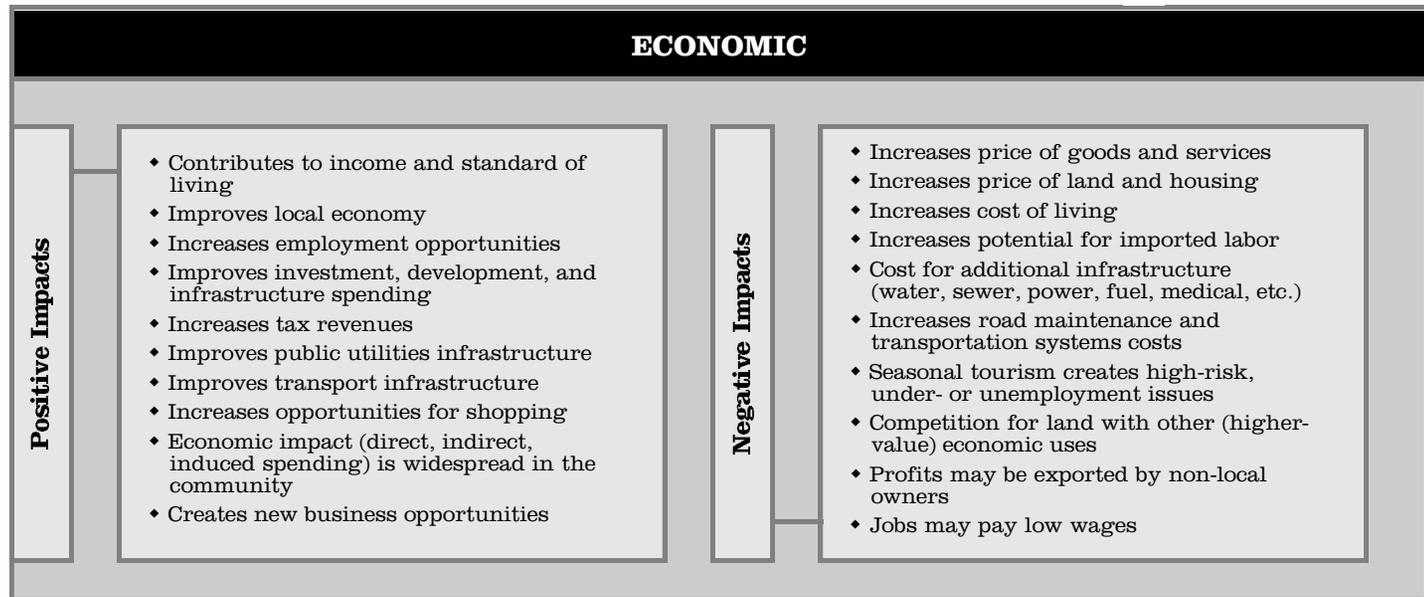


## Elaboration of Tourism Impacts

Understanding that tourism development may result in many and complex impacts suggests that local elected officials, the tourism industry, and community residents need to work cooperatively and carefully to plan for its growth and development. Planning can help create an industry that enhances a community with minimal costs and disruptions in other aspects of community life. Having broad community involvement and embracing different perspectives during planning helps identify and resolve concerns that would otherwise create problems later.

### Economic

Tourism increases employment opportunities. Additional jobs, ranging from low-wage entry-level to high-paying professional positions in management and technical fields,



generate income and raise standards of living. Particularly in rural areas, the diversification created by tourism helps communities that are possibly dependent on only one industry. As tourism grows, additional opportunities are created for investment, development, and infrastructure spending. Tourism often induces improvements

in public utilities such as water, sewer, sidewalks, lighting, parking, public restrooms, litter control, and landscaping. Such improvements benefit tourists and residents alike. Likewise, tourism encourages improvements in transport infrastructure resulting in upgraded roads, airports, public transportation, and non-traditional transportation (e.g., trails). Tourism encourages new elements to join the retail mix, increasing opportunities for shopping and adding healthy competitiveness. It often increases a community's tax revenues. Lodging and sales taxes most notably increase but additional tax revenues include air travel and other transportation taxes, business taxes, and fuel taxes. New jobs generate more income tax revenues.

