Barriers to sustainable tourist air travel: Liminoid space, multiple identities and performance

Scott Cohen
University of Surrey, United Kingdom

James Higham
University of Otago, New Zealand

Arianne Reis
Southern Cross University, Australia

One route to mitigating the negative environmental impacts of air travel is to influence public behaviour towards flying less for leisure-related purposes. The viability of this approach, which sits within a wider rubric of behaviour change, in which governments seek to encourage positive lifestyle choices amongst individuals, rather than develop restrictive policy, rests on the assumption that behaviour will be sustained consistently across domestic day-to-day and tourism contexts. However, behaviour is often inconsistent and contradictory, especially so within tourism practices, which are often symbolically valuable sites of non-rational consumption.

Deploying modern theory on liminoid space and postmodern theory on identity and performance, this paper examines some of the barriers to sustainable tourism air travel behaviour in light of these contrasting sociological perspectives. Based on 50 open-ended, semi-structured interviews carried out in Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom, the findings demonstrate that despite participant attitudinal concern over the environmental impacts of air travel, their actual tourism air travel behaviour is fraught with contradictions and inconsistencies.

We explain these contradictions and inconsistencies using first modern, and then postmodern, sociological perspectives, but the implications of either means of analysis for the prospects of governments relying on individual behaviour change remain the same: behavioural adaptations motivated by environmental concern do not necessarily, and often do not, transfer across to tourism practices.

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