

## Community Participation and Tourism Attitudes in Belize

### *Participación Comunitaria y Actitud hacia el Turismo en Belice*

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**ABSTRACT:** Even though existing literature has emphasized the importance of the host' attitudes, research in general has ignored the role of ethnic identities within communities. The purpose of this study was to identify the relevance and importance of ethnicity for tourism attitudes. The research site consists of two communities, Placencia and Seine Bight, in Belize, Central America. The effects of a number of determinants such as environmental awareness and intensity of contact on tourism attitudes are examined. Nearly 110 households were selected using a random sampling plan of which 107 households agreed to participate in this study. In general there appears to be broad-based support for tourism as an economic activity. Tourism as a form of development has increased the flow of non-tourist migration to the villages. The rise of tourism has brought residents of both Placencia and Seine Bight closer together. The policy implications of the study are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Tourism, attitudes, environmental awareness

**RESUMEN:** Aunque la presente literatura a enfatizado la importancia de la investigación en general se ha ignorado de identidades étnicas entre comunidades. El propósito de este estudio fue para identificar la importancia relevante de las actitudes étnicas de el turismo. El sitio de investigación consiste en dos comunidades, Placencia y Seine Bight, en Belize, América Central. Los efectos del el numero de determinantes como las alertas ambientales y la intensidad con el contacto en las actitudes del turismo son examinadas. Casi 110 casas de familia fueron seleccionadas sin un plan definido, 107 de ellas aceptaron participar en este estudio. Generalmente aparenta ser un apoyo al turismo exterior como una actividad económica. El turismo como una manera de proyecto de elaboración a incrementado el crecimiento de la migración no-turística a los pueblos. El aumento del turismo ha traído residentes de Placencia y Seine Bight más unidos. El curso de acción e implicaciones de este estudio son también discutidas.

**Palabras claves:** Turismo, actitudes, preocupación ambiental

(Recibido: 20 enero 2006. Aceptado 30 julio 2006)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of tourism in developing countries has had a preponderance of ethnographic case studies, emphasizing the negative impacts of tourism. Community based tourism (CBT) has emerged as a solution to the negative effects of mass tourism in developing countries (Goldman, 2003; Nel and Binns, 2002; Belsky, 1999). An important aspect of CBT is community participation in tourism. It is believed that many of the negative effects of mass tourism are likely to be reduced when communities have a role in making decisions with respect to the local growth of tourism. Community participation is expected to improve local resource management as well as distribution of the economic benefits of tourism. Community based tourism incorporates a number of objectives such as creating a sense of community, improving local entrepreneurship, access to venture capital, and conservation of local resources. CBT is a strategy that uses local tourism as a method of community organization. The extent of community participation in tourism is likely to depend upon its perceived costs and benefits. As a result, in the early stage of the development of community based tourism, positive attitudes toward tourism is likely to increase community participation.

Attitudes toward tourism in general are expected to turn negative over time. Doxey (1975) and Forestall and Kaufman (1995) drawing from stage models, assert that as tourism development increases, host communities have a variety of negative attitudes and may become hostile to tourists. Social surveys have examined the host's attitudes toward tourism and its impacts. At the theoretical level, several explanations of tourism attitudes have been proposed. However, the role of demographic/structural factors such as ethnicity has not been adequately investigated. Even though existing literature has emphasized the importance of the host's attitudes, research in general has ignored the role of ethnic identities within communities (Lundgren, 1993; McMinn and Carter, 1998; McClaurin, 1996).

Research on tourism attitudes contributes to community planning, and community research. People's perception of the advantages and disadvantages of tourism is important for planning strategies for community involvement in local development through tourism (Visser, 2003). In particular, knowledge of attitudes toward tourism provides information on strategies adaptable for tourism development. The purpose of this study is to

identify the relevance and importance of ethnicity for tourism attitudes and to underscore the importance of ethnic differences in tourism attitudes for ethnic community building. The research site consists of two communities in Belize, Central America.

