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# Growing up in a tourist destination: negotiating space, identity and belonging

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## **Growing up in a tourist destination: Negotiating space, identity and belonging**

There is little research on children's experiences of growing up in a popular tourist destination, where place and space are contested with visitors, migrants and temporary residents. Existing literature on young people's experiences of their socio-spatial surroundings has focused predominantly on the rural/urban dichotomy, often neglecting to explore how identity and belonging are negotiated in complex community contexts such as tourist destinations. This paper reports on recent research that suggests young people's experiences of growing up in such an environment are nuanced and diverse, with their rich narratives disrupting socially constructed distinctions between the rural and the urban, merging experiences from both worlds.

**Keywords:** Identity, belonging, agency, tourist destination, childhood experiences, Byron Bay

### **Introduction**

Communities that double as tourist destinations are socially and culturally complex, posing considerable challenges for residents, particularly children and young people<sup>1</sup>. This paper addresses the lack of research on young people's perceptions and experiences of growing up in a tourist destination. In particular, it reports on a recent study interested in how space, identity and belonging are negotiated in a socio-cultural environment dominated by tourism in the popular Australian tourist destination of Byron Bay. The paper aims to move beyond the well-documented rural/urban dichotomy prevalent in much childhood literature (White 1996; Kong 2000; Nairn, Panelli et al. 2003; Powell, Taylor et al. 2013), to critically explore the experience of growing up in a tourist destination, informed by the views of young people themselves. To do this, we bring together two inter-disciplinary areas of scholarship –

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'children' and 'young people' are used interchangeably in this paper and refer to participants between the ages of 10 and 24 years.

Childhood Studies and Tourism Studies. The Childhood Studies paradigm recognises the social construction of childhood and views children and young people as competent beings in their own right, capable of expressing their views, perceptions and experiences (Prout and James 1997). Such understandings challenge persistent notions of children as ‘not-yet citizens’ and reposition them as active agents capable of shedding light on key issues shaping their lives. Such framing of children and childhood is absent in Tourism Studies where there is a dearth of research reporting the perspectives of children, especially in relation to growing up in tourist destinations (Canosa, Moyle, and Wray 2016).

Most previous research has focused on the reactions and adaptations of residents of host communities to tourism development (Doxey 1975; Dogan 1989; Boissevain 1996). Anthropologists, in particular, have been interested in the sociocultural changes that tourism development can have in developing nations (Greenwood 1977; Nash 1977; Smith 1977). Among these studies, some have focused on the ‘demonstration effect’ of modern Western ways of life, leisure and consumption on young Indigenous populations (Leiper 2004). Leiper (2004, 238) defines the demonstration effect of tourism as the display of ‘foreign cultures, behaviours, attitudes and what is often termed lifestyles’ that occurs in front of locals.

Very little research has, however, focused on children’s experiences of growing up in a tourist destination and their perceptions of the socio-spatial polarisation that tourism development often prompts. A notable exception is Buzinde and Manuel-Navarrete’s (2013) study on children in Mexico and their lived socio-spatial experiences of inclusion/exclusion in communities where enclave resort style accommodation is prevalent. In the research reported below, ethnographic and participatory methods were employed to explore how identity and belonging are actively negotiated and conveyed through the stories shared by the young participants.

The findings suggest that children and young people have a strong sense of connection and belonging to their community, including the natural and built environment, which is challenged by the transient nature of tourism activity in the region. The discussion draws attention to the multiple constructions and interpretations of childhood in a tourist destination beyond the dichotomous divide of rural and urban identities. Young people in this study talked about their experiences of community from a rural *and* an urban perspective, often blending and merging both worlds into a nuanced, hybrid and dynamic “in-between” understanding of childhood.

Hence, in this paper, we seek to fill two important gaps in knowledge. Firstly, we include the voices of a previously ‘silent’ population in tourism research and draw attention to how this enriches what we currently know about the experience of growing up in a tourist destination (Canosa et al. 2016). Secondly, we challenge and extend existing understandings of children’s experiences of their socio-spatial surroundings, moving beyond the rural/urban dichotomy prevalent in childhood studies (White 1996; Kong 2000; Nairn, Panelli et al. 2003; Powell, Smith et al. 2016).