When considering the economic impacts of tourism, it is essential to understand that tourism businesses often include a significant number of low-paying jobs, often at minimum wage or less. These jobs are often seasonal, causing under-employment or unemployment during off-seasons. Labor may be imported, rather than hired locally, especially if particular skills or expertise is required, or if local labor is unavailable. Some tourism-related businesses are volatile and high-risk ventures that are unsustainable. Greater demand for goods, services, land, and housing may increase prices that in turn will increase the cost of living. Tourism businesses may claim land that could have higher-value or other uses. Additionally, non-local owners and corporations may export profits out of the community. The community may have to generate funds (possibly through increased taxes) to maintain roads and transportation systems that have become more heavily used. Similarly, if additional infrastructure (water, sewer, power, fuel, medical, etc.) is required, additional taxes may also be needed to pay for them.

### **Environmental**

Areas with high-value natural resources, like oceans, lakes, waterfalls, mountains, unique flora and fauna, and great scenic beauty attract tourists and new residents (in-migrants) who seek emotional and spiritual connections with nature. Because these people value nature, selected natural environments are preserved, protected, and kept from further ecological decline. Lands that could be developed can generate income by accommodating the recreational activities of visitors. Tourist income often makes it possible to preserve and restore historic buildings and monuments. Improvements in the area's appearance through

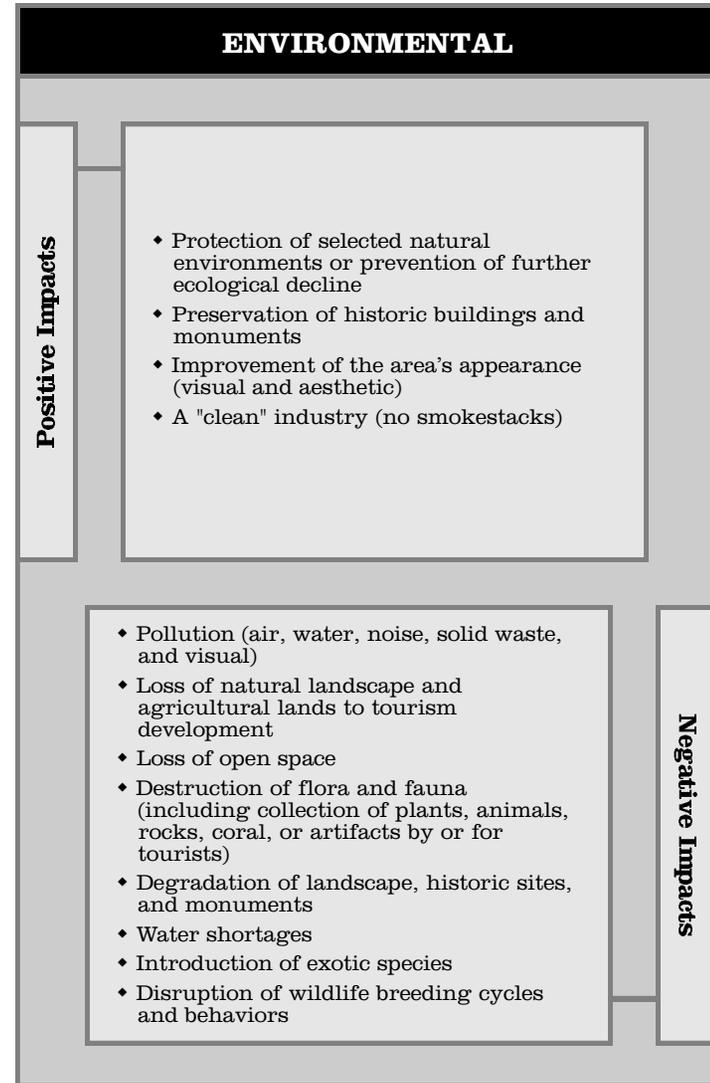


cleanup or repairs and the addition of public art such as murals, water fountains, and monuments (part of making a community ready for tourism) benefit visitors and residents alike. Tourism is generally considered a "clean" industry, one that is based on hotels, restaurants, shops and attractions, instead of factories.

