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# **An Ethnographic Evaluation of Local Residents' Perceptions of Tourism in the Pre-Tourism Phase: The Case of Burdeos, Philippines**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*There were many studies done on local residents' perception on tourism but only few scholars have embarked on an ethnographic study exploring local residents' perception from a pre-tourism development phase. Most of the past studies focused on resident's perception towards tourism impact and attitude towards expansion of tourism development (Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Harill, 2004; Lepp, 2008). The present study explores and reports on local residents' perceptions prior to the beginning of tourism in an island community in the Philippines. Focusing on how the local people understand tourism within the context of pre-tourism development, the paper draws up a basic framework in which tourism planning and development should be anchored.*

**Keywords:** *local residents' perceptions, ethnography, pre-tourism development, Burdeos*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Understanding and recognition of local residents' attitudes and perceptions toward tourism development is integral in the success and sustainability of any tourism development. A large number of studies have examined resident perceptions and attitudes as well factors that influenced community members' attitudes and perceptions (Gursoy, Chi & Dyer, 2009). Most of those studies are based upon on the context of existing tourism development which suggests that locals tend to have positive perception and attitudes because they see tourism as an economic development tool (Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal, 2002). However, in the study done in Viengxay, Laos by Suntikul, Bauer, & Song (2009) where tourism is on its very early stage of development, local residents have already expressed positive perceptions and expectations with tourism. In the context similar to Burdeos where tourism is non-existent, the local residents have already professed anticipation of economic benefits. Why do the majority of the local residents of Burdeos demonstrate positive perception toward tourism? How come only few among the interviewees shared negative thoughts towards tourism? How can these variations from local residents' perception can be explained and understood? Similarly, this research attempts to understand the critical factors that influenced local residents' willingness or unwillingness to support tourism development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Community Perceptions and Attitudes toward Tourism**

Various tourism scholars have stressed the importance of understanding local residents' views towards tourism development and the factors that have influenced their reactions. According to these scholars Ap, 1992; King, Pizam, & Milman, 1993; Lankford & Howard, 1994; McCool & Martin, 1994; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; Garrod & Fyall, 1998; Andereck & Vogt, 2000 that having a clear understanding of the local people perceptions as well as factors that shaped their views are essential in achieving a host community's support for tourism development. Local resident's support for tourism development is critical because successful operation and sustainability depend heavily on

their goodwill and community participation. More scholars pursued and engaged in investigating local people's perception in various destinations to validate the earlier claim that residents' views are critical factors that contribute to the sustainability of tourism development (Chen, 2000; Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001; Gursoy, et al., 2002). However, majority of these studies have focused on the perceived impacts of residents towards tourism rather than the proposed tourism development (Keogh, 1990; Mason, et al., 2000; Harill, 2004). Further, all these studies have been conducted in the context of existing tourism developments largely from the western perspectives.

Relative to these findings, although there are a number of theories and models developed in understanding the perceptions and attitudes of local residents in host communities, previous studies indicate that there is a lack of application and modeling the theoretical foundations specifically in the developing world (Ap, 1992; Harill, 2004; Kennedy & Dornan, 2009). Residents perceptions were variously conceptualized based on the contexts of developed economies where tourism is already considered as an economic engine of growth such as Doxey's irritation index (1975), Butler's (1980) destination lifecycle, dependency theory (Britton, 1982), forms of adjustment (Dogan, 1989), social disruption theory (England & Albrecht, 1984; Brown, et al., 1989), social exchange theory (Ap, 1992), embracement-withdrawal continuum (Ap & Crompton, 1993), collaboration theory (Jamal & Getz, 1995), social representations theory (Pearce, Moscardo, & Ross, 1996), framework for monitoring community impacts of tourism (Faulkner & Tideswell, 1997), chaos model of tourism (McKercher, 1999), and social carrying theory (Perdue, et al., 1999).

Research focusing on residents' attitudes towards tourism development with no or little knowledge of tourism is rare or very limited (Lepp, 2008). As cited earlier, Suntikul, et al., (2009) conducted a study in Laos People's Democratic Republic, where tourism is in its infancy. The study reports that residents have no or little understanding of tourism as well as the motivations of tourists visiting their communities. Cognizant of the gap, this research will add to the knowledge of understanding local residents' behavior prior to the development of tourism or from the context of 'pre- [tourism] development phase'.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

Based on the earlier statement that local residents' perceptions and attitude toward tourism contribute to the success of tourism development in a destination, the social exchange theory (SET) will be used to explain why it led to actual support, partnership and collaboration among the stakeholders. Various scholars in fact, have used social exchange theory as a framework for their respective studies in understanding residents' perceptions of the impacts of tourism (Ap, 1990; Ap, 1992; Allen, Hafer, Long & Perdue, 1993).

