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## AN ASSESSMENT OF RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MARSHALL COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

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### Abstract

Marshall County, as is the case with many economically depressed communities, is looking to tourism as an alternative to stimulate the local economy. Since tourism's success relies on hosts' hospitality, understanding the residents' attitudes towards tourism development is important. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to assess the attitudes of Marshall County, West Virginia residents towards tourism development. Data for the study were collected through a structured questionnaire administered through SurveyMonkey online tool. Attitudes were measured by a 5-point *strongly disagree/strongly agree* scale on a series of questions soliciting resident opinions on tourism development and its perceived impacts.

Overall, the results showed overwhelming support for tourism. Residents have positive attitudes towards tourism development as they perceive it to be necessary for economic growth. Demographic characteristics including gender and age didn't seem to have any significant effect on attitudes. However, several other factors were seen to significantly affect attitudes including: length of residency; role of resident in the community; resident perceptions on community preparedness; and perceived economic benefits.

### 1.0 Introduction

Marshall County, WV is located in the northern panhandle of the state of West Virginia, approximately 68 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Like many communities in the United States, Marshall County's economy is facing challenges as it historically depended on manufacturing. Marshall County, as is the case with many economically depressed communities is looking to tourism as an alternative to stimulate local economic growth and need to understand residents' perceptions towards tourism development.

Research on resident attitudes towards tourism development has yielded diverse results. Hao, Long and Kleckley (2011) found that length of residence and quality of life affect attitudes of local resident property owners towards tourism development. Some studies have cited socio-demographic factors as having an effect on residents' attitudes (Liu & Var, 1986; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Um & Crompton, 1987), while others found that perceived personal benefits from tourism affect individual perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development (Deccio & Baloglu, 2002; Jurowski, Uysal & Williams, 1997; Perdue, Long & Allen, 1990). Several studies have shown the importance of community characteristics such as level of tourism development and dependency of the local economy on tourism in shaping resident attitudes towards tourism development (Butler, 1980; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Long et al., 1990). This study brings in two more dimensions that were not identified in literature, including: the effects of the role of resident in the community and perceptions of community preparedness on attitudes.

The study sought to investigate residents' attitudes towards tourism development in Marshall County, West Virginia, assessing how these attitudes vary with respondent demographic characteristics, length of residency, role of respondent in the community, residents' perception on community preparedness and perceived economic benefits. The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What do Marshall County residents feel about tourism development?
- How do residents' attitudes vary with demographic characteristics such as age and gender?
- Does length of residency in Marshall County affect attitudes towards tourism development?
- Do attitudes vary with role of respondent in the community?
- Do resident perceptions on community preparedness affect attitudes toward tourism development?
- Do perceived economic benefits impact attitudes towards tourism development?

### 2.0 Methods

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered through SurveyMonkey online research tool. Emails with the survey link were sent to residents identified via a snowballing technique. Attitudes were measured by a 5-point *strongly disagree/strongly agree* scale on series of questions soliciting resident opinions on tourism development and its perceived

impacts. Resident perceptions on community preparedness were measured by several items grouped in four categories as presented in Table 1. Analysis techniques used included descriptive analysis, t-tests and ANOVA.

Table 1: Categories of residents' perceptions of community preparedness

Category	Items under each category	Measurement and scale
Infrastructural readiness	Public transportation Road conditions Road signage Adequate parking facilities Range of restaurants	Rating of the condition of each item 1 = Poor 5 = Excellent
Safety and community's ability to handle crises	Emergency medical services Police and law enforcement Fire department	Rating of community readiness to handle crises and emergencies 1 = Not ready at all 5 = Very ready
Availability of activities and entertainment	There is plenty to do in Marshall County There are enough recreational activities in Marshall County Marshall County needs more activities to attract more visitors	Agree or disagree with statement 1 = Completely disagree 5 = Completely agree
Ability to deliver quality services	Restaurants Lodging Parks, Banks	Rating of quality of service 1= Poor 5 = Excellent

### 3.0 Results and Discussion

A total of 123 surveys were completed of which 52% (64) were from within the county and 48% were from out of Marshall County. The 48% from outside of the county were not used in this analysis. Most (61%) of the respondents were female and about a third were male. The majority of the respondents were over the age of 50 years old, with 51-55 years as the mean age group. The average length of residence of respondents in Marshall County was 32.5 years.

