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# A Model for Understanding Residents' Support for Tourism in Small Islands

Robin Nunkoo

*University of Mauritius*, r.nunkoo@uom.ac.mu

Haywantee Ramkissoon

*University of Technology, Mauritius*, r.ramkissoon@utm.intnet.mu

Dogan Gursoy

*Washington State University*, dgursoy@wsu.edu

Christina G. Chi

*Washington State University*, cgengqi@wsu.edu

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# A MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING RESIDENTS' SUPPORT FOR TOURISM IN SMALL ISLANDS

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Robin Nunkoo

Department of Management, Faculty of Law and Management  
University of Mauritius, Réduit, Mauritius

Haywantee Ramkissoon

School of Sustainable Development and Tourism  
University of Technology, Mauritius, Pointe Aux Sable, Mauritius

Dr Dogan Gursoy

School of Hospitality Business Management  
College of Business, Washington State University, Pullman, USA

and

Dr Christina G. Chi, Ph.D.

College of Business, School of Hospitality Business Management  
Washington State University, Pullman, USA

## ABSTRACT

Small island economies have traditionally been popular tourist destinations. Achieving sustainable tourism development is a major challenge facing such economies. Yet, little research focusing on understanding small islands' residents attitudes have been conducted in the literature. Faced with unique characteristics, they deserve special attention, raising concerns about whether existing models and findings can be applied to understand community responses to tourism in such economies. To lessen this gap, this study develops a unique model for understanding small island community's attitudes to tourism. Pertinent factors likely to influence support for tourism are incorporated in the model.

**Key words:** Small economies; Community responses; Attitudes; Support; Tourism development

## INTRODUCTION

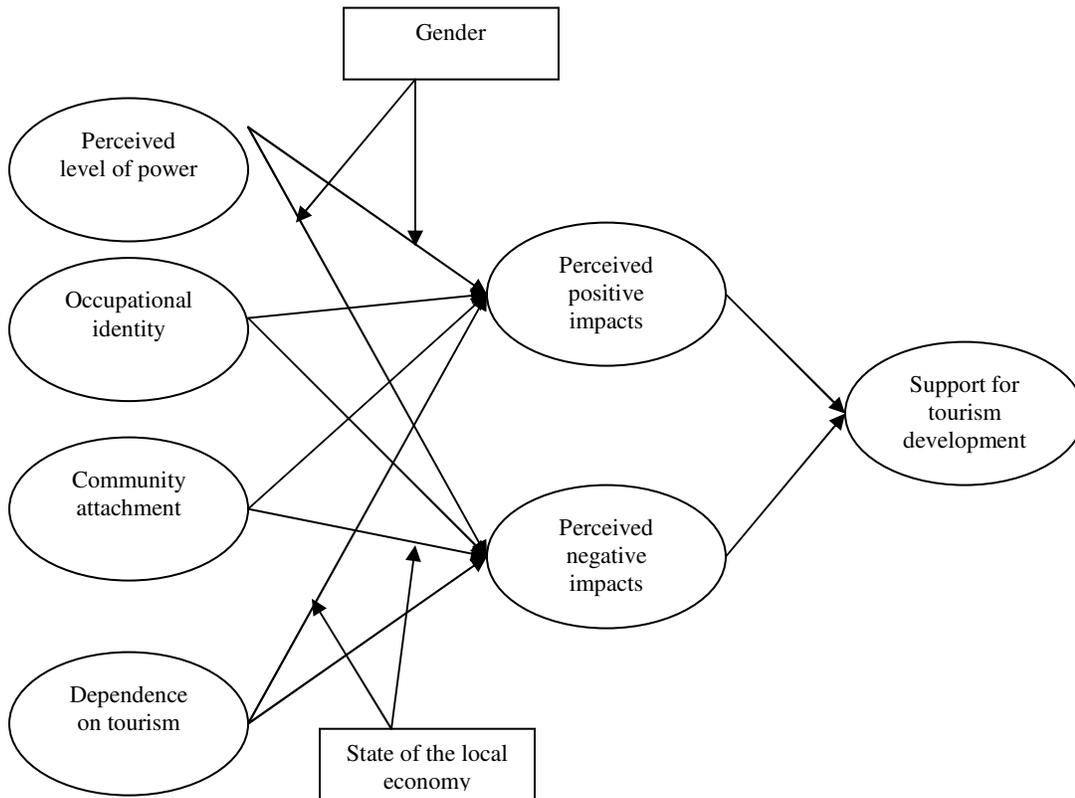
Despite the growing importance of assessing hosts' attitudes toward tourism and its importance in sustainable tourism development, many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) still lag behind in analyzing their residents' attitudes toward the industry as a component of sustainability. Jafari (1982) notes that the impacts of tourism on the host societies of developed economies like the United States or United Kingdom differ from those of developing economies (such as SIDS). Sirakaya et al (2002, p, 58) argue that "...the factors that influence residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism, as well as the nature and the extent of impact, are likely to be different between developed and developing regions." Though, in general, there is a plethora of studies examining community attitudes toward tourism (Teye et al., 2002), the majority have been conducted in developed and industrialized countries (Sirakaya et al., 2002). Teye et al., (2002) also note that few studies have been carried out in developing countries even though the literature has emphasized the importance of the tourism industry to SIDS (Apostolopoulos and Gayle, 2002; Beller et al., 1990; Briguglio et al., 1996; McElroy and de Albuquerque, 1998).

