Destination management: The tourists' perspective

Abstract

Although tourists are frequently cited as the central focus of much destination management activity little is known about how they regard destination management. Through a series of focus groups with guests at youth hostels in three locations in New Zealand, this study provides empirical evidence as to whether tourists consider destinations need to be managed; why destination management is needed; what it should involve; and what differentiates good destinations from poor ones. Their views are then compared with destination marketing and management strategies in the three locations to assess how well current practices match the tourists' perspective. The tourists' responses endorse the need for destination management and show a broad appreciation of why destinations should be managed. The participants see a need for destination marketing, value the provision of information and acknowledge the importance of visitor management. However, they strongly expressed the view that destinations should not be over-managed, raising the question of where the boundaries lie between effective destination management and over-management. The factors which differentiate good destinations from poor ones might be grouped under two broad themes: those associated with tourists' motivations and expectations and those related to a range of destination attributes. Comparison of the focus group participants' views with the strategies and plans of the three destinations reveals a degree of concordance but also emphasizes that consideration of their perspective alone is critical but insufficient for comprehensive destination management which needs to take account of the views of all stakeholders.

Key words: destinations, destination management, destination strategies, destination plans, focus groups, tourists

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1. Introduction

With the growth and maturity of destinations in recent decades the literature on tourism development has been complemented by a growing body of research on destination management. Some researchers emphasize the need for destination management in order for destinations to be competitive and sustainable and discuss the activities that need to be undertaken to achieve these goals (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Merinero Rodríguez, 2008; Presenza, Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). Others are concerned with the structures and processes required to manage destinations effectively (Bieger, Beritelli & Laesser, 2009; Bodega, Cioccarelli & Denicolai, 2004; Sainaghi, 2006). A third group focuses on the stakeholders that need to be taken into account in managing destinations (Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010; Fuchs & Weiermair, 2004; Wang, 2011; Zehrer, Pechlaner & Hölzl, 2005).

As is common with other rapidly growing literatures, research in this field is characterized by varying definitions, concepts and perspectives on what constitutes destination management. How we define, conceptualize and frame destination management is critical as it will determine the focus of our research and influence who or what is to be managed, how and by whom. It may also suggest where management priorities should lie and where solutions might be found. While this is true of all aspects of destination management, how we frame our research and approach destination management is especially important with regard to consideration of the stakeholders involved. In some cases a fairly inclusive approach is taken (Bornhorst et al., 2010; Buhalis, 2000; Wang, 2011). Wang (2011, p. 2), for example, follows the DMAI to suggest: '…destination marketing and management can be defined as a proactive, visitor-centred approach to the economic and cultural development of a destination that balances and integrates the interests of visitors, service providers and the community.' Others place the focus squarely on the tourist:

> …the fundamental goal of destination management is to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the product, facilities, services and programs that altogether provide memorable tourism experiences for visitors…
> (Fuchs & Weiermair, 2004, p. 212)

> Destination management and marketing is the consistent orientation of tourist services and service providers towards the needs of potential guests….The guest's subjective feeling, his expectations and experiences during his journey and his stay make his satisfaction a vital factor of competence of a destination management. (Zehrer et al., 2005, p. 148)

Given this recognition of the importance of tourists, either as one group among several sets of stakeholders or as the dominant focus of destination management activity, it is rather surprising that there is relatively little empirical research examining their perspective on destination management.

The work undertaken in this area has tended to deal either with particular problems such as perceptions of carrying capacity and overcrowding or with issues of satisfaction, often using some form of quality assessment or importance/performance

analysis (Butler, 2010; Griffin & Edwards, 2012; Litvin & Ng, 2001; Lopez-Toro, Diaz-Muñoz & Perez-Moreno, 2010; Wade & Eagles, 2003). Such work contributes to a better understanding of what in particular needs to be managed at given destinations although as Griffin and Edwards (2012) note with regard to the complexity of urban destinations, managers may exert only a limited control over some attributes.

However, the tourists' voice has generally been absent in terms of how destinations might be managed. Much of the recent research in this domain concentrates on organizational and resourcing matters, frequently with a focus on the roles and activities of destination management organizations (DMOs) (d'Angella & Go, 2009; Presenza et al., 2005; Sainaghi, 2006; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; Singal & Uysal, 2009; Wang, 2011). Sainaghi (2006, p. 1054 goes so far as to argue that the key question 'is not *what* to do, so much as *how* to do it.' While the views of a variety of stakeholders might be included here the emphasis is generally on the coordination and collaboration of a range of different providers and developing organizational structures and processes to facilitate this.

