

# Challenges for balancing conservation and development through ecotourism: insights and implications from two Belizean case studies

S. E. Alexander & J. L. Whitehouse

*Department of Environmental Studies, Baylor University, USA*

## Abstract

As an idealized alternative to mass tourism, ecotourism seeks balance between economic benefits for resident hosts and protection of the natural resource base against environmental costs. Yet these ambiguous descriptors fail to consider what is to be sustained, at what levels, and for whom. Nor is the fundamental contradiction resolved between the demand for economic growth to ameliorate poverty-induced ecological destruction and environmental conservation that inhibits economic growth. If ecotourism is to induce sustainable development, it must be ecologically sound, culturally sensitive, and economically viable. Using data from two Belizean case studies, this paper challenges optimistic assessments concerning the impacts of ecotourism and points to the leakage of profits back to tourist-source countries, high emigration rates, and a tourism industry that is likely more “brown” than “green”. Even though ecotourists in Belize tend to be affluent and spend more money than “mass tourists” leakages persist, local multipliers are low, and some natural resources are continuously threatened. If ecotourism is to support appropriate development, it should accelerate economic growth but also promote sound livelihood opportunities for local populations while simultaneously braking against environmental costs. How one defines these relationships and how communities work to achieve a balance between seemingly disparate goals is critically important to the process of using ecotourism as a development strategy. Given its recent commitment to ecotourism, Belize offers a unique opportunity to study local models and explore sustainable human-ecosystems in the context of this newly-developing industry. *Keywords: ecotourism development, economic benefits, environmental costs, social impacts, Belize.*



## 1 Introduction

Ecotourism is rapidly expanding and becoming increasingly more popular Weinberg *et al* [1]. In 1999, 652 million tourists travelled to other countries accumulating over \$550 billion in global tourism receipts. Accounting for approximately eight percent of total export earnings of goods and services worldwide, the industry has great potential to generate foreign exchange for development, thereby explaining developing countries' aggressive pursuit of economic growth through tourism Schlevkov [2].

As an idealized alternative to mass tourism, ecotourism seeks balance between economic benefits for resident hosts and environmental costs so that the natural resource base is sustained for the future. However, such ambiguous descriptors fail to consider what is to be sustained, at what levels, and for whom Wall [3]. Nor is the fundamental contradiction resolved between the demand for economic growth to ameliorate poverty-induced ecological destruction and environmental conservation that inhibits economic growth Redclift [4]. If ecotourism can induce sustainable development, it must be ecologically sustainable, culturally sensitive, and economically viable Wall [3,5].

Ecotourism can contribute to positive changes in local communities: increases in jobs Weinberg *et al* [1]; ecosystem preservation Stem *et al* [6]; protection of indigenous cultures and peoples Kerr [7]; and social, political, economic, and psychological empowerment of local communities Scheyvens [8]. In contrast, many businesses consider the promotion of tourism participation and the minimization of visitation impacts to be potentially conflicting objectives Farrell and Marion [9]. In order for such businesses to maintain profitability, it is essential to incorporate a balance between economic benefits, environmental costs, and social and cultural appropriateness Wall [3,5].

Ecotourism is usually tied to protected areas Wall [5], and in principle, reconciles the contradiction between economic development and environmental conservation Wallace and Pierce [10]. Yet local populations near or within protected areas frequently bear the cost of protection through denied resource access while receiving few benefits in return Durbin and Ralambo [11]. Indeed, host populations, tourists, the tourism industry, and environmentalists have mutual interests in ensuring that tourism development is sustainable Cater [12].

Using data from two Belizean case studies, this paper identifies challenges faced by local communities as they struggle to seek balance between conservation principles and economic development policies centred on ecotourism. The Tourism Impact Assessment (TIA) method, by Alexander and Gibson [13], was used in this research to evaluate the social and economic benefits of tourism at the household level and community and environmental well-being over the long term.

