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# Residents' Perception of Tourism: A Critical Theoretical and Methodological Review

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## Residentes y percepción del turismo: una revisión crítica teórico-metodológica

**Resumen.** Se presenta una discusión crítica del progreso académico en la evaluación de las percepciones del turismo en comunidades receptoras. Considerando un número significativo de artículos relevantes en la investigación académica, se muestran las limitaciones metodológicas y teóricas más relevantes en el área. Los resultados comúnmente contradictorios, la falta de escalas para la medición de percepciones, y las variaciones en aproximaciones teórico-metodológicas, se reportan como aspectos limitantes en el progreso del estudio de las percepciones del turismo. Se concluye con propuestas generales al respecto.

**Palabras clave:** percepciones del turismo, evaluación de percepciones, limitaciones metodológicas, limitaciones teóricas.

**Abstract.** Tourism impacts have been commonly assessed through the examination of perceptions of host communities. A considerable amount of literature in this field has been developed during the last few decades. The present exploratory paper presents a critical discussion of the academic advancement in the assessment of resident perceptions towards tourism. By considering a significant number of relevant academic research articles, this theoretical discussion highlights the most significant methodological and theoretical limitations in this field. The commonly contradictory findings, the lack of standard scales for measuring resident attitudes, and the variation of theoretical and methodological approaches, were found as significantly limiting the academic progress in the study of tourism perceptions. General propositions are eventually made.

**Key words:** tourism perception literature; resident perception assessment; tourism methodological limitations; tourism theoretical limitations.

## Introduction

Tourism perceptions<sup>1</sup> by host community residents have gained academic attention during the last decades, and their importance for planning issues, in terms of sustainable development, has been acknowledged (Dyer *et al.*, 2007). However, there are a wide number of studies that have considerably varied in terms of theoretical bases and methodological approaches and other significant factors that have affected the development of solid foundations for further studies on resident perceptions of tourism.

In order to provide a theoretical and methodological analysis on the development of tourism studies on resident perceptions, the present paper offers a critical discussion of a wide number of existing works in the subject.

1. In the tourism literature the terms *perceptions*, *attitudes* and *reactions* have been commonly used in an undifferentiated manner to refer basically to the 'opinions' held by host residents. Because of this, the author opted for using the actual term used by corresponding authors in the original texts being examined, either *perceptions*, *attitudes*, *reactions* or any other.

Although the number of works analysed in this work is significant –yet not exhaustive–, one major limitation of this review is that it does not analyse material published in languages other than English. The paper starts by considering the importance of undertaking such studies, which basically concentrates on planning and management issues. The paper then moves onto a critical examination of the theoretical frameworks that have underpinned a considerable number of investigations into this field. The principles, propositions and limitations of models such as Irridex (Doxey, 1975) and Destination Lifecycle Theory (Butler, 2006) are briefly discussed. Subsequently, the present work considers the factors that have been identified by the mainstream literature as being influential in determining resident perceptions towards tourism, and the contradictions in these findings are also briefly reported.

In addition, the paper presents an analysis of studies on segmentation of resident attitudes towards tourism. A brief description of the different segmentations together with a general critique of them is presented. Afterwards, by recognising the need for theoretical foundations for these studies, the present paper presents and discusses some of the theories that have been commonly used as theoretical bases by scholars. The paper then discusses other relevant issues that arose during the present literature analysis, particularly with regard to the conceptual inconsistency and the methodological nature of these studies. Finally the present article briefly proposes some aspects that are believed to be of relevance for the advancement of resident perception studies. Further research ideas within this field are also provided.

## 1. Academic interest and the importance of resident perception studies

During the last decades, increasing academic attention has been given to the resident perceptions of impacts of tourism, and a considerable number of studies have emerged focusing particularly on the perceptions and attitudes towards sociocultural impacts (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). While some scholars have examined the perceptions of sociocultural impacts on one particular location (Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Gu and Wong, 2006), others have examined such perceptions through comparative studies in different destinations (Madrigal, 1995; Tosun, 2002). Other researchers have examined residents' perceptions through comparing different resident groups belonging to the same region (Besculides *et al.*, 2002) whereas others have researched various subgroups within the same local

communities (Petrzelka *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, while some scholars have attempted to develop theoretical models for assessing the study of perceptions and attitudes towards tourism (Lankford and Howard, 1994). Others have analysed the existing research literature to develop theoretical frameworks (Ap, 1992; Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004).