It becomes therefore difficult to apply the findings of such studies to small islands which exhibit unique characteristics. The lack of research on host attitudes in small island economies may suggest that it might be inappropriate to apply existing findings of current research on community attitudes to tourism to small economies given their unique characteristics and tourism development patterns. Thus, by drawing from current literature on small economies, tourism dependency, issues in economic development, and previous theoretical frameworks that have been applied to the study of host attitudes toward tourism, this study proposes a model for analyzing community attitudes toward tourism in SIDS (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

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**The Proposed Theoretical Framework of the Study**



**SMALL ISLAND STATES**

The Report of the Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank on Small States (2000) defines small states as countries with a population of 1.5 million or less. During the last two decades there has been a significant interest in small island economies (Campling and Rosalie, 2006; Shareef and McAleer, 2005). More particularly, scholars and policy makers have started paying close attention to the sustainable development of SIDS (Campling and Rosalie, 2006). Small islands provide a special case because of the unique characteristics of their natural resources, economies and culture as well as the challenges they face. Liou and Ding (2004) note that aspects such as domestic economies of scale, international trade capacity, degree of vulnerability, development level, inflow of external resources and institutional capacity strengthen the case for small islands to deserve special treatments. SIDS faces many challenges associated with small size, insularity, remoteness, proneness to natural disasters, social isolation and external dependency (Douglas, 2006).

**SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY**

Many researchers who investigate host community's attitudes toward tourism and support for tourism study the perceived impacts of tourism (e.g. Besculides et al., 2002; Brunt and Courtney, 1999). Much of the research on host's attitudes toward tourism has been atheoretical (Gursoy et al., 2002; Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). However, a number of studies have made use of a theoretical framework in assessing residents' attitudes toward tourism (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). Such a framework has been the Social Exchange Theory (SET) which is one of the most widely used models in tourism impact assessments (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). SET has been described as *'a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and*

*groups in an interaction situation*' (Ap, 1992, pp. 668). SET offers a theoretical base for understanding residents' attitudes towards tourism (Ap, 1992).  
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The theory has also been found to be the most accepted in explaining perceptions and attitudes toward the industry (Perez and Nadal, 2005). Consequently several studies have used the SET as a theoretical base for assessing community attitudes toward tourism (e.g. Ap, 1992; Gursoy et al., 2002; Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). The theory assumes that those residents who believe that they benefit from tourism are likely to view it positively while those who perceive costs will view it negatively. Residents who view tourism as personally valuable and believe that the costs do not exceed the benefits will favor the exchange (King et al., 1993) and will thus be inclined to be involved in the exchange. Such residents have been found to display positive attitudes to tourism and be supportive of future tourism development in their community (Ap, 1992; Gursoy et al., 2002).