## 2 Ecotourism as sustainable development

### 2.1 Economic viability

The basic premise of ecotourism is to strive for sustainable community development Weinberg *et al* [1]. Researchers have found that ecotourism



facilitates economic growth, minimizes leakage by relying on local labour and commodities, increases employment opportunities, and generates more income in remote areas Cater [12] where ideally, it operates on a small-scale around locally-owned businesses and activities Weaver [14]. Foreign investment in ecotourism businesses and sites in the developing countries is becoming highly lucrative Cater [15].

Conversely, some researchers question such optimistic assessments of ecotourism and point to the leakage of profits back to tourists' countries of origin Brown [16]; the tendency to benefit only large tourism firms and corporations Cater [15]; inflated food prices; local communities' adjusting to a world that is based on monetary terms Dearden [17]; and visitor dissatisfaction which equates to little economic gain Inskeep [18]. In Belize, it is estimated that 90 percent of all coastal developments are foreign owned. As a result, prices of land, property, and food are oftentimes too inflated for local residents Cater [15].

Boo [19] expresses a concern for local economic dependency on ecotourism, because it is an unstable source of income susceptible to factors outside of their control, such as fluctuating politics, weather conditions, and volatile currency exchange rates. Furthermore, once a destination is established and highly profitable, it attracts more developers Tisdell [20]. As the area becomes saturated with ecotourism businesses, the profits of the original operators decline. Also, if the airline and hotel accommodations are foreign-owned, Britton [21] estimates that a mere 22 to 25 percent of an all-inclusive tour price goes to the local economy.

## 2.2 Environmental consequences

There are two major approaches in measuring environmental protection through tourism: protecting the environment *for* the tourism industry and protecting the environment *from* the tourism industry Cohen [22]. Ecotourism challenges the mass tourism industry by potentially supporting conservation of the natural environment with funding for management of the area, education of the protected area for tourists and local communities, limiting number of visitors, and construction of facilities that minimize impact Tisdell [20]. In western Sichuan, China, Fang [23] found ecotourism to be successful in protecting the natural environment. Managers of the area took measures to effectively control logging, encourage sound energy use, and enforce visitor rationing policies, all of which in turn resulted in a 6.7 million hectare increase of forested area with a vegetation cover of nearly 90 percent.

Despite its motives of resource conservation and sustainability, ecotourism persists in raising environmental challenges, including: contamination in terms of waste, traffic, and noise Weinberg *et al* [1]; loss of "ecological integrity" of highly visited areas Obua [24]; and increased unsustainable pressure on resources Tabatchnaia-Tamarisa *et al* [25]. These challenges exist because oftentimes ecotourism destinations are unusually sensitive places that have limited ability to withstand excessive use; travel is likely to occur at critical times (e.g., during mating or breeding season); unknown and unexplored relationships between volumes of use and multi-layered environmental impacts;



and "en route impact" from traveling to the site (e.g., consuming resources for planes) contributes to global climate change Wall [3].

### 2.3 Social appropriateness

Sociocultural impacts of ecotourism development include: the "demonstration effect" Dearden [17]; encouragement of drugs NDACC [26]; increases in crime rates van der Borg *et al* [27]; and local aggression toward tourists and managers of protected areas Farrell and Marion [9]. Dearden [17] identified environmental and sociocultural consequences of trekkers in northern Thailand. Bamboo stands, used to construct rafts, were depleted; there were inadequate facilities for disposal of human waste; and the "demonstration effect" was in full force where tribes learned that their traditional dress was worth cash and sold it in the tourist good markets.

Another sociocultural impact is the unfair acquisition of land to develop national park systems and ecotourism sites Kirkpatrick [28]. Local and indigenous people are dispossessed of land they have inhabited for generations. The Aboriginal people of Tasmania lost their land that was eventually protected as a national park system. They recently regained some of the land after intense public debate and escalated media attention.

Though clearly in the minority, some researchers have found positive social impacts of tourism. Today, in the Amazon rainforest of Ecuador, visitors hike in the rainforest with members of the Huaorani group and are taught about aspects of life in the area Kerr [7]. In return, the Huaorani ask that visitors raise awareness at home about their fight to protect their forestland and culture from the oil industry.

