

# Places, practices and (soft) power

Local Economy

2019, Vol. 34(7) 627–631

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DOI: 10.1177/0269094219889878

[journals.sagepub.com/home/lec](http://journals.sagepub.com/home/lec)**Nicholas Wise**  and **Kelly Maguire** 

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This special issue explores places, practices and (soft) power to examine issues pertinent to socio-economic inclusion and exclusion. Through the evaluation of these topics, further insight is offered on social, cultural and political impacts on places and local economies. Soft power is a term used widely in political geography, political science and international affairs. The term, coined by Nye (1990, 2004), refers to the ability to shape attitudes, perceptions and preferences through culture and/or political ideals in order to build a particular appeal, or create attractive (and affirmative) value. Academics in fields from international relations, marketing, sociology, urban/regional studies and human geography periodically engage with this term (e.g. Chatin and Gallarotti, 2019; Chitty et al., 2016; Surowiec, 2019), and it is useful to try and further explore this idea from international and interdisciplinary perspectives as it can influence and impact ongoing or ever-changing practices in different places. Critical scholars, such as Lefebvre (1991), Mitchell (2003) and Soja (1989), argue that the very semblance of power is framed around notions of inclusion and exclusion; therefore, it is important to assess insight surrounding the socio-economic considerations of soft power

based on different practices in different places.

The aim of this special issue is to evaluate, extend and relate discussions of soft power to critical conceptions of social impacts so that researchers, practitioners and policy makers can debate, discuss and further understand the affects and influences on places and local economies. Areas of study such as tourism and events offer much insight. These are important because of what they contribute to local economies and utilise elements of place and culture to persuade people to visit and attend (see Maguire and Hanrahan, 2016), as is the focus of several papers in this special issue. Also explored in this special issue are papers focusing on soft power in relation to migration, sport, local enterprise initiatives and concerns facing health inequalities. This positions the socio-economic focus of this special issue, to establish a platform for exploring issues of inclusion and exclusion influenced by soft power. The focus on soft power may put emphasis on spatially bounded areas

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experiencing gentrification or regeneration, concentrated in regions undergoing population change, migration or demographic transition, or based on political initiatives reinforced through popular culture, propaganda or fear. This special issue will draw insight from a range of international cases drawing from, contesting and uniting interdisciplinary perspectives to contribute nascent insight on social and critical theory to influence policy makers and practitioners and encourage community participation. The special issue will build on previous special issues that appeared in *Local Economy* (focusing on local community, place, policy and power) and *Bulletin of Latin American Research* (assessing sport and social transformation in Brazil) in 2017 and 2018, respectively (see Hall and Wise, 2019; Wise, 2017).

There are eight papers in this special issue, including four feature articles, two in perspective papers and two viewpoint papers. Federica Scaffidi's feature paper, 'Soft Power in Recycling Spaces: Exploring spatial impacts of regeneration and youth entrepreneurship in Southern Italy' concerns community involvement and active citizenship and explores processes involved with the 'social washing' of these ideas. This study evaluates the outcomes of neglected sites recycling and considers socially innovative initiatives undertaken by social enterprises and non-profit entities. Two case studies are analysed in this paper: Periferica of Mazara del Vallo and ExFadda of San Vito dei Normanni, both in southern Italy with creative centres managed by social enterprises focusing on enhancing social, economic, cultural and spatial impacts. Scaffidi argues that behind these initiatives lie soft power agendas that can help shape people's perceptions using culture.

The next feature paper by Kelly Maguire, titled, 'Examining the Power Role of Local Authorities in Planning for Socio-Economic Event Impacts', focuses on the

socio-economic impacts of events. As noted above, focusing on events is crucial, and although we often consider the positive impacts of events, they can cause detrimental implications to destinations and communities that host them. Focusing on Local Authorities in Ireland, Maguire looks at the authorising and licensing of large-scale outdoor public events and how enhanced monitoring and management practices can ensure socio-economic impacts locally. Using a multi-methodological approach based on a quantitative content analysis of Local Authority event management plans/guidelines and qualitative semi-structured interviews with Local Authorities, the findings draw attention to an overall dearth of socio-economic planning for events by Local Authorities across Ireland – with a number of gaps identified. For instance, a clear lack of planning among Local Authorities highlights the fundamental need for strategic plans so that Local Authorities planners can work to achieve greater levels of socio-economic sustainability.

'User-generated insight of Rio's Rocinha favela tour: Authentic attraction or vulnerable living environment?' is a feature paper written by Nicholas Wise, Maurício Polidoro, Gareth Hall and Ricardo Ricci Uvinha. This study is concerned with inclusion and exclusion in local living environments, focusing in particular on how tourism shapes social and cultural transformation and soft power. This insight helps us consider the impact of tourism on vulnerable communities based on how travellers post and share their experiences. This paper evaluates TripAdvisor posts of 'Rio's Rocinha Favela Tour'. In many respects, the notion of commodification, and even authenticity, runs through each section of the paper, but what the authors challenge us to consider is how a favela becomes a consumer product, or a tourist attraction – and this can be based on cultural appeal or a (perceived) dangerous place to

visit. To link the points highlighted in this paper, a discussion of soft power concerns relationships bonded through economic and cultural influence. Because favelas have become distinct attractions, it is cultural appeal and a different (residential) side of the city that persuades travellers to visit. Online and social media platforms for more than a decade now have played an important role today in projecting images and promoting authentic experiences based on user-perceptions, and this paper looks at how the users communicate their experiences.