## 2. THE COMMUNITIES

Mexico borders Belize in the north, to the west and south by Guatemala and to the east by the Caribbean Sea. The peninsula today consists of the Garifuna, the Creole, and expatriates from the United States. The Garifuna and the Creole are located in separate villages located seven miles apart. The Garifuna entered Belize at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Kroshus, 1998). They are descendents of marooned slaves and Carib Indians. Today Garifuna communities are found between Dangriga in the Stann Creek district and central Nicaragua, with the majority being located along the coast of Honduras (Davidson, 1976). The Caribs or Garifuna who had assisted in mahogany production and worked as laborers on plantations settled in the Stann Creek district and began to migrate to their present location of Seine Bight during the second half of the late 19th century. Many of them had large farms and grew bananas, corn, plantain, coco (a vegetable used in soup), sweet potatoes and yams. Their social life is characterized by the presence of fidelity system. The fidelity system is a system of reciprocity that enables the group to survive. The allegiance to the group becomes salient in the fidelity system that not only provides services but also acts as a mechanism to enhance group cohesion and implies allegiance, fealty, loyalty and devotion to the group rather than the individual.

One of the earliest Creole villages in Belize, Placencia, is located in the Stann Creek District. This village lies at the tip of a peninsula that juts into the Caribbean Sea surrounded by water from both sides. Placencia lies adjacent to Placencia Caye and this small mangrove island acts as natural protection from rough seas during times of turbulent weather. This natural harbor is still utilized today by boats sailing up and down the Central American coastline. During periods of rough seas and bad weather it is not unusual to see as many as fifteen sailboats or more anchored snugly between Placencia Caye and the peninsula. Descendants of African and Anglo heritage, they form a distinct ethnic group. Most of the Creole villages were established late in the 19th century. Due to the lack of roads until the 1930's, the Creole villages were mostly located on the coast (such as Placencia) or near a river (Bolland, 1988).

The people of Placencia always fished for their own consumption and a limited local market. With the aid of outside donors such as Canada and the United States, the creoles have been successful in exporting its products, mainly to the United States. Production has increased due to new technologies introduced by outside agencies. Gillnets and motors enabled fishermen to expand their territory. The improvement in technology, though initially beneficial in production, has led to the decline of marine resources by improving harvest efficiency. As a result dependence on fishing as a major source of income has decreased (Key, 2002). Through animal husbandry, small-scale agriculture, and fishing, the villagers are able to combine income-producing activities.

During the early days of the Creole settlement, homes were constructed of thatch and wood and were much smaller than the ones they have today. At this time, there was not a church, school, tavern, or store. They had to go to the Garifuna village of Seine Bight to shop and to attend school. Since the completion of the road to Placencia in the late 1980's, concrete blocks can be transported via truck into the village. With the improvement of the road, several villagers have used concrete blocks in the construction of their homes.

The Garifuna and the Creole while living only seven miles apart on the peninsula were able to maintain boundaries not only culturally but also in their mode of production. The Garifuna grew staple products for their own consumption and a limited local market and periodically would work hourly wage positions on the near-by plantations. The Creole fished for a limited market and grew coconut palms for the oil to be sold in Punta Gorda or Belize City. The fishing cooperative in Placencia has aided the Creole population in the tourism industry.

### **3. THEORIES OF TOURISM ATTITUDES**

Several models have characterized the impact of tourism development on local communities. The interpersonal relationships between the residents and the visitors whether real or illusory become a matter of contention in the minds of the residents. Differential access to tourism profits changes power relations. Those who have a vested financial interest in the tourism industry will be more favorable to tourism whereas those who are not able to profit from the tourist industry will be more likely to not endorse the industry.

Communities are many times eager to seize the economic opportunities that are presented with tourism (Allon, 2004). The seasonal nature of coastal tourism changes the cycle of leisure and work. Since many in coastal communities must make most of their annual income in a few months during the high season they have little time to pursue traditional leisure activities thus limiting the time of celebrations, family visits, partying and community festivities. Thus the inhabitants of communities are swift in many instances to adapt to tourism. Tourists affect the way of life in communities yet it would be misleading to assume that residents passively submit to the influence of tourism, rather they adopt coping strategies to protect themselves.