The existing research suggests that there are several reasons for the emerging scholarly attention to the perceptions of tourism. It has been recognised, for example, that the evaluation of residents' perceptions could be a valuable component in identifying and measuring tourism impacts (Getz, 1994); in fact, the majority of tourism impact studies have been conducted through measuring residents' attitudes towards tourism and the effects that are perceived by community residents (Zhang *et al.*, 2006).

The identification of such effects has gained special recognition as it has been claimed that one of the reasons beyond this is the quality of life of the host community (Williams and Lawson, 2001). In fact, when discussing the ability of a destination to provide a high standard of living for residents of the destination, namely *competitiveness*, scholars have acknowledged that tourism activity is an important factor in determining the quality of life of many host community residents; i.e. *societal prosperity* (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999).

[...] not only will tourism be a major contributor to global prosperity, but also [...] the very nature of the tourism phenomenon will shape the lifestyles, societal structures, and inevitably the quality of life [...] of many citizens of the world during the first segment of the third millennium (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999: 138).

In addition to identifying resident perceptions for the improvement of quality of life, identifying residents' attitudes is important in determining public support for tourism development as well as the opportunities to be exploited, or in evaluating perceptions of problems that should be solved (Williams and Lawson, 2001). By identifying the attitudes of local populations, programmes can be set up to minimise friction between tourists and residents (Lankford and Howard, 1994) and therefore to pursue the goal of sustainable tourism. In Williams and Lawson's (2001:271) words,

[...] If it is known why residents support or oppose the industry, it will be possible to select those developments which can minimise negative social impacts and maximise support for such alternatives. As such, quality of life for residents can be enhanced, or at least maintained, with respect to the impacts of tourism in the community.

## 2. Theoretical frameworks for the study of resident perceptions

Within the considerable body of academic research related to tourism impacts and residents' attitudes towards tourism, some models, constituting the beginning of the development of a conceptual foundation for the evaluation of social impacts (Wall and Mathieson, 2006), have been developed to help explain tourism impacts and their relationship with residents' perceptions. While some of these models focus on the change in resident attitudes towards tourism over time (Butler, 2006; Dogan, 1989; Doxey, 1975), others have concentrated on the possible residents' strategies that comprise a continuum for responding to tourism impacts (Ap and Crompton, 1993).

### 2.1 Doxey's Irridex

Undoubtedly, one of the most significant and earliest contributions to the development of theoretical models is the one proposed by Doxey (1975); the Index of Tourist Irritation or "Irridex". The Irridex model is a four-stage theoretical model that attempts to explain host community responses to tourism development. The model recognises that unfavourable impacts of tourism development might lead to irritation in the community. Such irritation, according to the author, is determined by the degree of incompatibility between residents and tourists. The model basically suggests that with the increase in the number of tourists and development of tourist destinations, residents' perceptions vary from *euphoria*, to *apathy*, then to *annoyance*, and finally to *antagonism*.

Although Doxey's (1975) Irridex has been currently regarded as one of the most influential works addressing the relationships between tourism development and residents' responses (Mason and Cheyne, 2000), some limitations of the model have been recognised. One of the most significant limitations is the fact that it is a unidirectional model and was intended to represent the existing disposition of a host community in its entirety (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Additionally, by recognising that the model assumes a degree of homogeneity in a community and therefore ignores intrinsic factors associated with the community members, it has been acknowledged that the model cannot explain in detail the variations among residents within the same community (Zhang *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, the model fails to address the situations where visitor management schemes may help to reduce tourist pressures or where the local community may participate more in directing tourism development (Shaw and Williams, 2002).