## **ANTECEDENTS OF ATTITUDES**

While studies on the impacts of tourism have been growing in the literature, other researchers have focused on the factors likely to influence the perceived impacts of tourism and subsequent support for it (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). In fact, these factors have often been used to study tourism impact (Jurowski and Gursoy, 2004) and an understanding of these factors is important if tourism policies are to be successful. The following discussion focuses on those factors likely to be more relevant in the context of small economies.

### **Economic dependency**

Many scholars have investigated the relationship between economic dependence on tourism and attitudes toward the industry. Most of the studies which have investigated this relationship have concluded that residents who are dependent on the tourism industry benefit economically from the industry and thus have a more positive attitude toward tourism than other residents (Sirakaya et al., 2002). Also, some scholars note that it is important to distinguish between a community dependence and individual dependence on tourism (Smith and Krannich, 1998) and given that both dimensions of tourism dependence are very much applicable to SIDS, analyzing the relationships between the two dimensions of dependence and host attitudes toward tourism in SIDS might reveal important results. Thus, the conceptual and empirical perspective in the literature led to the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1a**                      **A direct positive relationship exists between dependence on tourism and the perceived positive impacts of tourism.**

**Hypothesis 1b**                      **A direct negative relationship exists between dependence on tourism and the perceived negative impacts of tourism.**

Tosun (2002) notes that while positive attitudes can be explained by the benefits derived from the industry, they themselves provide no explanations about the perceived negative impacts of tourism development. Blau (1967) argues that an individual in an exchange process with fewer alternative opportunities tend to be more dependent on and is more committed to the exchange. Many communities (including those of SIDS) have been going through substantial changes in their economy and the primary industries on which the economy depended have departed, leaving behind economic difficulties and the search for alternative development strategies (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). For instance, in a depressed island economy, residents might need to struggle for a living and might not be in favor of tourism but may still engage in an exchange process with tourists as a result of lack of other opportunities in the economy. Kayat (2002) notes that such residents tend to display positive attitudes toward the industry which might not always be attributed to the increased dependence on tourism, but on the fact that these dependent residents have no alternative, other than tourism to sustain themselves. Similarly, residents depending on tourism who display negative attitudes toward the industry might believe that their local economy is strong enough not to depend on tourism and to enable them earn a living from industries other than tourism. Consequently such residents, though dependent on tourism, might not support the industry. This might be an explanation for the negative attitudes held by those residents who are dependent on tourism. This suggests that there are other factors such as the perceived state of the local economy which might be moderating the effect of tourism dependence on perceived tourism

impacts. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed based on the preceding discussion on dependency and state of the local economy as antecedents of attitudes toward tourism.

**Hypothesis 2a**                    **The state of the local economy positively (negatively) moderates the relationship between individual dependence on tourism and perceived positive impacts of tourism.**

**Hypothesis 2b**                    **The state of the local economy positively (negatively) moderates the relationship between individual dependence on tourism and perceived negative impacts of tourism.**

### **Occupational identity**

In many places of the world, more specifically in SIDS, traditional economic activities such as agriculture, manufacturing, farming and other resourced based industries are on the decline (Petzelka et al., 2006; Petzelka et al., 2005; Wilson et al., 2001). For such economies, tourism has been found to be one of the most popular development strategies (Edgell and Harbaugh, 1993) However, a number of studies have revealed that locals tend to show some degree of resistance to tourism as a form of economic development (Lankford, 1994). One of the explanations for this variance in attitude is that of occupational identity (Petzelka et al., 2006; Petzelka et al., 2005). Occupation identity is one in which members' sense of identity is closely tied to their occupations. Since many SIDS are moving away from traditional resource based industries to tourism as a main engine for growth, the issue of occupational identity as a determinant of host perceptions toward tourism clearly demands further attention. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 3a**                    **A direct negative relationship exists between occupational identity and the perceived positive impacts of tourism.**

