

# RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF WASHINGTON, NC

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Yasong Wang  
Department of Park, Recreation, and Tourism  
Management  
The Pennsylvania State University  
201 Mateer Building  
University Park, PA 16802,  
E-mail: yxw161@psu.edu

Robert E. Pfister  
East Carolina University

Duarte B. Morais  
The Pennsylvania State University

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**Abstract.**—This study examined the relationship between socio-economic and demographic attributes of local residents and their attitudes toward tourism in Washington, NC, a small community where tourism is in its development stage. Residents' attitudes toward tourism were measured by adapting 20 items from the Tourism Impact Attitude Scale developed by Lankford and Howard (1994). Factor analysis resulted in a 2-factor solution. Findings indicate that age, gender, and community attachment do not have relationships with the two factors, but education is associated with one of the factors, and perceived personal benefit has strong positive relationships with both factors. The study reinforced the need for further research on factors influencing residents' attitudes toward tourism during a destination's preliminary development stage. The findings support previous assertions that educating local residents about the potential benefits of tourism is critical in obtaining their support for tourism, enhancing their involvement in the industry, and achieving sustainable community development.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

It has been widely recognized that tourism development is a double-edged sword for host communities. Not only does it generate benefits, but it also imposes costs (Jafari 2001). By evaluating these benefits and costs, local residents develop their attitudes toward tourism. However, previous research indicates that the development of local residents' attitudes toward tourism is not determined by those perceived benefits and

costs but is modified by various moderating variables (Lankford et al. 1994). In the past three decades, numerous studies have been conducted to find those variables influencing residents' attitudes toward tourism (Brougham & Butler 1981, Perdue et al. 1987, Ap 1992, Lankford 1994, Cavus & Tanrisevdi 2002). Those tested variables include residents' socio-economic and demographic attributes, but the results are mixed. In particular, it is not clear whether residents' attitudes toward tourism are related to their attributes when tourism is still in its early development stage in the host community and its impacts are not particularly noticeable (Mason & Cheyne 2000).

This study aims at identifying the relationships between residents' socio-economic and demographic attributes and their attitudes toward tourism by focusing on a small community where tourism is in the development stage. By conducting this research, the authors hoped to find the predictors of residents' attitudes and capture their current perceptions of tourism based on preconceived expectations and incomplete information about tourism. Furthermore, this research is noteworthy because most authors agree that initial community attitudes toward tourism are critical to community involvement in the industry (Murphy 1981), the formation of destination image (Echtner & Ritchie 1991), political support for development (Schroeder 1996), and ultimately a more sustainable development of the host community (Owen et al. 1993).

## 2.0 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Attitudes are defined as "a state of mind of the individual toward a value" (Allport 1966, p. 24) and as "an enduring predisposition towards a particular aspect of one's environment" (McDougall & Munro 1987, p. 87). They are built upon the perceptions and beliefs of reality, but are closely related to deeply held values and to personality. Based on this understanding of attitudes, researchers recognized that residents' attitudes toward tourism are not simply the reflections of residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, but the results of interaction between residents' perceptions

and the factors affecting their attitudes (Lankford et al. 1994). Previous research has revealed major impacts of tourism and identified the related variables, but theory is underdeveloped: "Currently there is limited understanding of why residents respond to the impacts of tourism as they do, and under what conditions residents react to those impacts" (Ap 1992, p. 666). Husband (1989) also addressed this issue by saying "There is, so far, no theoretical justification of why some people are, or are not, favorably disposed to tourism" (p. 239).

In order to clarify the relationship between the impacts of tourism and residents' attitudes toward tourism, several models have been developed. One of the most influential models is Doxey's Irridex model (1975) which suggests that residents' attitudes toward tourism may pass through a series of stages from "euphoria," through "apathy" and "irritation," to "antagonism," as perceived costs exceed the expected benefits. This model is supported by Long et al.'s (1990) research results, which indicate residents' attitudes are initially favorable but become negative after reaching a threshold. The Irridex model indicates that residents' attitudes toward tourism would change over time within a predictable one-way sequence. It suggests that residents' attitudes and reactions toward tourism contain a sense of homogeneity (Mason et al. 2000). However, this notion is challenged by some research findings that reported heterogeneous community responses and diverse residents' attitudes simultaneously existing in a community (Brougham et al. 1981, Rothman 1978).

