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# RESIDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM IN MONROE COUNTY, PA

BY

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perceptions of residents of Monroe County on the impact of tourism in Monroe County, Pennsylvania. Attitudes toward tourism were measured along economic, sociocultural, and ecological scales and compared across a variety of sociodemographic variables. The relationships between perception of tourism impact and level of attachment were also measured. Furthermore, the factor structure of the instrument was assessed.

The findings of this study indicated that perceptions of tourism impact were effected by educational level and length of residence. There were no significant effects of gender, age, marital status, or income.

Correlation coefficients were measured between each of the scale scores and level of attachment. For each scale, there was a moderately low positive correlation between attachment and the scale score.

On the basis of eigenvalues and interpretability of results, factor analysis identified six structural dimensions of items on the questionnaire.

## INTRODUCTION

Most studies dealing with tourism's effect on the local community restrict themselves to economic analysis and articulate the benefits occurring to the area as a result of tourism development (16, 19, and 21). However, recently economic benefits associated with tourism development have been measured against its potential for social disruption (4).

In the past few years, a number of studies have been undertaken and have examined local residents' perceptions of the effects of tourism (2-5, 8, 10, 13, 14, 16-22, and 24). These studies have generally focused on identifying differences in attitudes toward tourism among local residents identified on the basis of sociodemographic characteristics.

The success of tourism development is crucially dependent on residents' attitudes toward the tourists and tourism (11, 17). People in marketing know very well that of all the factors which determine pleasure and enjoyment in travel, there is none more important than the way travelers are treated by the local residents of tourist areas. Their attitudes toward tourists are extremely

important because most of us avoid places where we are not welcomed (2). Therefore, it is important to minimize residents' negative attitudes toward the tourists as well as negative impacts of tourism (4, 8). If a growing number of local residents come to believe that tourism has a detrimental effect on the major elements of community life, visitors may become the targets of discontentment or hostility (17). By identifying areas of negative impact, involved organizations can intervene with educational programs and/or changes in operations to either modify the impacts or change the perceptions of these impacts (19). Furthermore, understanding the local residents' views will enable the organization involved to plan more carefully for the future of tourism (20).

The Pocono Mountains of Northeastern Pennsylvania have a long history as a tourist destination. Over the years, the Poconos have developed into a year round vacation region. The area is relatively rural in nature and with the exception of tourism offers little in the way of business and industry. As a result, tourism provides the primary economic base for the area.

One characteristic which makes the Poconos an interesting subject is the fact that over the past decade the local population has grown at a tremendous rate. Much of the growth can be attributed to an influx of New York and New Jersey residents seeking lower housing costs and lower taxes. As would be expected, at times the long standing residents may differ in opinion from the more recent residents with regards to a variety of issues of local concern. With this in mind, it is entirely possible that more "attached" residents may have different perceptions as to the impact of tourism on the region as compared to the perceptions of

less "attached" residents. Few studies have been reported which describe tourism impacts in terms of residents' level of attachment to a host community (23).

According to many tourist agencies, one of the goals of tourism development is to enhance the quality of life of residents within the host community (Um & Crompton, 1987). Assessing "enhancement" should involve periodic evaluation of the residents with regard to perceptions of tourism impact on a community (1, 22, and 23). However, the residents of a community are a diverse group. It would be expected that attached residents would have different perceptions of tourism impacts on their community than less attached residents. Operationalizing level of attachment will enable a tourist agency to distinguish between residents' level of attachment and perception of tourism impact.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was (1) to identify the perceptions of residents of Monroe County on the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impact of tourism in Monroe County (2) to determine if a relationship exists between perceptions of the impact of tourism and level of attachment and (3) to analyze the factor structure of the instrument used in the study.

Within the first purpose, it was hypothesized that there would be no differences in the perceptions of the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impact of tourism based upon gender, age, marital status, education, income, and length of residence. Within the second purpose, it was hypothesized that there would be no relationship between perception of economic, sociocultural, and

ecological impact of tourism and level of attachment. Finally, within the third purpose, the investigator examined the factor structure of the instrument.