**Hypothesis 3b**                    **A direct positive relationship exist between occupational identity and the perceived negative impacts of tourism.**

### **Community attachment**

A few studies have focused on the relationship between community attachment and attitudes toward tourism (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). Community attachment is defined as the "extent and pattern of social participation and integration into community life, and sentiment or affect toward the community" (McCool and Martin, 1994, p, 30). While some researchers have found that there is a negative relationship between community attachment and attitudes toward tourism (Lankford and Howard, 1994), other scholars have found the opposite or no definitive relationship (Deccio and Baloglu, 2002; Gursoy et al., 2002; McCool and Martin, 1994). For instance, Jurowski et al., (1997) found that residents who are more attached to their community display more positive attitudes toward the economic and social impacts of tourism, while Lankford and Howard (1994) did not find any clear relationship between attachment and impact perceptions. These results suggest that the relationship between community attachment and tourism attitudes is contradictory (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004) and hence deserves further investigations. The contradictions in the findings can be explained by the fact that different measures have been used to define community attachment. Community attachment has often been measured as length of stay and /or having been born or grown up there (McGhee and Andereck, 2004), sentiment about the community and involvement in the community. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed: Following the preceding discussion the following hypotheses are proposed:

**Hypothesis 4a**                    **A direct positive relationship exists between community attachment and the perceived positive impacts of tourism.**

**Hypothesis 4b**                    **A direct negative relationship exists between community attachment and the perceived negative impacts of tourism.**

## Gender, Power and Attitudes to Tourism

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Other variables which have been shown to influence attitude toward tourism are the socio-demographic characteristics of the local community which includes variables such as gender. In fact, the importance of gender in economic development is widely recognized by many countries. SIDS are no exception to this and their developing country status reinforces the need for gendered economic development strategies. In fact, according to the United Nation (1994), the smallness and vulnerabilities of SIDS requires that special attention is given to population issues such as gender equality amongst others. The relationship between attitudes to tourism and gender is somewhat contradictory in the literature. The contradictory and unclear findings with regards to the influence of gender on attitudes toward tourism suggest that other factors may be moderating the effects of gender on attitudes. One reason for this can be the level of power between males and females especially when considering that the social exchange theory postulates that residents' perceptions toward tourism depend on the level of power they have in relation to the tourism industry (Hernandez et al., 1996). Therefore, power relations between genders can be one explanation as to why males and females might have different attitudes towards the tourism. Indeed, Kayat (2002) and Ap (1992) argue that the role of power needs to be understood to have a better understanding of the tourism social exchange process. However, the role of power in gender relationships is a dimension which has been given very little attention in the tourism literature. More specifically, it has been a neglected aspect in host attitudinal studies. It therefore deserves further research and attention

Power can be defined as "all forms of successful control by A over B – that is, of A securing B's compliance" (Lukes 1974, p. 17). Indeed, Kayat (2002) and Ap (1992) argue that the role of power needs to be understood to have a better understanding of the tourism social exchange process. However, the role of power in gender relationships is a dimension which has been given very little attention in the tourism literature and deserves further research. Indeed, the previously discussed studies on gender and attitudes toward tourism did not consider the role of power between genders in shaping attitudes. Kinnaird and Hall (1995) argue that power relations in tourism development represents an extensions of the politics of gender relations and note that tourism and its related activities can be improved and made more sustainable by focusing on the dynamics of gender relations.

Several researchers have found that the level of power indeed influenced attitudes toward tourism. For instance, in this study, Madrigal (1993) found that perceived personal influence over tourism development was related to positive attitude toward tourism by the host population. Negative perceptions toward the tourism industry were related to perceived business influence over tourism development. However, recent years have indicated a need to delve deeper into gender based explorations and identify factors other than biological that drive different or similar behaviors among men and women (Chabra, 2007). In this research, it is proposed that there exist a power imbalance between gender and such power imbalances influence males and females attitude to tourism. Based on conceptual and empirical studies from the literature on gender and power the following hypotheses are proposed:

