



Perceived Expectations of Quality of Life on Kent's Residents' Support for the Development of London Resort Theme Park

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Abstract

Now it is certainly a consideration of tourism planners that any impact of proposed tourism development considers the attitudes and perceptions of residents, especially in respect to tourism policies. Thankfully for local communities, tourism development and the connection to the improvement of their quality of life (QoL) has gained much attention over recent years. This paper aims to discuss various aspects of the perceived value of tourism development and how it ultimately affects communities QoL. Various themes are discussed in the questionnaire that has been put to 100 residents within the vicinity of the Swanscombe peninsular. A wide range has been cast to ensure a full sample taken from a wide demographic.

Key words: Host community, Motivations, behaviour, perception

INTRODUCTION

The local community's attitude towards tourism development and their overall support in respect to their QoL depends upon the way in which it is evaluated. The literature comprises mainly of predictors of "tourism attitudes, community attachment, community life satisfaction, and quality of life by using such indicators as economic gain, personal growth (e.g., employment), and length of stay in tourism destinations" (e.g., Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; McGehee & Andereck, 2004).

There is of course the conversation around the economic gain, but there is seldom any discussion and research on locals perceived value of tourism as an indicator and predictor of community life satisfaction along with QoL. This move away from the economic value, is considered to be abstract for some developers, but has featured in respect to the overall marketing and PR exercises of their product (Woo, Kim, and Uysal, 2015).

It is of course the case that community support for tourism is necessary to ensure the overall economic stability of the development and industry as a whole. This directive has come partly from government and also the changing landscape in respect to understanding the long-term viability of developments in respect to their commercial appeal (Jamaludin, Othman & Awang, 2009).

Therefore, it is surely essentially that a positive perception amongst locals and the wider community will have an impact on their overall support for any such development, especially in consideration of the perceived benefit that is generated from any such development – jobs, income, status etc. (Dyer, Aberdeen & Schuler, 2007).

Therefore, we must look for ways in which to measure residents' perceptions and community attitudes to development. These could very well be objective outcomes for locals, such as understanding the perceived economic benefits brought on by employment and the trickle down effect that improves everyone in the communities standard of living (Ko & Stewart, 2002; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Snepenger, O'Connell, & Snepenger, 2001).

Objectives

To fulfil the research questions, the below objectives need to be achieved:

- Identify the key impacts that determine whether resident's support the development in relation to their QOL

- Measure the levels of satisfaction, and of dissatisfaction amongst resident's QOL in relation to the proposed development and differentiate data on status – demographic analysis.
- Evaluate the host community's QOL currently (pre-development) and justify how this may alter as development progresses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contextual Background

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The London Resort – Overview

The London Resort will be globally competitive and mark a step-change in leisure and entertainment provision in the UK. The first theme park 'gate' will open in 2024 and the second within five years (by 2029). Sustainability is at the core of its vision. Its aim is to create one of the most sustainable theme park destinations in the world. Its designs will integrate local public rights of way and a green network, with improved access to the river for visitors and local communities. The London Resort will showcase the natural features of the site, seamlessly integrating them into our designs. A large proportion of the Peninsula landscape will remain undeveloped and will be enhanced.

The London Resort will have a global profile, attracting visitors from all over the world, generating economic and community benefits for the local area that will reach far into Kent, Thurrock, Essex, London and the UK, supporting job creation, tourism and business growth. Its three core principles for development of attractions are to be innovative, relevant and flexible. What we design today needs to satisfy our visitors in 2024 and beyond, creating a park that can evolve and adapt easily to ensure that it always has fresh appeal to visitors.

Research Design and Data Analysis

The aim of this research proposal necessitates the need for a positivist approach that works

alongside the deductive reasoning philosophy. Any results derived therefore from said research can only be deemed accurate and helpful if aligned to this scientific and objective approach (Saunders et.al, 2009). The review of literatures of QOL in respect to host community impacts of tourism development therefore accepts the theory of deductive reasoning of the hypothesis's stated, and in turn these will be empirically tested utilising a quantitative method (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

A cross-sectional design approach to collect said quantitative data at multiple points throughout the timeline (stated below) will be collated. This approach is to highlight patterns or relationships of associations between the factors expounded in table 1(Bryman and Bell, 2007).In regard to the questionnaire design, a Likert scales will be used as they provide an ordinal variable and can be rank ordered. Likert scales in this research proposal can be considered to be symmetrical. The distance between each answer possibility is equal and a balance between positive and negative answers exists, therefore it can also be used as interval variable (Bryman and Bell, 2007). A typical Likert scale will be constructed and will make use of the common five answer possibilities (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