Many times the residents' values, rights and customs are threatened by tourists and the industry of tourism. In order to cope with the changes tourism brings into the community, strategies of covert resistance emerge (Scott, 1985). Examples of this covert resistance include sulking, grumbling, obstruction, gossip, ridicule and surreptitious insults against the power brokers in the local tourism activities. There are other forms of adapting to tourism (Lundy, 1999). For example, a community may have festivals or celebrations at times or in locations where they can avoid tourists. Another way of avoiding tourists is to fence off private areas and events. In other instances local citizens may organize and protest against those who are marketing their back regions without their consent.

Finally in some circumstances people may resort to violence to defend themselves against insensitive and intrusive tourists. The tourist-host encounter can be transitory and in social circumstances the ability to create a bond of mutual trust is negated. It is the non-repetitive nature of the relationship which can lead to deceit and exploitation and a general feeling of mistrust (van de Berghe, 1980). According to Sutton (1967) the relationship between hosts and guests is unequal in that the visitors are on the move looking for enjoyment while the hosts are stationary catering to the needs and desires of the guests. However other asymmetries may also exist between local groups and their access to the revenues tourism. Such asymmetries may generate misunderstandings and conflict.

The economic benefits may not be distributed equally across ethnic groups and that may cause hostility. The competition for resources between ethnic groups can become a source of contention. While cultural conflicts

may be imbedded in a complex series of historical events within a modern arena of political struggle, tourism can surely enhance or reinforce the prevailing dominant subordinate position of the different ethnic groups.

Tourism may also have an impact on ethnic balance and relations in a community. For example in Nepal, the Sherpa were preferred guides in mountain climbing and the favoritism exhibited by tourists served to alter relations between the Sherpa and other ethnic groups in the region. The impact of tourism on local ethnic structures can be less direct. In Kenya for example Isaac Sindiga (1996) found that one ethnic group became increasingly marginal within its regional economy refusing to participate in the tourism industry. Tourism can also lead to the removal of both ecological and psychological constraints among ethnic groups. For example, Gamper (1981) found that two separate ethnic groups in Austria are cooperating and competing within the same ecological niche of tourism.

In order to understand ethnic group's attitudes toward tourism, it is important to understand the role of ethnic stratification on tourist – host relationships. Individuals in general have a variety of group allegiances and sometimes these allegiances overlap, coincide and conflict with each other as individuals seek to maximize their survival chances. One type of group allegiance is associated with ethnicity. According to Patterson ethnicity is the condition where in certain members of a society, in a given social context choose to emphasize as their most meaningful basis a primary, extra-familial identity certain assumed cultural, national or somatic traits (Patterson, 1975 p. 308).

The members of an ethnic group may reside in a single nation or cut across several national boundaries. An ethnic group can only exist where members choose to be part of that group and have a conscious sense of belonging. It is important to differentiate a cultural group from an ethnic group. A group in a society that consciously or unconsciously share identifiable matrix of meanings, symbols, values and norms may be considered a cultural group. Cultural groups differ from ethnic groups in that there is no need to be aware of belonging to the group. Cultural groups can also be observed and are a verifiable social phenomenon. A cultural group then can become an ethnic group or at least segments of it, only when the conditions of ethnicity are met. Several studies on ethnic relations suggest the process of societal conflict be influenced by ethnic stratification systems. (Camper, 1981; Bolland, 1998). We expect significant difference in the

attitude toward tourism between the two ethnic communities, the Garifuna and the Creole in Belize.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The village of Seine Bight and Placencia consist of different ethnic groups. Placencia's population consists of Creole the descendants of Scottish and English buccaneers (pirates) and African slaves. The village of Seine Bight consists of the descendants of Carib Indians and runaway (marooned) or shipwrecked African slaves known as the Garifuna.  
*Operationalization of the Variables*

The dependent variable is tourism attitudes: It is defined as the attitudes of residents in Placencia and Seine Bight towards tourists. According to the Belize Tourism Board a tourist is defined as non-residents visiting for at least an overnight stay and not more than twelve months, for legitimate non-immigrant reasons such as vacation, recreation, sports, health, study, conferences, meetings, family matters and religious missions. It also includes person with a transit permit staying for at least an overnight stay in Belize as well as Belizean nationals who reside abroad and are visiting for any of the reasons mentioned above. The dependent variable 'attitude toward tourism' is a composite scale made up of twelve variables. Some of the questions used for constructing this composite scale are a) I like tourists to come to the village b) I enjoy sharing my views with tourists. The responses to these questions were measured by a five point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The responses to the twelve questions were added to arrive at a composite scale for attitude toward tourism. The scale ranges from twelve to sixty.

