

The British **host: just how welcoming are we?**

Abstract

Despite the rise in international education, there is a lack of literature on the domestic student perspective. This paper redresses the balance somewhat and reports findings from a qualitative study of British student attitudes to the presence in large numbers of international students on their tourism management programme. Analysis revealed home students to be empathetic, flexible and eager to learn about new cultures. This mindset was attributed by participants to their desire to work in the international tourism industry and their understanding that tourist satisfaction increases in line with host receptivity. A simultaneous trend of segregation in the home and international student body was revealed: this was interpreted as an inevitable desire to gravitate towards similarity in a multicultural setting.

Key words

International students tourism education welcome host/tourist relationships

INTRODUCTION

Educational tourism is described by Ritchie, Cooper and Carr (2003) as travel to a destination to participate in formal learning experiences: education and learning are the main drivers of travel. Educational tourism represents a significant proportion of inbound tourism, particularly to the key competitors of the UK, the US, Australia and Canada (Cushner and Karim 2004; Ryan and Carroll 2005). Indeed Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe (2008) note that international students constitute around 20% of all international tourists, making student travel a multibillion dollar business. Over the last decade, the number of international students studying in the UK has soared, and their recruitment by British universities has steadily grown (the United Kingdom Council for International Students Affairs, UKCISA, 2009).. Within the UK context, international students make up 13% of the total student population, with the percentage varying across institutions.

The relationship between income generation and overseas recruitment in Higher Education (HE) has been well documented: income from international students plays an important role in the financial health of the HE sector, representing almost a third of the total fees income for universities and HE colleges in the UK. The advent of full-cost fees means that most British HE institutions are dependent on income from international students (Ryan and Carroll 2005; Van Hoof and Verbeeten 2005), and the local economy has also been shown to benefit from the presence of increased numbers of international students (Ritchie, Cooper and Carr 2003). Furthermore, educational tourists make a significant contribution to the local, regional and national tourism industry, though this is an under-researched area (Llewellyn-Smith and McCabe 2008).

Accompanying the steady rise in the number of international students in global HE has been a growth in the research dedicated to the international sojourn, defined by Ward et al. (2001) as temporary between-culture contact, with adjustment being one of several interests. Given the economic dependence of universities on the fees from international students, and the increased competitiveness in their recruitment, it is recognised that practitioners need a clear understanding of the issues facing them if an optimum service is to be delivered, so that student retention is improved and positive word of mouth acts to increase recruitment (Ryan and Carroll 2005; National Union of Students 2004; UKCISA 2009).

This understanding can also be applied to the leisure tourist market, as a survey commissioned by VisitBritain (2009a) reveals: 78% of tourists strongly agreed that if they felt welcome, they were more likely to recommend Britain as a tourist destination to friends and family. If a warm welcome is not forthcoming, it is likely that the host's anger, apathy, or mistrust will result in their reluctance to repeat visit, and impact negatively upon the destination image (Gurseley et al. 2002).

Thus far, almost all research into international education has focused on the international student perspective; this is understandable given the need to support this growing market that is key to HE financial health. The following recurrent themes have been identified in this growing body of research: academic cultural dissonance, culture shock, identity confusion, language difficulties and friendship patterns. A recurrent finding is that a lack of host contact is experienced by international students, resulting in their disenchantment and demoralisation. Studies on the international student perspective have pointed to an unfriendly, unapproachable and indifferent host, and some studies have documented racism (Furnham and Erdman 1995; Volet and Ang 1998; Spencer-Rodgers 2001; Ward et al. 2005; de Vita 2005; Sovic 2008; Brown 2009a).

These findings raise questions about the welcome offered by the UK as a tourist destination to its international tourists, which totalled 31.9 million in 2008 (Office for National Statistics 2009). Indeed, the

receptivity of the host community was identified as a key issue to be addressed in the tourism strategy for 2012 and beyond (DCMS 2007), and the Welcome to Britain campaign was set up in 2009 to improve the welcome to all tourists (VisitBritain 2009a). The welcome received by overseas tourists has long been recognised as a weakness for the British tourism industry, both by those charged with promoting Britain overseas, and also by private sector industry leaders (VisitBritain 2009).

Recent research has shown the extent of this problem, with a Visitor Satisfaction Survey of holidaymakers from key European source markets showing that the UK achieved an overall tourist satisfaction score of 68 (this is based upon five key areas including welcome and friendliness of people), below the European mean of 78 (Johnson, 2008). The National Brands Index shows a similar problematic situation, with the UK ranked 14th out of 50 countries for its perceived welcome, despite the overall country brand being ranked fourth (Nation Brands Index 2008, cited in VisitBritain 2009a). Of interest to this study is that the UK was seen to be less welcoming among those from non English-speaking countries (People 1st 2007), the main market of the Tourism Masters programme followed by this study's participants.

Meanwhile, an increased presence of international students in British HE has put pressure on institutions to improve their product and to develop internationalisation strategies in order to attract international students and to provide an environment in which domestic and international students can benefit from their confrontation with diversity. In 2005, Ward called for research into the host student perspective so that the phenomenon of domestic-international student contact could be illuminated and addressed. This qualitative study answers this call, documenting British postgraduate students' response to the presence of significant numbers of international students on their programme of study in tourism management.

