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Title: Conceptualisations of Sustainable Tourism Development: An examination of the distance between ideology and local desires.

Abstract:

This research seeks to resolve academic concern for the limited insight within existing bodies of knowledge in terms of how Sustainability and Sustainable Tourism Development is conceptualised at a grassroots level; by the stakeholders and more specifically the inhabitants of the Tourism destination (Redclift, 1987; Liu, 2003; Swarbrooke, 1999; Mowforth and Munt, 1998). The research was driven by the aim to evaluate power relationships and conceptualisations of sustainability upon post-disaster Tourism redevelopment using the case study of Koh Phi Phi Island in Thailand which was devastated by the Asian Tsunami of December 2004.

An interpretive philosophy informed the research design in which primary data was gathered throughout the period April 2006 to December 2011 using a mixed methods approach. These methods included the use of online and offline techniques. Online research comprised the design and operation of a tailored website which was used to overcome geographical and access limitations. Offline methods included the use of visual techniques to monitor change over time, in depth face to face interviews with stakeholders of Phi Phi's development, open ended questionnaires with tourists on the island and extended answer Thai script questionnaires.

It was found that the greatest influencing factor within Phi Phi's development is the desire to develop the economy through Tourism and the philosophy underpinning the island's development pattern is largely economic. The Tsunami did not, as expected, cause any significant reassessment of the Tourism development pattern on the island but served to uncover a range of conflicts, and unlawful activity that was the result of power relationships leveraged by stakeholders to express their own interests and desired outcomes; in order to suit their own needs.

It was found, significantly, that the meanings attributed to sustainability in this context differ greatly to that of meanings elaborated within western ideological debates. Conceptualisations of sustainability derived from the data that stakeholders provided were mapped against key debates within literature. How meanings differed between stakeholder groups was also examined and a resultant definition for Sustainable Tourism Development on Phi Phi was compiled to illustrate a broad range of interests. It was furthermore acknowledged that there are many barriers that must be overcome in order for Phi Phi to pursue a form of Sustainable Tourism Development. For residents of Phi Phi, present needs are yet to be met and therefore this in their conception should preoccupy development prior to any consideration of future generations. The use of education was recommended as tantamount in order to increase islanders' understanding of impacts and sustainability but additionally to increase their skills and knowledge base in order to enable them to engage and compete intellectually with the 'ruling elite' in addition to increasing their self sufficiency thus reducing dependency upon landowners and the mainland.