## 3 Ecotourism development in Belize

Belize's tourism industry began in the mid-1960s when the world's second largest barrier reef came to the attention of scuba divers. Today, roughly 43% of Belize's land and marine resources have protected status CSO [29]. After 20 years as a diving destination, Belize entered a golden period of tourism growth in the late 1980s [30]. Arrivals grew from 77,542 in 1991 to 195,995 in 2000 BTB [31]. In 1996, Belize's tourism industry accounted for \$125.4 million, or 17.5% of total GDP CSO [32]. In the early to mid-1990s, the government chose to focus on the development of what was called "eco-cultural" tourism at that time, promoting the country's natural and archaeological resources.

In 1999, the Belizean government passed the National Tourism Development Policy which acknowledged *responsible tourism* as the key guiding principle for tourism development. The ethical practices defining responsible tourism include: a proactive approach by stakeholders and partners in the sector to develop, market, and manage the industry; environmental stewardship; environmentally-based tourism activities; local participation in decision-making processes about tourism; and respect for guests and between guests and hosts [30].



One noteworthy initiative, viewed as a model for other developing countries, is the Protected Area Conservation Trust (PACT) which oversees management of revenue generated by a conservation fee added to the airport departure tax charged to all foreign tourists. The fund is used for projects related to biodiversity protection, cultural heritage preservation, and community-based ecotourism ventures Honey [33]. As part of this initiative, the Ministry of Tourism supports development of community-based ecotourism projects Alexander [34,35].

## 4 Research design and methods

The data presented in this paper were collected as part of a larger research project conducted in Belize and Costa Rica from June 2001 through May 2002. This research examined the impacts of ecotourism on household livelihood security and vulnerability in four tourism-based communities paired with four non-tourism based communities.

Using participant observation, key informant interviews, and household surveys, the results presented in this paper include qualitative and quantitative data whose interpretations rely heavily on direct participation of informants. Key informant interviews were conducted with community leaders and individuals involved in various tourism industries. This information was used to finalize the Household Survey comprised of two parts: Part 1 was administered during the low tourist season in 2001 and collected information on household composition, basic demographics, migration, and employment histories. A total of 68 Part One Surveys were completed in Placencia and 188 in San Ignacio.

Part Two of the Survey was conducted during the high tourist season in 2002 (January-April). Part Two elicited information on the various components of household livelihood security, including nutritional status of children, health conditions of household members, food availability and access issues, school enrollment rates, adult education levels, employment opportunities, economic security issues, and participation in various types of social networks. Specific data were also collected on household members' perceptions of the impacts tourism is having on themselves, their families, their community, and their immediate physical environs. Fifty-seven Part Two Surveys were completed in Placencia and 163 in San Ignacio.

### 4.1 Site selection

Located at the top of an 11-mile peninsula and approximately 40 miles south of Dangriga along the coast, *Placencia* is one of the oldest continuously inhabited villages in Belize. Legends purport that English buccaneers founded the village in the early 1600s; artifacts discovered in the area suggest Placencia was the location of several intense battles between Spanish and British sailors Mahler and Wotkins [36].

In this century, Placencia has been a fishing village and today's permanent population consists mostly of Creoles but the numbers of North Americans,



Garifunas, and Hispanics are on the rise. Average household size is 3.95 people; average age of the head of the household is 45 and the average adult level of education/household is approximately 11 years (equivalent of “some high school”). The most prevalent household type is the nuclear family (52.6%).

A variety of tourism opportunities are available from Placencia. The South Water Cayes, Laughing Bird Caye, the Sapodilla Cayes, and Glovers Reef are all easily accessible for diving and snorkeling, and inland day trips to the Cockscomb Jaguar Sanctuary and the Monkey River area are also available. Consequently, a variety of types of tourists visit the area – ranging from those who prefer the exclusive resort to the low budget backpacker. Regardless, the social atmosphere is relatively relaxed and villagers report little conflict between hosts and guests.