As originally developed in a corporate context (Freeman, 1984; Donaldson & Preston, 1995), stakeholder theory asserts that an organization should take account of all of its stakeholders, a stakeholder being defined as 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives' (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). Furthermore, the interests of all stakeholders are of intrinsic value. Effective stakeholder management involves identifying stakeholders and their stakes and establishing processes to manage relationships and transaction with and between them. Given the multi-faceted nature of tourism and the range of interested or affected parties implicated in its development, it is not surprising that stakeholder theory has been widely applied to destinations and issues of tourism development and planning (d'Angella & Go, 2009; Currie, Seaton &Wesley, 2009; Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Morrison, 2013; Sautter & Leisen, 1999; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). While some of these studies incorporate tourists (Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Sautter & Leisen, 1999), those concerned with destination management commonly do not or their results show that tourists are not considered particularly salient by destination managers. Sheehan and Ritchie's (2005) analysis of the most salient stakeholders identified by CEOs of DMOs in North America showed tourists were considered of very negligible importance.

In terms of destination management, it is argued here that tourists are a very salient stakeholder group. Their salience relates not only to the tourist-centred focus of destination management outlined above but also to the need to manage the impacts tourists generate. While such issues have been dealt with in the large but rather fragmented body of work relating to satisfaction, quality evaluation and impact assessment, there appears to have been little or no attempt as yet to address the broader question of what tourists actually think about destination management *per se* and no parallels to recent studies that have considered the views of supply side stakeholders (Bornhorst et al., 2010). Incorporating the tourists' perspective will contribute to a more informed understanding of what destination management might involve and how it might be carried out. Moreover, understanding tourists' attitudes to destination management and why such management is necessary may also contribute to the achievement of destination management goals. Where tourists are

known to share the same values as other stakeholders, for instance with regard to sustainability, then they are likely to respond better to the policies and practices put in place, particularly where an effort is made to inform them of why a destination is being managed in this way (Stanford, 2006). Where their views differ, they should also be taken into account and attempts made to reconcile them with those of other stakeholders.

In short, tourists are frequently cited as the central focus of destination management but little is known about how they themselves regard the issue. It is in this context that this exploratory study examines the tourists' perspective on destination management. Through a series of focus groups with guests at youth hostels in three locations in New Zealand the study provides empirical evidence of how tourists view destination management *per se* and discusses the implications of incorporating their perspective in research and in practice. In particular, their views are sought on whether destinations need to be managed, why destination management is needed, what it should involve and what differentiates good destinations from poor ones.

2. Methodology

Focus groups were selected as the means of studying the tourists' perspective due to the exploratory nature of the research and the search for insight into the ways in which tourists think about and express their ideas about destination management. Focus groups encourage openness and interaction, factors which were seen as particularly helpful in generating discussion about the nature of destination management. As Gibbs (1997), citing Kitzinger (1994, 1995), observes: 'interaction between participants highlights their view of the world, the language they use about an issue and their values and beliefs about a situation'. Similarly, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006, p. 199) suggest that the narrative produced by focus groups is 'extremely useful for identifying the language, definitions and concepts that the research participants find meaningful'. Focus groups also provide the facilitator with opportunities to probe further, to follow up on and clarify emerging ideas and issues, another key advantage when exploring a topic such as this.

Recent studies have used focus groups to explore a range of destination management issues from the perspective of various stakeholder groups, particularly residents, providers and managers (Haukeland, Daugstadt & Vistad, 2011; Mackenzie, 2012; Salk, Schneider & McAvoy, 2010; Singal & Uysal, 2009) and, in the case of sustainable tourism in Daintree (Australia), also tourists (Hardy & Beeton, 2001). Focus groups have also been used in other studies of tourists. Sharpley and Jepson (2011), for example, used this technique to examine whether visitors to England's Lake District considered rural tourism a spiritual experience.

In terms of research design, inter-related decisions to be made about undertaking focus groups are: who is to be included; how many focus groups will be held and where; how will the focus groups be structured; how will the material be recorded; and how will the material obtained be analysed?