### **Situating Identity and Belonging in Childhood**

The study on which this paper is based builds on the two main tenets of the Childhood Studies paradigm: 1) the social construction of childhood, and 2) the shift towards a child-centred approach which positions children and young people as capable, competent beings in their own right (Prout and James 1997; James and James 2008). Within this broader conceptual framework we draw on socio-cultural theory (Smith and Ballard 1998; Rogoff 2003, 2008; Smith and Bjerke 2009) to explore the lived experiences of young people growing up in a tourist destination. In light of the recent theoretical developments in the study of childhood, socio-cultural theory takes on new meaning and is adopted in this study through the critical lens of the ‘competent-child’ paradigm (Graham and Fitzgerald 2010).

This research endeavours to balance concerns about the structural forces which influence the life, development and socialisation of young people growing up in a tourist destination, with their lived experiences as reported from their particular viewpoint. Thus, while we suggest that the environmental context in which the child develops shapes identities and worldviews, we also acknowledge the need to understand young people’s views and experiences as recounted by them. We focus, in particular, on the stories and narratives shared by young people as important elements of the reflexive project of ‘self’ (Thomson 2007; Yuval-Davis 2010). Williams (2002, 359) argues that in contrast to pre-modern and traditional cultures, today ‘the self has to be explored as an active, deliberate and reflexive project’.

Storytelling and the biographical narrative thus become important means of creating and expressing a sense of identity and belonging (Yuval-Davis 2010). As identity is an ongoing project which is shaped by experiences in a multitude of social and cultural contexts (Rattansi and Phoenix 1997; Sennett 2011; Furlong 2013), the stories and experiences told by young people in this research also shed light on their sense of belonging and socio-spatial

inclusion/exclusion (Yuval-Davis 2006; Antonsich 2010; Buzinde and Manuel-Navarrete 2013; Spyrou and Christou 2015; Wood 2015).

In this study, young people's narratives of identity are primarily about boundaries, about 'us' versus 'them', the 'me' and 'not me' (Yuval-Davis 2010). These boundaries are often contested, subjective and more or less politicised (Yuval-Davis 2010; Wood 2016). Belonging has been defined as 'an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way' (Yuval-Davis 2006). It is a dynamic process that encompasses both the personal and intimate feeling of being 'at home' (place-belongingness), as well as the creation, maintenance and repositioning of imaginary boundaries of the community of belonging (politics of belonging) (Antonsich 2010; Creswell 2004). Young people's identity narratives in this research are often about the politics of belonging, about defining those imaginary boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', 'locals' and 'non-locals', and about who belongs and who does not.

Within the literature on children's experiences of their socio-spatial surroundings, there is a clear divide between studies focused on rural childhoods (Valentine 1997; Matthews, Taylor et al. 2000; McCormack 2000; Panelli, Nairn et al. 2002; Cummins 2009; Riley 2009; Powell, Taylor et al. 2013), and studies focused on urban childhoods (White 1996; Malone 1999; Kong 2000; Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000; Woolcock, Gleeson et al. 2010). The former have focused on the 'rural idyll' and the conceptualisation that children growing up in rural areas experience greater freedom to play outdoor and are surrounded by safe and caring communities (Valentine, Holloway et al. 2008). The latter have focused on the stress, danger and corruption of urban life and the socio-spatial constraints on young people (Malone 1999; Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000).

Although this dualism between the rural and the urban has been challenged in the broader social sciences (Hoggart 1990; Küle 2008; Möller, Thulemark and Engström 2014), very few studies have done so in childhood studies. This research explores the lived experiences of young people growing up in a tourist destination with a particular focus on how they negotiate space, identity and belonging in such contexts. In this paper, we build and extend on Nairn, Panelli et al. (2003) study by discussing how children's experiences of life in a tourist destination 'destabilise' the rural/urban dichotomy prevalent in childhood literature.