The modern social exchange theory has evolved from the works of Homans (1961), Blau (1964), Levi-Strauss (1969) and Emerson (1972). It is a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interactive situation. Interactions are regarded as a process in which actors provide one another with valued resources either tangible or intangible benefits and tourism as a socio-economic activity exemplifies such kind of interactions between/among different stakeholders within the [tourism] system.

Tourism as a discipline and a field of knowledge shares similar nature with social exchange theory being a multidisciplinary discourse. SET's foundations are rooted and parallel with tourism studies which based on the disciplines of psychology, economics and sociology. As such, SET is fitting in this particular area of tourism where resident's perception and attitude are being explored and explained why certain residents view tourism development positively or negatively. SET's psychological philosophies explain that by

nature human beings always engage in social relations and interaction anticipating for potential benefits rather than risks. However, once the risks outweigh the rewards, a person may suddenly terminate or disengage from the relationship. This psychological principle of SET strongly relates to its economic philosophy, that is the cost-benefit continuum. In previous studies, SET was applied using the concept of cost-benefit continuum, which according to Ap (1992) the justifications were based upon cost-benefit analysis of the impacts of tourism at destinations. The theory suggests that residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism are determined by the benefits received and power relations involved in tourism. Residents support tourism if they benefit and dislike it when they do not benefit from it (Andereck, et al., 2005). This implies that for tourism to be perceived positively, residents may generally expect positive social, economic and environmental impacts of the tourism industry (Reisinger & Turner, 2003). Also, social exchange theory suggests that the three parties (e.g. local communities, tourists and tourism developers) will be in exchange if the benefits do not exceed the costs, and that the rewards are of importance in this context (Ap, 1992).

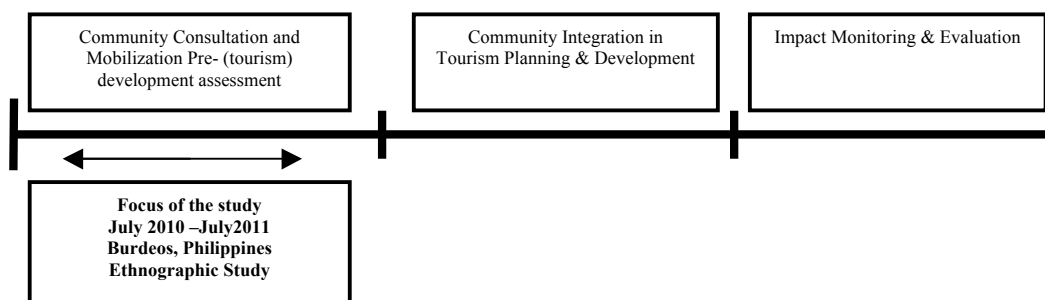
While majority of tourism studies adopted SET from economics perspective, only a few have looked at it from a sociological perspective. Based on the tourism literature, SET were not thoroughly discussed or investigated on the aspect relating to local residents social relations/interactions and reciprocity that leads to concept of power. As Blau (1964) asserts, the basic assumption of exchange theory is that individuals establish, nurture and continue social relations because they get some benefits, or they expect that such relations will be mutually advantageous. This assumption of mutually advantageous brings the notion of reciprocity or mutual gratifications between individuals. However, as Molm (2000), argues, when such relations result in heavy dependencies on each other, such as one benefiting greater than the other it could result to a sort of 'power imbalance'. As defined by Molm (2000), power imbalance between two actors' dependencies on each other is a measure of their relative power over each other. An imbalance in power is a result of unequal value or access in the resources that two actors have control. This particular principle of social exchange is very useful in understanding the social relations among the different stakeholders involved in the tourism development.