UKCISA statistics (2009) show that of over 300,000 international students in British HE, over a third are postgraduates. Meanwhile, the majority of postgraduate students in the UK, particularly on tourism programmes, are international; the implications of this for the domestic student have not been recorded before. This paper aims to uncover domestic students' attitudes towards their international peers, and to answer an important question: just how welcoming are 'we' to tourists to the UK? It reports on the key themes to emerge from this study: adaptability to diversity, the development of intercultural competence and somewhat conversely the tendency to segregation, and finally the unique status of the student of Tourism Management. Implications will be drawn for HE, for the tourism industry and for tourism educators.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of friendship groups in the adjustment experiences of sojourners, including international students, has been well documented (Hamburg and Adams 1967; Kim 1988; Furnham and Erdmann 1995; Ward and Kennedy 1999; Ward 2005). In their typology of friendship, which is still cited today, Bochner et al. (1977) and Dyal and Dyal (1981) found three categories: the host national friend, who acts as a cultural informant, the co-national who acts as a reference of values from the home culture and other nationality friends who act as a general social network.

Ward et al. (2001) are not alone in referring to contact with the host as the most important friendship bond; although multicultural and monocultural friendships are valued for their stress-reducing capacity, host nationals promise the route to improving language and host cultural knowledge, which in turn facilitate successful adjustment in the new culture. This is acknowledged in empirical studies which document international students' hope for and attachment to bicultural bonds with the host; they are quick to perceive the benefits associated with host contact of improved language capability, increased satisfaction with the total student experience and greater host communicative competence (see Kim 2001; Ward 2001; Toyokawa and Toyokawa 2002; Brown 2009a).

Though HE internationalisation strategies aim to foster an environment in which contact between domestic and international students can be made, successive surveys and studies of international student friendships document their disappointment over an elusive host contact. Their expectations of interacting with the host are usually unfulfilled as contact is described in most studies of friendship patterns as rare or non-existent (Ward 2001). The perceived reasons for this lack of contact are indifference, aloofness and racism (Pai 2006; Brown 2009a).

Meanwhile, it is often argued that for domestic students, studying and living on a multi-cultural campus promises the development of intercultural competence that will lead to personal growth, improved career prospects and greater social cohesion both locally and globally (Huntingdon 1997; Gudykunst 1998; Cushner and Karim 2004). Extended cross-cultural contact is imbued with the power to transform individuals into intercultural mediators who learn to grow beyond the psychological parameters of any one culture (Bochner 1981; Gudykunst 1998). The benefits of intercultural contact are not only accessible by international students but also by domestic students who can increase their intercultural skills without even leaving home (Leask 2007).

According to Ward (2005), this idealised account of the university campus is hypothesised and unsupported empirically. We could go further, and suggest that it is marketing hype put forward by HE institutions which have not corroborated their claims through empirical evidence from research into the host perspective. Though we acknowledge the link made between tourism and transformation in studies of international students and other categories of tourist, findings have not always been consistent (Alvarez et al. 2009), and change has not usually been related to contact between host and tourist, but to distance from the origin culture (see Brown 2009b; Hayes 2007; Madison 2006).

Despite claims for the benefits of internationalisation at policy level, many practitioners in HE have observed a lack of integration between student groups (Brown and Peacock 2007; Leask 2007; Killick 2007). As de Vita (2005, p. 75) states, “the ideal of transforming a culturally diverse student population into a valued resource for activating processes of international connectivity, social cohesion and intercultural learning is still very much that, an ideal.” Instead, a pattern of ghettoisation has long been observed, with interaction taking place within conational groups, and with the willingness to leave the confines of the monoethnic group being a rare phenomenon (Ward and Chang 1997; Gu et al. 2008; Sovic 2008; Brown 2009c).

In reference to the tourism experience, it is acknowledged that the host community plays an important role in the successful operation of tourism at the destination (Gursey et al. 2002); for tourism to develop sustainably, harmonious relationships must be maintained between host and tourists (Zhang et al. 2006). These form an important part of the destination image; the experiences tourists have at the destination may lead to change in image (Alvarez et al. 2009). For a positive experience, tourism requires the host to welcome tourists, to extend friendship, courtesy and hospitality and to tolerate inconvenience (Ap 1992). This in turn requires a positive host attitude to tourism, a subject into which there has been a substantial body of research (Snepenger et al. 2001; Fredline & Faulkner 2000; Ritchie & Inkari 2006). Such studies have been categorised as community or “extrinsic” studies, where variables that affect the whole community are studied, and individual or “intrinsic” studies, which focus on individuals within the community and variations in their attitudes or opinions toward tourism (Williams and Lawson 2001; Faulkner and Tideswell, 1997). The latter studies recognize the fact that as tourism can create both positive and negative impacts on communities, residents are likely to hold different attitudes (Zhang et al. 2006; Gursey *et al.* 2002; Williams and Lawson 2001; Ritchie & Inkari 2006), and researchers have studied many factors affecting individual attitudes, including: attachment to the community or length of residence, knowledge about the industry, contact with tourists, political and demographic position in society, sociodemographic characteristics, type and form of tourism, and economic benefits derived from tourism (see Gursey et al. 2002 and Williams and Lawson for a detailed review).