The basis of design in this research proposal is focused mainly on the study of of resident demographics (socio) and perceptions of tourism-related community quality of life indicators (TCQOL). These indicators are extracted from existing and current tourism and community quality of life literature (Yu, Cole, and Chancellor, 2016). The TCQOL indicators are listed in Table 1. In a recent study in Orange County, USA questionnaires were sent to residents to rate both importance (1=not at all important to 5=extremely important) and satisfaction (1=not at all satisfied to 5=extremely satisfied) with each TCQOL indicator. The research assessed the host communities perceived effects of tourism with each TCQOL indicator (1=tourism greatly decreases to 5=tourism greatly increases) with the ultimate purpose of utilising these scales calculate and determine TCQOL scores. (Yu, Cole, and Chancellor, 2016). The TCQOL score is come to on the results derives from the importance, satisfaction, and the perceived effects of tourism development on community QOL (Andereck and Nyaupane 2010; Brown et al. 1998; Massam 2002). This TCQOL score then goes to represent the local communities' perceptions of how tourism development influences their community QOL. This approach assesses the value of community QOL indicators by enveloping: satisfaction, importance, and tourism effect scales. (Yu, Cole, and Chancellor, 2016).

Extant research has suggested that an appraisal of a residents QOL should take into account with residents' satisfactions and their values (importance) in consideration (Brown et al.

1998; Massam, 2002). This in turn allows research to evaluate host communities' preferences

and conclusions of those said values and satisfactions (Brown et al. 1998; Felce and Perry 1995; Massam 2002). With this format, the literature suggests a computation of the QOL scores using the below formula:

$$QOL\ score = (satisfaction * importance)^{1/2}$$

This formulaic representation shows the “square root of satisfaction” of residents multiplying the importance and therefore represents resident perceptions of each community QOL indicators as shown in table 1. Where the quality-of-life score ranged from 1 to 5, the square root aims to maintain consistency of the interval ratio (Yu, Cole, and Chancellor, 2016).

The calculation of TCQOL scores however, in previous studies have measured tourism development effects and the QOL (based on the indices) by multiplying QOL scores and perceptions of tourism development effects (positive and negative) (Andereck and Jurowski 2006; Andereck and Nyaupane 2010). Therefore, the TCQOL scores are calculated by utilising the host communities perceived tourism effects in connection with QOL scores.

The equation that showcases TCQOL scores is:

$$TCQOL = QOL * (tourism\ effect)$$

The formula results suggest that the higher the TCQOL scoring, host communities perceive there to be a greater, or more positive community QOL attributed to tourism development, and vice versa (Yu, Cole, and Chancellor, 2016).

These calculations serve the balance of scales required in measuring the complexities of each individual's (sometimes) subjective experience through the varying timescales of development. The ideas put forward have their limitations in respect to the continuum in which host communities are placed on in respect to the time each development takes to conclude. Therefore, collection of data at a single point can skew the results depending upon which stage Kent residents find themselves in regarding the development of The London Resort.

One hundred questionnaires have been directed to households within Swanscombe, Kent. These residents are essentially most effected by the new development of The London Resort. Much talk and chatter has been made on social media, but very little research has been conducted. Very little media other than in local papers, and Facebook groups have discussed any of the

potential issues surrounding the subject discussed within this paper.

Testing the validity of the methods prescribed above have already been justified in the various elements of literature on the subject and conducted by Yu, Cole, and Chancellor, (2016). However, assessment of the UK demographic, especially within Kent in respect to tourism development is shown rarely if at all in academic literature.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The questionnaire featured 13 core questions based around the already as discussed TQOL format as adapted by Yu, Cole, and Chancellor (2016).