## **METHODS**

The scantiness in research mentioned earlier, inspired this descriptive investigation through the use of ethnography and participant-observation coupled with in-depth interviews, focus groups and participatory/group workshops. This allowed the researcher to address and speak on the grey areas that were often ignored by other researchers. Specifically, this study investigated how the local residents who only had minimal knowledge of tourism perceived its development in the pre-tourism phase. This ethnographic research was undertaken in Burdeos Quezon, Philippines from mid July 2010 to July 2011. There were two phases involved in this study in gathering local residents' perspective toward tourism. The first phase was prior to a tourism awareness education campaign conducted by the researcher, and the second phase was after the awareness education campaign. The awareness education campaign was part of the researcher's intervention, to explore whether the local residents would have a change of perspective if they have certain level of tourism awareness.

With regard to participatory action research, Gibson-Graham (2006) expressed that through participatory action research, the researched community able to gain new pathways to see themselves both their capacities and incompetencies resulting to new understanding of their 'self'. MacKay (2002) argues that in addition to transforming the researched group, participatory action research can also transform the researcher. I concur with that supposition as long as the researcher approaches the field with an open-mind or open-agenda, and ready to new discoveries and realities of the new lived-spaces or unfamiliar communities.

**Figure 1**  
**Focus of the Ethnographic Study ‘Pre-Tourism Development Phase**



This qualitative research provides a catalyst and facilitator’s perspective. There is no definitive answer such as ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but purely an explanation to the research questions based upon the community’s held beliefs, thoughts, feelings, values and capabilities obtained from the field.

There are types of ‘reflexivities’ critical in this study which helped me understand the discourses of Burdeos’ tourism pursuit. I was in a dialogic exercise all throughout my ethnographic journey in which I constantly relate ‘the self’, the other, and the environment. These reflexivities are: First, is my personal reflexivity being a Filipino and a former tourism officer of the province researching the ‘not-so distant’ community. Second, is epistemological reflexivity my research parameters were constantly challenged: Am I capable of undertaking this academic task the way it was designed? Are my research questions adequately defined and articulated?” “Could it have been investigated through different approach? Has the study’s design and method of analysis constructed the data/findings and would this have given rise to a different understanding of local resident’s perceptions and attitudes toward tourism, power relations in pre-tourism development and community participation? Lastly, is the consequential reflexivity, refers to the manner by which the research touches upon the researcher (my) social, cultural and academic life. How this ethnographic journey would further shape my interest in other aspects of community /rural development and tourism or other field of disciplines.

### **STUDY AREA**

The reason for choosing Burdeos as the research area was primarily due to its potential as a new tourist destination that will offer diverse tourism experiences and because of its rich biodiversity. Its virgin ecology and species diversity (endemic, endangered flora and fauna) are subjects of marine and terrestrial investigations and research. It has one the largest reef areas (7,862 hectares) among reef communities in Asia. Because of its numerous coves and unpolluted seas, Burdeos has the potential to attract ‘sun, sand and sea’ tourists. It is the site of the largest mangrove plantation and conservation program in Asia, and home of the giant frugivorous monitor lizards, the only remaining species in the whole world that can be found in Polillo islands including Burdeos (Welton, et. al., 2010).

Once Burdeos’ natural environment including its mountains, caves, forests and reefs has been fully explored, conserved and managed, it can evolve into a multi-dimensional adventure destination. Along with community-based tourism, adventure tourism can fit in through adventure tours and activities that will be developed later on.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Tourism through the eyes of the local people ‘accessing the local minds’**  
***Local People's Initial Perception***

As planned and designed, gathering local residents' perceptions toward tourism was conducted base on two scenarios. First, was prior to tourism awareness education campaign and second, was after the awareness education intervention has been conducted. As cited earlier, local people in Burdeos possess zero to minimal or limited tourism knowledge and exposure. With that, I am interested how these people view tourism and what intervening factors shaped their 'uninformed or informed' thoughts about tourism.

### *Positive Thoughts*

Tourism is perceived to be a '**money-making**' activity that equates to proliferation of money to the local people. Money is perceived as the measure of having a good life or quality life. The concept of money and desire for quality life as the fundamental goal of the local residents was consistent throughout all the villages. Respondents acknowledged outright the economic benefits associated with tourism. Owing to the lack of education, the local people's myopic mindset and limited information failed to provide them the opportunity to broaden their perspective and horizon. These local people maintain such narrow perceptions because of the scarce or limited opportunity to gain knowledge. Their basic goal is to earn additional income that would help them sustain their everyday lives. Similarly, their positive perception of tourism was influenced by the destiny that other Burdeos residents had. The destiny referred to is the opportunities other residents had, for instance there were local residents who are married to foreigners and leading a good life in and out of the country.