When considering domestic student attitudes, the results section will explore how individual attitudes are affected by such factors, primarily focusing on knowledge of the industry, and contact with tourists.

As well as exploring individual factors, this study will also consider relevant theories that have been applied in previous host-tourist studies to explain both community and individual attitudes to tourism. Among the theories used to explain community attitudes are the step-based models such as Doxey's (1975) Irridex model which proposes that community attitudes to tourism pass through a series of stages as tourism develops. This sits in contrast with Hofstede's (2001) claim that increased exposure to tourists, and to cultural diversity, reduces resentment and encourages a polycentric attitude. Doxey's work has been developed by others including Ap and Crompton (1993), who rather than seeing attitudes passing through a series of stages, suggested instead that individuals have a range of strategies they may adopt, ranging from embracement to withdrawal. This understanding of adjustment to flux is also found in the sojourner adaptation literature, for example, Martin and Harrell (2004) describe the adjustment journey as a fluctuating, curvilinear process, informed by a variety of internal and external factors.

To help explain what strategies individuals may adopt, Ap (1992) considered social exchange theory to be the most appropriate, where individuals evaluate the outcomes of entering into an exchange, and if perceived as beneficial "may extend friendship, courtesy and hospitality" (p.6) in exchange for benefits. However, this theory has not been universally accepted, and others have proposed social representation theory to help understand resident attitudes (Pearce et al. 1996; Fredline and Faulkner 2000; Zhange et al. 2006; Ritchie and Inkari 2006). It is how individuals form representations of objects and events around them that is important, and social representation theory suggests that direct experience and social interaction as well as the media all play a part in this (Fredline and Faulkner 2000; Zhange et al. 2006; Ritchie and Inkari 2006).

As noted by Ritchie and Inkari (2006), representations are resistant to change, however direct contact and social interaction with tourists will provide hosts with more information upon which to base their representations, and this may act as a catalyst for change in perceptions (Pearce et al. 1996; Fredline and Faulkner 2000). This was supported by research into working tourists in Israel, in which Pizam et al. (2000) found that intergroup contact can enhance understanding and acceptance. However, whether contact leads to change in community and tourist perceptions is a contested subject, and Alvarez et al. (2009) and Brown (2009b) call for further research in this area.

This unique study aims to further our understanding of the process and outcome of intergroup contact between cultures, filling some of the gap in our understanding of the experiences of domestic students in an internationalised university setting, and shedding light on the reception offered by members of the host community to international tourists.

DOMESTIC STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INTERNATIONALISED TOURISM MASTERS EDUCATION

Study methods

The aim of this study is to explore tourism postgraduate students' experiences of and responses to studying alongside international students. The research setting was the Graduate School of a university in the south of England. Of an annual intake of around 150 postgraduate students, the overwhelming majority are usually international students. Most are from Southeast Asia, which reflects the most common source of international students for UK universities (UKCISA, 2009); approximately one-third are from Europe, Africa, or the Middle East.

A purposive sample of participants was chosen: all twelve British students on a Masters programme in tourism management (in the academic year 2008/9) were invited in person and by email to be involved in semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences of studying on an internationalised programme. It was decided to conduct interviews rather than questionnaires as it was felt that the qualitative approach offered the researchers the chance to delve deeply into participants' feelings and attitudes. However, it is acknowledged that the interview does not allow anonymous responses, and the researchers and reader alike have to question the degree of honesty permitted in the face-to-face interview, even if the interviewer sought to elicit honest opinion in the form of persistent probing, as Simon's response reflects: *I'm not hiding any negative feelings.*

Ethical approval to undertake this study came from the university's Research Ethics Committee; participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. The researchers did not mark students' work and had no input in assessment; furthermore no financial incentive was offered: these were important ethical considerations. The brief interviewee profile offered below includes a pseudonym (to protect confidentiality), marital status, age and gender.

Brian, married, 27, male

Diana, married, 51, female

Jane, married, 36, female

Simon, single, 28, male

Emily, single, 24, female

Dorothy, single, 41, female

Cheryl, single, 22, female

John, single, 22, male

Laura, single, 22, female

Rachel, single, 24, female

Natalie, single, 25, female

Bianca, single, 40, female

All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity at the start of their interview when they were given a brief introduction to the research topic. A very flexible interview guide was prepared, however the initial questions were sufficient to get participants talking. The interview proceeded according to the issues raised by participants, which reflected their priorities. As recommended by Mason (2002), the interviewer was flexible and spontaneous in terms of the lines of enquiry pursued: the hallmarks of the semi-structured interview are its flexibility, its responsiveness to the interviewee and the researcher's ability to think on their feet (ibid). Thus interviews differed among the participants in response to the issues of concern raised by them: recurrent themes were identified during the analysis process, but there was predictably divergence in the emphasis placed by students on the relative importance of each theme.