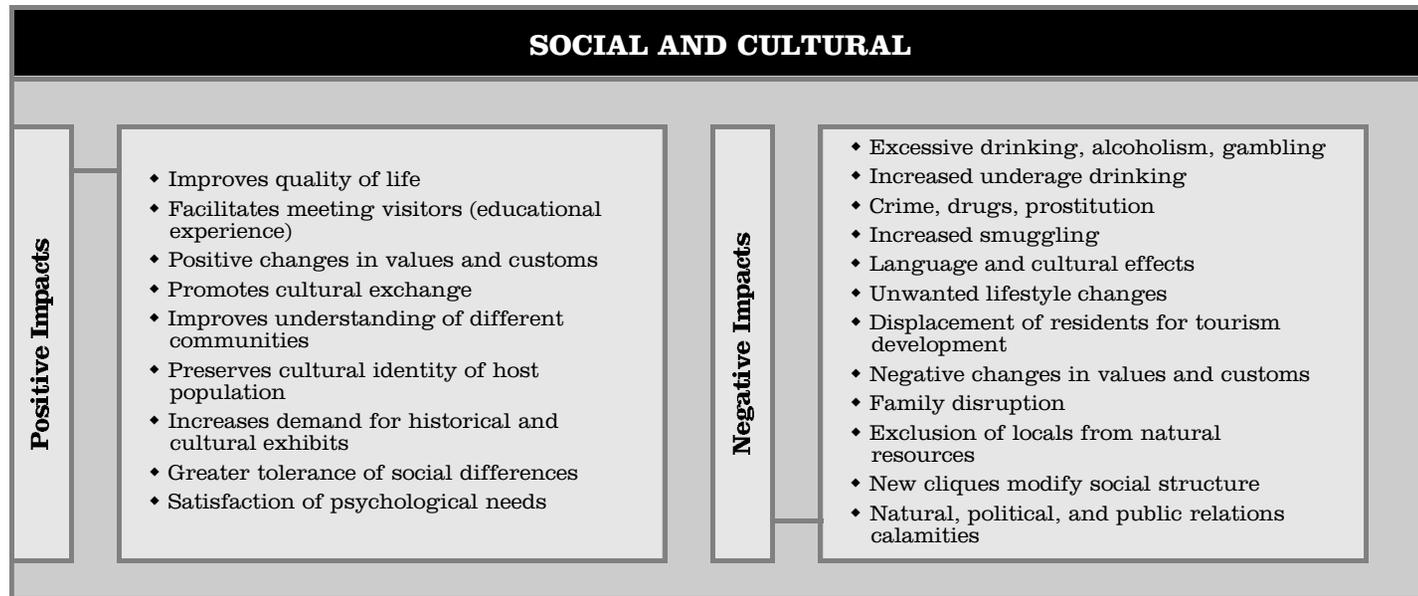
Tourism can also degrade an environment. Visitors generate waste and pollution (air, water, solid waste, noise, and visual). Natural resource attractions can be jeopardized through improper uses or overuse. Providing tourist services can alter the landscape's appearance. For instance, visual pollution may occur from billboard proliferation. As tourism develops, demand for land increases, especially for prime locations like beachfronts, special views, and mountains. Without forethought, natural landscape and open space can be lost. The destruction or loss of flora and fauna can happen when desirable plants and animals are collected for sale or the land is trampled. Tourists or the businesses that cater to them often remove plants, animals, rocks, fossils, coral, and cultural or historical artifacts from an area. Uncontrolled visitation or overuse by visitors can degrade landscapes, historic sites, and monuments. Where water is scarce, tourists can overwhelm the available supply. Travelers can also inadvertently introduce nonindigenous species, as can increases in the trade of animals and plants. A constant stream of visitors and domestic pets may disrupt wildlife by disturbing their breeding cycles and altering natural behaviors.

### **Social and Cultural**

The social and cultural ramifications of tourism warrant careful consideration, as impacts can either become assets or detriments to communities. Influxes of tourists bring diverse values to the community and influence behaviors and family life. Individuals and the collective community might try to please tourists or adopt tourist behaviors. Interactions between residents and tourists can impact creative expression by providing new opportunities (positive) or by stifling individuality



with new restrictions (negative). Increased tourism can push a community to adopt a different moral conduct such as improved understanding between sexes (positive) or increased illicit drug use (negative). Safety and health facilities and staffing tend to increase at the same time safety problems such as crime and accidents increase. Traditional ceremonies may be renewed and revived by tourist interest or lost in alternative activities. Community organizations can be invigorated by facing the opportunities of tourism or



overwhelmed by its associated problems. Calamities such as natural disasters, energy shortages, terrorism, political upheaval, disease outbreak, a chemical spill, or even widespread negative publicity could shut down tourism abruptly but sometimes can attract curious visitors.