One of the challenges of carrying out focus groups with tourists, compared with local residents or providers, is that they are a mobile population and bringing groups of them together for an hour or more in a suitable setting requires careful consideration.

This is particularly the case in New Zealand where much tourism, especially international tourism, involves circuit travel including overnight stays at multiple locations in both the North and South Islands. To address this, the decision was taken to limit the study to hostel guests, an important segment of tourists in New Zealand, as the hostels they use provide good opportunities to recruit participants and hold meetings (Becken, 2007). Meeting rooms were available to conduct the focus groups away from the noise and activity of hostel life. Participants were recruited either by hostel staff making the focus groups known when the guests checked in or by the facilitator approaching them in public areas of the hostel. A free night's accommodation to each participant was offered as an incentive.

Nine focus groups were held in the period September to November 2010 in YHA hostels in Wellington, Rotorua and Franz Josef, three focus groups in each location (Figure 1). Multiple sites were included to take account of any potential influence that the location might have held on the participants' views in terms of the stage of their visit or the characteristics of the destination. Wellington is New Zealand's capital and an urban setting; Rotorua is a major resort attracting visitors through a mix of Maori culture, spa facilities and geothermal attractions; and Franz Josef is a small village servicing visitors to the glaciers of the adjacent Westland *Tai Poutini* National Park.

[insert Figure 1 about here]

A total of 61 participants were recruited (Table 1). The focus groups fell within the commonly recommended size range (Gibbs, 1997), varying from five to nine participants, with an average of seven per group. Of the sixteen nationalities represented, 21 participants were from the United Kingdom and eight from Germany. Others came from North and South America, other parts of Europe, Asia, Australia and two were from New Zealand. The Franz Josef groups were slightly more diverse than those in the other two locations. In contrast to the more relatively even gender balance of participants in Rotorua and Wellington, there was a marked majority of females in the Franz Josef groups. Analysis of their introductory remarks shows many of the participants were travelling for quite long periods, some up to 7 to 8 months. Some were in New Zealand on working holiday visas or as language students. The majority were in the country for about 4 to 6 weeks and were well travelled. Some were on a world tour, other were only visiting New Zealand. Age details were not recorded. Most appeared to be in their late twenties but some were adolescents and others were in their 50s.   In the main they were either travelling individually or in pairs (friends, couples and a mother and daughter).

[insert Table 1 about here]

This mix represents a diversity of experiences and views. At the same time, the recruitment of participants from among hostel guests also provided some common background and group homogeneity which facilitated the sharing of experiences (Haukeland et al., 2011; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Kitzinger, 1995; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011). Most of the participants contributed fully and enthusiastically to the discussion but language difficulties did limit the participation of some for whom English was not their first language. A particular effort was made to include the latter by directing questions directly to them. The views expressed, nevertheless, reflect

those of hostel guests travelling independently; those staying in other types of accommodation or engaging in other forms of travel (e.g. coach tourists on a packaged holiday) may consider destination management differently.

To ensure consistency and continuity, the nine groups were facilitated by the same researcher. The focus groups lasted just under an hour on average (58 minutes), ranging from 44 to 75 minutes. After the purpose of the project was explained and formal consent from the participants was obtained some introductory remarks and brief presentations from each participant were sought so as to break the ice and establish some rapport within the group. The discussion took a semi-structured open approach whereby the facilitator presented a series of focusing questions listed on a flip chart. The initial questions related to how the tourists' viewed destinations proceeding from open to more specific ones so as to elicit as spontaneous a response as possible. The results of this part of the research will be reported elsewhere. Towards the end of the session, participants were asked directly whether destinations need to be managed and if so what should be managed. Participants were encouraged throughout to illustrate or elaborate on their responses by reference to particular examples or experiences, whether at their present location or elsewhere on their current or previous trips, in New Zealand or in other countries.

The discussions were audio-recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts provided a rich body of data with the interaction between participants enabling ideas to be developed in some depth. Using NVivo, the transcribed responses to each of the focusing questions from the nine groups were collated and coded separately by the two researchers whose categories were then compared. Responses in the categories were then combined into broader themes that emerged across the groups. In keeping with the general thrust of the analysis of focus group transcripts, the emphasis is on these broader themes but matters relating to differences between locations are reported when they are salient (e.g. with relation to destination boundaries). Points relating to particular groups are also noted but no attempt is made to analyse the responses by gender or nationality as, in contrast to surveys and in-depth interviews, the narratives examined are those of the group not the individual and the groups were not recruited on the basis of these variables. To allow the voice of the participants to come through and to exemplify the points raised, themes are illustrated with representative verbatim quotes, using pseudonyms for the participants who are identified by group only.

