Consequences of Tourism: Retrospect and Prospect

GEOFFREY WALL * (gwall@uwaterloo.ca)

Introduction

The purpose of this contribution is to discuss the consequences of tourism for the people and places which are visited. Of course, there are other consequences in addition to those which occur in destination areas. For example, tourism has implications for the tourists themselves, for the organizations such as travel agencies and tour operators which cater to their needs and wants, for investors who may live a long way from the locations in which tourism takes place, and for governments at all levels which may attempt to gain revenues through direct and indirect taxes on tourism. Also, the journeys between home and destinations may be of concern, particularly among those interested in global climate change. Thus, this is a partial discussion of the consequences of tourism.

The discussion is placed in the context of evolving global-local relationships. With about 900 million international travelers recorded annually and many more domestic tourists, tourism is clearly a force which is of global significance and it can be viewed as being an important instigator of global change. At the same time, tourism is very unevenly distributed and many, perhaps most, of the consequences of tourism are concentrated in destinations areas. Furthermore, although a global phenomenon, tourism is not homogeneous in its forms and the areas on which it impinges may respond in different ways to the threats and opportunities which accompany it. Thus, the local consequences of tourism may vary from place to place.

When viewed from the perspectives of the tourists, destination areas are commonly places in which pleasure is sought. But the motivations of tourists are diverse and their expectations of and commitment to the places which are visited are likely to differ from those of permanent residents. While for some purposes it may be appropriate to count business travelers as tourists, most tourists are likely to be seeking leisure experiences while temporarily away from home. In contrast, for residents of destination areas, the communities which are visited are places of home, work and retirement. Thus, tourists and residents bring different expectations to their involvement with the destination community and use it in different ways.

It may be useful to view tourism as involving the interaction of three types of cultures: the destination culture, the cultures of the visitors’ origins and a tourist culture reflecting the fact that tourists of diverse backgrounds often use common facilities, visit similar sites and exhibit many common