Tourism can improve the quality of life in an area by increasing the number of attractions, recreational opportunities, and services. Tourism offers residents opportunities to meet interesting people, make friendships, learn about the world, and expose themselves to new perspectives. Experiencing different cultural practices enriches experiences, broadens horizons, and increases insight and appreciation for different approaches to living. Often, dwindling interest in host cultures is revived by reawakening cultural heritage as part of tourism development, which increases demand for historical and cultural exhibits. This interest by tourists in local culture and history provides

opportunities to support preservation of historical artifacts and architecture. By learning more about others, their differences become less threatening and more interesting. At the same time, tourism often promotes higher levels of psychological satisfaction from opportunities created by tourism development and through interactions with travelers.



Tourism can come to a community with a dark social and cultural side, too. Illegal activities tend to increase in the relaxed atmosphere of tourist areas. Increased underage drinking can become a problem especially in beach communities, areas with festivals involving alcohol, and ski villages. It is easier to be anonymous where strangers are taken for granted; bustling tourist traffic can increase the presence of smugglers and buyers of smuggled products. Lifestyle changes such as alterations in local travel patterns to avoid tourist congestion and the avoidance of downtown shopping can damage a community socially and culturally. Hotels, restaurants, and shops can push tourism development into residential areas, forcing changes in the physical structure of a community. Development of tourist facilities in prime locations may cause locals to be or feel excluded from those resources. As local ethnic culture alters to fit the needs of tourism, language and cultural practices may change. In places where longer-term visitors tend to congregate, social cliques, such as condo tourists or RVers, may be at odds with local interests and work to influence local issues. The "demonstration effect" of tourists (residents adopting tourist behaviors) and the addition of tourist facilities may alter customs, such as dating habits, especially those of a more structured or traditional culture. The potential of meeting and marrying non-local mates may create family stress.

### **Crowding and Congestion**

People congregate in attractive places. Tourism often develops around specific locations and concentrates there, providing growth yet avoiding sprawl. Historic buildings and grounds, which might otherwise slowly deteriorate, have great appeal for tourism development and can often be renovated to suit the industry.

As people congregate, congestion and crowding produces stress, annoyance, anger, and other negative attitudes. Hordes of visitors may impede local businesses, prevent residents from accomplishing normal activities, and compete for space. Tourism construction, especially hotels, may be inappropriate in scale and style with respect to other structures and the landscape. In some areas, recreational second homes and condominium developments create major crowding and congestion problems.

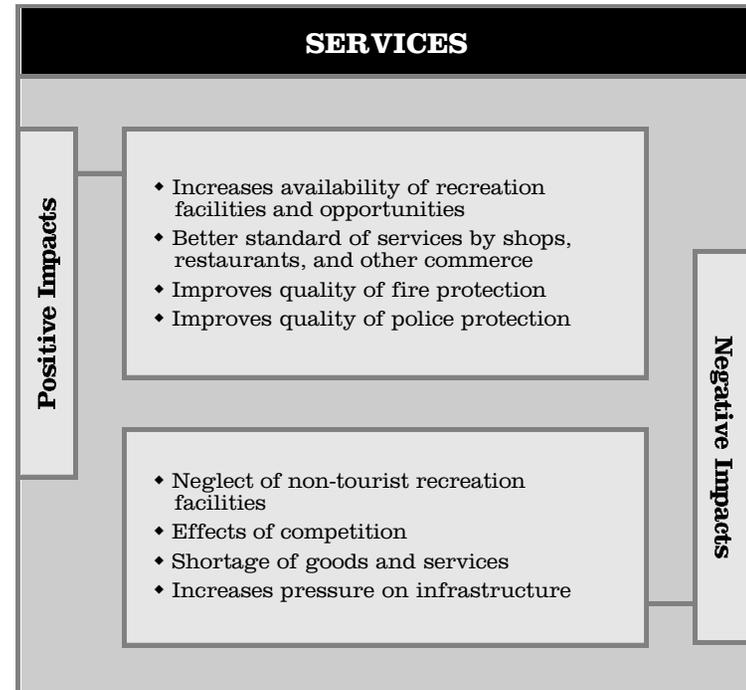
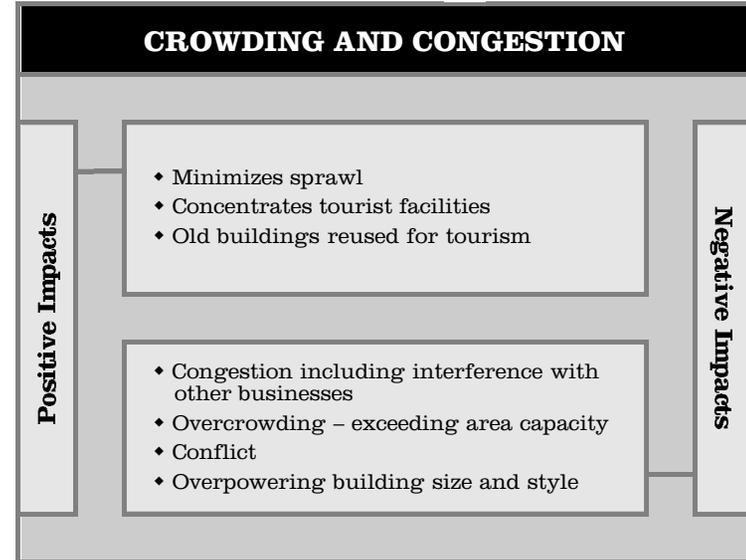
### **Services**