*My neighbor's daughter even though she wasn't able to study in the university they have good life now because her daughter met and married a foreigner, they are staying abroad I just don't know which country (has a smile on her face and manifests feeling of hope). When they visit here, I am happy to see them but I also wish that later on our life will also improve like theirs. I don't know if I want to marry foreigners all I want is to help my family from our poor condition (head moving sideways). I want to study but we can't afford, may be I will look for employer to be a house helper, and then I will save to continue my studies (a little sad face)..... Youth Female (10/1/10)*

Such assertion illustrates that tourism is a picture of 'hope' for some. Particularly the young women and even their mother's perspective, tourism seems to be attributed to the opportunity of 'meeting upon foreigner' that could be a potential future partner; hence, their passport towards better and improved life.

The above elucidation concretely indicates the economic facet of tourism. Their positive thoughts even before the conduct of tourism awareness education, majority of the population have already thought of employment opportunities as the consequence of opening up Burdeos to tourists and that is the source of money as well as their 'hope' that they are referring to.

**Local Pride & Security.** This perception was shared both by the municipal and barangay officials. The local authorities had already opportunities of visiting key tourist destinations within the country as part of familiarization/educational tour integrated within their seminars and trainings as elected government officials. Cognizant of this information, it is no longer surprising that they recognized tourism as a tool to instill local pride among the local residents. While the issue of security is regarded as one of the major concerns that must be addressed not only by the themselves but their constituents as well. These local officials recognized that opening their municipality to tourists, means that every resident should take pride of being a resident of Burdeos, that their community is unique and deserves appreciation and respect from visitors.

**Quality of life and community pride.** Noting one positive impact of tourism, is the improvement of the quality of life of the destination community. As shared by the public school teachers and some members of the people's organization they anticipated that on the event Burdeos become a tourist destination, quality of life will improve alongside the improvement of the entire municipality. They believe that many improvements in the services and facilities on the island will take place as part of the tourism development. Further, aside from the improvement of quality of life, they also have noted that having tourists on their island make them feel proud and happy.

**Road repairs & improvement.** Intuitively, the driver sector due to the nature of their work as jeepney and tricycle drivers, they positively correlate road improvements with tourism. They believe that for tourists and visitors to visit their place they need to have good network of roads.

**Electricity Improvement.** Continuous or permanent electricity has been a long time clamor of the residents in Burdeos. As stated earlier, only on certain time of the day or night electricity is supplied in some of the barangays while there other barangays that utilize solar power, selected and provided by a solar energy company from abroad.

**Port Improvement and Increase Ferry Frequency/Schedule.** The port in Barangay Anawan, Polilio is very rustic and there is an absence of basic ports facilities such as comfort rooms or toilets. Local residents believe that with tourism, there will be major changes and improvements in the ports and there will be more ferries that will travel to and from Burdeos.

#### *Negative Thoughts*

Despite the commonly held positive belief on tourism by the majority of the local residents, among the 14 barangays/villages that constitute the municipality, there are only 1 or 2 barangays that consistently deviate from the rest and resist from the general program of the town.

**Displacement of local people and its livelihood.** Only in one or two barangays that community members expressed their negative sentiments with tourism. They are afraid to be displaced and prohibited to conduct fishing activities. The fact that majority of the fishermen in this village refused to follow the municipal ordinance on illegal fishing and they verbalized that if they will support tourism development in the area, their livelihoods would be at stake. To illustrate the scenario where rejection is manifested both on illegal fishing ordinance and tourism development, a scary incident happened when there were at least three residents in the assembly who were unable to control themselves expressing their rejection on the issues, threw some chairs upon us (guests/speakers).

The antagonistic attitude of the residents is totally different from the claims of Doxey (1975) in which at the initial stance local residents are usually euphoric. The local people become antagonistic only after they have felt threatened by tourists or due to expanded tourism development resulting to negative impacts. However, some research also does not concur with the claims of Doxey (1975) such as Brougham and Butler (1981) and Rothman (1978) that having a heterogeneous community one may have diverse attitudes simultaneously existing in a community. This finding from Burdeos thus, supports what Butler (1980) suggests that both positive and negative attitudes could be held by residents in a community simultaneously and can be manifested through support or rejection.