*San Ignacio* town, the administrative center for Cayo District, lies on the west side of the Macal River approximately 72 miles southwest of Belize City. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, San Ignacio was established as a logging centre. Today, the town relies on cattle ranching, tourism, and small retail businesses Hoffman [37]. Average household size is 4.48 people; the average age of the head of the household is roughly 43 and the mean level of education for all adults in the household is 9.49 years. Approximately 70% of households are comprised of nuclear families.

Over the last decade, ecotourism has come to be San Ignacio’s primary industry. The main attractions luring tourists to the area include the Mountain Pine Ridge Forest Reserve and a number of significant Maya ruins – Xunantunich, Cahal Pech, El Pilar and Caracol in Belize, and Tikal in the eastern Petén of Guatemala. Canoeing, tubing, caving, hiking and horseback riding along the Belize River, are all readily accessible from San Ignacio.

## 5 Data presentation

As reported by the residents of both study communities, the impacts tourism has had on their lives have been diverse and intense in nature. The following discussion provides a summary of critical responses made by residents when asked to comment on the various ways tourism has impacted their families and their communities.

### 5.1 Economic impacts

The most cited economic benefits of tourism are that it provides jobs, additional income, and opportunities for entrepreneurs, as shown in table 1. One longstanding concern in Belize has been that tourism mainly benefits foreign investors while local Belizeans are burdened by inflated land and consumer prices. With few domestic industries, a limited arts and crafts tradition, and with most of its investment in foreign hands, the tourism industry has been plagued by the lack of multiplier effects Barry [38].

Placencia is following in the footsteps of San Pedro (Ambergris Caye) where the tourism industry was birthed in the 1960s. While the population may be



better off than it was several decades ago, the encroachment of foreigners into the tourism sector has caused land and property values to skyrocket. Even though there are still family-owned businesses, much of the upper-end tourism dollar is controlled by American, Canadian and European investors.

Table 1: Local Perceptions of Tourism Impacts (all figures indicate the percent of affirmative responses).

Variable	Placencia	San Ignacio
Has tourism changed...		
...family life?	63.2	37.4
...your community?	91.8	90.2
...the environment?	75.4	58.9
How has tourism changed...		
...family life?		
• Employment	53.5	80.3
• No time for family	8.8	0
• Don't want to have anything to do with tourists	0	27.9
...your community?		
• More job opportunities	15.4	51.0
• More money	19.2	34.0
• More businesses	19.2	36.1
• Better economy	0	9.5
• More people	11.5	0
...the environment?		
• Destruction of natural resources	34.9	2.1
• Overcrowding	25.6	4.2
• More buildings	25.6	8.3
• Villages are cleaner	23.3	55.2
• Increases in air and water pollution	18.6	2.1

The lack of multiplier effects in San Ignacio is not as pronounced. Belizeans resent the all-inclusive tour, booked through the foreign-owned agency, while little money is spent in San Ignacio. Complicating this feeling is the fact that the government does not support local involvement in tourism and foreigners are able to secure permits for tourism-based businesses with greater ease than Belizeans.

There is no doubt that tourism has brought more businesses, and in turn, more employment and economic security to residents of Placencia. In this community, 59.7% have an occupation they would directly link to tourism. Roughly 64% of households report they are always able to pay their monthly expenses while 7% report they are never able to do so. In Placencia, approximately 58% of households report they have savings and 54% indicate they have given money to other family members over the course of the last year. Fifty-six percent of households report they have secured credit within the last year, most typically from a credit union; 21 % were borrowing to help rebuild homes and businesses after Hurricane Iris.



Beyond these benefits, people cite an array of problems, from not benefiting at all to a destruction of family, community, the environment, and a loss of privacy. Many also feel that tourism has destroyed the fishing industry. Few young men want to fish; most want to be tour guides or dive masters. Older residents blame the protected status of the marine reserves for helping to destroy the livelihood of the older fishermen who are physically unable to make the transition to tour guide or dive master.