- Hypothesis 5a**                    **A direct positive relationship exists between a resident's level of power and the perceived positive impacts of tourism.**
- Hypothesis 5b**                    **A direct negative relationship exists between a resident's level of power and the perceived negative impacts of tourism.**
- Hypothesis 6a**                    **The gender of the resident positively (negatively) moderates the relationship between the resident's level of power and perceived positive impacts of tourism.**
- Hypothesis 6b**                    **The gender of the resident positively (negatively) moderates the relationship between the resident's level of power and perceived negative impacts of tourism.**

## Support for Tourism Development

Support for tourism development can be measured by the attitudes of the local residents, which can dictate the extent to which the local community would accept tourism (Andriotis, 2005). However, although there is a plethora of such studies dealing with attitudes toward tourism in the literature, more research is needed to understand the relationship between residents' attitudes toward the industry and consequent support for it. It is usually assumed that positive attitudes toward tourism would mean support for further tourism development

(Andereck and Vogt, 2000). Based on the empirical and theoretical discussions from the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed: International CHRIE Conference-Refereed Track, Event 18 (2009)

**Hypothesis 7a**                    **A direct positive relationship exists between the perceived positive impacts of tourism and support for tourism development.**

**Hypothesis 7b**                    **A direct negative relationship exists between the perceived negative impacts of tourism and support for tourism development.**

## **THE PROPOSED MODEL**

Based on the theoretical and empirical discussion from the literature, 14 hypotheses (H1a, H1b - H7a, H7b)) have been developed and used to construct a comprehensive model for studying host attitudes toward tourism development in SIDS. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1 where support for tourism development is measured as the ultimate dependent construct. Attitudes toward tourism have been conceptualized as perceived positive and negative impacts of tourism. Four independent variables have been identified as antecedents of attitudes toward tourism: level of power, occupational identity, community attachment and individual dependence on tourism. Gender and state of the local economy have been hypothesized as moderating variables, the former moderating the relationship between level of power and perceived positive and negative impacts of tourism and the latter as moderating the relationship between individual dependence on tourism and the perceived positive and negative impacts of tourism development. Two additional constructs are examined as mediating variables between independent variables and the ultimate dependent construct: perceived positive impacts of tourism and the perceived negative impacts of tourism.

## **PROPOSED METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to test a proposed model concerning local resident perceptions about the impacts of tourism and their relationship with support for tourism and to test hypotheses to confirm casual relationships. At the time of writing this paper, data collection was not yet undertaken. However, data collection will involve the use of a structured questionnaire which will be designed following a review of existing literature on host attitudes toward tourism. Data will be collected through face-to-face interview using a structured questionnaire. The sample size will be determined using a stratified random sampling approach. It suggested the minimum sample size should be 200 to ensure appropriate use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to avoid getting goodness of fit indices as a result of small size. Since the study will use a SEM approach, the sample size is expected to be 500 residents living in the different regions of Mauritius. Data will be analyzed using the maximum likelihood method of estimation and the fit of measurement model. The fit of structural model will be tested using the LISREL structural equation analysis package. Other tests to determine how well the proposed model fit the data will be conducted. To determine the fit, chi-square and *P* values will be used. Other statistical tests will also be conducted.

## **CONCLUSION**

The unique characteristics of small island economies render findings of existing studies on community responses to tourism invalid, resulting in a need for further research on this aspect. Support for tourism development is a complex issue and findings from other studies suggest that community developers and tourism planners should take into account the attitudes of the residents before investing in a particular development. This study proposes a unique model of investigation small island communities' attitudes to tourism development in such economies. Factors likely to influence attitudes to tourism are discussed and incorporated in the proposed model. The framework could serve as a basis for tourism planning in such economies. The model could help tourism planners to better integrate the local communities in tourism development and understand areas of frustration and dissatisfaction. The likely antecedents of attitudes to tourism can also assist in formulating a program of internal marketing to the benefits of those most affected by tourism development. Such factors have been found to be a prerequisite for the sustainable development of tourism in a destination. It is expected that this research will further debate on sustainability issues in small economies, more precisely on the role of communities in the sustainable development of the tourism industry.

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