Tourism creates opportunities to develop new amenities and recreation facilities that would not otherwise be viable in a community. Tourist expectations can upgrade service by local shops, restaurants, and other commerce operators. Tourist traffic in a community creates an opportunity for upgraded fire, police, and medical protection that also benefits residents.

Traditional services may be forced out or relocated due to competition with tourist interests. Supply shortages may occur, temporarily, seasonally, or chronically. Water, power, fuel, and other shortages may be experienced with increased pressure on the infrastructure.

### **Taxes**

Increased retail activity from restaurants and tourist shopping will add state and local sales tax revenue. Lodging tax revenue to the city (or state) should increase since travelers account for virtually all lodging tax

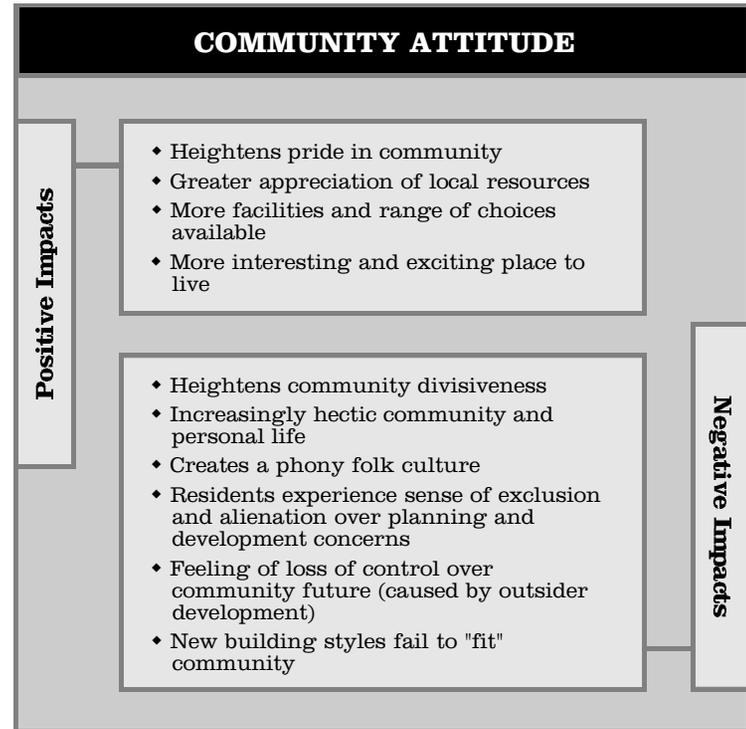
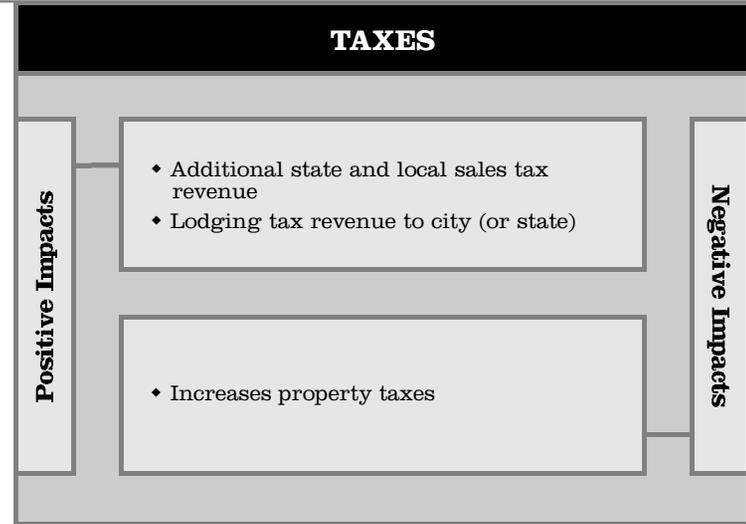


receipts. Increased tax burdens to expand infrastructure and public services will be passed on to property owners through increased property taxes.