In accordance with this argument, a more complex model has been developed by Butler (1975), who suggested that both positive and negative attitudes could be held by residents in a community simultaneously and be expressed via active and passive support or opposition. This model is supported by Murphy's (1983) research results, which reveal the distinct attitude differences among residents, public officials, and business owners in three English tourist centers. Although the model addresses the complexity of residents' attitudes toward tourism, researchers still lacked theories explaining relationships between residents' attitudes and tourism impacts until Ap (1992) applied social exchange theory to tourism.

According to the theory, exchange would initiate when asymmetrical inaction forms (Sutton 1967). Ap (1992) suggests that "residents evaluate tourism in terms of social exchange, that is, evaluate it in terms of expected benefits or costs obtained in return for the services they supply" (p. 670). He concludes that when exchange of resources is high for the host actor in either the balanced or unbalanced exchange relation, tourism impacts are viewed positively, while tourism impacts are viewed negatively if exchange of resources is low. Social exchange theory has been examined as a theoretical framework by researchers to describe residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts (Perdue et al. 1990, McGehee & Andereck 2004). In particular, its tenets have been supported by attitudinal research on tourism.

A review of research has revealed that most attitude studies focus on examining the differences in residents' attitudes according to their socio-economic and demographic attributes, but the study results are mixed. In their study of 16 rural Colorado communities, Perdue et al. (1990) concluded that there was little difference in residents' attitudes toward tourism by socio-demographic characteristics, while they found that personal benefits were closely related to perceived impacts of tourism. In a study of Flagstaff, Arizona, Schroeder (1992) reported that socio-economic variables were not good predictors of residents' attitudes toward tourism. However, Husband (1989) found that age and education were important variables in his Zambian study. Harrill and Potts (2003) also identified that gender and economic dependency were significant predictors of perceived economic benefits of tourism, though the relationship between length of residence and perceived tourism benefits was not found in their study of Charleston, South Carolina. Conversely, Liu and Var (1986) identified that length of residence was one of the most important socio-demographic variables explaining attitudinal differences in their Hawaii research. Since those studies were conducted using a variety of methods and instruments, it is difficult to compare such mixed results.

In response to the call for establishing standardized instrumentation for use in tourism impact research (Crompton 1990), Lankford and Howard (1994) developed the tourism impact attitude scale (TIAS),

which enables researchers to measure residents' attitudes toward tourism in different contexts. It has been used in various tourism settings over the past decades, e.g., Lankford (1994) in Oregon and Washington, Lankford et al. (1994) in Taiwan, Rollins (1997) in British Columbia, Vesey and Dimanche (2001) in New Orleans, Louisiana, Harrill et al. (2003) in Charleston, South Carolina. The results of the previous studies have proven TIAS as a reliable and valid instrument to measure residents' attitudes. Although those previous case studies have tested the impacts of demographic and socio-economic variables on residents' attitudes by using TIAS, none of them was conducted in a small East Coast community where tourism is not yet flourishing.

Based on this theoretical review, several key research questions are addressed in this study: (1) Is TIAS a reliable and valid instrument to measure residents' attitudes toward tourism for this case study? (2) What are residents' attitudes toward tourism in the study site? (3) Are socio-economic and demographic variables significant predictors of residents' attitudes toward tourism? (4) Do results in this case study support social exchange theory for explaining residents' attitudes toward tourism?

### 3.0 STUDY AREA

The study was conducted in Washington, a small community with a population of 9,500 located in the eastern coastal area of North Carolina. With its strategic location at the junction of coastal and inland rivers, Washington used to serve as a regional shipping center, and its economy was strongly influenced by resource-based industries such as farming and manufacturing. In recent years, however, service sector industries have emerged as an important dimension of the local economy. In particular, tourism is increasingly perceived as a potential source providing local employment opportunities, tax revenues, and economic diversity.