A similar trend is occurring in San Ignacio but Belizeans are not being shut out of the industry to the same extent. While ecotourism is the mainstay of the economy, the economic base is more diversified. The most significant change has been the transition from agriculture and timber to tourism. Only 19% of sampled households have an occupation they would directly link to tourism. Roughly 39% of households report they are always able to pay their monthly expenses while almost 16% report they are never able to do so. Almost 59% of households report they have savings but only 32.5% indicate they have given money to other family members over the course of the last year. As well, 13.5% of households report they have secured credit within the last year, most typically from a bank or credit union. The purpose for the loan ranged from building a house to paying bills or schooling costs, to borrowing for food and/or medical expenses.

## 5.2 Environmental impacts

Tourism has definitely contributed to more environmental awareness and division of responsibility to address environmental problems. The Belizean government was skeptical about conservation five years ago, but today, they strongly support conservation efforts. Both communities are located near a number of significant protected areas – terrestrial, riparian and marine.

Garbage disposal, disposal of raw sewage, the disappearing mangroves, the explosive growth in population and building, and the proliferation of marinas and charter boats are all environmental issues of concern to residents of Placencia, as shown in table 1.

The village is located at the end of a long but narrow peninsula and has to manage its own garbage, including the garbage that charter boats and tourists leave behind. Residents are most concerned that the septic system is over-taxed and no longer practical for a village with a growing population. There are no laws to regulate the current practice of dumping raw sewage in the lagoon.

Mangroves are also disappearing as a result of the proliferation of marinas on the peninsula. Several full service marinas have been built recently and one of the newer and larger resorts has secured a permit to build a canal separating the peninsula from the mainland completely, creating an island.

In San Ignacio, residents have commented on increased congestion, increases in water and air pollution, and increases in noise pollution. They are concerned that more land is being cleared for business construction as well as roads. Tourism is also cited in San Ignacio as a contributing cause to increased levels of air pollution. Increases in demands for transportation services have meant more vehicles. Given fuel prices, more people use vehicles that burn diesel. Increases



in demands for electricity necessitated building the hydroelectric dam located upriver from San Ignacio. Parallel to the growing tourism industry, population size has increased – the two trends combined have increased demands for air conditioning and electricity.

### 5.3 Social and cultural impacts

Ecotourism has changed social life in these communities significantly. More people are more highly educated. Educated women are working, and most people have more money than they did a decade ago. At the same time, people are abandoning their culture. The traditional Creole language has changed since the growth of tourism. It is spoken everyday but they utilize more American English words. Tourism has impacted the way people dress. People are eating different foods, watching cable television, and abandoning their traditional Belizean music for rap and rock and roll. The movement to processed packaged foods is of particular concern considering the high rate of Type-II diabetes among both men and women in Placencia.

In Placencia, the tourism-based society is centred around the activities of its male members. With the exception of a few expatriate women, licensed tour guides are invariably men. While women may own and operate guesthouses and restaurants, men have the most contact with the largely female tourists. Women and the work that they do are invisible.

Young men in Placencia pursue white women tourists and then go back to their Creole girls when the tourist season is over. Heterosexual Creole women have few choices unless they leave the village. If they frequent the clubs they quickly acquire a reputation as women with loose morals. Consequently, women socialize among themselves at home or at their places of employment.

Social life in Placencia is strongly influenced by the economy of tourism which is also blamed for attracting drug dealers and other “scamps.” There are few people in the village who have not benefited in some way from the drug economy. Those who are not active participants tolerate the sale of cocaine and marijuana to tourists. Today, many villagers who were productive members of the community are now addicted to crack. The street level sellers are young men conducting their business for the most fashionable name brand clothes, sunglasses, cell phones, or other consumer electronic goods.

In both communities tourism is also blamed for rising crime rates. Most people blame crack addicts for the rash of thefts and burglaries. Others are quick to point the finger at the “Spanish” who have become scapegoats for the ills of the village. However, most people contend that the “thieving” is done by people with long roots in the community. Tourism only impacts crime rates when the rate of tourism activity declines. When people are not making money crime rates escalate.

Many locals in San Ignacio report that one of the main reasons the foreign-owned hotels bother them is that they try to influence policies associated with tourism development, and do so to the exclusion of Belizeans. Many Belizeans are no longer involved in tourism organizations because they feel they are not empowered and receive little benefits from membership.



