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### **Differences in Stakeholder Attitudes of Tourism development and the natural Environment**

Stakeholder inclusion, participation and management have become a critical issue in sustainable tourism development and management. The purpose of this study was to identify if there were differences in the traditional stakeholder groups' mean attitudes about tourism and the natural environment and if a difference did exist which stakeholder groups were different. Based on the study, government officials were found to be statistically different from the residents and business owners in mean responses on one of 14 items: "Tourism development should be discouraged when it harms the environment."

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**Keywords:** Stakeholders Inclusion, Attitudes, Sustainable Tourism, Natural Environment

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## **Introduction**

Today, most professionals and scholars in the tourism industry acknowledge the importance of sustainable tourism development (Byrd, Cardenas, & Greenwood, 2008; Gunn, 1994; Hardy and Beeton, 2001; Ioannides, 1995; Robson and Robson, 1996; WTO, 2004).

The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism development as,

Development [that] meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecology processes, biological diversity, and life support systems (WTO, 1998, p 21).

In 2004 to further describe and explain sustainable tourism the WTO expanded their definition. The expanded description "addresses six main principles: (1) High level of tourist satisfaction, (2) Make optimal use of environmental resources, (3) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, (4) Provide socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders, (5) Constant monitoring of impacts, and (6) Informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership (WTO, 2004, p. 193)."

One key to sustainable tourism development that the WTO's description identifies, is the concept of stakeholder inclusion and participation. A stakeholder can be defined as, "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organizations objectives" (Freeman, 1984, p 46). Without stakeholder participation, the development of tourism in a sustainable manner is unattainable (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Andriotis, 2005; Ap, 1992; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Gunn, 1994). Traditionally for tourism, stakeholders have included residents, governmental officials, local business owners and visitors (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Byrd 1997; Byrd, 2007; Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Long, Perdue & Allen, 1990; Martin 1995; Pizam, Uriely & Reichel, 2000). Driscoll and Starik

(2004) argued that the natural environment should also be viewed as a major stakeholder in any type of development. To include nature as a stakeholder, other stakeholder groups must acknowledge, understand, and take into account the value and interests of the natural environment. From this point of view, decision makers will be better equipped to make conscious and responsible decisions about how natural resources are utilized. Thus, it is necessary to understand the attitudes of the other stakeholders toward the natural environment and its relationship to tourism development.

Much research has been done to investigate the attitudes and perceptions toward tourism and tourism development. Most of these studies focused on one specific stakeholder group such as residents (Akis, Peristianis & Warner, 1996; Allen, Long, Perdue, & Kieselbach, 1988; Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Gursoy *et al.*, 2002; Long *et al.*, 1990; Martin, 1995; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Tosun, 2002), business owners (Clarksen, Getz, & Ali-Kinght, 2001), or local government officials (McGhee, 1991; McGhee, Meng, & Tapanon, 2006). A few studies have investigated the differences in attitudes among multiple stakeholders groups (Andriotis, 2005; Byrd, 1997; Byrd & Bosley, 2004; Kavallinis & Pizam, 1994; Lankford, 1994; Murphy, 1983; Pizam 1978; Puczko & Ratz, 2000). These studies found that, for the most part, differences do exist in the attitudes and perceptions of different stakeholder groups toward tourism and tourism development. For example Byrd and Bosley (2004) found that, in general, governmental officials are more positive than business owners and residents in their perceptions of tourism development. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify stakeholders' attitudes toward the natural environment and tourism, and to investigate if differences exist between stakeholder groups in relation to those attitudes.

## **Method**

A questionnaire was developed for this study, which included 14 Likert style questions (see Table 1) pertaining to the respondents' attitude toward the natural environment and its relationship to tourism and tourism development. The 14 Likert questions were generated based on previous research and literature on sustainable tourism (Byrd, 2003; Mason and Cheyne, 2000; McFarlane and Boxall, 2000; Perdue et al., 1990; Stein et al., 1999; Vincent and Thompson, 2002). The questions were reviewed and analyzed by a panel of tourism experts (tourism researchers, professors and managers) to assess the appropriateness, and generality of the items. Based on the panel's suggestions modifications to the questions were made. The Likert style questions used a 5-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree as recommended by Maddox (1985).

Five North Carolina counties were selected for this study (Alamance, Tyrell, Guilford, Wayne, and Stokes). These five counties were selected based on the researcher's familiarity with the county and the local destination management organization's willingness to assist in the study. The level of tourism development in the counties selected ranged from very little tourism development to major tourism development. A random sample of 400 residents was taken from each of the five North Carolina counties, resulting in a sample of 2,000 residents for this study. Selection of the sample was achieved using a commercial source, USADATA. These residents represented stakeholders that can be grouped as residents, business owners, or government officials. To identify which stakeholder group an individual respondent belonged to, qualification questions (i.e. Do you own a business?; Have you ever held a public/governmental office?) were used. There were no special instructions given to the respondents on how to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to residents during the winter and spring of 2005 by mail using a modified *Total Design Method* (Dillman, 2000).

Of the 2,000 surveys distributed, 109 were returned undeliverable due to incorrect addresses resulting in a total usable sample of 1,891. Of the 1,891 that totaled the sample, 281 responded giving a response rate of 14.9%. Of those 281 responses, 12 were identified as opinions of government officials, 41 as representing business owners and 228 as reflecting the general population of residents. An ANOVA test was conducted for each question to discover if a difference existed between the stakeholder groups' mean perceptions and attitudes. Subsequently, a Scheffe test was conducted to determine which groups were different.