In order to identify the role of ethnicity on tourism attitudes, it is essential to control for a number of other factors which influence on tourism attitudes. These variables, other than ethnicity, are control variable. Conflict theory posits that individuals and groups compete with each other for scarce resources. Marx identified two classes engaged in struggle over control over resources. However Weber elaborated this classic Marxian notion to involve a multiple dimension model of class. Weber suggests that formation of multiple classes is conditional on inter-organizational communication. The arrival of tourists increases the likelihood of contact between the host population and tourists. The tourists compete for available resources in the host locality. In order to make the system work groups have to accept the legitimate use of power. The negotiation of power between the tourists and

the host population then forms the basis of attitudes toward tourism. Thus the conflict theory suggests that host attitudes are likely to be influenced by the perception of use value in local resources such as the environment, the extent of contact with tourists, recognition of ethnic identities, and class affiliations.

Three variables, income, education and occupation indicate the dimension, socio-economic status. The variable, occupation of the respondent, was constructed by categorizing the occupations of the respondents into four categories. These categories were arranged in an ascending order with the least status occupation coded one, and the highest status occupation coded four. The four categories are a) manual such labor, domestic, fishermen and cook b) service occupations such as tour guide, diver, shop clerk, security and bar tender, c) more administrative occupations such as bank employee, post master and secretary d) Professionals such as teacher, manager, tourist ship captain and physicians.

The variable, income has four categories. Those who earned income between 1 and 1000 Belizean Dollars per month were coded 1; those who earned income between 1001 and 2000 Belizean Dollars per month were coded 2; those who earned income between 2001 and 3000 Belizean Dollars per month were coded 3; and those who earned income above 3001 Belizean Dollars per month were coded 4.

The variable education was coded as follows. Those who did not have any education were coded 1, those with less than high school were coded 2, those with high school or less than college degree were coded 3, and those with either college degree or more were coded 4.

The socio-economic status (SES) dimension is created by a factor based composite index of three variables, occupation, income and education. The variable environmental awareness is a composite scale made up of six variables. Some of the questions used for constructing this composite scale are a) Because of tourists, we use more gas and oil and this increases the amount of bad air b) In Belize people now use the beaches more than they used to. The responses to these questions were measured by a five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses to the six questions were added to arrive at a composite scale for environmental awareness. The scale ranges from six to thirty.

The variable 'intensity of contact' is a composite scale

made up of six variables. Some of the questions used for constructing this composite scale are a) how often in the last six months have you come in contact with tourists at work b) How often have tourist friends come to your home in the last six months. A five-point scale ranging from none to every day measured the responses to these questions. The responses to six questions were added to arrive at a composite scale for intensity of contact. The scale ranges from six to thirty.

The variable 'ethnicity' is a dichotomous variable. The three dichotomous variables are created. The first dichotomous variable (GARY) includes respondents who belong to the 'Garifuna' ethnic group. The second dichotomous variable (CREOLE) includes respondents who belong to the 'Creole' ethnic group. The third dichotomous variable includes all those who are neither 'Garifuna' nor 'Creole'.

#### *Sampling*

According to Belize census 2000, Placencia has 178 households and Seine Bight has 221 households. However, the Seine Bight area also includes the Maya Beach area that is heavily populated by expatriates from countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom. The Seine Bight Village proper, settled by the Garifuna has fewer households than Placencia. A larger number of households are drawn from Placencia because of its larger population size compared to Seine Bight.

A random sample of households, consisting of one third of the number of households from Placencia and Seine Bight consisted of nearly 60 households from Placencia and about 50 households from Seine Bight. Every third household in each of the two areas were contacted and requested participation in the study. In accordance with this sampling plan, 110 households were contacted. Of the 110 households contacted, 107 households agreed to participate in this study.

