COVID-19 – acknowledgement of children as stakeholders of the tourism industry

Introduction

There is a dearth of academic research in tourism involving children (Canosa, Graham, & Wilson, 2018; Seraphin & Gowreesunkar, 2020). Tourism and hospitality research to date have focused almost exclusively on adults' perspectives, often overlooking, if not neglecting, the views of children and young people (Canosa et al., 2018a). Many academics are now supporting the fact that children are as important as adults in academic research in tourism (Poria & Timothy, 2014; Radic, 2017). Despite all the negative impacts of the breakout of COVID-19, the pandemic has also provided opportunities to reviews old practices, and adopt more suitable and up to date one (Prideaux, Thompson, & Pabel, 2020), among these are the opportunity to empower children as tourists, while informing them about the impacts of COVID-19, and measures to remain safe. The guided walk developed for young consumers in Winchester is the example that is discussed in this study. This study not only contributes to address a gap in literature, but also provides an example of strategy put in place to empower children to be the tourists of the future (Cullingford, 1995).

Methodology

A logical follow up to this guided walk, would be the evaluation of children' perception of the destination. At the moment, the perception of children on tourism products and services is mainly collected through their parents (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati, & Brackstone, 2014; Poris, 2005). As a result of Khoo-Lattimore (2015) suggestions to use prompts (such as drawing) to collect data from children, this study is in turn, suggesting pictures taking as prompts (Table 1) to collect data on children' perception of Winchester as a destination.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

There are three types of empowerment in tourism (Boley & Gard McGehee, 2014; Strzelecka, Boley, & Woosman, 2017): Psychological empowerment (sense of pride), social empowerment (development of social capital, and equilibrium within a group), and political empowerment (involvement in decision-making). These different forms of empowerment work well if suitable strategies are put in place. Adams (2008) identified the following strategies as the most effective: cathartic and facilitative (enable people to express their feelings), catalytic (enabling people to engage in self-discovery, self-directed

living; problem-solving), supportive and catalytic (enabling people to build self-confidence), and finally, self-advocacy (enabling people to speak for themselves). The guided walk put in place for children in Winchester (UK) seems to be contributed to their social empowerment. This guided walk could be said to be catalytic in its approach.

Results

The non-verbal, participatory and empowering technique presented in this study (Figure 1), has provided an opportunity to discuss why and how COVID-19 could be considered as an opportunity to empower children.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Indeed, discourse analysis framework which has been increasingly concerned with images as texts (Hammond & Wellington, 2013), is articulated around five pillars, among these are: audience (who was it written for? Why this audience?), and production (what were the social, political, and cultural conditions in which it was produced?) (Hammond & Wellington, 2013), reveals that the guided walk could enable children to learn how to stay safe and healthy (self-directed living and problem-solving: 1A; 1C; 1D), while visiting the city (self-discovery: 1B), without impacting negatively on equilibrium or social capital between groups (1E; 1F).

The Norway Prime Minister, has taken a full opportunity of the breakout of the virus to address children, and discuss the current issue faced by the world (BBC [Online]), contributing that way to their social empowerment, by using a cathartic and facilitative approach, alongside a supportive and self-advocacy approach. Equally important, this study shows that with an adapted and tailored method, research carried out with adults can also be with children.
The approach of this study is inspired by an empirical study carried out by Canosa, Wilson and Graham (2017, p.899) on young people who 'drove the production of three short animation movies which represent their views on tourism and their concerns about living in a tourist destination'. It is not unrealistic to assume that children's perception of Winchester as a destination would cover three dimensions: (1) their concerns regarding the community (2) memories and experience of their selected place/attraction in Winchester (3) their sense of belonging and connection to the community (similar to Canosa et al., 2017). It is also expected that comments for all three dimensions would be rather positive, as Winchester is one of the best places to live in England (Séraphin, Platania, Spencer, & Modica, 2018), and also because, research on adults' perception of tourism and events development in Winchester revealed

that both are contributed positively to locals and visitors' enjoyment of life and experience (Seraphin et al., 2018). The limitation of this study is based on the fact that the research method suggested in Table 1 has not yet been tested empirically.

Conclusion

This study is engaging with the emerging trend of children empowerment in tourism via academic research (Canosa et al., 2017; Canosa et al., 2018; Khoo-Lattimore, 2015; Radic, 2017). It is also worth highlighting the fact that, 'in order to uncover the deeply embedded issues concerning tourism development for host communities, children and young people must be actively included and engaged in the research process' (Canosa et al., 2017, p.902). In this line of thoughts, the research note suggests that more empirical research (using non-verbal, participatory and empowering technique) with children should be conducted. Future research could look at applying the toolkits developed in table 1 to investigate how children perceive Winchester (UK) as a destination. The findings could then be compared with the results of the research carried by Seraphin et al. (2018), what would help to determine the extent to which children's perception of a destination varies from adults' perception. There is no comparative study in this area. Beyond the specific case of Winchester, the toolkit presented in this study could be adapted to other contexts.

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