## Methods

This paper draws on a broader research study that employed critical ethnographic and participatory methods to explore the lived experiences of young people (between the ages of 10 and 24 years) residing in the Australian tourist destination of Byron Bay and surrounding communities (Canosa, Wilson, and Graham 2017). Critical ethnography and participatory approaches to research are uniquely compatible as they embody the philosophical values underpinning this study, namely the orientation towards research which ultimately benefits the population under investigation (Hemment 2007; Berg 2009).

In the first instance, and in line with the critical and participatory nature of the study, a group of young people – who form part of the Byron Youth Council (BYC) – was consulted on important methodological aspects of the project. This approach provided a way for them to have a say in the research design and planning (Graham and Fitzgerald 2010). BYC continued to provide invaluable input over the course of the research in the capacity of ‘Advisory Group’. Fieldwork was then carried out over 12 months and included a range of methods including secondary data analysis (e.g. historical documents, newspaper articles, key policies and statistical data), in-depth interviews ( $n=14$  adult youth workers;  $n=6$  young people), focus groups ( $14n=68$ ) and two participatory projects ( $n=20$ ). Prolonged engagement in the field facilitated a deeper and more nuanced understanding of young people’s lived experiences as well as creating the opportunity for a more authentic engagement of young people in the participatory projects. This paper focuses specifically on data generated from the in-depth interviews and focus groups held with 74 young people in the communities of the Byron Shire in 2014-2015.

Reflecting on the relationship that exists between the interviewer and interviewee, and cautious of the inherent asymmetrical power relations (Weis and Fine 2000; Nunkoosing 2005; Kvale 2006), every effort was made to position the young person as an expert in describing his/her perceptions and experiences. This meant being open to a more ‘organic’ process during the interviews, which were thus semi-structured and included broad and open ended questions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Dialogical and dialectic learning were encouraged through flexible wording of questions and inclusion of probes (Berg 2009).

Similarly to Christensen (2004), the interviews strove to be a ‘continuing dialogue’ which young people felt they had some control over. The intent of the interviews was to open up a ‘communicative space’ where communicative action could take place (Habermas cited in

Kemmis 2008). Creating communicative spaces conducive to intersubjective and two-way learning outcomes is consistent with the participatory and critical approach of this study (Kemmis 2008). This kind of interview is defined by Schwandt (2007, 162) as an ‘active interview’, as both respondent and interviewer are regarded as ‘agents active in the co-construction of the content of the interview’. This narrative or discursive approach to interviewing assumes that ‘the subject is always making meaning, regardless of whether he or she is actually being interviewed’ (Holstein and Gubrium 2000).

All interviews were audio recorded with participants’ consent and content/thematic analysis was used to identify emerging themes (Creswell 2014). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis tool which involves organising the data, reducing it into themes through a process of coding and finally representing the findings in figures, tables or a discussion (Creswell 2014). In the first instance, all interviews and focus group transcripts were entered in QSR NVivo 10, a qualitative data management and analysis software (Bazeley and Jackson 2013). Open coding was then performed by assigning text to free nodes in NVivo (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Subsequently, these nodes were linked to broader categories forming what is referred to as ‘tree nodes’ (Creswell 2014). These tree nodes or major themes are supported by a diverse range of quotations and discussed in relation to relevant literature in the findings of this paper. Although thematic analysis was the dominant data analysis tool, the ethnographic and interpretive approach of the study meant that interviews were of an organic nature with young people often sharing oral narratives of their childhood memories. These narratives were analysed as expressions of a deeper meaning connected to their ideologies, beliefs and experiences as is practice in narrative inquiry (Floersch, Longhofer et al. 2010).

Ethical issues associated with undertaking research with minors were addressed by adhering to the principles and practices set out in the International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children (Canosa and Graham 2016; Graham, Powell et al. 2013). In addition, the related three ‘Rs’ (reflexivity, rights and relationship) framework was employed to respectfully and ethically involve young people in the study. This framework is useful to guide research towards a *relational* approach, to recognise children’s *rights* – as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – and to strive for a *reflexive* engagement in the field in order to negotiate the ethically challenging moments throughout the research process (Powell, Graham et al. 2016).