#### 3.1 Resident Attitudes towards tourism

Overall, the residents had positive attitudes and supportive of tourism development. However, results also show that residents are supportive of tourism development as long as they don't have to pay to fund it. The lowest mean score (2.91) on positive statements was for the statement 'User fees should be introduced to fund tourism development in Marshall County.' Residents are not particularly supportive of user fees even though they support tourism development. Residents generally don't agree that tourism would damage the rural character of their towns; increase crime or create pollution, indicating overall support for tourism. Table 2 summarizes the attitude results:

Table 2: Mean scores for resident attitudes towards tourism

Item	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.
Tourism creates jobs in Marshall County	4.18	4.00	4.00	.6507
Tourism would damage the peaceful, rural character of our towns	1.83	2.00	2.00	.7261
Tourism jobs are highly desirable	3.62	4.00	4.00	.860
Tourism will increase crime in Marshall County	1.96	2.00	2.00	.815
Tourism increases local awareness and appreciation of the environment	3.83	4.00	4.00	.834
Tourism creates too much pollution and waste	2.18	2.00	2.00	.846
Tourism will improve living conditions in Marshall County	3.48	3.50	4.00	.731
Tourism creates congestion and overcrowding	2.36	2.00	2.00	.967
Tourism will inform others about our culture and history	4.09	4.00	4.00	.777
Tourism overburdens local resources	1.96	2.00	2.00	.712
Tourism is costly to locals	1.88	2.00	2.00	.811
Residents should welcome and be hospitable to tourists	4.46	4.00	4.00	.569
Tourism development is critical for Marshall County	4.13	4.00	4.00	.854
Tourism development will improve Marshall County's quality of life	4.16	4.00	4.00	.591
User fees should be introduced to fund tourism development in Marshall County	2.91	3.00	3.00	1.106

1= Completely disagree; 5 = Completely agree.

### 3.1.1 Do residents' attitudes vary with demographic characteristics and role of resident in the community?

Age and gender had no significant effect on any of the attitude items. Independent samples t-test,  $t(29) = 2.422, p = .022$  showed that length of residence had significant effect on one item: 'Tourism creates too much waste and pollution.' Residents with more than 10 years of residency ( $M = 2.08, SD = .806$ ) tended to disagree with the statement more than those that had resided in the county for less than 10 years ( $M = 2.86, SD = .690$ ). Those with fewer years of residency could have relocated to the county from larger cities for the peace and quiet of rural communities, therefore, might have more experience with negative impacts of tourism than long-time Marshall County residents.

Role of resident in community had significant effects on two items: 'Tourism increases local awareness and appreciation of the environment,' and 'Tourism would damage the peaceful, rural character of our towns.' Significant differences existed between two groups: officials (city council/chamber of commerce members) and residents on these two items as presented in Table 3. City council and chamber members had a tendency to be more supportive of tourism than residents with no political role in the community. City council and chamber members felt that tourism would increase local awareness and appreciation of the environment and also didn't agree that tourism would damage the peaceful and rural character of local towns.