Interviews took place in one of the researchers' offices, and were recorded by digital recorder. As advised by Mason (2002), interviewees' physical comfort was attended to: lighting was not too bright, seating was comfortable, a hot or cold drink was supplied and was replenished, the phone was taken off the hook, and a 'do not disturb' sign was put on the door. The demeanour of the researcher has an impact on the quality of the data generated as well as on the emotional comfort of the interviewee (O'Reilly 2005), thus we made sure that we were friendly and attentive, and that eye contact was maintained. O'Reilly (2005) advises that the interview *should* feel like a conversation with a friend, but as Mason (2002) mentions, the effort needed to sustain conversation in the in-depth interview can be tiring; this was particularly pertinent in this study as interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

All interviews were transcribed in full by the researchers: this has the advantage of bringing them close to the data, allowing them to recall incidents from the day of the interview and permitting initial analysis to take place during transcription when nascent ideas may form (Daymon and Holloway 2002). Subsequently, transcripts were printed and repeatedly read, in order to get a sense of the whole. Then we began to code the interview data: coding entailed separating and labelling the data, which were placed into broader categories. The research categories that emerged from the data therefore reflect participants' priorities. These were: being in a minority; adapting to the majority; being a tourism student; gravitating to sameness.

With regard to the generalisability of findings, qualitative researchers acknowledge that a small sample and the selection of one case makes it difficult to move to general classifications (Mason 2002). Nevertheless, they often claim that similar settings should produce similar data, such that theory-based generalisation, involving the transfer of theoretical concepts found in one situation to other settings and conditions, is possible (Daymon and Holloway 2002). As Hammersley (1992, p. 16) argues, it is possible to produce research that identifies generic features: “to find the general in the particular; a world in a grain of sand.” The setting for this research explicitly enables the transfer of the findings to similar settings, namely, HE institutions where international students, particularly at postgraduate level, outnumber the domestic student body. Furthermore, postgraduate numbers have been consistently over the recent years targeted for increase; postgraduate programmes are usually internationalised; and there is a sizeable and growing market of applicants (UKCISA 2009). Therefore there is a growing transferability of findings to other institutions.

Being in a minority

Surprise described participants’ reactions to the mixed-nationality student group which they joined on induction day for their Tourism Masters programme in late September 2008, when they found themselves outnumbered by international students. This is revealed in the following typical comments:

It was a very big surprise actually, and it was also a surprise to the foreign students as well. John

It was a surprise, it is very different! I just looked round and could see that everybody was international.
Laura

I was a bit bewildered at the beginning that there were not many English people there, it was like ‘ooh’, surprise, no English people. Simon

To be honest I was very shocked, I didn’t know there would be any international students, it wasn’t stated anywhere. There was so many, I couldn’t believe it, I felt like a minority in my own country, I wasn’t expecting it. It made me feel like I’m in a different country. Its weird, it sounds horrible, but I don’t know if I would have taken my course if I had known. I didn’t sign up for an international course.
Emily

Participants had not known that their programme was international; for a few like Emily, this may have influenced their decision to study at the institution. This points to the need for communication of such pre-arrival information for all, not only, international students. This informational approach focuses on the acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills to ease adjustment (Cushner and Karim 2004). Biddle (1979) describes this as anticipatory socialisation, a coping strategy used to remove or minimise stress in the new environment, which was present among the domestic as well as the newly-arrived international student.

Participants were also anxious that they would not make many friends in a culturally diverse setting, social interaction being one of the drivers behind their decision to study in HE and at this particular institution. The importance of social life to university students is supported by Moogan and Baron (2003), who found that prospective students also considered leisure and social factors as important influences in their decision regarding where to study. The fear of loneliness was noticeable, and this was surprising to the researchers, as previous studies have highlighted loneliness among international, not domestic, students (Brown and Holloway 2008):

I was a bit apprehensive and a little bit scared that I wouldn’t make any friends as I was the only British

student, they might not need to bother with me. Laura

It did make me feel lonely to be honest, I was really revved up to make new friends, and it made me feel very lonely because I was English. Emily

Nevertheless, participants quickly found that their misgivings were unfounded, as Simon reflected:

It quickly lifted, you get talking to people and they talk a lot of English. Simon

Moreover, as Brian noted:

I think the only time it becomes an issue in a minority is when you are discriminated against.

Mitigating the degree of negativity experienced by participants was their own experience of international travel and exposure to cultural difference:

It didn't bother me because of my background from living overseas for so long; it didn't faze me.
Brian

I guess I would be more prepared for it because I travel a lot. Simon

I've travelled quite a lot, my parents live in America and in England, and I've always had that sort of international perspective. Cheryl

The value of prior international experience in the degree of anxiety felt by actors in the cross-cultural situation is acknowledged in the empirical and theoretical literature on transition to a new culture. Gudykunst and Nishida (2001) argue that successful adjustment is a function of anxiety management; the more familiar sojourners are with change, the more flexible they are and the more capable they are of withstanding the stress of the new and unfamiliar. Familiarity with uncertainty acts to diminish fear of the unknown. Though this theory was developed in the study of the international sojourner, including tourists, it can also be applied to the domestic community faced with a change in its demography. A question also worth considering is that it is possible that tourism students might have travelled more often than students of other disciplines, and are consequently less resistant to change. This is supported in a handful of studies into the impact of travel on the tourist, which have documented an increase in confidence and flexibility (Tucker 2005; Hottola 2004; O'Reilly 2006; Brown 2009b).