## Research Context

The Byron Shire – which includes the popular tourist town of Byron Bay – is situated on the far north coast of New South Wales (NSW), Australia (see Figure 1). Tourism has been a major catalyst for the region’s economic growth and development since the 1980s, thanks to its favourable geographical location and north-facing beaches which provide safe bathing and excellent surfing conditions (Wray 2009). The abundance of natural resources coupled with the alternative lifestyle and cultural diversity of the communities in the Byron Shire have contributed to the popularity of the region both as a domestic as well as an international tourist destination (Wray 2009).

### INSERT FIGURE 1

It is estimated that an annual average of 1.5 million tourists visit Byron Bay with an expenditure of \$426 million (Tourism Research Australia 2015). Of these, over 180,000 are international visitors and 62% are young overseas travellers between the ages of 20 and 30 years. In addition to increased tourism visitation, the residential population of Byron Shire has also experienced considerable growth and change since the 1980s. Regional Development Australia has forecasted the Northern Rivers to be the fastest-growing region in NSW during the next 20 years, with 1.2% growth per annum (0.4% above the state average) and an extra 76,000 people from 2007 to 2027 (RDA-NR 2013). The population of Byron Shire has continued to increase since this time, and it is estimated that the current resident population is 24,674 of which 6,506 reside in Byron Bay (ABS 2011a; ABS 2011b).

This growth in residential population coupled with the increased tourism visitation numbers over the years, has resulted in a number of land use and social pressures which are referred to as ‘tourism urbanisation’, a widespread phenomenon in coastal areas of Australia (Essex and Brown 1997). There is evidence that some residents leave the Byron Shire at peak times (e.g. Schoolies<sup>2</sup>, Christmas, New Year and Easter) to “escape the noise, traffic congestion and violence associated with alcohol abuse” (McLeod, Nolan, & Bartholomew 2008, 22). The popularity of Byron Bay as a tourist destination and as a place to live has placed strain on the town’s infrastructure and service facilities, and has increased concerns about the impacts of tourism for residents (Wray 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> Schoolies is a popular event in the Byron Shire, and specifically in Byron Bay, where school leavers flock to party and celebrate the end of their schooling and the beginning of their independent adult life.

Westerhausen and MacBeth's (2003) research on backpacker tourists in Byron Bay revealed that the impact of tourism at peak times was extreme and required remedial strategies to mitigate its effects. Likewise, Fredline, Tideswell et al.'s (2005) study shows that 60% of local residents believed that tourism had a negative impact on their personal quality of life and on the community as a whole. As a consequence 50% of residents surveyed indicated a desire for reduced visitation levels (Fredline, Tideswell et al. 2005). In addition, there is evidence that the 'party' reputation of Byron Bay and its popularity with young backpackers and Schoolies (young school leavers), are causing widespread concerns for the well-being of young local residents (Canosa et al. 2017).

## **Findings**

Growing up in a tourist town, where at many points of the year there may be more tourists than locals, has important implications for young people's development, socialisation and ultimately their sense of identity and belonging. In this study, the diversity of childhood experiences is noticeable and likely related to the diverse communities that form the Byron Shire. The findings draw attention to the ways in which young people experience both the positive aspects and the challenges of growing up in a rural area as well as the opportunities and problems of growing up in an urban area. In this paper, we focus on the stories and narratives that the young people shared during one-on-one in-depth interviews and focus groups as manifestation of their agency in imagining, constructing and negotiating space, identity and belonging. Interview excerpts and quotations are included to illustrate themes and discussed in relation to the relevant literature. Although there is no such thing as an all-encompassing 'young people's view', a series of recurring themes have emerged from the data which are here discussed.