## METHODOLOGY

To investigate the impacts of tourism as perceived by the residents of Monroe County, adult residents living in the community were sampled. The study population was defined as individuals at least 18 years of age whose place of residence was Monroe County. The sample consisted of 750 residents within Monroe County. A firm specializing in direct mail provided a random mailing list of households in the study area.

The survey instrument was similar to the one developed by Liu and Var (10) in their study of residents of Hawaii. The questionnaire consisted of two primary sections. Part one consisted of six sociodemographic factors regarding respondents' gender, age, marital status, education, income, and length of residence. Also included in part one were three questions designed to measure the respondents' level of attachment to the community: "Would you say you feel 'at home' in this community?"; "What interest do you have in knowing what goes on in this community?"; and "Suppose that for some reason you had to move away from this community, how sorry or pleased would you be to leave?". These questions were identical to those used by Goudy (6) and Kasarda and Janowitz (7). Part two contained 29 statements describing perceived impacts of tourism on Monroe County residents. These impact statements were subdivided into areas of economic, sociocultural, and ecological concern.

Respondents were requested to respond to these 29 statements by way of a six-point Likert scale. The economic scale was comprised of items 1 through 8 on the questionnaire. The sociocultural scale consisted of items 9 through 20 on the questionnaire, and the ecological scale was comprised of items 21 through 29. A mean was computed for each of the scales.

## RESULTS

The overall response rate for the study was 43%. The study sample was predominantly male (62.8%), middle aged (50%) and married (77.6%). The average age of respondents was 46.7 years; the range was from 18 to 87. Over 50% of the respondents had attended college or possessed a bachelors degree. Almost 62% of respondents indicated a household income of at least \$30,000. The majority of the respondents were long-term residents of Monroe County although 44% of respondents lived in Monroe County ten years or less. The average length of residence was 21.8 years.

The first hypothesis tested the relationship between six sociodemographic variables (gender, age, marital status, education, income, length of residence) and perception of the economic, sociocultural and ecological impact of tourism. The results indicated perceptions of tourism impact were not significantly related to gender, age, marital status or income. However, there were significant effects for the other two sociodemographic variables; educational level and length of residence. In the case of length of residence, there were significant effects on each of the three scale scores while educational level provided significant

effects only on the economic and sociocultural scales.

Certain tendencies were noted within these two sociodemographic variables. Post-hoc analysis indicated that those individuals with a graduate degree had significantly higher economic and sociocultural perceptions of tourism impacts than did individuals possessing a high school diploma. Furthermore, long term residents had significantly less favorable perceptions with regard to the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impacts of tourism as compared to recent and medium length residents.

The second hypothesis tested the relationship between perception of economic, sociocultural, and ecological impact of tourism and level of attachment. As Table 1 indicates for all three scales, there was a moderately low positive correlation between level of attachment and the scale score.

Within the third purpose of the study, factor analysis identified unique dimensions of items within the questionnaire that were perceived similarly by the respondents. The varimax rotation was employed to provide clarification to the factor structure. Several factor solutions were investigated and the six factor solution was selected on the basis of eigenvalues as well as interpretability of the results. A total of six factors were identified as having an eigenvalue of greater than 1.0. These factors accounted for 61.2% of the variance in the data. Variables with a loading of greater than .4 were considered to be significantly correlated with a particular factor. Six underlying dimensions were identified from the 29 tourism impact items within the questionnaire. Negative socio-ecological impact, positive economic effect, positive cultural/educational impact,

infrastructure, negative financial consequences, and courtesy to tourists were the structural dimensions identified. Complete factor analysis results are provided in Table 2.

