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Beedle, Jennifer; Cardenas, David; Kline, Carol; and Byrd, Erick, "Resident Attitudes Towards Women Owned and Operated Tourism Businesses in an Emerging Destination" (2016). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 42. <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra/2012/Oral/42>

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Resident Attitudes Towards Women Owned and Operated Tourism Businesses in an Emerging Destination

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates resident attitudes towards women owned and operated, tourism related businesses in a rural and emerging destination. This study used social exchange theory (SET) to assess whether attitudes about women owned and operated tourism businesses (WOOTB) differ with respect to residents' opinions related to perceptions of associated costs and benefits, and whether attitudes differ with respect to demographics. The majority of respondents agreed that women-owned businesses would have an effect on tourism in the community. Residents agree that WOOTB will preserve local culture and contribute to women's capacity building, yet would also disrupt family life and damage the peaceful, rural character of the community.

Keywords: *resident attitudes, emerging destinations, gender, community development*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism as an economic engine and a mechanism of stimulating the economy is well documented. Often, communities look to tourism as a means of replacing traditional industries in decline or as a way of creating an economic base (McGehee and Andereck 2004). However with the development of tourism, impacts are created that change or alter the community. Tourism scholars have often focused on residents' attitudes a means of understanding the impacts of tourism on host communities (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, and Vogt 2005; Ap 1992;

Harrill 2004; Jurowski, Uysal, and Williams 1997; Mason and Cheyne 2000; Wang and Pfister 2008). According to Andereck and Vogt (2000) “a commonly cited objective for understanding resident attitudes is that without community support, it is difficult to develop a sustainable tourism industry in a community” (p. 27). The concern for resident attitudes is related to the importance of knowing how community residents perceive impacts of tourism to understand the social issues associated with development (Ap 1992; Lankford and Howard 1994), so that tourism can be planned in accordance with what is valued by the community.

The importance of assessing resident attitudes in areas where tourism is emerging, but not yet economically important has been suggested in the literature (Harrill 2004; Mason and Cheyne 2000; Vargas-Sanchez, Plaza-Mejia, and Porrás-Bueno 2009; Wang and Pfister 2008). Examining attitudes toward tourism prior to development engages this key stakeholder in the tourism planning process, and at the same time, serves to identify their desires and concerns. A specific impact resulting from tourism development in an emerging destination is the potential for tourism to influence new roles for segments of the population whose access to economic participation is limited by prescribed sociocultural norms (Cukier and Wall 1993). The role of women, in particular, has been strongly impacted by tourism development. Much of the literature on women’s role in tourism has presented quite complex situations through which tourism provides both opportunities and challenges. Several studies have depicted how tourism reinforces traditional gender divisions of labor, at times due to customary restrictions placed on the type of work women can become involved in (Apostolopoulos and Sönmez 2001; Timothy 2001). However, many of these studies also illustrated a level of independence and economic freedom provided to women by involvement in the provision of tourism products and services. Wilkinson and Pratiwi (1995) discussed the impact of tourism development on the role of women in rural Indonesia, and while their study indicated that women were pleased with new roles in tourism employment, they often worked in positions in line with traditional social roles, were prevented from activities viewed out of line with tradition, and often incurred double and even triple workloads.

Social exchange theory (SET) has been the prominent theoretical base for many resident attitude studies (Andereck, et al. 2005). The application of SET to tourism research was developed by Ap (1992) who constructed a model by which social exchange propositions could be used to explain resident attitudes toward tourism impacts. A substantial amount of research using SET has followed Ap’s contribution to the development of the theory as a framework for resident attitude studies (Andereck et al. 2005; Choi and Murray 2010; Jurowski and Gursoy, 2003; Jurowski, et al. 1997; McGehee and Andereck 2004; Sirakaya, Teye, and Sönmez 2002; Wang and Pfister 2008).

While studies of resident attitudes have been a strong component of the tourism research agenda for over 30 years (Andereck and Vogt 2000), little exists in the way of understanding resident attitudes in emerging destinations toward specific sociocultural impacts of tourism such as changing social roles, and the role of women in tourism. The purpose of this research is to investigate resident attitudes towards women owned and operated, tourism related businesses in a rural and emerging destination. It is also the intention of this research, using a social exchange theory framework, to gain an understanding of whether residents perceive the benefits of women owned and operated tourism businesses (WOOTB) to outweigh the costs. This research will assess whether attitudes about WOOTB differ with respect to residents’ opinions related to perceptions of associated costs and benefits, and whether attitudes differ with respect to demographics.

METHODS

The study was conducted in the summer of 2010 in Ayampe, Ecuador. The study site was selected because of results from a 2009 qualitative study indicating that community members were interested in tourism development and specifically interested in tourism related business for women in the community (Cárdenas and Elekwa 2010). Ayampe is a rural coastal community, located on the Ruta Del Spondylus scenic highway. The community has approximately 300 inhabitants and is in an economically depressed region of Ecuador. Very little formal industry exists in the community with agriculture and fishing being the main forms of subsistence. Ayampe's scenic vistas, abundant natural resources, tranquil coastal setting, and high surf make it an attractive location for potential visitors seeking rest and relaxation, as well as for the surfer market.