3. Results

3.1 Destinations

Before examining in detail the focus group participants' perspective on destination management it is useful to summarize their views on destinations which are reported fully elsewhere (Pearce & Schänzel, in press). In particular, participants overwhelmingly expressed their ideas on destinations and types of destinations in trip-related terms rather than place-related attributes, that is, as the end point of a trip or part of a journey, some place which has been reached or that one is going to. As used by the participants, the concept of destination is very fluid and readily encompasses layers of destinations as a journey unfolds. Personal factors were given more

importance than place attributes. Destinations were seen as places of personal interest, travel to which was generally purposive and planned for, though unplanned destinations were also visited and pleasant surprises were valued.

The tourists' views of the characteristics of good and poor destinations are particularly important as they can help shape the focus of destination management activity by drawing attention to what needs to be managed. The factors mentioned most frequently by the participants might be grouped under two broad themes: the first related to those associated with tourists' motivations and expectations; the second, to a range of destination attributes (Table 2). In most cases the characteristics of good and poor destinations were expressed in dichotomous terms, for example meeting/not meeting expectations, having many/few activities or safety/lack of safety. In other instances this bi-polarity did not occur: good destinations were seen as being different but a lack of difference was not used to describe poor destinations; poor destinations did not offer value for money but value for money was not an expressed attribute of a good destination. Several participants claimed that they had never visited a poor destination.

[insert Table 2 about here]

3.1.1 Motivations and expectations

Many participants suggested that what makes a good or poor destination is not so much a function of the destination *per se* but rather is a very personal matter, varying from individual to individual in terms of their motivations, values and changing moods:

> *Like I don't think a destination necessarily has to have anything spectacular there. It just has to play to what you're looking for at the time.*
>
> Ailsa (Franz Josef 1)

> *…good and bad, poor, those are all based on your values I think when travelling…*
>
> Sally (Franz Josef 2)

> *It depends also always on your mood, which mood you are in this moment. You are in different moods every time so sometimes this is a perfect place for your mood and sometimes not so.*
>
> Irene (Franz Josef 3)

This personal perspective was reinforced by other participants who equated good destinations with those that fulfilled or exceeded their expectations:

> *…for it to be a good destination you want it to deliver on your expectations. And if possible, like, a really good destination would surpass them.*
>
> Roy (Wellington 2)

> *What's a good destination? It can be that it ticked all the boxes of what you expected and it can be somewhere that surprises you?*
>
> Andrew (Rotorua 1)

Surprise, discovery and 'the accidental' were generally seen to add to a destination:

> *…you can get some surprises in destinations which actually make them even better sometimes because it's such a surprise.*
>
> Mary (Rotorua 1)

> *…it sort of surprised us and the spontaneity of the situation made it a good destination.*
>
> Neil (Rotorua 1)

> *…when you've discovered it yourself, it's kind of doubly amazing…*
>
> Manfred (Wellington 2)

However, destinations which did not live up to expectations were consistently regarded as poor:

> *I think maybe a bad destination is somewhere that appears outwardly to be something that it's not.*
>
> Lucy (Franz Josef 2)

3.1.2 Destination attributes

Good destinations were seen as having a variety of things to see and do, thereby appealing to different groups of people. Those that offered few were generally considered poor although some suggested a lack of activities could hold appeal, as in this exchange in Rotorua focus group 2:

> *…You just know that there's always something going on, there's something happening, and there's lots to see and do. I think that's what makes a good destination.*
>
> Kate

> *Or on the other hand a good destination is also the arch opposite, like from that to being a place where you go and all you see is a beach and a palm tree, and a hammock, and like a cocktail. And that's all, like Samoa.*
>
> Jim

Good destinations were also described as offering something different to what tourists had seen or experienced before:

> *…I think it's generally about having something different but being inviting for you to experience.*
>
> Raymond (Wellington 1)

> *Something unique as well. Like a unique feature that makes a city stand out, just something different.*
>
> Jean (Wellington 1)

For some, what made a destination good was something intangible, something special:

It's the place that touches you…that leaves an impact with you.