### 2.2 Butler's Tourism Destination Lifecycle

Another significant contribution to the development of theoretical models with regard to the relationship between tourism development and residents' attitudes is Butler's (2006) Tourism Destination Lifecycle Model. Although originally proposed almost three decades ago, the model is still academically recognised. By considering that tourist areas evolve and change over time, and based upon the product cycle concept—where a product sales proceed slowly at first, then experience a rapid rate of growth, stabilise, and subsequently decline—Butler's model suggests that tourism areas follow a similar evolution pattern. It suggests that initially the area will be visited by a small number of tourists, who are restricted by lack of access and facilities. It then states that as facilities and awareness about the area grow, the number of visitors increases as well. Then the area is supposed to grow rapidly due to marketing efforts together with information dissemination and further facility provision. However, the number of visitors will ultimately decline as levels of carrying capacity are reached.

According to this hypothetical evolution, which has been both supported (Akis *et al.*, 1996) and contradicted (Dyer *et al.*, 2007) by recent empirical studies, the stages that tourist areas experience are *exploration*, *involvement*, *development*, *consolidation*, *stagnation*, *decline* and/or *rejuvenation*. However, although the academic conceptual significance of the Tourism Destination Lifecycle Model has gained academic recognition (Zhang *et al.*, 2006), certain limitations have been observed. Like Doxey's (1975) model, Butler's (2006) framework has been for a long time regarded as a unidirectional conceptual model (Ap and Crompton, 1993). Furthermore, it has been pointed out that the model assumes a degree of homogeneity of community reactions (Mason and Cheyne, 2000). According to Butler (2006), a consistent evolution of tourist areas can be conceptualised. However, it is of importance to acknowledge that, as other scholars have found (Tosun, 2002), not all areas experience the stages of the cycle as clearly as others and therefore the model should be regarded as partially applicable since the cycle experience must be expected to vary for different areas.

### 2.3 Butler's Dynamic Matrix

Other existing theoretical frameworks have been suggested as being applicable to the social relationships between tourists and residents. By considering that communities are not necessarily homogeneous, a former model suggested by Butler in 1974 (cited in Wall and Mathieson, 2006) attempted to explain the host attitudinal/behavioural responses to

tourist activity. The framework, being based on a dynamic matrix, suggests that residents may be active or passive with regard to their behaviour towards tourism, and negative or positive in terms of their attitudes. Unlike Doxey's model, Butler's matrix recognises that a variety of opinions may be found within the host community, and that opinions can indeed change in any one of the four directions derived from the matrix. According to Ryan (2003) it may be that Doxey's model represents the general tendency of opinion of the community, while Butler's attitudinal/behavioural matrix represents the attitudes separated into its various possible components within the different resident groups of the community.

#### 2.4 Dogan's Framework

Like the general models proposed by Doxey and Butler, Dogan (1989) developed a framework by identifying and reviewing the major consequences of tourism and the behavioural responses adopted by residents. Unlike Doxey's and Butler's models, Dogan's framework focuses on response to tourism impacts rather than attitudes. Such a framework proposes that a homogeneous community characterised by a particular response to tourism ultimately becomes diversified; tourist development transforms a relatively homogeneous community to a relatively heterogeneous one. By assuming that to the extent that the impacts of tourism are perceived as positive or negative, residents' reaction takes the form of acceptance or resistance respectively. Dogan's (1989) model proposes *resistance*, *retreatism*, *boundary maintenance*, *revitalization* and *adoption* as the strategies that community residents develop to cope with the effects of tourism.

Like Butler's matrix, Dogan's model recognises that the heterogeneity of a host population implies that several responses, which will vary considerably depending on the relationship between tourists and residents, may simultaneously exist within a community. It also assumes that since tourism development significantly depends on the interests and attitudes of the government, its policies appreciably determine the dominant response to tourism.

[...] (T)he variable homogeneity of a host population implies that various combinations of strategies may exist simultaneously within a region. The level of heterogeneity of the local population and the power structure within it may determine the differentiation of responses to tourism and the forms of strategies adopted. Moreover, the power structure within a region may regulate the responses of the local population and suppress certain forms of reactions (Dogan, 1989: 225).