### ***Nature and the rural idyll***

It is evident that young people living in the Byron Shire have a strong connection to nature and the natural environment, such as the beaches, parklands and the ocean. For these children, the beauty of the landscape is ingrained in their memories and contributes to their sense of identity and belonging. Younger participants interviewed showed a unique aesthetic sensibility and often spoke about their connection to nature. They also talked about the freedom they experience when walking or bike riding to their favourite places, which they associated with a rural childhood:

*There are lots of trees and plants so it's, like, really nice. (Ploggin, 11 years, focus group BZB)*

*I like that I can walk to school and walk into town with my friends and not have to worry about anything. (Charlie, 11 years, focus group MG)*

*I like that it's country so there is grass to play on and trees to climb. I like that it's not too big so my friends are very close. (Lucy, 11 years, focus group MG)*

*You don't have to wear shoes in this area which makes everything so much easier! And it's a much friendlier place. (Bils, 16 years, focus group BYSG10)*

Among the positive aspects and memories that young people shared, the main theme that emerged was their love and connection to the natural environments in their community. Young people reported that they enjoy walking, riding, surfing, swimming or just exploring the beautiful coastline and rainforests that make this region so unique. Young people's identities seemed strongly connected to their experiences of nature, outdoor play and freedom (see also Powell, Smith et al. 2016). They also displayed an acute sensitivity to environmental issues and talked at length about nature conservation issues.

Young people growing up in the Byron Shire were acutely aware of the dangers that uncontrolled tourism development may have on the natural environment they feel so attached to. In many conversations young people expressed concern about the visible effects of tourism on the environment, arguing that often travellers display a lack of respect:

*It's disappointing to see people come to supposed paradise, the place where they're expecting to be clean and beautiful and pristine, then they leave it in such a state. It's just disrespectful". (Jack, 21 years, interview)*

*I don't like that Brunswick Heads is becoming more like Byron Bay and heaps of Queenslanders are pouring in. They are taking down*

*our big beautiful pine trees. There is lots of littering everywhere and it's mostly because a lot of tourists are always everywhere in Brunswick and they have changed how Brunswick is as a community.*

(Dave, 14 years, focus group BYSB9)

Young people's stories and narratives revealed a strong connection and care for the environment and are evidence of the agentic role that children and young people have in their communities. Betty (21 years), for example, explained how she has been part of many beach clean-ups in the area:

*I've been a part of a lot of beach clean-ups... When you do a beach clean-up on Main Beach, it's all stuff people has left there...straws, cups and bottles, and you can tell when something's been left there and when something has washed up and been out at sea for a long time. (Interview)*

When asked to identify their greatest concern about growing up in a tourist destination, most young people referred to littering and the lack of respect that tourists display towards the environment. They were eager to identify themselves as environmentally conscious community members and provide their perspectives on this issue. Bills (15 years) argued that *'everyone from here is so environmentally conscious, but then the tourists don't care because they're leaving... I think the locals want to look after their town whereas tourists just dump rubbish everywhere'* (focus group BYSG10).

Having a continuous flow of visitors temporarily residing in the Byron Shire creates a series of tensions (Wray 2011). Places in prime tourist locations are particularly 'contested' spaces (Bender 1993), and may represent sites of exclusion for children and young locals (Buzinde and Manuel-Navarrete 2013). Within the geographical literature on childhood and the interdisciplinary field of Childhood Studies, there is a growing scholarship focused on the experiences of childhood in rural areas (Matthews, Taylor et al. 2000; Panelli, Nairn et al. 2002; Cummins 2009; Riley 2009). Within this literature the most common discourse is the 'rural idyll' or the belief that growing up in the countryside provides a safe environment where children can experience healthy and innocent childhoods in harmony with nature (Powell, Taylor et al. 2013). However, for children growing up in rural communities which are also tourist destinations, experiences of nature and the 'rural idyll' often merge with experiences typically associated with urban childhoods.