Adapting to the majority

Interaction with their international peers raised participants' awareness that language proficiency varied from student to student, and that a low language level posed an obstacle to both well-being and to communicative ease. This is supported in the literature on adjustment: a good grasp of the host language is an important variable in learning about and fitting into the new culture (Hofstede 2001; Ward et al. 2001; Brown 2008a). Moreover, poor language skills can provoke feelings of ineptitude and lead to a desire to avoid the stress induced by communication errors; a trend towards ghettoisation results (Kim 2001; Brown 2009c). It was understood early on that the varying language and cultural skills displayed in the internationalised cohort called for the British students to adjust their usual communication style accordingly.

I am very aware that I have to change how I speak. You have to be aware that if you are speaking to a non native speaker, you have to try not to overcomplicate until you know the level of the language they can speak. You don't have to treat people like idiots but just until you can gauge "ok this person can speak

perfect English, I'll carry on as normal." Brian

I might have used different words or rephrased things, it's not a negative; I don't go home and say, 'God!'
Cheryl

You do adapt. You have to think about it; it makes me speak slower and use easier words. You do get really tired; you can't really start a conversation even if it's a simple conversation, and they must feel the same.
Simon

With the foreign students you just have to bear it in mind, that you have to make a bit more of a conscious effort. John

I think there was a big steep learning curve about how you can phrase things with the international students. Diana

The above comments reveal among participants a high degree of empathy for the newly-arrived international student who was struggling to cope in an alien academic and sociocultural setting, and this informed their willingness to modify their usual speech and delivery patterns. The importance of this attribute in communication is acknowledged by Goffman (1972) in his work on stigmatisation: crucial to communicative success is the willingness in one or both parties in the interaction episode to rescue and safeguard the other from distress. According to Ryan (2005), the willingness of the native speaker to adapt their mode of communication is a vital component of successful cross-cultural communication. Participants found it easy to imagine the problems faced by their peers, especially if they themselves had confronted the stress inherent in transition (Kim 2001). This is revealed in Diana's heartfelt comment:

I felt a bit maternalistic. My maternal instinct kicked in. You know, I go home to my husband and kids every night; they go back to a family where nobody might speak to them or they might go back to a bedsit where they are living on their own. They are miles away from their home and, if I can help them a bit with what they are going through in the day, I will.

This finding flies in the face of the image portrayed in studies of friendship patterns on the university campus of the disinterested domestic student (see Spencer-Rodgers 2001; Ward 2005; Brown 2009a). It was felt that the onus was on the host to adapt; this contradicts the popular and theoretical discourse of migration, which places the adaptability of the sojourner at the heart of adjustment success. The acquisition of such flexibility is also valuable for those pursuing a career in an international service industry, such as tourism (Southal 2009). It was understood that this skill would be necessary if they travelled for their job, even if they moved to a setting where English was the lingua franca of communication. As Sappal (2003) points out, managers with the ability to work and manage across cultures are rare and in increasing demand.

An interesting finding emerged from this study: the problems faced by their international peers acted to offset the stress British students felt about doing a Masters course, usually after a hiatus from HE. Such anxiety about resuming study is common among returning students (Merrill 1999; Bowl 2003). Before arrival on induction day, participants mentioned feelings of inferiority, inadequacy and inconfidence that abated as they were called upon to help others:

Would I be good enough, would I be clever enough? It was the fear of not succeeding, to go through all that work and then fail at the end of it, that was what frightened me I think. We'd end up sitting down and we'd find ourselves sitting next to someone who'd actually say 'excuse me, do you mind....I didn't understand something'....and it was nice to then help that person because you felt, oh, maybe it's not just me. Diana

It really built my confidence that other cultures looked up to me. If I was in a British class I would've worried more about what they were thinking of me. Rachel

I'm a little bit shy and a bit quiet. I have grown to be more confident. John

Participants commented that their shyness and nervousness tended to dissipate in the face of increased and justified anxiety in others. Realising that they had the advantage of familiarity with most academic conventions in British HE and of linguistic superiority, many participants described a feeling of relief and of responsibility for their class mates who were confronting greater stress and anxiety than they could imagine. This is supported in several successive studies of the stress generated by studying in a foreign language and academic culture (see Brown 2008b for a review). Time spent as a mature student in HE can be transforming (Bowl 2003), as can the international sojourn (Milstein 2005; Brown 2009b), but this is the first time that studying alongside international students has been shown to be an agent of change.

Being a tourism student: a unique perspective?

The academic programme and the future career of participants were both cited as key variables in the degree of empathy and openness shown towards international students, as Brian's comment indicates:

I think because of the nature of the subject, tourism, I think it has a massive international element to it anyway; if you are doing tourism, you are obviously interested in other cultures.