#### *Neutral stand on Tourism*

**Environmental Conservation and Protection.** It was surprising that there is a group of local residents in Burdeos who seemed to be fully aware of the potential impacts of tourism, these are the volunteers as sea rangers and forest rangers and locally referred to as *Bantay Dagat* (Sea Rangers) and *Bantay Kalikasan* (Forest Rangers) respectively. These volunteers

are either fishermen or farmers who volunteered themselves as protectors of their natural environment. It was unusual indeed to chance upon with the kind of local people who went out of their way to be able to contribute to their community. It was surprising because owing to their meager daily income from fishing and farming activities they still have the capacity, willingness and commitment to become a volunteer.

### ***Perceptions Change (AFTER the conduct of awareness education campaign)***

In this study, more than one hundred residents were interviewed formally including the informal dialogues with other local residents and sectoral groups on two occasions. The first round of interviews was prior to the tourism awareness raising intervention and then the second round was held after the intervention. Given the initial intervention, the study elaborates on whether the local people both the 'powerless and powerful elites' changed their views and perception toward tourism. I categorized this into two groups: first group is the local people/residents which include all stakeholders within the town; and second group is categorized as the local government officials.

#### **a) Local People/Barangay residents**

The awareness education training and workshops proved to be valuable as participants demonstrated a change in understanding but not necessarily its attitude. The change in local people's attitude can only be assessed based on their actual engagement in community development activities or in the future planning exercise. The level of understanding on tourism of the local residents widened after they had participated in the awareness raising activity. It was manifested through the way they responded in the second interview. Their new understanding of tourism includes potential negative impacts that it may cause a destination. The participants understood that the success of tourism on their island (should they embrace it) is dependent upon the presence of their attractive landscape/seascape, and that they recognized that income can be generated from this natural endowment. But, the problem lies on the issue of conservation and protection, that if income is to be generated for the community in the long-term, then this pristine environment needs to be conserved. One participant raised the question... "*how do we conserve and protect it? Who would help us to achieve such goal?*" Apparently, this local resident seemed unaware of the current environmental program that the local government was undertaking as well as the initiatives of the NGOs working in Burdeos.

The fact that the people have not experienced concrete benefits or threats from tourism, it was hard for them to identify possible negative impact of tourism. However, after the series of tourism awareness education workshops some of the local residents became more reflective and realized that tourism is a like a '*double edge sword*' that unplanned and uncontrolled tourism development could generate destructive blow to the community and its environment. There is an absence of concrete and measurable tourism activity despite the presence of some tourists or visitors on the island. This is the scenario primarily due to no direct participation or engagement between the local people and the tourists.

While all the villages/barangays in Burdeos have tourism potentials, but differ in terms of greatness and abundance of tourism resources. Further, local residents from different villages possess different levels of social and individual skills and capacities. During the workshop, it was apparent that there are villages/barangays that possess strong human resource skills such as tour guides (apart from the two tour guides interviewed earlier). There were instances that local residents have manifested potential skills and right attitudes required in handling tourists/visitors.

#### **b) Local government officials (Municipal)**

The ability of local people to participate actively in bottom-up, small-scale tourism development can vary considerably depending on economic, social and political relationships as well as ecological and physiographic factors found in any particular area. This ability can be nurtured through good governance and leadership of those people holding power. The strength that can be developed from the local people should be supported by the people whom they have elected in the position such as the Mayor, Vice Mayor and the 10 Municipal Council Members and the Municipal Department Heads.

The municipal government believes that the town's fame as a tourist destination, once established, will convince the national government to invest and pour financial support to the entire Polilio Island. This notion of some members of the municipal government seems to be easier said than done. Their belief is that if they proceed with the tourism development through their own capabilities, they can automatically generate assistance from the national government.

## **DISCUSSION**

The use of the terms residents' perception and attitudes in other tourism studies often are used interchangeably. But, in this study perception was used as a term to indicate how the local people view tourism or their knowledge from the context of no-existing tourism development yet, or no prior tourism experience. This is the cognitive aptitude of the local residents while the term attitude refers to the future behavior or action that local people will exhibit on the event the town embraces tourism. The over-all findings revealed that the majority of the local residents favor and have positive view towards tourism, though there were only few who are neutral and negatively viewed tourism. Since, the local people have zero to minimal knowledge on tourism, they cannot distinguish differences between tourism and other alternative forms of tourism development. When they were asked what type and scale of development they prefer in Burdeos, they were hardly able to verbalize the extent of the possible tourism development they want. Hence, the findings suggest that respondents will support any forms of tourism development as all of them are likely to produce positive impacts to their community and municipality.