Questionnaires were used to gather data. Questionnaires were distributed to a total of 107 households in Placencia and Seine Bight. The questionnaire was designed as a self-administered questionnaire in English because English is the official language of Belize. Those who needed assistance with the questionnaire were aided by this researcher and helped in completing the questionnaire in full. The questionnaire consisted of both closed ended and open-ended questions.

#### 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the four independent variables, SES, Environmental awareness, intensity of contact, and ethnicity and the dependent variable, 'attitude toward tourism' is presented in Table 1. The mean of the dependent variable is 49.16 and the standard deviation is 4.52. The mean of the variable 'intensity of contact' is 17.95 and the standard deviation is 5.03. The mean of the variable 'environmental awareness' is 20.51 and the standard deviation is 3.18. The mean of the variable SES is 15.98 and the standard deviation is 28.44. The standard deviations of all the four variables are small. The percentage of 'Garifuna' in the sample is 43.93 and the percentage of 'Creole' in the sample is 39.25.

Simple linear regression is used to assess the gross relationships between each one of variables and the dependent variable, attitude toward tourism. The results of the simple linear regression are presented in table 2. The effect of environmental awareness on tourism attitude is not significant. The standardized regression coefficient is 0.064. The relationship between 'intensity of contact' and 'attitude toward tourism' is significant and positive. The standardized regression coefficient is 0.174. The effect of SES on tourism attitude is not significant. The standardized regression coefficient is 0.325. The two dichotomous variables, GARY and CREOLE are also insignificant. The reference category is 'the rest: other than the Garifuna and the Creole'.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the four independent variables and the dependent variable**

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
Attitudes Towards Tourism	102	37.00	60.00	49.16	4.52
Socio-Economic Status	99	3.00	106.00	15.98	28.44
Intensity of Contact	104	6.00	28.00	17.95	5.03
Environmental Awareness	98	12.00	28.00	20.51	3.18
Garifuna	107	0.00	1.00	.439	.498
Creole	107	0.00	1.00	.392	.491

**Table 2. Simple linear regression of attitudes towards tourism on the four independent variables**

Variable	Constant	Unstandardized B	Standardized B
Socio-Economic Status	47.42	.258	.107
Intensity of Contact	46.36	.157	.174*
Environmental Awareness	47.23	.093	.064
Garifuna	48.68	.632	.070
Creole	48.68	.492	.053

\*p< .05

**Table 3. Multiple regression of attitudes toward tourism on the four independent variables**

Variable	Constant	Unstandardized B	Standardized B
Socio-Economic Status	42.882	0.127	.088
Intensity of Contact	42.882	0.182	.198*
Environmental Awareness	42.882	0.098	.068
Garifuna	42.882	1.367	.149
Creole	42.882	0.298	.198

\*p< .05

The final stage of analysis involves multiple regression. The results of multiple regression are presented in table 3.

The net effect of environmental awareness on tourism attitude is not significant. The standardized regression coefficient is 0.068. The net effect of intensity of contact

on tourism attitude is significant. The standardized regression coefficient is 0.198. The net effect of SES on tourism attitude is not significant. The standardized regression coefficient is 0.088. The two dichotomous variables, GARY and CREOLE are also insignificant. The standardized regression coefficient of GARY is 0.149. The standardized regression coefficient of

CREOLE is 0.032. The findings suggest that an increase in contact between tourists and hosts is likely to result in positive attitude toward tourism. The adjusted R-square was 18 percent. The variables in the model accounted for only 18 percent of the total variance in tourism attitudes.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study attempted to examine the role of ethnicity and tourism. The results from the quantitative data utilized in the study did not reveal significant differences between the two communities in terms of tourism attitudes. Ethnic identities can no longer be understood in terms of the local and this study has strongly emphasized the role of strangers in the formation of ethnic identities by examining tourism attitudes across ethnic groups. Tourists are also changed by their experiences of encounters with members of ethnic groups. To the extent that numerous tourist and ethnic member's encounters are satisfying to the tourists, the demand for tourism is likely to increase as tourists see themselves positively through the eyes of the members of the ethnic groups.