Table 3: Significant results on effect of role of respondent in community on attitudes

Item	Role of respondent in community	Mean	t
Tourism increases local awareness and appreciation of the environment	Chamber/city council member	4.03	1.798**
	Residents	3.67	
Tourism would damage the peaceful, rural character of our towns	Chamber/city council member	1.58	2.210*
	Residents	1.97	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

### 3.1.2 Do perceived economic benefits affect attitudes towards tourism?

Perceived economic benefits were assessed by respondents' perception on the ability of tourism to create jobs in the county, measured by respondents' rating of the statement, 'Tourism creates jobs in Marshall County.' One way ANOVA results showed perceived economic benefits significantly affected resident attitudes towards tourism on two attitude items: 'Tourism development will improve Marshall County's quality of life,' [ $F(2,54) = 5.561, p = .006$ ], and 'Residents should welcome and be hospitable to tourists,' [ $F(2,54) = 2.857, p = .066$ ]. Tukey's HSD post hoc comparisons indicated those who strongly agreed that tourism would create jobs for Marshall County believed that tourism development would improve Marshall County's quality of life more ( $M = 4.53, SD = .515$ ) than those who just agreed that tourism would create jobs for the county, ( $M = 4.00, SD = .568$ ). Also, those who strongly agreed that tourism would create jobs felt that residents should welcome and be hospitable to tourists more ( $M = 4.71, SD = .470$ ) than those that just agreed ( $M = 4.31, SD = .592$ ). Considered together these results suggest that perceived economic benefits as measured by tourism's ability to create jobs positively affect resident attitudes towards tourism development.

### 3.1.3 Do resident perceptions on community preparedness affect attitudes towards tourism?

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to test if any significant differences existed in attitudes towards tourism between residents who thought that the community was adequately prepared for tourism and those that didn't, based on their ratings of several preparedness items under four categories including: Infrastructural readiness; safety and ability to handle crises; availability of activities and entertainment; ability to deliver quality service. A cut-off point of 3 out of 5 was used to separate respondents who felt the community was prepared from those who believed it wasn't. All ratings above 3 were interpreted as an indication of the community's preparedness on each item and those below 3 to indicate that residents perceived the community wasn't adequately prepared. Significant results showing effect of residents' community preparedness perceptions on attitudes towards tourism development are presented in Table 4.

(-Insert Table 4 here-)

Results showed that significant differences existed in residents' attitudes towards tourism based on their perceptions on the community's infrastructural readiness. Results displayed in Table 4 illustrate that residents who perceived the county's public transportation and road signage as adequate agreed that tourism would improve the county's living conditions and that tourism jobs were desirable. However, results also showed that residents who perceived road conditions and signage to be good were less agreeable to the statement that tourism would improve the county's quality of life. These findings could be interpreted to imply that residents who feel the county's infrastructure is poor see tourism development as the only way to improve the infrastructure, hence the county's quality of life. No significant differences were noted on any other attitude items based on resident perceptions on infrastructural readiness.

Preparedness perceptions on community's ability to handle crises were also seen to significantly affect attitudes (Table 4). Residents who felt that the county's police and law enforcement services were inadequate felt that tourism development would increase crime. On the other hand, residents who perceived the county's emergency medical services to be ready and adequate also tended to be more supportive of tourism than those who didn't, agreeing that tourism: is critical for the county; increases local awareness and appreciation of the environment and informs others about local culture and history. Overall, results reveal a negative relationship between the residents' perceptions of the community's ability to deal with safety and security issues and their attitudes towards tourism development. It is expected that residents would be concerned about their safety and security when there are not adequate resources within the community to respond to emergency situations.

Perceptions on availability of activities and entertainment were also seen to significantly affect attitudes. Residents who felt that the county didn't have enough activities tended to have more positive attitudes towards tourism development than those who felt the county had enough activities. Residents who felt that the county had enough activities and entertainment associated tourism with increased pollution and waste. Put together, these findings indicate that residents who feel that the county doesn't have enough recreational activities and entertainment see tourism development as a way to improve these in the county, therefore, are more supportive of tourism.