However, for those few residents who seem to have wider understanding of tourism, they are more critical than the rest of the population. They are not only concerned with economic benefits, but they too are concerned about the social, cultural and more importantly environmental and other costs attached to the development. Indeed, understanding local residents' perceptions and attitudes toward any form of tourism development requires a thorough study of a set of very complex and interrelated factors (Gursoy, et al., 2009).

Using the principle of the social exchange theory or SET, a sociological principle widely used in tourism scientific investigations primarily focused on understanding stakeholders' perceptions and attitude toward tourism development. In this case, SET provides understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the local residents which are influenced by their evaluation of consequential outcomes in the community (Andereck, et al., 2005). The widely held positive belief and attitude of the local people of Burdeos strongly supports the principle of social exchange theory. The beliefs that there are more advantages than costs to be generated from tourism, these people are willing to get involved with the development (Ap, 1992).

Given the limitation or weaknesses of SET in the previous studies, this current research endeavored to contribute in the theoretical enhancement of the social exchange theory. In figure 1, the 'values and beliefs system' component is regarded as one of the underpinning factors influencing the value exchange process. Common to the local residents with zero knowledge of tourism, is a welcoming attitude which expresses openness to tourism in Burdeos. It seems that resistance or support to tourism development was shaped by individual or even group identities, which become the predictor of the attitudes. For example,

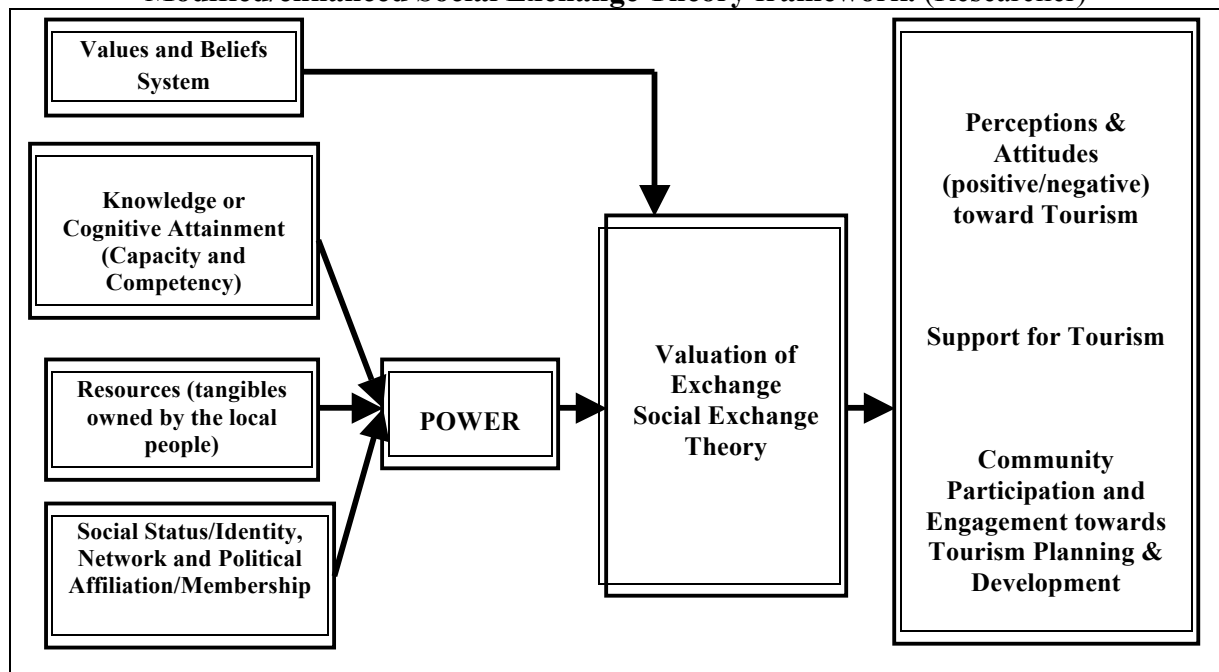
the case of the indigenous people, the Dumagat group who are heavily dependent upon nature, and value its sanctity as not to be exploited, their cultural belief strongly deter their support to tourism development. In other situations, many local residents that belong to the ‘zero-knowledge group’ expressed similar belief (stated earlier) with these...