Dogan's representation of the several combinations of residents' responses is similar to Butlers' matrix. On the other hand, while Butler's attitudinal/behavioural matrix suggests that all four forms of response (active or passive and positive or negative) may exist within a community at a certain time but their distribution may change, Dogan's model assumes that residents' responses may change in a variety of directions. Additionally, Dogan's framework assumes that tourism generally begins to develop in a rural community that is relatively homogeneous and then transforms it into an urban and heterogeneous community. Therefore, and unlike Doxey's Irridex or Butlers' Tourism Destination Lifecycle Model, Dogan's model proposes that the first stage of tourism development involves any one of the possible four reactions in a homogeneous rural community and that as a result of increasing heterogeneity, all four responses may exist simultaneously within a community. It suggests, for example, that if tourism does not become an integral part of the socioeconomic life of the community, it is possible that the initial dominant response towards it will be of resistance, and not necessarily of euphoria as suggested by Doxey's Irridex.

#### 2.5 Ap and Crompton's Framework

By examining resident response, rather than attitudes, to tourism impacts, other researchers have attempted to develop similar frameworks. Such frameworks, however, hold a narrower orientation. Ap and Crompton (1993), for example, reported four strategies that comprise a continuum for responding to tourism impacts; namely the *embracement-withdrawal strategy* continuum. Ap and Crompton's model was derived from primary qualitative data from selected communities, and therefore the existing cultural contrast within such communities was much less pronounced than in the macro-level context of Dogan's model. According to Ap and Crompton's framework, residents' reaction to tourism could be placed on a continuum comprised of four strategies: *embracement*, *tolerance*, *adjustment*, and *withdrawal*.

Ap and Crompton (1993) recognised that their framework is not rigid since they acknowledged that there may be a diversity of attitudes and behavioural manifestations to tourism within a community. Although the strategies reported by the framework are more a function of residents' responses to tourist numbers and their behaviour than of the existence of a cultural gap underpinning Dogan's model, their framework was reasonably consistent with Butler's matrix, and therefore to certain extent with Dogan's model itself. The actual applicability of Ap and Crompton's framework, nevertheless, needs further empirical evidence.



As can be noted, all the frameworks described above are similar in that they consider a dynamic and progressive element; they recognise that the social impacts of tourism change through time in response to structural changes in the tourist development, and the extent and duration of the exposure of residents to such development (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). They consider that the impacts, their residents' perceptions and possible reactions towards tourism will not be permanently static. These frameworks, however, differ in their conceptions of the possible and variable directions in which change may take place.

Although such frameworks have been widely used for the study of tourism impact perceptions and attitudes, all frameworks stress a further need to empirically identify the dimensions of residents' responses over a behavioural continuum, the levels of resident response and threshold levels in proportion to the degree of tourism impact (Wall and Mathieson, 2006). Simultaneously, these frameworks should be regarded as being based on a much too simplistic understanding of resident attitudes as they have ignored the complexity of factors that can influence such attitudes (Lankford and Howard, 1994: 135).

### 3. Factors influencing tourism perceptions

The substantial body of literature examining local residents' attitudes towards tourism suggests that although the existing research has significantly varied in several dimensions, it has generally concluded that there are a large number of factors that may influence residents' attitudes, and that residents hold diverse opinions about tourism development and tourists (Mason and Cheyne, 2000). While some scholars have attempted to frame these factors into different categories, such as an extrinsic/intrinsic dichotomy to derive cluster analysis (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000), others have simultaneously included several of them to test hypotheses for model development (Perdue *et al.*, 1990).

With regard to the factors that are commonly identified in

the existing literature as being influential in the perceptions and attitudes towards tourism, it has been observed that there is an inconsistent relationship between such factors and perceptions of tourism (Pearce *et al.*; 1996). In fact incipient findings indicate that most sociodemographic variables do not affect resident level of support for the tourism industry (Milman and Pizam, 1988). Recent studies however have claimed differently (Harrill, 2004). By supporting the latter case, the detailed analysis conducted for the purpose of the present paper suggests that sociodemographic variables can indeed become influential dimensions in shaping resident

perceptions towards tourism. These dimensions mainly include factors such as *gender, age, birthplace and level of community attachment, ethnicity, education level, and length of residence*. In addition, other variables such as *tourist-resident contact, proximity to resorts, economic dependency, economic and tourism development, level of knowledge about tourism and involvement of residents in tourism decision making* have also been identified as influential in resident perceptions towards tourism.

