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Toward an Understanding of Cross-Cultural Interaction between Residents and Tourists: The Case of Bahamian Family Islands

Introduction & Justification of the Problem

Small Island Developing States (SIDS) face many unique challenges due to their extremely high levels of intrinsic vulnerabilities as a result of their natural, economic and social systems (Cross & Nutley, 1999; Douglas, 2006; Nunkoo, Gursoy & Juwaheer, 2010). Not uncommon to SIDS is the growing dependence or reliance on developing and/or sustaining their tourism industry as a viable economic contributor to the state's GDP. One such example is the Islands of the Bahamas where tourism is by far, the countries number one industry. Although tourism generates a plethora of economic benefits for a community, it also puts a strain on natural resources and can impose negative social and cultural impacts in many destinations and especially small island communities (Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal, 2002). Furthermore, it has been argued by multiple scholars that tourism impact studies must be done on a case-by-case basis to ensure that the unique and peculiar characteristics of each individual community are assessed properly (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Sirakaya, Teye & Sonmez 2002; Tosun, 2002). This study seeks to examine the unique attitudes and perceptions of residents living on three different islands along the Bahamian archipelagic chain. To guide this study, the following research questions are posited:

- (1) What are the overall attitudes and perceptions of Bahamian Family Island residents towards tourism in their communities?
- (2) What are the attitudes towards themes and/or issues that arise within this specific geographic region with regards to tourism development?
- (3) Are there any differences among Bahamians based on Island of residence?
- (4) Are there any differences among Bahamians based on employment status (non tourism and tourism)?

Methodological Contribution

The Bahamas, consisting of 700 Islands and Cays, face a rare challenge with regards to tourism planning and development. The term 'Family Islands' refers to those islands surrounding the main Island and capital city of The Bahamas, Nassau, New Providence. Islands chosen for this study include Great Exuma (population 7,314) Andros (population 7,386) and Eleuthera (population 7,826) (Bahamas, 2010). Based on Ritchie and Spencer's (1994) qualitative approach, Framework Analysis, the data was analyzed. Framework analysis involves a five-step iterative process: (1) Familiarization (2) Identifying a thematic framework (3) Indexing (4) Charting and (5) Mapping and Interpretation.

Research Setting & Methodology

Data consisted of eighteen semi-structured open-ended interviews amongst three islands, averaging forty-five minutes in length. Participants were selected using the snowball technique, with The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism as the initial contact. Each interview was guided by a set of semi-structured questions modeled based on the

proposed research questions in addition to follow up questions based on emergent themes that were raised throughout the process. The interview process was concluded when the researcher determined that data was saturated (Goulding, 2002).

Using Ritchie and Spencer’s (1994) Framework Analysis as a guide, data analysis began with the transcription of each interview (familiarization), which was completed by the primary researcher. Atlas.ti. 1.0.7, a qualitative data analysis program, was used to analyze the data. Analysis of the data continued with the use of a-priori codes based on the literature. As emergent themes materialized, they were added to the codebook (identifying a thematic framework). For each interview, a codebook was developed to categorize sections of the data that corresponded to a specific theme (indexing). Member checking was performed on each codebook to ensure that the codes and themes identified matched the raw data. Sample quotes were lifted from the data and organized within the codebook according to theme (charting). Once all codebooks were completed, mapping and interpretation took place in the form of synoptic charts and a search for disconfirming evidence. The steps above were completed several times in a vigorous attempt to exhaust all possible meaning.

Key Preliminary Findings

As a result of the tourism development within the Islands, a high level of cross-cultural interaction between residents and tourists is inevitable. Therefore, locals are faced with this somewhat challenging and complex phenomenon. Regardless of island, occupation or gender, local residents living on Eleuthera agree that while this interactive experience can lead to understanding between cultures, it can also very easily lead to misunderstanding. Detailed below is a synoptic chart derived from the original analysis of the data from Eleuthera. This chart displays a framework for cross-cultural interaction between residents and tourists within a tourism driven economy.