Perceptions on the county's ability to deliver quality services were also seen to significantly impact attitudes towards tourism development. Residents who rated the quality of lodging services as poor were more likely to agree with the statement, 'Residents should welcome tourists and be hospitable,' ( $M = 4.78, SD = .478$ ), than those who rated lodging services quality as good to excellent ( $M = 4.30, SD = .571$ ). However, both groups agree that residents should be welcoming and hospitable to tourists as the mean scores for both groups were above 4. There were no other service-related significant differences on any other attitude items. The findings from the four categories display that resident attitudes towards tourism do vary based on their perceptions of the community's preparedness to deal with increase in tourism activity.

#### 4.0 Conclusions and Implications

Overall, residents of Marshall County are very supportive of tourism development. However, it is interesting to note that residents are supportive as long as they don't have to pay for it. Residents didn't seem as supportive to the idea of introducing user fees to fund tourism development as they were to tourism development in general. Long et al. (1990) found resident support for special tourism user fees and taxes to increase with increasing levels of tourism development. The implication of this is that residents have to see and experience the positive impacts of tourism to be willing to pay fees and taxes for additional development. Marshall County should, therefore, seek alternative sources of funding to jumpstart tourism before residents can be expected to support fees and taxes for tourism development. The main driver for the support seems to be economic as residents view tourism as important to stimulate the local economy, create jobs and improve living conditions and quality of life. Results also showed that attitudes towards tourism development vary with perceived economic benefits. Residents who believed that tourism would create jobs in the county tended to have more positive attitudes towards tourism than those who didn't. The findings are consistent with findings from other researchers. Andereck & Vogt (2000) found that residents tend to support tourism as a community development strategy. This implies that the county needs to promote and prioritize those developments that utilize local resources and skills in the pursuit of tourism as residents seem to support tourism mainly on the assumption that it will bring jobs to the county and improve their quality of life. Training programs can be established to develop local skills and entrepreneurship to ensure that residents fully participate and benefit from tourism growth.

The main concerns with tourism development shown by Marshall County residents seem to be related to social issues such as increase in crime, congestion, pollution and inability of the community infrastructure and resources to sustain tourism growth. To improve resident attitudes and support, Marshall County officials might need to focus on improving basic infrastructure and services first, in-order to assure residents that the community can sustain tourism growth without creating too much cost for them and/or disrupting their daily lives.

Future research should focus on monitoring resident attitudes over time to determine if these change with level of tourism development and economic growth in the community. It will be of interest to different stakeholders, including the residents themselves to establish the threshold of support for tourism development and growth in the community.

#### 5.0 Citations

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Table 4: Significant results on effect of residents' community preparedness perceptions on attitudes towards tourism

Category	Preparedness items with significant effect on attitudes	Attitude items affected	Mean Difference**	t
Infrastructural readiness	Public transportation	Tourism will improve living conditions in Marshall County	.933	2.188*
	Road conditions	Tourism development will improve Marshall County's quality of life	-.625	-2.12*
	Road signage	Tourism jobs are highly desirable Tourism development will improve Marshall County's quality of life	.530 -.32	2.51* -2.11*
Safety and community's ability to handle crises	Emergency medical services	Tourism increases local awareness and appreciation of the environment Tourism development is critical for Marshall County Tourism will inform others about our culture and history	1.16 1.01 2.37	3.15* 2.60* 6.04*
	Police and law enforcement	Tourism will increase crime in Marshall County	.48	-1.97*
Availability of activities and entertainment	There are enough recreational activities in Marshall County	Tourism creates too much pollution and waste	.858	2.58*
	Marshall County needs more activities to attract more visitors	Tourism creates jobs in Marshall County	.820	2.94*
		Tourism increases local awareness and appreciation of the environment	1.21	3.22*
		Tourism will improve living conditions in Marshall County Tourism will inform others about our culture and history	.667 1.67	2.12* 3.88*
Ability to deliver quality service	Lodging	Residents should welcome and be hospitable to tourists	.48	-2.35*

\*p<.05; \*\*Mean difference is between those who perceive the community to be adequately prepared (M>3) and those who don't (M<3) on each preparedness item.