## DISCUSSION

This study was in part a continuation of earlier studies designed to examine the relationship between select sociodemographic variables and perception of tourism impact. This study's finding that long-term residents had less favorable perceptions of tourism impacts supports the findings of Sheldon and Var (21) and Davis et al. (5) that lifelong residents demonstrate the greatest negative sensitivity to tourist impacts on local life. However, it contradicted Liu and Var's (10) finding that long term residents generally held the most positive attitudes to the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impacts of tourism (although Liu and Var cautioned that their findings should not be generalized due to Hawaii's "unique island society").

One explanation why long term residents had significantly lower perceptions of the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impact of tourism may have been due to the fact that long term residents tend to "remember when" whereas more recent residents have not had adequate time in the community to acquire a frame of reference and remember "the way things used to be". Ten years from now, today's recent and medium length residents will have had the opportunity to acquire a frame of reference and possibly develop perceptions similar to current long term residents.

With regard to the finding that residents with a graduate degree had significantly

higher economic and sociocultural scale scores as compared to those residents with a high school diploma, further analysis suggests that individuals possessing a graduate degree may be more aware of the economic benefits of tourism (i.e., employment opportunities, multiplier effect) than those residents with a high school diploma. Furthermore, they may be more likely to participate in the sociocultural opportunities that tourism provides. It seems likely that residents who appreciate the economic benefits of tourism and who take advantage of the sociocultural opportunities that tourism may offer would have more favorable perceptions of the economic and sociocultural impacts of tourism than those residents who do not.

This study's finding that perception of tourism impact was not significantly related to gender supported the findings of Davis et al. (5), Kim (8), Pearce (15), and Pizam (16). However, Milman and Pizam (12) concluded that gender did influence the respondents' level of support for the tourism industry. With regard to the remaining sociodemographic variables of age, marital status and income, in general the findings of this study were consistent with previous research (2, 5, 8, 10, 15, 16, and 21).

The second hypothesis examined the relationship between perception of the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impact of tourism and level of attachment. With the exception of the Um and Crompton (23) study, the concept of attachment has been largely ignored in tourism research. While Um and Crompton operationalized level of attachment differently than this study did, as a result of the paucity of literature involving perception of tourism impact and level of attachment, the Um and Crompton study remains the only

comparable investigation into the relationship between these two variables.

Um and Crompton found a significant negative correlation between level of attachment and perception of tourism impact. The findings of this study indicated there was a moderately low positive correlation between the two variables. While the results of this study appear to contradict the findings of Um and Crompton, further examination indicates there may be more commonality between the two studies than was indicated by the results. Um and Crompton operationalized level of attachment in terms of length of residence, birthplace, and heritage. This study operationalized attachment based on previous research by Goudy (6) and Kasarada and Janowitz (7). Therefore, the incompatibility of the results may have been due to the different techniques employed by each study to operationalize level of attachment.

It should be noted this study also examined the relationship between perception of tourism impact and length of residence. The results indicated that long term residents had significantly less favorable perceptions of the economic, sociocultural and ecological impact of tourism as compared to recent and medium length residents. These findings tend to confirm those of Um and Crompton.

A number of factors may have accounted for this study's unexpected finding that residents who had higher levels of attachment to the community had moderately favorable perceptions toward tourism impacts. First, as was mentioned previously, the population of Monroe County has grown rapidly since 1980. It is likely that many of these recent residents have adjusted to the area and have integrated into the community. As a result,

it is likely many of these residents are attached to the area and, therefore, scored high on the attachment scale. Furthermore, many of the new residents have moved to Monroe County from metropolitan New York and New Jersey. It may be that these individuals look favorably at tourist impact because the visitors, the traffic, and the money that tourism can bring are characteristics of the areas from where they came. As a result, they may have demonstrated a sentiment more favorable than anticipated.

Factor analysis provided a number of implications with regard to the study. While factor analysis identified six underlying dimensions within the questionnaire, only two major dimensions were identified; negative socio-ecological impact and positive economic effect. These two factors accounted for almost 45% of the total variance. The remaining four factors, positive cultural/educational impact, infrastructure, negative financial consequences, and courtesy to tourists accounted for a combined 16.5% of the variance.