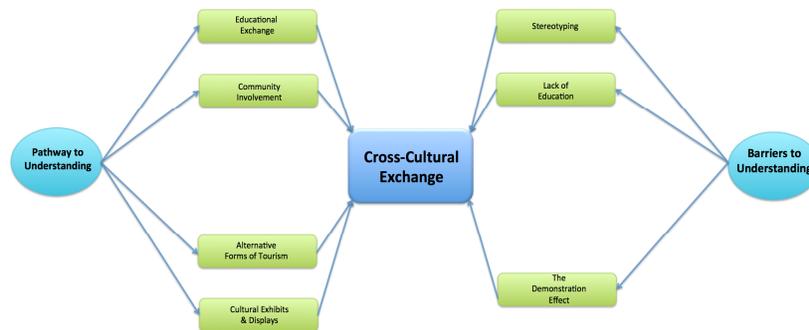


Fig 1. Framework for Cross-Cultural Interaction

Within this model, we can begin to understand the multifaceted and arduous nature of cross-cultural exchange in a small island tourism setting. Amongst residents, both positive and negative experiences emerged resulting in the development of a “pathway to cross-cultural understanding” and “barriers to cross-cultural understanding”. While residents appreciated some of the economic benefits resultant from tourism, they showed concern for the negative socio-cultural impacts possible from tourism. Table 1 provides details some of the quotes shared by Eleutheran residents that support the synoptic chart.

Pathway to Understanding		Barriers to Understanding	
Theme	Sample Quote	Theme	Sample Quote
Educational Exchange	<i>"It's enriching for both cultures and that's something that I'm trying to promote is the exchange of ideas and figuring out how you can take an idea from a different culture and adopt it to your own and the they do the same thing, they learn about the Bahamas and they learn and take a little bit of the Bahamas with them. So it's a give and take, it's a very positive thing".</i>	Stereotyping	<i>"... people come here with the perception that Bahamians are not the smartest people because we're black. They think we come out of the jungle... I've worked in tourism for my whole life, my parents own and run a tourism company and when tourists first come up to me to ask me a question about some of our activities, as soon as they hear my voice they have a bewildered look on their face because I speak English and am intelligent".</i>
Community Involvement	<i>"I think the community would welcome it as long as those coming in are respectful of that culture because a lot of things have been going on especially in my area, Bahamians don't trust scientist especially if you're white, because they feel like they've always been told what to do by white people. So you need to work with them, and collaborate".</i>	Lack of Education	<i>"We need repeat tourists, tourists who are educated about the community. They are not naïve about where we live, they don't come with these false sense of 'slap stick show' like we all run around naked and live in huts or something".</i>
Alternative Forms of Tourism	<i>"Well with volunteer tourism, a lot of stuff is done within the communities to help out people who are in need, so that's a great thing, you're getting that cultural exchange but also young people are getting the experience helping people and then those people are getting something for free that they really need".</i>	The Demonstration Effect	<i>"If foreigners were to come in, they should not bring their ideals from their country. I think that's another big problem with tourists is that they bring their ideals and therefore the people grasp onto their ideals and then the society collapses under that pressure. People who are coming in should want to learn about the culture and become apart of it rather than take away from it".</i>
Cultural Exhibits and Displays	<i>"...I think that the report that we did helped show us a lot of things that we took for granted and a lot of our cultural assets were just being ignored and left behind but the report helped highlight those cultural assets and say to us, "look guys you don't do this for tourism you do it for yourself". And what attracts that type of tourists, they want to engage in the culture, they want to eat a nice meal in a Bahamian restaurant".</i>		

Table 1 - Quotes to support the framework for Cross-Cultural Interaction

Implications for Tourism Development

Although this study is incomplete, preliminary findings from have both theoretical and practical implications. The most valuable theoretical contribution is the development of a framework for cross-cultural interaction. Small islands already face numerous vulnerabilities; therefore understanding the delicate nature of cross-cultural exchange is a key factor for communities wanting to strive towards sustainable tourism development. Practically speaking, The Bahamas Ministry of Tourism can utilize this information during the planning process for new tourism developments on Eleuthera, and other Family Islands as well. Due to the lack of infrastructure and human resources, many of these islands are subject to smaller forms of alternative tourism, which in turn result in residents and tourists being in closer proximity to each other, thus increasing the levels of exchange. In order to support a sustainable model for tourism development, the local ministries of tourism must take cross-cultural exchange into account, specifically the residents' attitudes towards tourists. Alas, the communities cannot survive economically without tourism and tourists will not visit a community where residents are non amenable. Tourism providers and officials can take this information and form programs to aid in the eradication of cross-cultural misunderstanding, thus increasing the opportunities for tourists and residents to interact in a more healthy and sustainable way.

Upon completion of this study, the differences between attitudes based on island of residence as well as and type of employment (tourism and non tourism) will be conducted. Moreover, a broader look at the overall attitudes and perceptions will be reported. The model for cross-cultural interaction will continue to develop and be tested based on the data from the other two islands. It is the intention of the authors that this study be completed by May of 2015.

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