<div align="right">Mary (Rotorua 1)</div>

I kind of like it [Lisbon] *'cause I feel like it's my special place, because it's not Paris or Barcelona or London.' So Lisbon is kind of like I have a connection with Lisbon that no one else does, so it feels really special.*

<div align="right">Jim (Rotorua 2)</div>

Poor destinations were associated with a particular set of attributes: as places that offered poor value for money and created a feeling that tourists were being "ripped off", as being "too touristy" or making "you feel like you're on some sort of tourism conveyor belt", as well as those that were filthy and congested, "just the basic stuff". Safety, or the lack of it, was also a factor by which participants, especially women, differentiated between good and poor destinations. Likewise with it being easy to get around the destination or not.

Discussions within the groups revealed that experience with other people was an important factor but one that went beyond the commonly expressed views that good destinations were associated with nice, friendly people and poor ones with unwelcoming locals. In some cases it was a question of frustration caused by language barriers or a sense of unease with homeless people, beggars and the way local conditions impact on residents. The participants also recognized that reaction to people at a destination might vary from individual to individual:

…you talk to people and say, 'Oh, have you been to Vietnam?' and they'd say, 'Yeah, I hated it because I hated the people.' We went, 'Oh, we loved it because of the people'.

<div align="right">Estelle (Rotorua 2)</div>

Others stressed that it was not just the locals but other tourists who influenced their views of a particular place:

Part of it had absolutely nothing to do with the destination; it had to do with the fact I was with a great group of people, which I think can make or break a destination when you're travelling.

<div align="right">Sally (Franz Josef 1)</div>

…[in Cancun] *it was just the people that were staying at the hotel and the things they did. It was just, just the people really.*

<div align="right">Manfred (Wellington 2)</div>

3.2 Do destinations need to be managed?

More direct discussion of destination management was initiated with the open question 'Do destinations need to be managed?' Some respondents, especially some of the non-English speakers, showed some initial uncertainty over what being managed meant. Did it mean, for example, that destinations needed to be 'looked after'? The general response, however, was a qualified 'yes': destinations need to be managed but not over-managed. Such management should be 'discrete' and 'subtle':

… the most effective ones in the countries that we've been to have managed it in a way that you kind of don't necessarily always realise that it's being managed

Stewart (Wellington 1)

… a destination needs to be managed but not too much, because … you lose the charm of the destination. And after it's too managed it's too touristy, the beauty is lost.

Gerry (Rotorua 1)

To a certain point. But not overly managed where … it's like, "Okay now look to your left and you will see," or, "Look to your right and this is". Maybe, to a certain point yes it is good, but not completely all the way, where you feel like …everything is being managed.

Fanny (Franz Josef 2)

The tension that emerged in the participants' responses between the need to manage a destination but not to the extent that it detracted from their experience of discovery and self - reliance was expressed in several ways:

…you don't want some areas to be over managed, because that's precisely why you've, sometimes, come away.

Roy (Wellington 2)

…on one hand it's kind of the safety [taking a guided tour to see the glacier], *on the other hand it's good when you do the things yourself, like when we did the Tongariro Crossing … it gives you another feeling when you do your things on your own.*

Jeremy (Franz Josef 2)

…when you're in kind of the nature and stuff like that, you don't want little, like guide ropes to where you can only go … unless it's really important they don't want you stepping on endangered plants and stuff. But there's some you need to go with, to kind of feel like you're on the edge…

George (Wellington 2)

I've enjoyed struggling in some places because I feel like I'm not in a tourist destination. I feel like if everything was overly managed everywhere I wouldn't get that feeling sometimes.

Sally (Franz Josef 2)

While some participants felt all destinations should be managed others expressed the view that it depends on the type of destination or the type of traveller:

It depends on what the destination is. Like, with a city, you'd hope so. But if you're out in the wilderness that's quite exciting as well, if it's unmanaged.