1. How aware of The London Resort Theme Park project would you say you are?
With 1 being not at all aware, 5 being very much aware
2. Please now rate the importance of each of the points below that relate to quality of life, with 1 being not at all important, to 5 being extremely important.
3. Now, please indicate your current level of satisfaction in relation to each of the community conditions and services below, with 1 being not at all satisfied to 5 being extremely satisfied.
4. Lastly, what are the expected effects of the the London Resort Theme Park Development with 1 being that the development greatly decreases tourism to 5 being the development greatly increases tourism

Community Conditions:

- Q. Job opportunities
- R. Property values
- S. Prices for goods and services
- T. Cost of living
- U. Infrastructure (roads, bridges, utilities)
- V. Traffic conditions

- W. Crime level
- X. Personal safety
- Y. Entertainment opportunities
- Z. Recreation opportunitiesClean air and water
- AA. Conditions of wildlife habitats
- BB. Conditions of natural areas
- CC. Overall appearance in the community
- DD. Overall community liveability
- EE. Overall community conditions

Data was intended to be collected over a period of several months as per the research methods assignment timeline. Due to the various restrictions in place at the time

It is the case that residents were anonymised, but rigours were used in the collection of data to ensure that appropriate residents were utilised to fill in each form.

Each question was used as the Likert scale used to assess the impact of the London Resort theme park predevelopment. Therefore, the results show the community's current status.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

A sample size of 100 questionnaires were completed online which were distributed over the two Facebook pages. The Facebook pages in question were those that required users to be "locals" and users gained permission based on their knowledge of the area before they were permitted entry to the group.

The sample age ranges from 18, all the way to 65+. A majority of (34%) responders were aged between the age range of 18-34. Consider the makeup of the location, this would appear to be an appropriate segment of the demographic. Considering also the netnographic nature of social media platforms such as Facebook this would again showcase a relative slice of the audience. The second group is the 45-54 which holds 22% of responders. It is this group that represents the homeowner proportion, with 85% of this age group representing as either owning with a mortgage or owning without a mortgage. This again is suggestive of the era and the location in question.

In respect to question 1, a majority of responders at 66% were aware of the London Resort, with the remainder being only moderately aware. This showcases how much of an impact the proposal has etched into the minds of local residents. This shows how valuable the data set is and how valid the reporting should be considered. Question 2, which was designed to assess the current level of satisfaction in relation to community conditions as set out in the questionnaire design. Job opportunities: overall, 20% of respondents declared that they were extremely satisfied with the job opportunities that were currently available to them – the age group concerned were mainly male and between the 45 to 64 + plus age range. 90% of this group have declared themselves as homeowners and 75% were in full time employment, 10% part time, with the remainder being retired. Educationally, this group in their majority hold degrees or higher. When looking at the effect of job opportunities on the other end of the spectrum, or those that are dissatisfied, the demographic shifts to the much younger age group range and this group are overwhelmingly renters, lesser regarding Higher Education. Property values, the data suggests that those who identify as homeowners appear to be extremely satisfied, whereas those who are renters appear to be mainly dissatisfied. Those that come from single parent households and those that are not employed, or part time only scored less on this question. Those from the older generations appeared to be mostly satisfied. Prices for goods and services appeared to be a misnomer for the questionees – this question in its majority scored “unsure”. In relation to the London Resort being prebuild stage, and little if anything other than the Bluewater shopping centre being nearby, it is not surprising. This question was too ambiguous for this sample, clearly. The next area within the questionnaire is the “cost of living” and interestingly a majority of 42% selected the not at all satisfied and slightly satisfied. There was a cross section of all demographics included within this data set. It is not surprising that a majority voted in this manner, potentially influenced by the coverage of inflation in recent months. This again would not have much bearing currently, but potentially for the developers of the London Resort, this area could be investigated in respect to cost of entry/spend within the attraction – more of this is covered within the discussion section of this paper. Three quarters of responders in respect to the next element of the survey (infrastructure) are not at all satisfied. This moves up to 86% when the sample were asked about traffic. These two points seem particularly relevant to the predevelopment of the attraction. Some work has started in the area, and it is the case that roadworks has affected the Swanscombe area, and it has been well noted in local newspapers and within the local Facebook groups that tailbacks are commonplace, with temporary traffic lights and once quiet roads providing cut throughs. This undoubtedly has quite an impact on the quality of life of residents. This area of distress is felt across all socio-economic groups. This is to say and suggest that whether you rely on public transport, or have your own car, your journey to work, school or shopping is and has been affected negatively.

The crime level and personal safety is a mixed bag with both elements producing 42% at slightly satisfied. Looking at the data closer, it is clear to see that the older population within the surveyed

group feel less safe, as well as those from single family households. Female score at 90% in the breakdown and clearly do not feel safe currently. Homeowners are also less satisfied with their take on the crime rate, whereas men do not feel unsafe.