Currently, Washington is undergoing revitalization to bring businesses and tourists into the local area to help boost the local economy. Victorian-era homes in the downtown district are being refurbished as an important tourist asset for the community, the waterfront is renovated to attract more visitors, and many historic

buildings along the Main Street have been well preserved. The community also has a wide variety of attractions, ranging from historic sites, shopping, and dining, to special events such as Music in the Streets and the Summer Festival. In addition, an office dedicated to the full-time development of tourism and to helping Washington capitalize on its waterfront and historical district was established in 2002. Moreover, the city's Tourism Development Authority hired its first director in 2001 after ten years of operating with a volunteer staff. As a newly-developed tourist destination, Washington provides a unique opportunity to study residents' attitudes toward tourism from the standpoint of the planning and development process.

### 4.0 METHODS

This research attempted to identify the relationships between residents' socio-economic and demographic attributes and their attitudes toward tourism, which is in the preliminary stage in the study site. To examine residents' attitudes toward tourism in Washington, NC, the researchers adopted 20 statements from TIAS and built a 20-item, five-point Likert-type response format based on the following scale: (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree).

Perceived personal benefit by respondents has been suggested to be an important variable associated with residents' attitudes toward tourism (Ap 1992, McGehee et al. 2004). Thus, in this study, perceived personal benefit was presented operationally to respondents as a set of benefits derived from the economic, socio-cultural heritage, and activities observed within the study area. Eight items were identified from public documents, public brochures, and the local newspapers that illustrated benefits identified frequently in the literature (Fridgen 1996). The personal benefit associated with each item was assessed by respondents using a four-point scale (1 = not at all; 2 = very little; 3 = somewhat; 4 = a lot). To test the association of the personal benefit variable with the stated attitudes toward tourism, the variable was coded by adding up the overall mean score for each of the eight items.

The other tested variables include age, gender, level of formal education, and community attachment. In

this research, community attachment was measured in two ways: (1) the respondents' length of residence and (2) active membership in civic organizations in Washington, NC. Length of residence has been highly used in previous research as one of variables to measure community attachment (Sheldon & Var 1984, Um & Crompton 1987). Membership as another critical variable measuring community attachment was identified to be significantly correlated with attitudes toward tourism (Vesey et al. 2001).

A random sample of 436 residents in Washington, NC was selected from a list of all households appearing on the billing list provided by the local utility company. The structure and administration of survey were based on Dillman's (2000) mail-in survey methodology. A cover letter informing participants of their selection for the survey together with a copy of the questionnaire and a stamped return envelope was mailed to participants. Subsequently, a second mailing was made to those participants that did not return the questionnaire at the end of two weeks. The final step was a postcard to those who did not respond.

## 5.0 RESULTS

One hundred and thirty usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 32 percent. The mean age of study subjects was 54.3 years old, and there was a roughly even distribution of men and women with 49.2 percent for men and 50.8 percent for women. Educational levels were also roughly evenly distributed, with 26.6 percent possessing a high school diploma or less, 23.4 percent having an associate degree, 25.8 percent holding a college degree, and 24.2 percent earning a graduate degree. Respondents' length of residence ranged from 1 year to 80 years with a mean of 30.42 years. The majority of respondents did not belong to a local civic organization (64.7%) (see Table 1).

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to assess the dimensionality of the 20 TIAS items. Kaiser's (1974) overall measure of sampling adequacy is 0.85, indicating that the data are appropriate for the principal components model. Values of 0.6 and above are required for a good factor analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell 1989). An examination of the scree plots derived from principal

**Table 1.—Characteristics of respondents**

Variables	%
<b>Gender (n=130)</b>	
Female	50.8
Male	49.2
<b>Age<sup>a</sup></b>	
20-29	8.1
30-39	11.3
40-49	15.3
50-59	24.2
60-69	21.0
70-79	16.1
Older than 80	4.0
<b>Education</b>	
High school or less	26.6
Associate degree	23.4
College degree	25.8
Graduate degree	24.2
<b>Length of residence<sup>b</sup></b>	
1-10 years	23.8
11-20 years	19.4
21-30 years	17.9
31-40 years	10.4
41-50 years	6.0
51-60 years	9.0
61-70 years	7.5
71-80 years	6.0
<b>Membership of local civic organizations</b>	
Yes	35.3
No	64.7

<sup>a</sup> *M* = 54.34; *Mdn* = 55; *SD* = 16.0.