John (Wellington 2)

There was a general awareness that tourism has impacts and causes places to change. Consequently management is needed to 'avoid chaos', to keep this development 'under control' and to 'keep places natural'. This was especially, but not exclusively, the case with national parks:

> *...I think that some of the national areas, like the national parks, they need to be managed just to manage the impact we as tourists are having ...*
> *...I mean we're here because it's beautiful and natural and you don't want ...have it overrun and trails everywhere...'*
>
> Suzette (Franz Josef 2)

Participants also showed an understanding of the different sorts of impacts which poorly managed destinations might have and recognized that poor management might affect not only tourists but also residents. This was particularly the case in Rotorua:

> *... Rotorua for example has probably quite a lot of tourists because of the things there are to do around, but if Rotorua itself wasn't carefully managed, I think you'd start to lose the tourism and then therefore it would have knock-on effects on the economy, etcetera, etcetera. So, I think it has to be managed or you're going to lose your tourists.*
>
> Neil (Rotorua 1)

> *... obviously tourism does completely change places, but you see like some examples of where they've obviously built the town planning around tourism, which actually sort of kills the whole sort of town in a way. And they should just take tourism as like input into the town ... they should still do it for the residents too, 'cause it is the place where they're going to live, and that's where the culture of the place comes out of...*
> *...in some places it is sort of quite contrived, and it just then puts off tourists and what they're actually going for.*
>
> Owen (Rotorua 2)

> *... if you're in a tourist town then you, as the resident, want to enjoy the amenity of the town without the tourists just kind of taking over. And because we live in a global world you have to be very careful about how you manage your resources, so, energy and being green and all of that sort of thing, so yeah, I think you can't, like, not manage it. But you've got to manage it for... not only the tourists, but the people that actually live here as well, so, that's probably harder to balance. Yeah.*
>
> Jean (Rotorua 3)

3.3 What needs to be managed?

When asked whether there was anything specific that needed to be managed in destinations much of the discussion focussed on issues that directly related to tourists. Marketing and the provision of information management were seen as important:

> *A tourist destination needs to be managed to the extent that it needs to be marketed, let people know more about it. And then once they're here, really*

help the people to get the most out of it, to meet their expectations, and to make it a memorable destination.

<div align="right">Colin (Rotorua 2)</div>

...if there was no management then people perhaps wouldn't visit because they wouldn't know where to go and what to do. ... you have to have some sort of tourist management to attract people as well as keeping people in line.

<div align="right">Lucy (Franz Josef 1)</div>

...management, in certain places, also shows you kind of the opportunities you wouldn't have thought of yourself... a certain management that gives you the focus, focus on what is worth to see, or how you can travel there... that's important....

<div align="right">Jeremy (Franz Josef 2)</div>

Information centres (i-SITES) received particular praise:

... it's just kind of giving people that little "i", the "i" of hope. You see the little "i" in a building and say, "Oh, okay, how do I get here, what do I do?" So it gives people a sense that they belong there, and there's facilities for them to use.

<div align="right">Jim *(Rotorua 2)*</div>

A number of issues associated with visitor management were also raised. Those in Franz Josef recognized the need for measures to ensure the safety of visitors while on the glaciers or in other natural areas but at the same time admitted that they had actually gone beyond protective barriers to get a better photo. Others pointed to the value of good signage, the provision of toilets, the need to regulate traffic to avoid problems of congestion and the importance of good roads and good local transport.

Participants in one focus group (Rotorua 1) felt some form of management was needed 'to make sure everybody does things properly and there's no sort of dodgy things going on and ripping people off'. Romania was given as an example, not Rotorua. Pricing was a related issue raised in another group (Franz Josef 1); whether it was possible to cap prices on attractions and whether there was a need for entrance fees to national parks (the no fee policy of New Zealand was contrasted with that of the United States). Some form of quality assurance scheme was seen as one possible response to these issues:

The Quality Mark thing [Qualmark]*, they've got over here, I think it's quite useful. Like there needs to be some kind of management of the standard of facilities that are provided for tourists partly so you can make an informed decision, whether what you're paying for is worth the money but also to stop the really crap hostels from existing that are dirty and everything. They've got to have some kind of basic level. I think management comes in there like restaurants, hostels, public toilets, all those kinds of things.*

<div align="right">Hannah (Wellington 1)</div>

Other than the larger issue of protecting areas and keeping them natural, the only specific environmental issue raised was that of making provision for recycling. Although tourism was seen as having an impact on residents there was no specific mention of management measures to be taken with regard to this group of stakeholders other than those relating to planning mentioned earlier. Limited discussion also occurred with regard to the roles of the business sector and councils:

> *… maybe the councils of the areas* [have] *got to ensure that they are allowing the small businesses and the things that are going to make the city different and stand out - allow them the ability to be able to set up their businesses and develop them freely and also like the marketing of maybe the city to other people as well.*
>
> Raymond (Wellington 1)

3.4 Destination boundaries

Participants were also questioned on the geographical extent of the destination they were at as the administrative boundaries of destinations are critical in terms of who is responsible for particular management functions. This issue was pursued in particular in the Franz Josef focus groups as the township of that name is one of two settlements servicing visitors to the glaciers located within Westland National Park (Figure 1). The national park is managed by the Department of Conservation whereas the townships fall under the Westland District Council. Specifically, respondents were asked: 'So what do you see as the destination here, is it the Franz Josef township, or is it the Franz Josef glacier, or is it Westland National Park, or is it the West Coast?' Responses varied, for some it was 'the glaciers', for others 'the town'. Whatever the case, it was quite clear it was the glaciers drawing visitors to the area:

> *I came here to go on a glacier, but I'm just in Franz Josef the town to sleep basically. A base I suppose…*
>
> Suzette (Franz Josef 2)

> *…it's just a means to an end; I mean you have to come to this town to go to the glacier so we are here.*
>
> Fanny (Franz Josef 3)

Most of the respondents were not aware the glaciers were in a national park and also did not see the wider West Coast region as their destination. In Wellington, the city itself, and in many cases just the city centre, was considered the destination. Rotorua was something of an intermediate case: some saw their destination as just being the city, for others the city was a base from which to visit outlying attractions.

4. Discussion

Practitioners and researchers involved with destination management might be both heartened and challenged by the responses from the focus group participants in this study. Their responses endorse the need for destination management and show a broad appreciation of why destinations should be managed. The participants see a need for destination marketing, value the provision of information and acknowledge

the importance of visitor management, three of the most common activities of DMOs (Wang & Pizam, 2011). At the same time, they strongly expressed the view that destinations should not be over-managed, that there should still be a place for discovery, for the excitement and self-reliance which comes with opportunities to 'feel you're on the edge'. Surprise and difference were also characteristics associated with good destinations. Discussion in the focus groups also highlighted the intangible nature of good destinations and emphasized that what made a destination good or poor was often something very personal which varied from individual to individual. The difference between good and poor destinations was also seen to be a function of the extent to which expectations were met or reality corresponded with the destination's image. Poor value for money and 'rip offs' were other characteristics of poor destinations cited with regard to what should be managed.

Some of these issues are of course well-established. The links between marketing, destination image and expectations are already underpinned by a large body of research and practice (Wang & Pizam, 2011) and the development of quality assurance schemes (Lopez-Toro et al., 2010) is one response to dealing with 'rip offs'. More challenging are the issues raised with regard to not over-managing coupled with the intangible and subjective nature of what constitutes a good destination. Where do the boundaries between effective destination management and over-management lie? Some parallels might be drawn with the related issues of carrying capacity and the limits of acceptable change (Butler, 2010). However, the matters being raised by the participants in this study do not appear to equate simply to such issues as levels of crowding but rather concern the tourists' perceptions of being managed and the extent of this management. Moreover, given the highly personal and subjective appreciation of what constitutes a good destination significant variations might be expected amongst tourists. What may create for one a feeling of frustration arising from a lack of information or poor signage may for another engender a sense of surprise and spontaneity.

In this regard, some of the most effective destination management might be that which tourists are unaware of but which nevertheless contributes to their enjoyment and sense of discovery and which fulfils other goals such as protection of the natural or built environment. As noted in Section 3.4, many of the participants in the Franz Josef focus groups had come to see the glaciers without being aware that they were located in a national park with all that that entails in terms of conservation and management. Similarly, many visitors to Wellington may appreciate the attraction and accessibility of the city's waterfront without being aware of all the underlying debate, council intervention, land-use regulation and development which have shaped its present character (Nguyen, 2010).

Conversely, some of the focus group responses suggest that particular aspects of a good destination may largely lie outside the destination managers' control, such as the 'people' and weather attributes (Table 2), a finding shared with the study by Griffin and Edwards (2012). Good host campaigns and measures to reduce adverse impacts on host populations may be used to foster friendly attitudes towards tourists but it is less clear how destination management might strengthen the 'people you are with' aspect deemed to be an important attribute of a good destination.