Entertainment and recreation appear to be satisfying the residents within the Swanscombe peninsula. With the younger generation and mainly men showcasing some element of dissatisfaction. With Bluewater within striking distance and its array of shops, bars, cinemas, and restaurants which serve many different markets, it is clear that this shopping centre has had a positive impact on the overall results.

Moving to the natural world in which residents have been asked to consider – clean air and water, conditions of wildlife habitats and of natural habitats, over 52% of responders felt that they were not at all satisfied. The recent coverage of the site in the media which has gained much attention has been in part due to the conservation efforts of NGOs that operate locally such as the RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust and others but to name a few. This level of lobbying has influenced the government planning inspectorate to deem the proposed site of the attraction an SSSI (A Site of Special Scientific Interest) (London Resort: Swanscombe Peninsula site confirmed special status, 2022). It is the younger generation and those that are more highly educated that are most dissatisfied than their older counterparts.

Question 4 within the questionnaire was designed with the intention of assessing the current level of satisfaction in relation to each of the community services. The first section of this element of the survey looks at educational services. Those who responded as unsure 38% were retired, or single/coupled but working full time. Amongst the parents of the sample, their responses seem very much divided with a 24% vs. 26% with the lesser being dissatisfied and the latter being satisfied. For the ambulance fire and police, it again proved to be an interesting split. Most responders were satisfied with the medical and fire services, but 32% were dissatisfied. This came from the older population, and this group were satisfied with the medical services and the fire department. Those who entered as unsure were those who worked full time and were between the 34-45 age range and who owned their own homes. The majority at 32% were happy with the public transportation services available within the locale – this is the older population and those who are retired.

However, it is in direct contrast to the responses received when asked the question of how satisfied they were with the traffic conditions. It is clear that some are residents are satisfied once they consider their transport options but seem dissatisfied at the length of time it takes to get from one destination to the next. As to be expected, with its close proximity to Bluewater 65% of responses in regard to shopping facilities were positive. The older generation seem to be less keen, but those within the category of full-time work seem most satisfied. This would seem evident as they would on the face of it appear to have a greater disposable income. Lastly, for this question, the combined recreational facilities, services and overall community services

showcase that 67% of residents are either extremely, very or slightly satisfied. This majority has been supported by the female population of the survey and those that fit mainly in the 18-24 range. Those individuals with low employment and lower income.

In question 5, the responses to What would you say your overall perception of The London Resort Theme Park project is? Is as follows: 38% negative, 12% slightly negative, 4% neither positive nor negative, and 20% slightly positive and 26% positive. Those that declared that their positive perceptions were older members of the community, mainly retired and owned their own homes. Those that viewed their perceptions to be negative were in the younger age ranges, did not own their own homes in as great many cases and mainly female.

Question 6, This question was added in to test whether there was any correlation to the academic format in which is being used in this paper and to the overall understanding of what quality of life means and feels like in the local vernacular. Interestingly 60% of responders stated neither positive nor negative. It is the case that as the development is in its infancy that the majority didn't feel compelled to answer. Those that responded positive 18% and the negatives at 22% were from opposing age ranges, genders and homeowner status.

In question 7 to 13 was designed to assess the demographic of individual that responded to the questionnaire. Question 7 asked responders for their gender, and the results are as follows: 32% associated as Male, 66% Female, with the remaining population as preferring not to say. This quite clearly showcases those two thirds of responders were female. Some scholars would argue (incorrectly) that this can somewhat skew the data. According to Smith (2008) it is not the case that gender has any foundation in weighting responses one way or the other based on sex.

Next is age range, and the survey followed the typical range, from 18-34 (4%) 25-35 (14%) 36-44 (34%) 45-54 (22%) 55-64 (20%) and 65 plus (6%). This range clearly showcases again the usership of such community social media pages. The older population being mainly men with the youngest being female.

Education, with 42% of responders with a degree and 14% with a post graduate qualification such as a MA or PhD this combined showcases a strong majority in respect to the educational level of the sampled group. The remaining responders are educated to at least a secondary level with A levels achieved, with a negligible amount of those that only have basic secondary education – this is amongst the 65+ group.

54% of the sample are full time employed with more than 65% of this group being male. 16% are part time employed and solely female. 6% were self-employed and only male. The remainder of the group 12% were unemployed – a near even mix between male and female, no students and 14% of the group offered themselves as retirees.

Interestingly it is these retirees that are least satisfied with the overall development so far.