According to many, tourism has destroyed the sense of family in this community. Many say when Placencia was a small fishing village the community was more like a family. They say that of course there were competitions and rivalries, but not sustained vendettas. Now that land has become so valuable, personal rivalries have reached a dangerous level. Property values have soared, so the stakes are very high. The competition is threatening social network security.

## 6 Discussion

As related by a prominent community leader who was one of the earlier promoters of an ecotourism sector in Belize:

Without tourism, we would have been less developed. We would have had a smaller population, not just because of reproduction but because the knowledge of Belize because of tourism has led to more tourists living here. It depends on where you want the country to go. Without tourism, I can't imagine what people would do for an income. We started with woodcutting...agriculture...chicle.... Belize is better now with tourism. We need it as a means to survive. Without tourism people would be leaving to go abroad. It provides a way of life and a way of surviving.

Placencia has significant potential as an ecotourism destination where development could be sustained in sound ways. The resource base is still largely in its pristine state and much of it is in protected status. Unfortunately, protective status has brought higher visitation rates causing resource degradation and threats to recreational and ecological carrying capacities.

Environmental problems in town also affect the area's attractiveness. Waste management is of paramount concern. Placencia is the second largest contributor of foreign exchange through tourism, yet it receives no assistance from the government for waste disposal. Villages cannot lay and collect taxes, so they have no financial resources to manage this problem.

The fast buck associated with tourism is definitely influencing policy and management decisions regarding critical natural resources. Dredging the lagoon to create more land for real estate is a good case in point. Many feign concern about the lagoon, when in fact there are few people in the village who have not applied for a dredging permit to create new land. The reasons are simple economics and the scarcity of land.

Few people in the tourism trade see an intrinsic benefit to preserving wildlife. Most people explain that the main advantage of the marine reserves is they provide tour guides easy access to areas that can be exploited for the tourist dollar. A local cafe owner wonders why fishermen cannot fish at places like Goff Cay because it is the breeding area for whale sharks, but tourists are allowed to spend thousands of dollars to swim with the same sharks.

Although Placencia has a friendly and relaxed attitude about tourism, in many ways its' advent has disrupted community life. Local culture is definitely losing out to tourism, particularly in reference to women's status. The male



patterns of sexual behaviour (with white female tourists) has resulted in low self-esteem among young women in the village, who in turn, suffer psychological and emotional abuse.

The economic impacts of ecotourism on local residents in San Ignacio parallels that of Placencia – pronounced foreign ownership, lower end service jobs but increased incomes. Tourism brings in much needed foreign exchange and the businesses provide employment for local residents, but many still comment about the “role of servitude” for Belizeans. The people who are profiting the most are the foreigners. “Foreigners shouldn’t control everything. I hate the idea of foreigners coming in and exploiting us,” complains one tour guide from Cayo District.

In essence, tourism has been good for the economy and for local residents with some exceptions. Tourism provides numerous employment opportunities. Everyone benefits whether or not they are directly involved with tourism, even the farmers and vegetable sellers at the market. At the same time, locals are being denied access to resources they have always been able to use and enjoy. Mountain Pine Ridge “...used to be for everyone. Now it’s an exclusive area. Average Belizeans can’t afford to even have a cup of coffee there. The resorts are not made for average Belizeans. Belizeans are not encouraged to go year round, only in the low season. It’s created a class consciousness that didn’t used to be here.”

On a more positive note, a Belizean hotelier from San Ignacio made the following comment:

Tourism shows Belizeans that it doesn’t have to be all work. Husbands can take their wives out to dinner or take their families to the swimming pool. They learn that they should do things with their family and not just hang out with their friends. They see that tourism isn’t just for foreigners. It also benefits how we look at our cultural and natural resources. We learn to respect and preserve them since these are what people are coming to see.

## 7 Conclusions

Tourist destinations and the people in them change in response to tourism. If ecotourism promotes development and conservation, it should accelerate economic growth while simultaneously braking against its environmental costs. In documented cases of successful ecotourism projects, compromise is always part of the process. The central question comes to be the means by which compromises are sought and the direction these decisions take local residents and the natural resources upon which they depend.