### *Urban childhoods*

Discourses surrounding belonging and connectedness to the natural environments in the community are prevalent in young people's stories and narratives. However, feelings of pride also feature strongly. Young people talked at length about the social and cultural aspects of the Byron Shire, displaying positive attitudes towards the multicultural and eclectic nature of the region. The opportunity to meet new people, to socialise and to build transnational friendships with the visiting tourists were positive aspects identified by young people which they associated with an urban childhood. Jack (21 years), for example, argued that *'Byron is the nicest place on earth I've now realised. It's distinctively unique, not just for the environment, but the people as well and the politics and the culture'*.

Many of the young people interviewed clearly valued the multicultural environment that has developed as a result of the influx of visitors. According to Isaac (24 years), *'there is always something happening it's not sort of stagnant and for me a positive is meeting so many different people and making a lot of friends from different countries'* (focus group SV). These findings are consistent with studies including Möller's (2012) examination of young residents' experiences in a ski destination in Sweden, and Canosa's (2014) study of young people growing up in Positano, Italy. Similar to these earlier studies, for young people interviewed in this research, tourism is an important social aspect of their journey to adulthood.

A distinctive aspect of the findings, though, is that young people's narratives suggest that the vibrant and stimulating lifestyle – which respondents typically associate with urban spaces – coexists with the *rural idyll* and discourses surrounding the beauty of the natural environment. In contrast to studies where participants dichotomise the relationship between rural and urban childhoods, rejecting the negative stereotypes of urban identities and highlighting the positive aspects of a rural, safe and peaceful childhood (Valentine 1997), in this research the two coexist, to reveal a more hybrid and often ambiguous experience of childhood. These findings suggest that young people's lived experiences of their environment are eclectic and heterogeneous, with their narratives disrupting socially constructed distinctions between the rural and the urban (Nairn, Panelli et al. 2003).

Just as growing up in a city has its challenges, likewise the experiences of childhood in a tourist destination are often fraught with tension due to the continuous flow of visitors. According to Tammy (24 years), *'it's still rural...it's like a rural-metropolitan, it's*

*weird...in-between! Byron still has a nice feel during the day but it changes at night! It's crazy...it completely changes! I don't mind it, but I do feel overwhelmed by it'* (interview). This 'weird...in-between' place that Tammy referred to exemplifies the complexity of growing up in a tourist destination.

Young people often talked about their experiences as a '*sort of love/hate relationship...some of it is good and some of it is a bit annoying*' (Fiona, 18 years, interview). Growing up in a tourist destination shapes young people's lives in many ways; however, the dominant theme which has emerged from the data is how young people's sense of belonging is challenged and jeopardised by the continuous flow of visitors temporarily living in the community. Young people in this study often have to negotiate the same pressures and tensions that urban youth encounter, such as feelings of alienation and lack of safety.

### ***Negotiating Space, Identity and Belonging***

The interviews and focus groups revealed a number of issues and concerns that are important to young people. The concept of belonging was often described as something ephemeral which is often hard to understand and experience when there are so many travellers and temporary residents in the community. Andy, a 21 year old Schoolies volunteer, argued that having so many people coming and going has really changed the character of Byron Bay:

*I think being such a transient town there are some things that come with people not being grounded like that sort of ....I don't know what the word is but not a stability and I think that sort of reflects on people's lives as well and you can sort of see it...I guess a lot of people make some bad decisions and you sort of see that around as well... it's like Vegas you go there and whatever you do there doesn't matter. (Interview)*

Young people identified three important issues which challenge their sense of belonging and often create feelings of alienation and social exclusion: crowding; job competition; and rising rental and property prices. At peak tourist times crowded spaces and unfamiliar faces contribute to feelings of alienation and displacement among youth. According to Serena, a 17 year old resident of the Byron Bay, in the past '*you could come into town and sort of see some of your friends but now you don't see any faces you know...the beaches are also heaps crowded*' (focus group BYST). Young people talked at length about the diminished sense of

community that is felt in Byron Bay because it *'has become too commercial and there are often more tourists than residents'* (Stuart, 24 years, focus group TBL). This shrinking sense of place and ownership of the streets, beaches and ocean in the community can contribute to feelings of frustration as Leyla (14 years) points out:

*I went to South Golden beach store when the festival [Splendour in the Grass] was on and literally you walk up and there's this massive line out the door, and it's like can I just go in, I come here every day and now I can't because of all these people.* (Focus group BYSG9)

Crowded spaces and unfamiliar faces are just some of the issues identified by young people which impact their sense of belonging. In addition, young people talked about the lack of meaningful employment opportunities which further contributes to feelings of alienation and social exclusion. Many young locals compete for jobs with migrant workers (and particularly temporary residents such as overseas backpackers with Australian working visas). Young people felt that their identity as *locals* is a disadvantage when seeking employment. Temporary residents are willing to work for low wages or for board and lodging. This issue emerged in many conversations with the young people interviewed, contributing to feelings of exclusion and lack of self-worth.

Young people (particularly those between the ages of 18 and 24 years) also spoke about the rise in prices and lack of affordable housing as an alienating factor for youth growing up in the area. Tammy (24 years), for example, felt insecurity and a lack of prospects for her future: *'It kind of scares me because it means that people can't live here anymore as they can't afford the rent and things like that! I suppose that's just tourism, that's how it works, it's for the privileged'* (interview). Children as young as 11 were aware of the rise in prices and the housing difficulties experienced in the region:

*'I know someone that was my friend and he finally got a place and when the tourists came they bought that guy's house for more money and the owner of the house actually gave it to the other guy, so he lost his house'.* (Kimba, 11 years, focus group BZB)

Feelings of alienation due to crowding and competition for resources such as jobs and housing are important issues that young people growing up in the Byron Shire have identified. Strategies that young people use to negotiate these challenges are consistent with the literature in this space. Similar to Boissevain's (1996) study in Malta, young residents in

this study employ subtle strategies to negotiate life in a tourist destination including ‘avoidance’ and creating ‘locals-only’ spaces. Creswell (2004, 102) argues that the creation of ‘our place’ is important for group identity and belonging and by necessity it involves ‘the definition of what lies outside’. Young people often talked about avoiding crowded places during the tourist season by choosing, for example, to surf early in the morning when there are no tourists. Sofia (age 13) chooses a particular time of day to engage in her favourite activity in order to avoid the crowds and meet her friends: *‘I go to Byron really early for a surf that way I can surf with my friends without the crowds and I feel safer’* (focus group BYSG9). Likewise, Betty (age 21) shops locally:

*Maybe it's like the places I go as well. Like I always do my shopping at Santos and that's a very local place. If I went shopping at maybe Woolworth's it might be different ... the places I specifically go to are more sort of like local spots.* (Interview)

Stuart (age 24) also commented that often *‘you just know when it's time to stay out of town...just ‘cause you know the traffic is going to be a pain, you're going to be squished walking around, it's not enjoyable it's better when it's quiet’* (focus group TBL). These boundary discourses and practices point to the complex ‘politics of belonging’ at play in tourism destinations (Yuval-Davis 2006; Antonsich 2010; Buzinde and Manuel-Navarrete 2013).

In negotiating a sense of identity and belonging, the young people in this study reported that it is common to create boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Although young people feel strongly attached to the places in their community, boundaries they erect cannot be place-bound, as the natural and built environments have increasingly become consumable products. Young people thus politicise belonging by creating imaginary boundaries around their communities (Yuval-Davis 2006). Creating locals-only spaces in the community and reaffirming their identities as true locals, takes on new meaning in such contexts. The struggle to be authentic may be viewed as a ‘means to recover oneself from the alienation involved in allowing one’s own life to be dictated by the world’ (Xue, Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2014, 190). These communities of belonging consolidate around youth subcultural groups or tribes which fulfil young locals’ needs for connectedness, safety and belonging. This resonates with literature that points to the importance of ‘non-place-based’ notions of