While the purpose of factor analysis was to identify the most important structural dimensions among items on the questionnaire, in this study it also served to identify dimensions not readily apparent in the questionnaire. Specifically, the survey instrument addressed economic,

sociocultural, and ecological areas of concern. However, factors, such as infrastructure, and courtesy to tourists, were dimensions identified through factor analysis that were not fully recognized in the survey instrument. This indicates that tourism attitudes may be more multifaceted than had been disclosed in the questionnaire.

Within the final discussion, it should be mentioned that the influx of former New York and New Jersey residents has effected life in Monroe County. As a result, it is a possibility the findings of this study may have been influenced by the growth that has occurred in Monroe County over the past 15 years. While much of the growth has occurred independently of tourism, in some cases, population growth and tourism have been intertwined. For example, some second home developments originally designed to attract tourists gradually evolved into year round communities housing permanent residents.

Whether the growth in Monroe County has arisen from tourism or not, the area has changed in recent years. While it was the intent of this study to identify the perceptions of residents of Monroe County on the economic, sociocultural, and ecological impact of tourism, it is possible that some respondents may have attitudes about growth which might have influenced their perceptions of tourism impact.

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TABLE 1  
CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR LEVEL OF  
ATTACHMENT AND THE SCALE SCORES

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	Economic	Scale Scores Sociocultural	Ecological
Level of Attachment	0.23	0.22	0.18

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TABLE 2

## FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR RESIDENT PERCEPTION OF TOURISM

	Eigenvalue	Variance	Loading
<b>Factor 1: Negative Socio-Ecological Impact</b>	9.95	34.32	
Tourism has contributed to a decline in the natural environment in Monroe County.			.776
Tourism has led to increased vandalism in recreation areas.			.764
Tourists are inconsiderate to Monroe County residents.			.763
Because of tourists, the crime rate in the county has increased.			.758
Increased tourism means increased litter.			.746
Monroe County residents are the people who suffer from living in a tourist area.			.728
Tourists disrupt the peace and tranquility of Monroe County.			.727
Tourists cause local residents to avoid particular areas of Monroe County.			.716
Monroe County residents are being exploited by tourism.			.714
Tourism has resulted in overcrowded recreation areas in Monroe County.			.710
Money should go to protecting our local environment rather than encouraging more tourists to visit.			.660

	Eigenvalue	Variance	Loading
Tourists are a burden on our local government finances.*			.623
During the peak tourist season, it is difficult to get tickets to local entertainment events.			.610
Because of tourism, traffic has become a problem in Monroe County.			.598
Tourists are unaware of the way of life in Monroe County.			.545
<b>Factor 2: Positive Economic Effect</b>	3.00	10.37	
Tourism has attracted more investment and spending in the county's economy.			.780
Tourism has created more jobs for Monroe County residents.			.726
Tourists spend little money in Monroe County.			.574
The business climate has improved in Monroe County as a result of tourism.			.568
<b>Factor 3: Positive Cultural/Educational Impact</b>	1.41	4.88	
Tourism creates a variety of cultural opportunities for the local population (e.g., crafts, arts, music, etc.).			.730
Tourists have a positive impact on the cultural life in Monroe County.			.716
Tourism is one major reason for the great variety of entertainment in Monroe County.			.631
Meeting tourists is a valuable educational experience.			.549

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	Eigenvalue	Variance	Loading
<b>Factor 4: Infrastructure</b>	1.21	4.19	
Because of tourism, our roads and other public facilities are better maintained.			.735
Because of tourism, there are more parks and other recreational areas in our county.			.711
<b>Factor 5: Negative Financial Consequences</b>	1.09	3.75	
Prices of many goods and services in Monroe County have increased because of tourism.			.809
Local businesses are ones which have benefitted most from tourism.			-.601
<b>Factor 6: Courtesy to Tourists</b>	1.07	3.68	
Monroe County residents are courteous and friendly to tourists.			.813
*Also loaded to a lesser extent in Factor 5.			

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