Belize is at a critical point in its ecotourism development. The government has placed a significant amount of the country’s natural resources in protective status, but in doing so, they have also raised the dilemma of whether they are protecting these resources *for* tourism or whether they want to protect them *from* the tourism industry. Current policies surrounding cruise-ship development would suggest the former, whereas in reality their own responsible tourism



policy mandates the promotion of environmental stewardship as well as a proactive approach toward environmentally-based tourism activities. The intent for conservation is clear; the enforcement of policy is less clear.

The question of foreign ownership and local participation in decision-making about tourism is most serious. The issue of Belizean ownership of tourism businesses persists and will escalate if the leakage trend intensifies as it most certainly will. Local populations already feel alienated and are resentful of the high incidence of foreign investors. Many have lost any sense of empowerment, and in turn, their feelings of apathy have translated into little or no participation in tourism organizations.

Tourism is changing many aspects of social life and cultural traditions. One older resident from Placencia claims that people in the village are “killing themselves.” He argues that the promise of fast money in tourism, coupled with global media images of conspicuous consumer consumption, has destroyed people’s lives. He points to the escalation of drug dealing and drug use in recent years.

The key to whether any tourism development is sustainable lies in one of the basic premises of Belize’s responsible tourism mandate, that is, the promotion of local participation in decision-making processes. In the data that have been presented here, evidence that this mandate is being upheld is scant. While there are local tourism-related non-governmental organizations in both of these communities, with some local membership, many residents comment that their feelings of apathy about their own empowerment and influence in the political process prevents their participation even at this level.

A lifetime resident of Placencia asks, “With this hope of tourism, is there danger for our community?” While hoping that tourism can provide Placencia the secure economic future it needs as the fishing cooperatives have struggled, he fears the foreign investors, he fears the influx of multitudes of tourists, he fears the environmental degradation, and he fears the lifestyle changes. All of these impacts have occurred in his community and the changes will continue.

How one defines the relationships between economic growth, promotion of sound livelihood opportunities for local populations, and environmental conservation, and how communities work to achieve a balance between seemingly disparate goals is critically important to the process of using ecotourism as a development strategy.

## References

- [1] Weinberg, A., Bellows, S., & Ekster, D., Sustaining ecotourism: insights and implications from two successful case studies. *Society and Natural Resources*, **15**, pp. 371-380, 2002.
- [2] Schlevkov, A., Global trends and prospects for central and eastern European countries. *Proc. Of the World Tourism Organization*, 2002
- [3] Wall, G., Is ecotourism sustainable?, *Environmental Management*, **21(4)**, pp. 483-491, 1997.