Question 11 asked whether the responders were attached to the leisure, tourism or hospitality sector in some way – 88% responded no. This is a significant finding that is discussed more later on in this research paper.

Another area that I felt important was the aspect of family/relationship. This aspect I felt important as would have some bearing on the overall result. The literature does not consider the potential future impact of the tourism development in this respect. Those families that stand to benefit from the resort – by benefit it is to suggest that employment and job opportunities may arise from such a development and house prices may go up as a result. The majority of responders came from a nuclear family with children at 32%. The next group up with 28% is one member households, 18% shared/multi occupancy households, followed by 14% with single parent households, and lastly 8% from nuclear family without children. This spread reflects the community well in respect to the demographic split in respect to the latest census. The Swanscombe peninsular is well represented in this sample, therefore.

Lastly, the subject of home ownership vs those that rent/let and their support. It is encouraging to know that in past studies (see Liang and Hui, 2016) that those who rent see tourism development as a positive. It is suggested that those who rent do not have a choice and usually are of the younger generation, and they ultimately, they do not “own” their home, but see the potential within the area or even choose to rent as it offers greater flexibility. Homeowners however are more tied to the area based on house prices and can only move when the market moves in their favour. In the survey conducted for this research, 48% of people answered **Own Home With Mortgage** for this question, and the majority answered "No" for Question 10. 12% people answered "Rent Home - Social Housing/Local Authority" for question 12. 67% of them answered "Single-Parent Family/Others " for question 11. 12% of people answered **Rent Home - Social Housing/Local Authority** for this question, and the majority answered "**Single-Parent Family/Others** " for Question 11.

Discussion

Interestingly in the 88% of the group do not work in the travel, leisure or hospitality sector. Potentially in future research once the development is carried out, there maybe more of a shift towards more employed and a further direct impact in respect to the perceived benefits.

In respect to the more academic limitations and discussions, in Andereck & Vogt (2000) paper on Arizona state, they concluded that resident and community attitudes were not necessarily a good predictor of the actual future support of a proposed tourism attraction (Andereck & Vogt 2000, p. 35) They went on to suggest that a combined approach with both quantitative and

qualitative methods should be used for future research Unfortunately, the combined option was not possible for this project due to the constraints as advised already.

McCool & Martin (1994) in their paper on wildlife tourism state that: “A caveat with all resident attitude surveys is that they are a snapshot in time, thus events during the time span of the data collection could sway public opinion.” No truer is it for this instance where in the period of time the results were taken many political disruptions may have swayed the result one way or another.

It is true to say that this paper could have gone deeper and a more thorough understanding of the reasons why the residents support the tourism industry or do not support it will help to establish models for such developments that minimise their negative impacts and maximise the social support for these initiatives. This is why research conducted in this field is relevant. (Woo, Kim, Uysal, 2014)

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident and clear that local communities play a pivotal and important role in the success of tourism development. Support from residents is now considered essential in the process of development, especially so in the planning, operation, and sustainability of tourism (Jurowski 1994). Importantly, the host community are now recognised in the overall tourism experience of a destination. Resident involvement and support is now acknowledged for the success of any new development that relates to tourism ventures (Andereck and Vogt 2000; Ap 1992).

The tenets of sustainable tourism development and practices showcased in the literature review go on to highlight adhering to these principles in relation to how they are important to the overall quality of life of locals. To address some of the inevitable issues that occur within any form of development in relation to local communities' quality of life, this research proposal aims to assess tourism-related community quality of life (TCQOL) by way of attempting to uncover residents' community living experiences in the context of tourism development and quality of life.

CONCLUSION

The results within this research showcases that currently there is to some degree support as to the perceived benefits that the development of the attraction will bring to local residents. Currently, trivialities such as traffic appear to be a major stumbling block currently. However, the perceived benefits appear to outweigh much of this. The younger demographic of well-educated nuclear family homeowners clearly is set to benefit monetarily in respect to their future outcomes for the perceived benefit their children and their increasing house price will achieve.

For lower working-class residents there appears to be hope for the future and perceive the benefits to partly improve their QoL.

Clearly much of the discussion around the size and scale of the development of the London resort will raise concerns from the various stakeholders. Some have skin in the game and others like local residents most definitely do. It is now down to the policy makers and elected officials to ensure that QoL is a consideration and forms the main agenda before any decision is made for the future long-term benefit for the local community.

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