Spring break’s social impacts in Cancun: An ongoing qualitative analysis of local views

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**ABSTRACT**

Spring break is a tourism phenomenon consisting of thousands of North American college students travelling to beach resorts in the United States, the Caribbean and Mexico. Existing research has revealed that the ‘excessive’ behaviour of students include high levels of alcohol consumption, illegal drugs and other hedonic activities. While relatively much is known on the behavioural patterns of students, limited knowledge exists on the social impacts of spring break on local populations. This paper aims to fill this gap by presenting the findings of a research project looking at the social effects of spring break in Cancun, Mexico and South Padre Island, the USA. In Mexico, the project was methodologically split into two phases; the first was a qualitative stage aiming to get a deep understanding of residents’ perceptions of spring break impacts through in-depth interviews; the second was a survey intended to sample the population on the same issue. The findings presented here correspond to the preliminary analysis of the first phase of the research in Mexico. It seems that spring break’s economic benefits only accrue to very specific hotels, restaurants and night clubs, thus the extended economic benefits to the general population are highly questionable. On the other hand, the social costs of spring break are closely related to the behaviour of students in the locality. Locals perceive that students ‘misbehave’ in public and that they are not penalised for this. This has led to resentment in the local population. They perceive that, as compared with spring break students, they are treated differently and in a discriminatory manner by both local authorities and businesses.

**KEYWORDS**: spring break, tourism impacts, Cancun, Mexico