The relationship between ethnic identities and tourism attitudes is also influenced by several political and structural variables. In this study, we investigated attitudes of host community members in terms of their perceptions of factors such as impact on environment and intensity of contact. Ethnic identities and modernization forces collide. The emergence of the global village, mass production, development of fast and efficient technologies tend to bring people together where they are able to communicate with each other and develop a sense of apportionment. The focus of modern forces is to create similarity and homogeneous material and non-material cultures that can easily be produced and transacted in markets. Tourism as a social phenomenon exists because, a large number of people want to get away from the modern and experience the strange, the unknown, and the unfamiliar. The preservation of ethnicity and therefore the ability of ethnic groups to provide a variety of tourist experiences across ethnic groups remains a strong counter force to the process of globalization and reveals the importance of the local.

The response to the last question, How have your values influenced your views on tourists in general? The response to this question did not yield large variation. In general there appears to be broad based support for tourism as an economic activity to the extent that tourists were not contributing to the growth of immigrants who have visible contributed to the

social inequalities.

There is a significant inflow of migrants from other countries, especially the United States. They have bought beach properties and recently have built large homes. The wealth gap between the immigrants and Belizeans is becoming more and more noticeable. The immigrants fall into one of three categories, Belizeans migrating to the peninsula, immigrants from North America and Europe migrating to Belize to start businesses and who build homes to retire.

The socio-economic differential between Placencia and Seine Bight has inevitable implications. The development of tourism in Placencia was founded on the growth and decline of the fishing industry in Placencia. During the growth phase of the fishing industry, a number of cooperatives were founded throughout the country. This cooperative movement provided the impetus for the organization of the labor markets while generating capital for the transition to the tourism industry. The development of local infrastructure for tourism continues to enhance the growth of tourists in Placencia. In Seine Bight, however, the growth of tourism industry was a response to the tourist demand for sun and sand. The capital necessary for the growth of the tourist industry in Seine Bight is minimal but easily provided by entrepreneurs outside the Seine Bight community. The residents from Seine Bight continue to meet the demand for labor. Thus, the two communities differ in terms of their contributions to the tourist economy. The two communities, taken together provide a glimpse of the evolution of a ranked system shaped in a large measure by the growth of the tourism industry. The ranked system has implications for tourism attitudes. The quantitative data supported the hypothesis that intensity of contact and attitudes towards tourism are positively related.

The roles of these two communities in the tourism industry also differ. Communities in Placencia were well prepared for the transition to a tourism economy while a large proportion of Seine Bight residents participate in the tourism economy by providing cheap labor to the industry and therefore lack the ability to control the growth of the industry. The tourism industry in effect now presents unprecedented opportunities for the two communities to build alliances. The socio-economic difference between the two communities has emerged as an issue. The impact of tourism in the coastal communities in Seine Bight and Placencia has created conflict, but not between the villages. Tourism has emerged as an agent of social change in these communities.

In conclusion, the forces of globalization are entrenched in the villages of Seine Bight and Placencia. Through the ever-expanding tourist industry, a larger worldview is shared through the tourist-host encounter. It is apparent from this research that conflict is emerging in both villages. However while globalization has a homogenizing effect in attitudes in both villages it simultaneously is instrumental in the rise of conflict between the villages and the outsiders. Belize is a new nation gaining its independence in 1981 and developing political and economic institutions. Historically the village of Placencia aligned itself with the UDP (United Democratic Party) while Seine Bight was aligned with the PUP (People's United Party). Each village also had different religious affiliations, Seine Bight's religious participation was in the Catholic Church whereas Placencia's religious participation was in the Anglican Church. The villages' participation in different social institutions also facilitated the villages' separation. However with the rise of tourism residents of both Placencia and Seine Bight have been brought together under the same economic system.

The villages of Placencia and Seine Bight are each represented by a village council. The village councils are responsible for raising funds to assist in village activities that are in the public forum. Placencia established the Placencia Tourist Association to assist businesses and to gain political strength within the Belize Tourist Association. Thus Placencia has been able to secure a political arena through the participation of residents in the sphere of the economy.

There are also a few limitations. Implementing a random sampling approach proved difficult. Maps of the two areas were not readily available. A few that were available were old and outdated.

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