

Towards Sustainable Tourism: Understanding Online Resistance Against Tourism Development Projects

This study provides an inquiry into the public online resistance against a large-scale infrastructure project in the Austrian Alps. Drawing on a methodological approach that combines critical discourse analysis (Alvesson und Karreman 2000; Fairclough und Wodak 1997) and critical visual analysis (Rose 2016), it analyses a highly successful online petition against the connection of two glacier ski resorts. The primary research question is how the signers of the online petition articulate their justification strategies and how these strategies are situated within wider social discourses.

Our study reveals a transnationally organized coalition against the project. We analyse the online comments by focussing on the interrelation of discursive *objects*, *subjects* and *concepts* (Caruana und Crane 2008). The online resistance is organised within an overarching *de-growth* discourse, which is dominated by three concepts: *nature*, *ski-tourism* and *future generations*. The primary discursive object is an abstract notion of *nature*, which materializes in *glaciers*, *landscape*, and *mountains*, and is seen within the discursive dichotomy of *untouched* or *destroyed*. The project proponents are framed as a *short-term*-, and *profit-oriented elite* that behaves *irrational*, *greedy*, and *insane*. The project itself is seen as the manifestation of a *capitalist market-force* (Fletcher et al. 2019; Valdivielso und Moranta 2019). The subjectivity of the activists is framed in opposition to the project opponents as of being *rational advocates* of *future generations*. Their behaviour is justified as *rational*, *responsible* and *long-term oriented*. Juxtapositions, which frame the relationships of subjects and objects, are *protect vs. destroy*, *resource vs. commons*, *short-term vs. long-term* and *nature vs. tourism*. Remarkably, many comments express a deeper concern with the *growth imperative* inherent to the capitalism-based tourism industry (Fletcher et al. 2019) rather than directly criticising the proponents or the project. An analysis of the discursive tactics (MacKay und Munro 2012) shows that the project proponents employ a strategy based on *relativizing* the scope and impact of the project and *delegitimizing* the petition by framing it as a decision of the local community.

Our research reveals the increasing power of civil society, as well as the conflict lines tourism development projects face in a digitally mediated society (Fazito et al. 2016; Fletcher et al. 2019). This study clearly shows that online resistance towards tourism development projects expands beyond the visitors/residents-dichotomy (e.g. Cheung und Li 2019). Rather, the conflict lines are situated between two subjectivities: immediate *economic profiteers* of the

project and a *transnationally organized online public*. The combination of critical discourse analysis and critical visual analysis turned out to be a fruitful methodological approach for analysing the wider political and social dynamics surrounding tourism development projects. This study suggests rethinking the legitimacy of tourism development projects beyond residents' perspectives. Our findings can be understood within wider political-economic context as the emergence of an increasingly concerned online public that feels responsible beyond national boundaries and questions the current economic logic of endless growth in tourism development.

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