community among young people who actively create their own interpretations of 'community' (Skelton and Valentine 1998; Panelli, Nairn et al. 2002).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings reported in this paper highlight the multiple constructions and interpretations of 'childhood' in a tourist destination. In doing so, the dichotomous divide between rural and urban identities is challenged, suggesting that a 'tourist location childhood' is indeed diverse, hybrid and complex. As revealed in the case of Byron Shire, aspects of both worlds, the rural and the urban, coexist and are internalised by young people who actively negotiate a sense of identity and belonging to place. Their identities fluctuate between an idyllic childhood in a rural and seaside community and a childhood fraught with the same issues and tensions that urban youth encounter. Building on studies such as Nairn et al.'s (2003), where young people seek out the *rural* within the urban and the *urban* within the rural, in this study the two dimensions coexist, and the challenges and opportunities of both worlds are continuously being negotiated by young people. A new hybridised and somewhat ambiguous notion of childhood emerges from participants' narratives. Along with popular conceptualisations of rural childhoods, as played out and experienced in close-knit, harmonious communities free from the corruptions and danger of urban life (Valentine, Holloway et al. 2008), young people in this study also have to contend with the stress typically associated with urban spaces.

The paper discussed recurring and dominant themes including young people's narratives about growing up in an idyllic place in contact with nature and surrounded by beautiful landscapes. The strong attachment to nature and place has also developed an environmentalist identity or consciousness among young locals who are concerned about the impacts of tourism development on the environment. Similarly to Dockett, Kearney and Perry's (2012) study, participants in this study drew attention to things they liked the least about their community such as rubbish and litter. Furthermore, environmental issues are often the focus of heated discussions among young people, suggesting a genuine concern for the community. Their narratives are evidence of the agentive role they play, with participation in beach clean-ups and community protests popular among young locals.

A further theme explored in this paper concerns the experiences of an urban childhood. Among the positive aspects discussed are the opportunities for socialising, multiculturalism

and a sense of pride connected to growing up in a popular tourist destination. Although rural and urban experiences of childhood coexist in participants' narratives, at times negotiating the positives and the negatives of both worlds is challenging. Feelings of alienation and displacement are often felt by young people, particularly in the peak tourist season. Tensions and negotiations between young hosts and guests over space are common and recurring themes in the data. In addition, young people talked about the perceived lack of safety that is typical of urban childhoods.

Growing up in a tourist destination shapes young people's lives in many ways. However, the dominant theme which emerged from the data is how young people's sense of belonging is challenged and jeopardised by the continuous flow of visitors temporarily living in the communities of the Byron Shire. These findings reveal the complexity and ambiguity of the lived experiences of young people, who may benefit from the positives of both rural and urban worlds but who also have to contend with the challenges and problems of life in this *in-between* place. Young people thus re-read and re-make their own experiences of childhood, and in doing so shed light on the unique set of circumstances that characterise their 'tourist location childhood'.

Findings suggest that the environment in which the child develops and the wider socio-cultural forces (e.g. tourism) which work at a macrosystem level are indeed influencing factors, however children also display agency and are able to shape their own experiences of childhood. The multiplicity of experiences of inclusion and exclusion show how young people are often capable of negotiating and actively seeking a meaningful sense of identity and belonging in a community context which is increasingly perceived as alienating. Similarly, Panelli, Nairn et al. (2002) argue that powerful 'politics of negotiation' are employed by young people to challenge the constraints of the adult world. Creating boundaries around their 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1991) or 'micro-communities', fulfils important needs for connectedness, safety and belonging.

Such findings suggest that children and young people are both *constrained* by the structural forces in the community context in which they develop as well as 'agents *acting* [emphasis added] in and upon those structures' (James and Prout 1997, 26). Giddens (1991) argues that 'agency' and 'structure' need to be understood as different sides of the same coin, the findings reported in this paper suggest that what is ultimately important is the need to scaffold children and young people to participate in community life and have a say in matters

that affect them, including tourism development, in order to foster healthy and socially sustainable host communities. Ultimately, however, based on the accounts of the young people involved, the experience of participating as active researchers was an empowering process which contributed to their pedagogical development and enhanced their status in the community.

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