Continuing with a focus on tourism, the following feature paper, 'Exploring an Importance-Performance Analysis Approach to Evaluate Destination Image' by Hailong Wu and Takamitsu Jimura explores the effectiveness of an Importance-Performance Analysis approach to assess destination image. Destination image is important when we consider soft power because it is about understanding how a destination is: foremost perceived, and then later consumed. More studies are needed focusing on image perceptions of particular groups who originate from one country and how these travellers perceive the image of another country. Therefore, this study focuses on the image of the UK for Chinese students studying in the United Kingdom. The paper looks at 23 attributes of destination image, and results align to one of the five quadrants to help destination planners and managers identify strengths and weaknesses in terms of how a group of travellers from one nation perceive a destination.

There are two in perspective papers in this special issue. The first, 'Creating a coffee tourism network in the North of Thailand' by Natnaree Smith, Nopparat Suthitakon, Teprasit Gulthawatvichai and Sombat Karnjanakit continues this focus on tourism. This paper aims to provide directions on coffee tourism administration as well as to establish a coffee

tourism network among the communities in Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Mae Hong Son, and Lampang provinces. The authors collected data from 45 attendees during a meeting focusing specifically on coffee tourism. They discussed several case studies then visited Doi Chang Village in Chiang Rai to study their successful practice before exchanging views on how similar tourism management plans can be implemented (in their own communities). They identify major challenges regarding coffee tourism in northern Thailand and these findings then go on to discuss the initiation of three projects: the community-based tourism by coffee farmers in Chiang Mai, the pilot study of a coffee tour program in Huay Hom Village, Mae Hong Son, and the project 'Good Coffee in Lampang'. The work offers insight into the need to explore niche tourism and local influence and appeal, in this case to explore whether northern Thailand can flourish as a coffee tourism attraction, but insight is useful to consider in other cases as well.

The next in perspective paper by Julie Clark, Nick Jenkins and Sarah Noone is titled 'Soft Power and Hard Choices: A critical perspective on health and inclusion in disadvantaged communities'. This paper is concerned with the potential of area-based initiatives when it comes to addressing health inequities. This is increasingly important among local policy makers and planners. As the authors note, there is a need to move beyond 'bricks and mortar' so as to mitigate and reverse concentrations of those who are disadvantaged. Plans to stimulate economic development may be of limited benefit to local communities without addressing poor population health, and this can be a threat to communities going forward. Focusing on this issue in Scotland, the authors explore opportunities, risks and tensions that arise when statutory organisations seek to incorporate 'bottom up' approaches to community

development, in and within their established hierarchical organisational cultures. An increasing challenge for trying to overcome these issues are austerity measures and strained public sector budgets.

Two viewpoint papers are included in this special issue. The first by Weronika A. Kusek titled ‘Ukrainian Migrants in Poland: Socio-Economic Inclusion or Exclusion?’ addresses the need to focus on migration and its impact on the local economy. This paper looks at initial findings of a study with Ukrainian migrants in Poland who are moving there to fulfil labour shortages and take advantage of Poland’s growing economy. This paper helps identify some observed trends from interviews to identify future research directions related to socio-economic inclusion or exclusion. The second viewpoint paper by Jung Woo Lee titled ‘A winter sport mega-event and its aftermath: A critical review of post-Olympic PyeongChang’ offers some critical reflections on the 2018 Winter Olympic host of PyeongChang addressing environmental damage and its restoration process, the construction of the sport facilities and their use after the event, and the sustainability of social infrastructure built for the Winter Olympics.

Going forward, research narratives must be continuous (or longitudinal) because places change and new imaginations can transcend perceptions or expectations. We see this in each of the Feature, In Perspective and Viewpoint papers in this special issue. Importantly, during such times of uncertainty, with increasing wealth-gaps, uneven geographies and globalisation resulting from the rapid-pace of change and increased competition, there is a need for academics to expand debates, maintain a contemporary focus, re-conceptualise understandings and provide practical recommendations (as well as solutions) in different regions and locales. Given ever-changing social, political and economic

circumstances, we need to engage topics using different epistemological and methodological frameworks, to not only advance theory, but also influence policy and practice. There is no longer a one-size fits all or a prescribed approach. Therefore, current research needs to acknowledge difference (across theory and practice) to provide a voice, enable or help raise awareness of those excluded to further understand who socio-economic change is for – and who benefits (Clark and Wise, 2018; Wise and Whittam, 2015). The target audience of this special issue is broad. Policy makers, practitioners, destination managers, urban and regional planners, non-governmental organisations and academics each have a stake (and vested interest) in issues concerning the local economy, social impact, inclusion, exclusion and soft power.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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