A critical literature review of the influential factors named above reveals that the existing findings with regard to resident perceptions towards tourism are quite diverse and it is difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions. The variation of instruments, sampling techniques, locations, methodologies and theoretical frameworks makes it more difficult to extrapolate previous findings. Therefore, most of these findings cannot be generalisable outside of the sampling frame,

methodology (Williams and Lawson, 2001), and even time and location to which they relate. It must be recognised, nevertheless, that the creation of general theories regarding this issue appears to be complicated as most studies have focused on specific empirical needs.

### 4. Segmentation of resident perceptions

In addition to the lack of consistent methods and theoretical foundations (Harrill, 2004), the tendency to view residents in the community(ies) under study as a single group, rather than

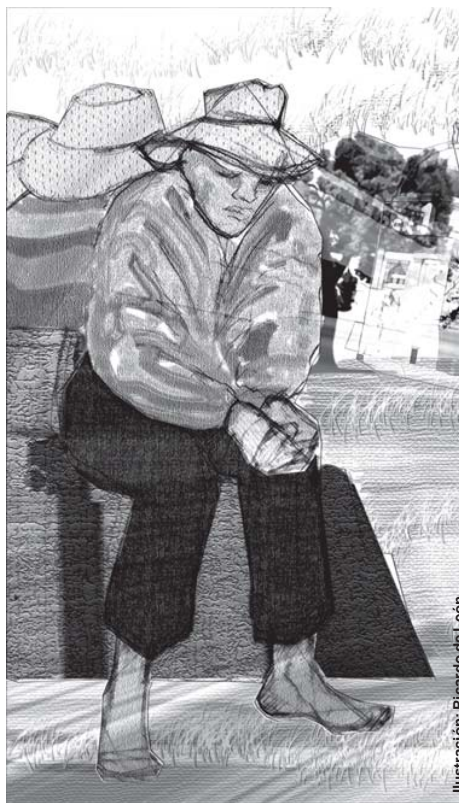


Ilustración: Ricardo de León.

examining any discrepancy among local subgroups, has contributed to explain the evident contradiction in findings in the measurement of resident attitudes towards tourism (Petrzelka *et al.*, 2005). Scholars have recognised that *community* is a difficult concept if it is treated as homogeneous rather than recognising and acknowledging the intrinsic diversity within communities (Petrzelka *et al.*, 2005). In recognition of the heterogeneity of host communities in terms of perceptions towards tourism, some attempts have been made to homogeneously segment resident perceptions.

The existing literature reveals that different segments, based on the degree of residents' support to tourism, have been identified within the investigations undertaken to date. While early –yet currently functional– works such as that of Davis, Allen and Cosenza (1988) have identified clusters named 'Haters', 'Lovers', 'Cautious Romantics', 'In-Betweeners' and 'Love'Em for a Reason', others have named them 'Enthusiasts', 'Somewhat Irritated' and 'Middle of the Roaders' (Ryan and Montgomery, 1994). More recently, clusters named 'Development Supporters', 'Prudent Developers', 'Ambivalent and Cautious', 'Protectionists' and 'Alternative Developers' (Aguiló and Roselló, 2005) have also been suggested.

Although the recognition of community heterogeneity has been acknowledged, and it has been claimed that it is possible to segment a destination's residents on the basis of their perceptions about tourism development (Madrígal, 1995: 100), no significant conclusions (if any) can be drawn from the existing investigations with regard to resident perception clusters. Authors have suggested that even though it is relatively easy to identify corresponding clusters among those residents who hold the most extreme views, direct comparisons among the different authors' clusters are impossible (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000: 777). Such impossibility is basically due to the lack of consistency in terms of the clustering variables, communities and destinations' characteristics, the number of clusters identified and the data collection instruments utilised.

Furthermore, although it has been stated that by identifying clusters of residents by their responses may bring researchers closer to the development of more general theories concerning the links between resident attitudes and tourism (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000: 780), it is academically important to recognise that such an approach would still be limited. It must be acknowledged that because earlier works have imposed analysis frameworks upon the community through pre-determined research instruments, researchers have limited emic responses with regard to resident perceptions towards

tourism (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000), and therefore the accuracy of study results with regard to 'real' clusters should be questioned.