*“there’s nothing wrong if tourism means having tourists on our island, it only shows that our very own Burdeos is also considered beautiful place...”Farmer (10/1/10)*

*“the very presence of tourists only shows that we are beautiful island just like the one I see in television and movies...”Housewife (11/5/10)*

Because of their belief that tourism is good they profess positive attitude and willingness to support the development. Simple comment as it may seem, only reflects rudimentary belief of the local people with regard to tourism. Indeed, there is a need to empirically identify the dimensions of residents’ responses or perceptions regarding tourism (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). With the aid of social exchange theory, this explains why majority of the people expressed positive views and attitudes toward tourism. It is primarily due to the fact that if a person or a local resident is deprived of some ‘power’ he/she has the tendency to be one-sided. Often, that being one-sided is also being impartial focusing only at one side of the issue. In this case, the powerless or ‘weaker voice’ residents favor only the positive side of tourism as the word (tourism) itself connotes positive image or idea to these people.

**Figure 2**  
**Local Residents’ Perceptions and Attitudes toward Tourism.**  
**Modified/enhanced Social Exchange Theory framework. (Researcher)**



Analyzing the scenario, in Figure 2, the power that was referred to earlier in which some of the local residents are deprived of, indicates that these residents found to have limitations or inadequacies in terms of resources or capabilities. I realized that these people consider that power is a result or consequence of having knowledge, formal education or degree and capacity, resources (financial and physical assets) as well as their respective individual or social status/identity in the society and political affiliations. This analysis highlights that

power is derived, achieved and mediated through individual or social acquisitions of both tangible and intangible resources and cognitive attainment. Often, the insufficiency of these resources limits local communities' capacity to recognize the benefits or impacts of tourism development and may also reduce their involvement in the planning and development process. Cognizant of this understanding, this explains why majority of the local residents who are considered 'powerless' viewed tourism positively. Hence, they too are willing to participate in the process of exchange where they expect more rewards and benefits will accrue to them.

The above contention explains not only the economic perspective but also highlights the sociological dimension of SET within the context of residents' perception. As such, it explains the sociological underpinning why the local people are very optimistic and other opposed tourism. Again, in relation to the issue of power, the local people are indeed in advantageous (Blau, 1964). However, as Molm (2000) shares those social relations tend to be one-sided or unequal if one of the parties has greater access in the resources, thereby, one becomes powerful than the other. Thus, causing power imbalance and may lead to two possible scenarios: first, the disadvantaged party may just depend on the other party who is powerful; or the other scenario, is that the former will become withdrawn, antagonistic or may simply exit from the exchange process. Nonetheless, despite the imbalance of power the local people tend to continue their social relations with the local officials primarily due to their 'hope' that those 'in power' will do something to help them improve their quality of life through economic intervention such as tourism.

## **CONCLUSION**

To recap the main themes of their perceptions, positive view illustrates economic, socio-cultural, physical and environmental contributions, similar to the findings of Mathieson and Wall (1982). Evidence from observations, interviews and dialogue, workshops and other social processes that took place from mid July 2010 until July 2011 created a synergy which resulted in 'realization and consciousness' of the community members to reassess their priorities and values. To some extent, the realization and consciousness verified that there is a long way before the local people can embrace/adopt tourism. The awareness education workshop provided to the local people, proved to be an effective tool, to a certain extent, in aligning and leveling off of actors/stakeholders' orientation toward tourism. Through education awareness, it became the first step of the local people engagement with other groups or members of the community. By initiating education awareness on tourism, it played a crucial role among the local residents as it disseminated knowledge, provided fundamental or basic skills and helped in forming or enhancing their attitudes (Rahman, 1994) and changing residents' initial perception toward tourism. It is fundamental and necessary for the local people to be informed, as they are the ones to be affected by the changes. In that way, community members would not develop false hopes or expectations.

As a researcher, I acknowledge the genuine value of understanding the meaning of tourism from the grass root. I gained a better understanding of the experiences of the people by listening to their stories and narratives, which are grounded in their cultural orientation as well as its social, historical and environmental contexts.

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