<sup>b</sup> *M* = 30.42; *Mdn* = 25; *SD* = 22.9.

component analysis with oblique rotation indicated that a two-factor solution was appropriate for these data. These two factors explained 51 percent of the variance in attitudes toward tourism. Although this percentage is a little less than the 58 percent found by Lankford et al. (1994), the dimensionality that emerged from this analysis is the same as their two-factor solution (concern for local tourism development and personal and community benefits). Factor 1 comprises 12 items (0.917 alpha), and Factor 2 is composed of eight items (0.813 alpha). Factor 1 was annotated as "concern for tourism development" and Factor 2 was labeled as "contributions to quality of life." The overall reliability of the TIAS in the Washington study was 0.904, which is similar to Landford and Howard's (1994) alpha-value of 0.964 obtained with their sample from Oregon (see Table 2).

**Table 2.—Dimensions of attitudes toward tourism development**

Dimensions and Factored Items	Factor Loading	Factor Mean	Alpha Coefficients
Concern for Tourism Development <sup>a</sup>		3.91*	0.917
I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in my community.	.862		
I support tourism and would like to see it become an important part of my community.	.802		
I am against new tourism facilities which will attract more tourist to my community.	.781		
I believe tourism should be actively encouraged in the State of North Carolina.	.759		
The city government was correct in supporting the promotion of tourism.	.753		
Generally, the positive benefits of tourism outweigh the negative impacts.	.731		
My community should become more of a tourist destination.	.706		
Long-term planning by city officials can control the negative impacts of tourism on the environment.	.636		
Tourism has reduced the quality of outdoor recreation opportunities in my community.	.596		
It is important to develop plans to manage the growth of tourism.	.578		
The tourism sector will continue to play a major role in the economy of the community.	.548		
One of the most important benefits of tourism is how it can improve the local standard of living.	.468		
Contributions to Quality of Life <sup>b</sup>		3.00*	0.813
Our household standard of living is higher because of money tourists spend here.	.770		
Local recreation programs have expanded due to the influx of tourist in my community.	.752		
The quality of public services has improved due to more tourism in my community.	.718		
Since tourists have arrived I have more recreational opportunities available to me.	.681		
Quality of life in my community has improved because of tourism facilities in this community.	.643		
Tourism sector provides many desirable employment opportunities for residents.	.593		
My community has better roads due to tourism.	.467		
Shopping opportunities are better in my community as a result of tourism.	.430		
Reliability of Total 20 Items	0.904		

<sup>a</sup> eigenvalue 7.4; variance explained 37.0%

<sup>b</sup> eigenvalue 2.8; variance explained 14.0%

\* indicates significance at the  $p < .001$  level

As indicated in Table 2, the mean value of Factor 1 is 3.91 (SD = 0.60), and the mean value of Factor 2 is 3.00 (SD = 0.62). The significant one-sample t-test results indicate that overall residents are generally favorable to tourism and demonstrated substantial concern about the positive effects of tourism development on improving their future household standard of living. However, residents were neutral concerning tourism's positive effects on their current quality of life. These results are consistent with Doxey's (1975) Irridex Model, which

suggests that residents usually hold a relatively positive attitude toward tourism as tourism is introduced to the host community. Meanwhile, the results indicate that tourism benefits have not been substantial enough to be noticed because tourism is still in the preliminary stage of development in Washington, NC.

In order to explore the relationships between residents' socio-economic and demographic attributes and their attitudes toward tourism, multiple regression analysis was

**Table 3.—Regression analysis of the relationship between variables**

Independent Variables	Beta	t-statistic
Model 1: Concerns for tourism development		
Model statistics	Adjusted R-square = .435, F = 7.185, p = .00	
Perceived Personal Benefits	.656*	6.390
Age	-.251	-1.778
Education	-.144	-1.334
Civic Club Membership	.045	.403
Length of Residence	-.050	-.358
Model 2: Contributions to quality of life		
Model statistics	Adjusted R-square = .507, F = 9.752, p = .00	
Perceived Personal Benefits	.697*	7.201
Education	-.305*	-2.998
Age	-.171	-1.623
Civic Club Membership	-.049	-.381
Length of Residence	.014	.103

\*Indicates significance at the  $p < .05$  level.