The views summarized in Table 2 generally support the large body of research on importance performance analysis, a common tool in destination management (Griffin & Edwards, 2012), while indicating that in the debate over how these dimensions are conceptualized and used greater attention might be given to expectations (Huan, Beaman & Shelby, 2002; Oh, 2001; Wade & Eagles, 2003). The elements in the table underline the value of obtaining the tourists' views on what might be included in such studies while the absence of bi-polarity in some of the attributes (difference, people you are with, not value for money) suggests more attention might be given to Kano, Seraku, Takahasi and Hinshitu's (1984) three factor theory which distinguishes quality in terms of three categories of attributes: basic, excitement and performance (Deng, 2007).

While the location and methodology used in the two studies differ, the findings in Table 2 might also be compared with Bornhorst et al.'s (2010) study into supply-side stakeholders' perspectives on what constitutes destination success. The five themes that emerged from the Canadian study were: economic success, internal stakeholder interaction, product and service offerings, effective marketing and quality of visitor experiences. Although expressed differently, there is a large degree of overlap between the last three themes and those in Table 2. However, the tourists did not mention either economic success or internal stakeholder interaction, even though that may be critical to the delivery of their own visitor experiences, and the supply side stakeholders (e.g. sector managers and DMO executives and chairs) showed little appreciation of the importance to the tourists of personal motivations and expectations.

It is also instructive to compare the current destination management activities in the three study locations with the views expressed by the focus group participants. Table 3 provides a summary of the main activities in the key strategies and plans for the three destinations. Franz Josef is the only one with an explicit 'destination management plan' (Tourism Resource Consultants, 2009). The regional tourism organizations of Wellington and Rotorua have, respectively, prepared a visitor strategy (Positively Wellington Tourism, 2008) and a business plan (Destination Rotorua Tourism Marketing, 2011).

[insert Table 3 about here]

Comparison of the participants' views with the strategies and plans of the three destinations reveals a fair level of degree of concordance. The documents generally cover a wider range of issues but the tourists' views offer further insights into how some of these might be addressed. Both the plans and the tourists stress the importance of marketing, visitor information and access. However, with the latter the tourists mainly mentioned local access whereas the plans in Wellington and Rotorua also underlined the strategic importance of facilitating external access. The plans' emphasis on product development is in line with the participants' view that good destinations offer a range of things to do and experience. The focus group responses suggest the main challenges here are to ensure that expectations are met and that products are developed in a way that does not seem too contrived and still offers surprise and spontaneity. The claim made in the Wellington strategy that an exciting and interesting destination is good for visitors and residents alike and the Rotorua proposal for CBD developments for both groups also resonate with participants'

views that destinations should not be managed just for tourists. In general, however, the tourists did not refer to infrastructure, support services and community services. The priority given in the Franz Josef plan to enhancing and sustaining the visitor experience in the glacier valleys matches the stress the participants put on the attraction of the glaciers and, for many, the glaciers being the destination. However, there was little that emerged from the Franz Josef focus groups to indicate that destination management should embrace the broader support measures to the local community that feature in the plan, however important they might be for sustaining the tourists' base for visiting the glaciers.

5 Conclusions

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the need to extend research on destination management to tourists and to incorporate their views in preparing and implementing destination management strategies while at the same time acknowledging that they should not be the sole focus of the research nor of the strategies. Rather, comprehensive destination management should take account of the views of all stakeholders, however demanding that might be in terms of resources and methods. The tourists' perspective should be considered not just in terms of more conventional topics, such as satisfaction or destination image, but also with regard to destination management *per se*. Incorporating the views of tourists can bring a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to managing destinations and provide a means of assessing current practices and strategies. In particular, this study has not only shown what might be managed (in particular, destination marketing, information provision and visitors), but also drawn attention to the importance of considering the nature of management and over-management and determining where the boundaries between these might lie.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, future research might be extended to other destinations and other types of tourists to examine the generality of these findings and to investigate whether location and forms of tourism influence tourists' perspectives on destination management and the issues that are important to them. How, for instance, might the views of packaged tourists to coastal resorts differ from those of the independent travellers engaged in circuit tourism who were the subjects of this study? With some of the broader issues having been identified here scope exists now to focus in on and drill down into more specific topics. In particular, how are tourist experiences influenced by destination management and what constitutes over-management of destinations?

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