In their theoretical work on intercultural communication, Detweiler (1975, 1980) and Gudykunst (1998) use the term category width to describe the degree of tolerance of diversity displayed by the sojourner. The broad categoriser is open to and accepting of difference, whereas the narrow categoriser is rigid and averse to change. It was the view of participants that the type of person drawn to work in the tourism industry and therefore onto a tourism academic programme is necessarily open to and inquisitive about new cultures; in other words, they are broad categorisers. This opinion is supported by Sappal (2003) and Southal (2009) who argue that an international industry such as tourism demands a flexible management and service approach. This begs the question then: are domestic students following a different discipline as sympathetic and flexible as the portrait offered in this study?

Not only would tourism students be more tolerant and accepting of difference, but they would also benefit from the opportunity offered by the internationalised environment to increase their cultural learning. This was seen to be transforming, in the same way that international travel is cast in the literature on tourism and transition as a catalyst for change (Hottola 2004; Milstein 2005; Muzaini 2006; O'Reilly 2006; Steyn and Grant 2006; Brown 2009b), and participants were excited about the chance this international programme represented for them to improve their cultural knowledge, as the following comments indicate:

I'm very interested in different cultures so it was great. When I go abroad I don't want British food or British people, I want the culture. Rachel

Studying alongside international students meant that we would get a completely diverse cultural input. The more the merrier! Bianca

It was going to be really interesting learning about people's backgrounds and cultures. Natalie

Such excitement also describes the international student response to national and cultural diversity (Brown and Holloway 2008), but this is the first time such positive feeling has been found in the domestic student cohort.

I think I'm more open and accepting now.

Cheryl

I have become more tolerant as a person.

Diana

It does change you just in little ways, just in how you are with people, you don't even realise it at first I don't think. I guess it taught me that you sort of judge people a bit quick, and that you shouldn't really.

Laura

Any prejudices are challenged, and its no bad thing for me and my fellow students to all have to develop some cultural awareness if not sensitivity.

Bianca

The above typical comments indicate the development of a culturally relativist mindset, defined as the recognition that no single culture has the absolute criteria for judging another (Hofstede 1991); according to Hofstede (2001), this is the most desirable outcome of culture contact. In this finding, our study supports Pearce et al. (1996) in suggesting the use of social representation theory to help understand resident attitudes: new information is received, through direct contact and social interaction with tourists, and this acts as a catalyst for change in perceptions (Pearce et al. 1996; Fredline and Faulkner 2000). Participants also described a confrontation with elements of their own culturally ingrained attitudes and behaviours, as John's comment reveals:

It makes you think about your culture too. It kind of startles you; you haven't really sat down and thought about it before.

It should be noted that a key component of cultural relativism is awareness of self: according to Hall (1976), this is an important step in cultural deprogramming.

Participants were aware that the intercultural contact afforded by the internationalised tourism programme would be beneficial in their future career in an international industry; it was a value-added extra to the academic syllabus. They pointed in particular to an increased confidence in negotiating cultural diversity; this was clearly a transferable skill:

I feel confident that I can go to some of these countries now because I am aware of what to expect, behaviour patterns, culture patterns, I can try some of the skills I have learnt from being here.

Diana

The main benefit for me is that never before could I imagine working abroad. I would definitely feel more confident now.

John

I definitely think I could get used to working with different cultures, even if it's in London! London is going to be multinational and international. You get used to dealing with different cultures, just trying to understand people talking different languages. Now I know that even if at first it might be a bit difficult, you can always communicate and work it out.

Laura

I have no fear of going to a different country or meeting completely different people.

Rachel

The importance attached by participants to the development of cultural sensitivity and of cultural knowledge, and of an increased understanding of tourist markets and destinations is corroborated by the increasing emphasis placed by international companies on intercultural competence as a key management attribute in an increasingly globalised working environment (Cushner and Karim 2004). This is also acknowledged in studies of travel and change by Hottola (2005) and O'Reilly (2006).

Indeed, People 1st, the Sector Skills Council for the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector in the UK, identified that the demand for cultural awareness skills was likely to increase during the next ten years (People 1st 2009). Providing excellent customer service is seen as an important differentiator by 82% of sector businesses surveyed by People 1st (2008), and in order to provide high quality service to overseas tourists, cultural awareness was one of the skills identified: “understanding cultural diversity and different customer’s needs will be vital in delivering ‘World Class’ customer service for 2012” (People 1st, 2007:78).

This is supported by research by the National Centre for Languages (2009), which argues that cross-cultural skills are essential in providing tourists with excellent service, and by Southal (2009) who claims a link between the level of cultural awareness within a tourism business and the perceived level of product/service quality by the tourist. This claim is vindicated by research by Sizoo et al. (2005), which found that interculturally sensitive employees in luxury hotels in Florida provided better service and were more attentive to the needs of overseas tourists. Meanwhile, Sinovics and Penz (2009) argue that difficulties caused by interaction between residents and tourists from different cultural backgrounds are one of the reasons for service encounter failures.

The hypothesis that culture contact increases cultural learning and that it is transforming for domestic students on the internationalised campus was therefore supported by our findings, which offer the empirical evidence called for by Ward (2001). Although domestic students did adopt a range of strategies when responding to their international peers, reflecting the ‘embracement withdrawal strategy continuum’ developed by Ap and Crompton (1993), it does appear that the extent to which they welcomed and embraced tourists was a function of the perceived benefit of any exchange.