**Table 4.—Independent t-test of gender difference in factor 1 & factor 2**

Gender	Mean	$\chi^2$	p
Support for tourism development <sup>a</sup>			
Females	3.93	.02	.818
Males	3.91		
Community benefits <sup>b</sup>			
Females	2.97	-.06	.587
Males	3.03		

<sup>a</sup>n = 120; <sup>b</sup>n=121

performed. As indicated in Table 3, personal benefit has statistically significant relationships in a positive direction with both Factor 1 and Factor 2. It suggests that the more personal benefits respondents expected from tourism, the more likely they are to favor tourism development and the more likely they are to attribute the improvement in quality of life to tourism development. Additionally, education also has a small but negative significant relationship with Factor 2 in model 2. It indicates that the higher level of formal education the respondents have, the less likely they attribute the improvement of life quality to tourism development. Model 1 explains 43.5 percent of the variance in the dependent variable and model 2 explains 50.7 percent of the variance. Taken together, Models 1 and 2 suggest that when controlling for residents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, personal benefit is a good predictor of attitudes toward tourism. Education also helps predict the perception of tourism's contribution to quality of life.

Since gender is a nominal variable, the independent t-test was performed to test whether there are significant differences in attitudes toward tourism between males and females. As indicated in Table 4, there are no significant differences in Factor 1 and Factor 2 between males and females.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION

In the previous studies, TIAS has been identified as a reliable and valid instrument to measure residents' attitudes toward tourism in various settings, which include well-developed tourism destinations (such as Hawaii; Charleston South Carolina; New Orleans, Louisiana), National Scenic Areas like the Columbia River Gorge region of Oregon and Washington, Penghu National Scenic Area in Taiwan, and large urban communities like Nanaimo, British Columbia where the "tourism industry has grown slowly and somewhat inconspicuously over the years" (Rollins 1997, p. 742).

The results of this case study reinforce the findings of those previous studies and indicate that TIAS can be used to measure residents' attitudes toward tourism in a small community where tourism has not yet appeared to be a significant economic area of activity.

This research partially supports the tenets of the Irridex model and indicates that residents in the study area overall have a favorable attitude toward tourism. The results show that they support the ongoing tourism development and express a positive attitude toward further development and tourism planning. Because tourism development is only in its initial stage, however, unfavorable tourism impacts in Washington are not readily evident. Thus, this research is limited in its ability to identify whether residents' attitudes would reach a threshold after which support for tourism would decline. Furthermore, the current level of tourism development may also explain why no differences in attitudes toward tourism were found by age, gender, and community attachment. The results support the assertion of Dogan (1989), who argued that the initial response to tourism development, particularly in rural or Third World settings, might be uniform within the residents.

Although age, gender, and community attachment were not identified as the predictors of residents' attitudes toward tourism, perceived personal benefit was found to be closely and positively related to residents' attitudes. The results are consistent with previous research findings, which showed that personal benefits are correlated with support for tourism development and tourism impacts (McGehee et al. 2004). Such results can also be explained by social exchange theory. According to the theory, attitudes in a host community should be favorable when the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived impacts, thus producing a positive social exchange. Moreover, this study also provides support for the previous findings that highly educated people were more likely to express concern about tourism impacts (Andriotis & Vaughn 2003).

The findings of this study indicate that to obtain residents' support for tourism in Washington, NC, and plan for and maintain its healthy development, local

authorities should ensure that residents are aware of the long-term accruing benefits to them personally as a consequence of tourism development. Future research should identify whether residents' attributes variables are related to their attitudes toward tourism at the different stages of tourism development and whether tourism will reach a threshold after which residents' support for it declines.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

This study reinforces previous research findings and supports the premise that TIAS is a reliable and valid instrument to measure residents' attitudes toward tourism. It also provides empirical evidence to support the assumptions associated with the Irridex model and social exchange theory. Additionally, the study findings provide a glimpse of residents' attitudes toward tourism in the study area. It indicates that most respondents are favorable, at least initially, toward tourism. Particularly, the findings supported previous assertions that educating residents about the potential benefits of tourism is critical in obtaining the political support for tourism in enhancing residents' involvement in the industry, and in achieving sustainable community development.

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