No published studies could be identified which measured resident attitudes toward WOOTB. Therefore, a new survey instrument was created by selecting relevant scale items from previous studies, as well as formulating new items based on themes from existing literature on women's involvement in tourism. The survey instrument for this research consisted of a combination of items adapted from previous studies. The new instrument contained six items adapted from the Tourism Impact Attitude Scale (TIAS) (Lankford and Howard 1994), five from Mason and Cheyne (2000) and four from McGehee and Andereck (2004). Additionally, eight new items related to women's role were included to further assess resident attitudes toward potential impacts of WOOTB. The survey consisted of 22 items regarding resident attitudes toward WOOTB. Items were measured on a 4-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree), and included the option "do not know."

Convenience sampling was chosen because the researcher had to rely on available subjects due to the small overall population, and population fluctuation during the week. Data was collected using intercepts during a public health awareness event. A total of 57 Ayampe residents 18 years of age and older completed the questionnaire. The data from the surveys were entered into SPSS 17.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test/Mann-Whitney U analysis (WMW) was run to test for differences in attitudes between dichotomous groups and a Kruskal-Wallis test was used to determine if group differences existed between groups of more than two.

RESULTS

The majority of the respondents (74%) were women. The mean age of respondents was 38, with a median age of 36. The oldest study participant was 82 and the youngest was 18. Over half of all respondents (56%) were married; the majority of whom (35%) indicated they have children under 18. Only two of the participants reported being married without children, while the majority of single participants (20%) did not have children. Over half, (66.7%) of respondents were unemployed. Of those who reported being employed (31.6%), 38.6% reported being employed in the community. Over one-third of employed residents (35%) reported working in a tourism related job. The average length of residency in Ayampe was 27 years.

Resident Attitudes Toward WOOTB

The majority of respondents agreed that women-owned businesses would have an effect on tourism in the community. Out of the 22 items, the statement receiving the highest level of agreement (98%) was "women-owned businesses would encourage more tourism in my

community”. The four statements related to the economic impact of WOOTB also provoked a high level of agreement with less than ten percent of residents indicating disagreement with the statements. Nearly all respondents (96%) agreed with the statements “women-owned businesses will provide more jobs in my community”, and “women-owned businesses will increase my standard of living”. The majority of respondents (91%) also agreed with the general statement “women-owned businesses will be vital for the community”. In contrast to the high level of agreement with economic and capacity building statements, responses to these statements provoked stronger reactions. Nearly one-third of the sample (32%) believed that WOOTB would negatively affect the community’s way of life. Three-quarters (75%) of respondents agreed that WOOTB would disrupt the social structure of the community, and over half (55%) of respondents agreed that women-owned businesses would cause change to traditional culture. Responses were nearly split over whether “women-owned businesses would disrupt family life”, and also whether “women-owned businesses would damage the peaceful, rural character of Ayampe”.

Group Differences in Resident Attitudes Toward WOOTB

A Mann-Whitney U analysis was used to test for dichotomous group differences in resident attitudes toward WOOTB. The test determined that men and women differed in terms of their attitudes toward the item women-owned businesses are vital for the community. Men ranked higher ($m=31.96$) than women ($m=23.96$) in their belief that women owned businesses are vital for the community ($Z=-2.042$, $p<.05$). Although the results expressed a lack of statistically significant differences between the attitudes of men and women, men generally ranked at least four points higher than women with respect to several items regarding the impact of WOOTB on the current level of tourism and economic activity in Ayampe, as well as items regarding increases in women’s education and skills. The data also indicated that women ranked higher than men along several items describing potential sociocultural impacts with regard to WOOTB. Employed residents ranked higher ($m=34.00$) than unemployed residents ($m=25.89$) with the statement “I think an increase in women’s education would be good for the community” ($Z=-1.982$, $p<.05$).

The results from the Kruskal Wallis test indicated that except for two items women-owned businesses will help preserve the cultural identity of my community ($X^2(2)=8.003$, $p<.05$) and women owned businesses will improve understanding/image of my community and culture ($X^2(2)=7.274$, $p<.05$) no statistically significant differences existed in resident attitudes based on their evaluation of the costs and benefits of WOOTB.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study indicate that communities developing tourism perceive a variety of impacts resulting from women’s participation as business owners within the tourism industry. Ayampe residents agree that WOOTB will preserve local culture, and that they will contribute to women’s capacity building. However, there is a nearly even split level of agreement with the statements women owned businesses will disrupt family life and, the establishment of women owned businesses would damage the peaceful, rural character of Ayampe, implies that residents are aware of the potential for WOOTB to have an impact on traditional lifestyle. Women’s participation in tourism businesses has been shown in the literature to cause some disruption to family life (Kousis 1989).

Research on the role of women in tourism suggests that tourism contributes to increasing opportunities for women to step outside their traditional domestic roles by participating in the provision of tourism products and services to visitors. Women's participation in tourism appears to have a number of positive impacts on the women themselves, their families, and host communities. Such examples have included increased levels of empowerment and self-esteem, increased personal and family income, a raised standard of living, and conservation of local community culture. However, this social role change has the potential to cause discord within communities that may not be prepared for such a shift. Thus, understanding the attitudes of residents toward this aspect of tourism development may serve as a tool to gauge residents' desires and concerns, build support, create awareness, and establish appropriate planning techniques.

As rural communities continue to look to tourism as a mechanism for economic development, it is becoming more important that the attitudes, opinions and perceptions of residents be considered as the foundation for tourism planning. For tourism to be successful in any community the host residents should feel that ultimate ownership and control of the sector is in their hands. The findings from this and other studies suggest the need for continued research on resident attitudes towards tourism, and particularly the role of women in tourism.

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