In our study, it can be argued that domestic students accepted the international student presence *because* of the associated benefits from cross-cultural contact of increased cultural knowledge and learning. Regardless of the intrinsic motivation for establishing contact with their international peers, our study shows that intergroup contact *does* lead to change in cultural attitudes, and this also supports the use of social representation theory suggested by Pearce et al. (1996) to understand host attitudes, as direct experience led to changes in the representations held by domestic students.

Gravitating to sameness

In common with previous studies of international student networks (Furnham and Erdman 1995; Yang and Clum 1995; Wiseman, 1997; Ward and Rana-Deuba 1999; Ward 2001; Ryan 2005; Brown 2009c), this research uncovered a phenomenon of ghettoisation in the international student body. Students formed mononational friendship groups that were entrenched and observable to the rest of the cohort, as the following comments reveal:

One of the big problems international students suffer from is that they live in groups of their own nation or culture. There was definitely a grouping of Asians, they did everything together, especially the Thais - they all associated with Thais and there were very few Westerners who broke into the Thai circle. Brian

People from China, Thailand, they all stick to their groups. Emily

There was a rather large Asian cohort, they are still from different parts of Asia, but just because they are all Asian I think they just all stick together. Laura

Interestingly, participants were non-judgemental about this pattern of interaction, and in fact formed their own British friendship group, as these indicative comments reveal:

The herding instinct is probably normal behaviour when someone is in an alien environment. Bianca

It's natural it's easier. I can't have the same conversation with an international student as I can with a British student... I guess I would just be sort of relaxed mentally; you don't have to think about things so much. I think you shouldn't fight that, in the end it's up to them. Simon

The reality is that you will naturally find a community of your own nationality, we find our comfort zones. We can't blame the Asian students at all, they're doing what we do, everyone does it. At the end of the course, we had become so segregated. We formed very strong groups. Jane

Segregation into groups along national lines was seen to be natural, understandable and predictable, supporting the findings of both empirical and theoretical research on segregation. Participants identified the reasons for gravitation to points of similarity in a multicultural setting, including ease of communication:

Because of language barriers, they naturally regressed into their own groups. There was a complete divide. Jane

Well it's just easier isn't it? It's just easier being with people who talk the same language. Brian

It is all too easy to stick with your own; to speak a second language can be quite exhausting. Dorothy

It is quite nice to talk to people who speak English so you can talk lazier with the way you speak, so you don't have to explain jokes and stuff like that. Sometimes it's just a bit of a break. John

If I've spent time with other students, particularly if their English isn't as good, I can't wait to cut off, and don't really want to spend my free or leisure time doing more of the same with them. Bianca

I think I gravitated towards those who had a good command of English to start with. I don't know, maybe being able to speak openly and freely. Diana

The fatigue caused by speaking in a foreign language has been noted in studies of international students (e.g. Kramsch 1993; Brown 2008a), but it has not been observed in domestic students who also need a break from the ardour associated with cross-cultural communication. Borrowing Ap's (1992) use of social exchange theory to understand resident attitudes towards tourists, it can be posited that the cost of interaction, fatigue, outweighed at times the benefits: if the benefits of the tourist exchange are minimal, host members are likely to reduce their exchange behaviour or even discontinue and withdraw from an exchange relationship. The latter was clearly not the case in this research.

A further factor in self-segregation was the desire for interaction with same-culture members who shared the same sense of humour, which was clearly attributed by participants to cultural origin:

I was talking about this with John the other day. We thought that sometimes international students have a completely different sense of humour. The British sense of humour is a dry sense of humour and maybe more silly. It feels good that John is my British friend - he gets my humour. Rachel

I think its humour, it's a big thing, and some other cultures don't get the British humour. It can be a bit rude, as sarcasm is usually involved. Emily

Humour particularly is very important to me, and it does not always travel well! Bianca

The importance of shared humour is acknowledged in Arora's (2005) work on ethnicity, which describes the hallmarks of ethnic belonging as the comforting sense of shared origins, and the belief that ethnic group members are distinctive from other groups in some way.

Arora's use of the word 'comfort' is appropriate, as when describing the interaction with conationals, the words *comfort* and *home* were recurrent:

I suppose it feels like home. It's comforting to know that I have someone who understands me completely. Although I have other friends I don't feel that they can ever know me completely whereas John can because he is British. Rachel

You need someone like you, someone you can share experiences with, it's hard to explain. I think you feel more relaxed, more comfortable and you feel someone knows you. Emily

We gravitated straight away as soon as I realised they were British, I felt more comfortable just sitting by them to begin with. Maybe reassurance, I guess because if you are going to do anything new, you think 'if I stick with them, I will be alright'. At first I thought we were all quite glad to have each other. Laura

It was this comfort zone thing, thinking you kind of gravitate towards your own cultural background. Diana

Just as previous research into the adjustment of international students has found, in the face of cultural diversity, domestic students *also* sought out reassuring points of familiarity, which brought comfort and belonging. Such findings were mirrored in O'Reilly's (2000) ethnographic study of expatriate life in Fuengirola, which found that Britons retained a discrete identity to reinforce ethnic identification: their ethnic group provided the "safety-net into which they can fall and within which they can gain their sense of belonging" (p.145).