## **Results**

The mean score for the 14 Likert questions indicated that the stakeholders have a positive attitude toward the natural environment (see Table 1). Unlike previous research, there were not many differences found between the stakeholder groups. Based on the results of the ANOVA test, only one question, "Tourism development should be discouraged when it harms the environment," resulted in a statistically significant score with  $p = .02$  (see Table 2). A Scheffe test was then used to determine which of the stakeholder groups were different. Based on the Scheffe test, government officials were statistically different from the residents and business owners in mean responses to their agreement with: "Tourism development should be discouraged when it harms the environment" (see Table 3). The residents indicated the strongest agreement with this statement (mean = 3.90), followed by the business owners (mean = 3.85), and government officials (mean = 3.16).

## **Discussion**

The results of the study indicate that stakeholders in a community generally have positive attitudes toward the natural environment. The only statements that hinted at a less

than positive attitude toward the environment were its relation to economical aspects. It can be inferred that, in general, stakeholders would support the protection of the natural resources; however, they are lukewarm in that support if there is an obvious economic cost. This view is most apparent in the government officials. Of the 14 statements used in this study only one, "Tourism development should be discouraged when it harms the environment," indicated a statistically significant difference between two of the stakeholder groups (residents and governmental officials). The findings of this study indicated that government officials are less likely than other stakeholder groups to discourage tourism development that has the potential to damage the natural environment if they believe there is possible economic gain. Business owners and residents are more strongly against tourism development within their community if it harms or negatively affects the natural environment.

It is crucial not to leave tourism development and management up to the government officials alone because of their propensity to sacrifice the natural environment for economic gains, which is not reflective of all stakeholder groups. Therefore, tourism development and management must involve all stakeholder groups so that all interests are taken into account. It is also important that each stakeholder group understand the importance of incorporating the interests of the natural environment in the decision making process. Once this is accomplished, then the natural environment can truly be considered as a stakeholder and have an influence in the decision making process.

This study is limited because of the low response rate and the number of respondents in two of the three stakeholder groups being studied. A low response rate can result in response bias. The response bias is due to self-selection and unidentified populations. Respondents were mailed the questionnaire and then were asked to mail it back. Respondents that chose not to mail the instrument back are not represented in this study, and may be different than those that are represented. There were also segments of the population that

could not be contacted through the methods used in the study. The mailing list for stakeholders was obtained by a commercial source. If a resident moved to the county or a business opened after the list was created, those individuals would not have a chance to be selected for the study.

This preliminary study provides initial data and more extensive research should be conducted. Future research should take several things into consideration. The size of the sample for each stakeholder group should be larger to develop a better understanding of the individual stakeholder group's attitudes and perceptions of tourism and the environment. Because this study focused on five counties in one state in the US, this study should also be replicated in different areas of the United States and in other countries.



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Table 1: Mean Attitude Scores about Tourism and the Environment by Stakeholder Groups (Based on a 5 point Likert Scale; 1- Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4- Agree, 5- Strongly Agree)

		Total Sample n= 281	Residents n= 228	Government Officials n= 12	Business Owners n= 41
The Community should be actively involved in the conservation of the region's environment	Mean	4.37	4.36	4.50	4.37
	SD	0.73	0.70	0.67	0.94
The environment has a value that outweighs its value as only an economic resource	Mean	3.95	3.91	4.42	4.05
	SD	1.04	1.06	0.67	.95
Plants and animals have as much right as humans do to the natural resources in the community	Mean	3.66	3.63	3.83	3.77
	SD	1.08	1.09	1.03	1.08
The natural environment must be protected for use by future generations	Mean	4.49	4.49	4.50	4.45
	SD	.071	0.68	0.67	0.89
Opportunities are needed to learn more about environment	Mean	4.08	4.08	4.00	4.08
	SD	0.77	0.76	0.60	0.84
Environment education programs lead to improvement in natural resources	Mean	4.02	4.01	3.92	4.07
	SD	0.79	0.77	1.08	0.82
Economic productivity in the community should have a higher priority than the protection of the natural environment	Mean	2.64	2.64	2.83	2.55
	SD	1.03	1.01	1.19	1.12
It is more important to be financially secured than to protect the environment	Mean	2.48	2.50	2.25	2.43
	SD	0.97	0.95	0.87	1.12
Tourism development should be discouraged when it harms the environment*	Mean	3.86	3.90	3.17	3.85
	SD	0.86	0.82	1.19	0.94
The natural environment is a tourism attraction	Mean	4.16	4.14	4.25	4.22
	SD	0.71	0.75	0.62	0.52
Tourism should be allowed to damage the natural resources within the community	Mean	1.79	1.78	1.83	1.85
	SD	0.92	0.87	1.27	1.04
Tourism development should include the protection of the natural environment	Mean	4.32	4.33	4.33	4.30
	SD	0.67	0.66	0.65	0.75
Tourism should improve the environment for future generations	Mean	4.08	4.07	4.08	4.15
	SD	0.72	0.73	0.51	0.76
Environmental impact studies should be conducted for both existing and proposed tourism developments	Mean	4.11	4.12	4.08	4.10
	SD	0.71	0.71	0.79	0.70

Table 2: ANOVA Table for Stakeholders' Perceptions That Tourism Development Should be Discouraged When it Harms the Environment.

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significance
Between Groups	.617	2	3.08	4.23	.02
Within Groups	202.62	278	.729		
Total	208.79	280			

Table 3: Scheffe Test of the Perception by Stakeholders That Tourism Development Should be Discouraged When it Harms the Environment.

Stakeholder Group (I)	Stakeholder Group (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Significance
Resident	Government Official	.74	.02
	Business Owner	.05	.94
Government Official	Resident	-.74	.02
	Business Owner	-.68	.05
Business Owner	Resident	-.05	.94
	Government Official	.68	.05