**Community Attitude**

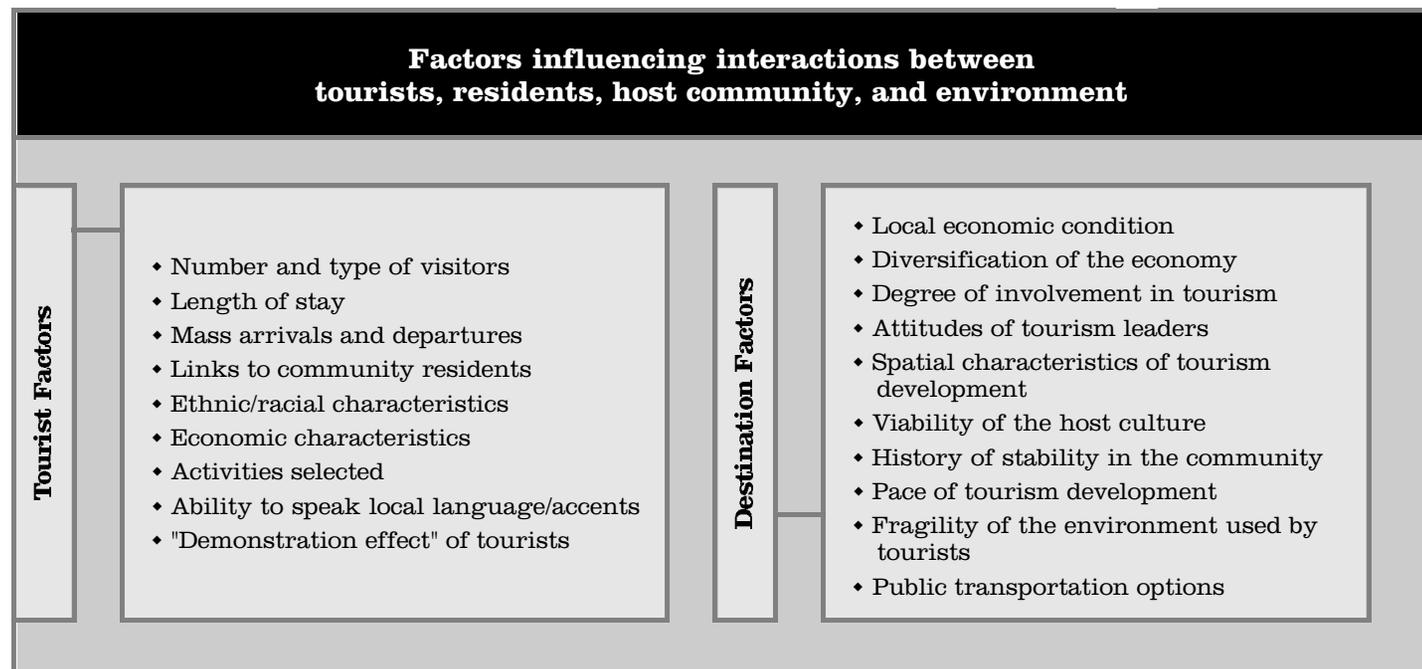
Visitor interest and satisfaction in the community is a source of local pride. Seeing visitor interest makes local residents more appreciative of local resources that are often taken for granted. As tourism develops, local residents will enjoy more facilities and a greater range of choices. Tourism activities and events tend to make living in a place more interesting and exciting.

However, heightened tension and community divisiveness can occur over tourism development, pitting tourism supporters against non-supporters. Also, tension between residents and tourists can occur. People will often feel stressed over the new, increasingly hectic community and personal pace of life. They may claim the result is no better than before or perhaps even worse. Where culture is part of the tourist attractions, over-amplification of cultural traits and creation of "new" cultural traits to satisfy tourist tastes may create a phony culture. Residents may experience a sense of exclusion and alienation over planning and development concerns. They may feel a loss of control over the community's future as "outsiders" take over establishments and new development. Over-dependence on non-local developers and an influx of outside businesses creates a sense that the community is being manipulated and exploited by outsiders for the sole benefit of those developers or business people. Hotels built in monolithic cubes or restaurants with standardized franchise designs might clash with local standards and disrupt the aesthetic appearance of the community, damage unique community character, and spread "sameness."