Segregation can also be driven by fear of prejudice and resentment, and Ingroup/Outgroup theory is often used to illuminate interaction patterns (see Crocker and Luhtanen 1990), but in this study, the drive to create monoethnic groups was to obtain comfort and identification, not to avoid conflict.

These findings undermine current discourses of multiculturalism and globalisation; it is often theorised that cultural homogenisation is increasing, that divergence is of decreasing relevance (Ritzer 1999). And yet, in times of flux, it appears that both tourist and host seek the familiar. This was also found in research by Sinovics and Penz (2009), who, in trying to explain host-tourist interaction, used the concept of social distance: this refers to the level of understanding and intimacy between groups, which may be differentiated by nationality (Williams 2007). Sinovics and Penz (2009) hypothesised that difficulties encountered between host and tourists from different cultural backgrounds were a result of social distance, and where this occurred residents would withdraw physically to avoid conflict, or where this is not possible achieve desired levels of distance by withdrawing psychologically.

The discovery of the importance of sameness in a multicultural setting undermines the notions that cultural uniformity will be the product of globalisation and increased culture contact (see Todres, 2002; Martin and Harrell 2004), and that globalisation will lead to an embracing of cultural diversity (see Featherstone 1995). The debate over cultural diversification and cultural homogenisation is likely to continue for some time yet, being a topic of relevance to an increasingly globalised world community.

Suggesting that exposure to diversity increases cultural identification, this paper poses the question, is the entrenchment of identity a more common response to cultural diversity than theorists of globalisation would have us believe? This finding has important implications for the understanding of multicultural society: as Pettigrew et al. (2007) state, there is a practical importance of research into intergroup contact,

whose findings can contribute to strategies for improving cross-cultural interactions and diminishing intergroup prejudice. It must be noted however that, as this study shows, segregation may not imply a lack of acceptance or interest in other ethnic groups; rather Gilroy's (2007) term *conviviality* better applies to the co-existence of segregated groups.

CONCLUSION

The increasing internationalisation of the university campus, which is only set to grow, carries implications for the experiences of the domestic student body. Opportunities are offered by the internationalised programme to foster intercultural dialogue: this is often credited with an increase in intercultural competence and in student employability. It has been hypothesised that these outcomes are offered not only to the international sojourner but also to the domestic student, and this paper provides empirical support for this claim. For the student who desires to work in an international industry such as tourism, the internationalised programme is therefore welcome.

This is a new finding: not only has the domestic student perspective been rarely documented, the tourism student experience of and attitude towards postgraduate provision has received little to no attention. Our study showed a clear enthusiasm for cultural learning and a pronounced empathy on the part of domestic students towards international students. The extent to which this was influenced by the programme of study followed is open to question: tourism students clearly have much to gain from intercultural experience before their career in the industry begins, and we may speculate that such students possess the attributes of openness and flexibility that aid cross-cultural communication. We can only wonder whether students of other disciplines would manifest a similar commitment to learn from their international peers.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding participant's recognition of the importance of cultural learning, this study echoes previous research in documenting a trend of self-segregation in the domestic and international student body. Given that existing research, including the present study, reveals a tendency among students *not* to maximise the cultural learning opportunity offered by the internationalised campus, it is arguable that the positive outcomes promised by cross-cultural contact are rarely optimised either by the home or international student body. It appears that the response to a multicultural environment is to interact with students of other nationalities at times and to gain relief and succour through conational interaction for the majority of students' leisure time. This gravitation to conational friends suggests that cultural identification is strong and withstands a changed environment; in some cases, it is strengthened.

It is commonplace in research documenting segregation to find recommendations and calls for action to stimulate increased cross-cultural interaction. For example, Gu et al. (2008) argue that whilst the emotional and interpersonal benefits of differing forms of interaction mean that *all* friendship bonds should be encouraged, more should be done by HE Institutions to encourage intergroup interaction so that the benefits associated with cross-cultural contact can be realised. The domestic student body has been particularly targeted for exhortations to change, and in the context of leisure and sport tourism, the need to improve receptivity is evidenced in VisitBritain's Welcome strategy for 2012.

However, the extent to which behaviour in the private sphere can be influenced and modified is questionable, especially if behaviour is culturally ingrained. As Hofstede's research shows, the UK is a highly individualist culture, in contrast with the collectivist background of the majority of international students. This differing score carries implications for differing attitudes towards social interaction. As O'Reilly (2000, p. 164) states, "contemporary Britain continues to exhibit ambivalence in its dealings with the outside world and with other cultures and societies."

Rather than encouraging a change in culturally ingrained behaviour and attitudes among the host community, we suggest that the international tourist be prepared for the national character of the host.

Whilst this study shows that domestic students are open and willing to learn about new cultures, it is suggested that behaviour and attitudes are culturally ingrained and resistant to change. The tourist must be pre-warned; the welcome extended by the host may be fleeting; it may be limited to superficial contact; the hand of friendship may not be extended as far as tourists might like.

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