- [4] Redclift, M., The meaning of sustainable development. *Geoforum* **23(3)**, pp. 395-403, 1992.
- [5] Wall, G., Ecotourism: old wine in new bottles?. *Trends*, **31(2)**, pp. 4-9, 1994.
- [6] Stem, C., Lassoie, J.P., & Lee, D.R., Community participation in ecotourism benefits: the link to conservation practices and perspectives. *Society & Natural Resources*, **16(5)**, pp. 387-413, 2003.
- [7] Kerr, M., Ecotourism: alleviating the negative effects of deforestation on indigenous peoples in Latin America. *Colorado Journal of International Environmental Law & Policy*, **14(2)**, pp. 335-364, 2003.
- [8] Scheyvens, R., Case study - ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities. *Tourism Management*, **20(2)**, pp. 245-251, 1999.
- [9] Farrell, T.A., & Marion, J.L., Identifying and assessing ecotourism visitor impacts at eight protected areas in Costa Rica and Belize. *Environmental Conservation*, **28(3)**, pp. 215-225, 2001.
- [10] Wallace, G.N., & Pierce, S., An evaluation of ecotourism in Amazonas, Brazil. *Annals of Tourism Research* **23(4)** pp. 843-873, 1996.
- [11] Durbin, J.D. & Ralambo, J.A., The role of local people in the successful maintenance of protected areas in Madagascar. *Environmental Conservation*, **21**, pp. 115-120, 1994.
- [12] Cater, E., Environmental contradictions in sustainable tourism. *The Geographical Journal*, **161(1)**, pp. 21-28, 1995.
- [13] Alexander, S.E. & Gibson, J.W., Tourism Impact Assessment (TIA): participatory empiricism in the measurement of ecotourism. *Proc. of the Society for Applied Anthropology*, 2000.
- [14] Weaver, D., Alternative to mass tourism in Dominica. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **18**, pp. 414-432, 1991.
- [15] Cater, E., Ecotourism in the third world—problems and prospects for sustainability (Chapter 5). *Ecotourism: a sustainable option?*, eds. Erlet Cater & Gwen Lowman, John Wiley & Sons: New York, pp. 69-86, 1994.
- [16] Brown, F., *Tourism reassessed*, Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford and Boston, 1998.
- [17] Dearden, P., Tourism and sustainable development in northern Thailand. *Geographical Review*, **Oct.**, pp. 400-13, 1991.
- [18] Inskip, E., *Tourism planning: an integrated and sustainable development approach*, Van Nostrand Reinhold: New York, 1991.
- [19] Boo, E., *Ecotourism: the potentials and pitfalls*. Washington, D.C.: World Wildlife Fund, 1990.
- [20] Tisdell, C., Ecotourism: aspects of its sustainability and compatibility with conservation, social and other objectives. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, **5(2)**, pp.11-21, 1998.
- [21] Britton, R.A., The political economy of tourism in the third world. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **9**, pp. 331-558, 1982.
- [22] Cohen, E., The impact of tourism on the physical environment. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **Apr./Jun.**, pp. 215-230, 1978.



- [23] Fang, Y., Ecotourism in western Sichuan, China. *Mountain Research and Development*, **22(2)**, pp. 113-115, 2002.
- [24] Obua, J., The potential, development and ecological impact of ecotourism in Kibale National Park, Uganda. *Journal of Environmental Management*, **50**, pp. 27-38, 1997.
- [25] Tabatchnaia-Tamirisa, N., Loke, M.K., Leung, P., & Tucker, K., Energy and tourism in Hawaii. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **24(2)**, pp. 390-401, 1997.
- [26] National Drug Abuse Control Council, *National anti-drug strategy 2000-2004*. Belize: NDACC, 1999.
- [27] van der Borg, J., Paolo Costa, P., & Gotti, G., Tourism in European heritage cities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, **23(2)**, pp. 306-21, 1996.
- [28] Kirkpatrick, J.B., Ecotourism, local and indigenous people, and the conservation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, **31(4)**, pp. 819-829, 2001.
- [29] CSO (Central Statistical Office), *Environmental statistics for Belize*. Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Finance: Belmopan, 1999.
- [30] Blackstone Corporation and HELP for Progress Ltd. *A tourism strategy plan for Belize*. The Ministry of Tourism and the Environment: Belmopan, 1998.
- [31] BTB (Belize Tourism Board), *Belize Travel & Tourism Statistics*, BTB: Belize City, 2001.
- [32] CSO (Central Statistical Office), *Belize abstract of statistics*. Belmopan: Central Statistical Office, Ministry of Finance, 1997.
- [33] Honey, M., *Ecotourism and sustainable development: who owns paradise?*, Island Press: Washington D.C., 1999.
- [34] Alexander, S.E., The role of Belize residents in the struggle to define ecotourism opportunities in monkey sanctuaries. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, **23(2)**, 1999.
- [35] Alexander, S.E., Resident attitudes towards conservation and black howler monkeys in Belize: the Community Baboon Sanctuary. *Environmental Conservation*, **Oct.**, 2000.
- [36] Mahler, R., & Wotkyns, S., *Belize: a natural destination*. John Muir Publications: Santa Fe, 1992.
- [37] Hoffman, E., *Adventuring in Belize*. Sierra Club Books: San Francisco, 1994.
- [38] Barry, T., *Inside Belize*. Resource Centre Press: Albuquerque, 1995.