## Sources of Impacts

Knowing the nature of tourism impacts won't automatically lead to solutions. It is equally important to identify the sources of these impacts (see table below) and how they influence interactions between tourists and residents, the host community, and the environment. Researchers generally divide these impact sources into two groups: tourist factors and destination factors. Tourist factors are those which tourists bring to the destination and include such elements as demographic characteristics, social differences, and numbers of visitors. Destination factors are those that are part of the destination itself, such as travel linkage and circulation, local acceptance of tourism, and local vitality and leadership.



## **Tourist Factors**

### **Number and type of visitors**

- Numbers: small numbers of tourists are often relatively unobtrusive and may be a curiosity or an interesting diversion for community residents. As visitor numbers increase and they become commonplace, locals may ignore them. When the number of visitors reaches a point that residents feel a sense of displacement, obstruction, loss of community, or safety threat, resentment and resistance may result.
- Demographics: family status, age, education, profession, etc., influence the actions and activities of tourists and their local visibility.
- Transportation: private vehicle or rental car, bus, train, air, or passenger ship dictates tourists' movements, influences whether choices are pre-selected, and affects the ease of reaching attractions and services.

### **Length of stay**

- Day trips have less economic impact.
- Short (2-5 day) stays in a community maximize per-day economic impact for regional driving destinations, i.e., tourist spending is maximized, but the pace can be hectic.
- Tourists who stay longer have wider range of needs and may spread the direct economic impact more broadly in the community. Seasonal visitors (1-6 months) may take more interest in non-tourism community matters.
- Annual events can create a large economic impact in a short period.

### **Mass arrivals and departures**

- How and when people arrive (passenger ship, opening of festival) and depart influences traffic congestion and the availability of attractions and services to tourists.
- Smaller lodgings and restaurants can't accommodate large groups.
- Transportation options and availability may limit the choice of attractions and services.



**Links to community residents**

- Reduced economic impact when staying with friends or relatives.
- Better understanding of community values.
- High potential for repeat visitation.

**Ethnic/racial characteristics**

- When the tourist population differs greatly in ethnic or racial origin or economic status from the local population, more consideration of resident concerns is needed to reduce the potential for resentment, social conflict, and crime. Careful planning and ongoing education can reduce points of conflict.

**Economic characteristics**

- Influences spending choices.
- Higher incomes may give tourists greater access to environment and have higher negative impact on the environment.

**Activities selected**

- Educational, cultural, and historical tourism often has lower social and environmental impact.
- Recreational activities may have a greater impact on the environment.
- Entertainment activities may conflict with the social values of local residents.

**Ability to speak local language/accents**

- Perceived as making more meaningful connections with local people and culture.

**"Demonstration effect" of tourists**

- Local residents copying behaviors of tourists can add new dimensions to local culture but sometimes the behavior is not appropriate to local values.
- Locals copying negative behavior of vacationers (excessive drinking, inappropriate dress, casual sex, etc.) create social problems.

**Destination Factors****Local economic state**

- Troubled economies may benefit from tourism. However, government officials should plan so that new tourism developments are sustainable.
- Towns with strong economies can look for tourism that complements other

community goals such as preservation of historic buildings, creation of recreational amenities, and expansion of food/lodging options.

#### **Diversification of the economy**

- Economic diversity helps reduce the influence of negative impacts to the host community. If tourism has a poor year, other economic activities may offset the impact and vice versa.

#### **Degree of local involvement in tourism and attitudes of tourism leaders**

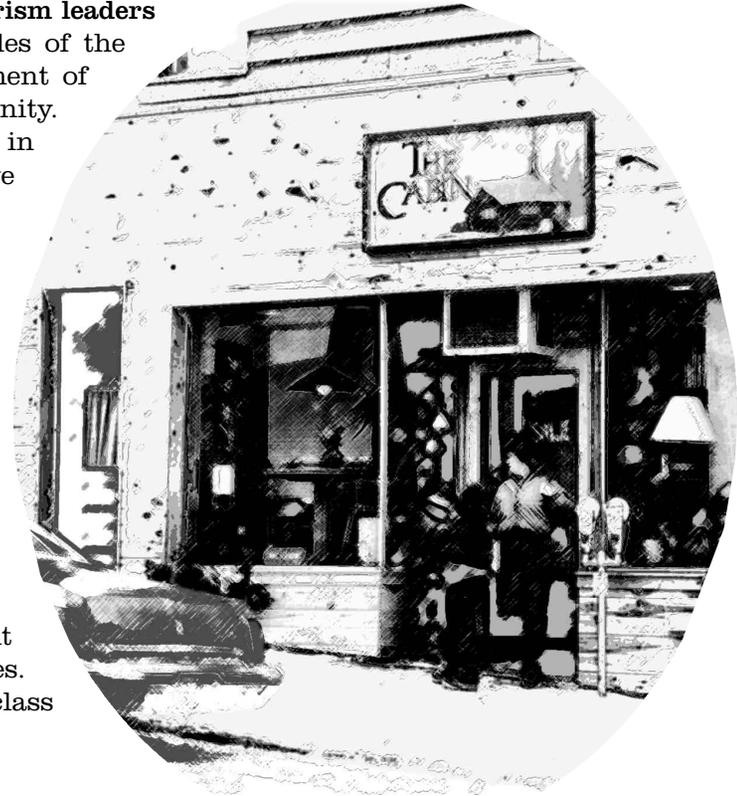
- Local involvement helps align tourism with the attitudes of the rest of the community. Local ownership and management of tourism businesses keep profits from leaving the community. In most cases, if tourism businesses are cooperative in responding to residents' concerns, the industry will have strong local support.

#### **Spatial characteristics of tourism development**

- Separation of active tourist areas from residential areas reduces conflict.
- Shared commercial areas. A mix of resident-oriented and tourist-oriented businesses adds to the vibrancy of the retail area. Domination of tourist-oriented businesses pushes locals elsewhere and may create resentment.
- Shared cultural or recreational amenities (parks, museums, plazas, beaches, gardens) can be more successful with tourism.
- Tourist strips can clog streets and may restrict resident access to public resources, especially beaches and shorelines.
- Gated or exclusionary tourist developments can create a class structure and local resentment.

#### **Viability of the host culture**

- A strong and active local culture combats tourism's tendency to change a community.
- Active programs to educate tourists in local cultural practices (especially public taboos) help reduce conflicts.
- Pride in culture influences tourists to honor local customs and adhere to cultural restrictions.



### **History of stability in the community**

- Strong local economies give leaders more options in influencing tourism development to fit the community.
- Strong community leaders and active planning can place tourism more appropriately within the community's geography and can support suitable tourism projects while resisting inappropriate ones.

### **Pace of tourism development**

- Slower development provides time for residents and leaders to reassess tourism growth and make changes that better serve the community. Rapid development can strain a community's infrastructure and lead to serious resident dissatisfaction. Negative environmental impacts are also more likely.

### **Fragility of the environment used by tourists**

- Many of the most sought-after environments for tourism are also the most fragile. Extra effort to plan appropriate access and use of fragile environments helps insure their long-term viability and continued attractiveness for tourism.

### **Public transportation options**

- Availability of local public transportation (bus, trolley, cab, shuttle, train) and alternative transportation corridors (bicycle, pedestrian) can reduce auto congestion.
- Poor access can make facilities inaccessible for motor coach or public transit.

## **Conclusion**

Directing tourism growth toward local needs, interests, and limits can greatly enhance tourism's value to the community and help create a sustainable industry. Many small communities have the skills and resources for successful tourism development. Creating a local tourism industry is not a daunting task, but making tourism really "fit" the community requires work. Creating a successful and sustainable tourism industry is like creating any successful and sustainable economic activity

—it takes **vision, planning, and work.**

*Tourism is a goose that not only lays a golden egg, but also fouls its own nest. (Hawkins, 1982)*

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## Acknowledgements

Sincere appreciation goes to Phil Alexander, Michigan Cooperative Extension Service; Diane Kuehn, New York Sea Grant; and Michael Liffmann, Louisiana Sea Grant, for their thoughtful reviews of this publication.

## Publications / Information

Publication Number: T 13  
Date: April, 2001  
Production Coordinator: Marie Zhuikov  
Editor: Sharon Moen  
Information Specialist: Debbie Bowen  
Graphic Designer: Cory Josephs

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Minnesota Sea Grant is a statewide program that supports research and public education programs related to Lake Superior and Minnesota's inland waters. It is part of the National Sea Grant Program, which supports 30 similar programs in coastal states throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. Minnesota Sea Grant is funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Minnesota.

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