## 5. Theoretical foundations for resident perception studies

Another significant difficulty that is frequently faced when attempting to make generalisations in terms of resident's perceptions is the lack of theoretical foundations. It has been widely recognised that the atheoretical orientation of studies on resident perceptions poses problems in developing conceptual frameworks (Harrill, 2004). It must be recognised however that such conceptual frameworks in resident attitudes research are frequently weak because tourism research tends to be an applied rather than theoretical field. Nevertheless, the existing atheoretical orientation can be regarded as a major limitation in advancing understanding of residents' perceptions of tourism. In recognition of this, some theoretical foundations have been suggested as the basis for conceptual development in resident attitudes towards tourism. Theories such as the Social Exchange Theory and the Social Representations Theory are frequently incorporated into such theoretical foundations.

Within a tourism framework, Social Exchange Theory postulates that an individual's attitudes towards tourism will be influenced by his or her evaluation of consequential outcomes in the community (Andereck *et al.*, 2005). Although the Social Exchange Theory has valuable potential applicability, since it provides a basis for identification and definition of the central concepts involved in measuring residents' perceptions of tourism (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004), it has not always been fully empirically supported (see McGehee *et al.*, cited in Harrill, 2004). The lack of total support might be expected, as the theory has been criticised for its assumption that humans are isolated individuals and respond as computer-like information processors (Pearce *et al.*, 1996: 34). If the Social Exchange Theory was to gain academic and practical acceptance, the theory would need to be further tested due to the complex nature of the interrelationships proposed in the model (Zhang *et al.*, 2006) and to the complexity of residents as both isolated and collective individuals.

Social Representations Theory is another theoretical framework that has been proposed and empirically used (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000) for the understanding of community attitudes towards tourism. The theory

specifically focuses on understanding everyday knowledge and how this knowledge is used to understand the world in which individuals live and therefore to guide their actions and decisions (Pearce *et al.*, 1996). However, although Social Representations Theory offers an emic, contextual, process oriented, and longitudinal approach necessary to understand the complex social phenomenon of tourism (Pearce *et al.*, 1996: 54), the value of such a theory still needs to be widely supported and recognised by empirical studies on resident perceptions about tourism.

## 6. Other relevant issues in the study of tourism perceptions

In addition to the points considered in the preceding discussion, there are other issues that deserve special thought when examining the literature on resident perceptions towards tourism and tourists. One of these issues, as the following discussion will reveal, is the frequent conceptual inconsistency to refer to the 'opinions' of residents towards tourism. This terminological inconsistency might eventually strengthen the wide variation and even contradiction in any findings.

### 6.1 Terminological variation

As already mentioned, the literature review reveals that there are various concepts that are frequently used interchangeably to refer basically to the opinions or views of residents towards tourism. For example, while some scholars have commonly used the concept *perceptions* (Aguiló and Roselló, 2005; Ap, 1992; Besculides *et al.*, 2002; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Dyer *et al.* 2007; Tosun, 2002), others have instead opted for using *attitudes* (Akis *et al.*, 1996; Mason and Cheyne 2000; Zhang *et al.*, 2006). Simultaneously, whereas *opinions* (Williams and Lawson 2001) and *reactions* (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000) have also been used for similar purposes, others have preferred to adopt the term *perspectives* instead (Wall, 1996). However, there are also scholars that have simultaneously used two of these terms (*attitudes* and *perceptions*) (Lankford, 1994) in an undifferentiated manner.

Despite this frequent variation of terms, few scholars have recognised such inconsistency, and it has been claimed that the difference among terms is important since many studies, for example, seem to use *attitudes* when, in fact, they measure *perceptions* (Getz, 1994). According to Ap (1992), perceptions signify the meaning attributed to an object while attitudes signify a person's continuing predisposition or action tendencies to some objects. Although some of the varying terms in question have been used within this article, it must be stated that this was done in order to respect authors' own

words (i.e. as used in originals). The author of this article, however, opted for the frequent use of *perceptions* both for practical purposes and for the following reason:

[...] In the host resident-tourism context, use of the term perceptions is considered more appropriate. This is because residents may attribute meaning to tourism impacts [perceptions] without necessarily having knowledge or enduring predispositions about them [attitudes], and because it cannot be assumed that all residents have knowledge and hold beliefs about tourism impacts (Ap, 1992: 671).

### 6.2 Nature of studies: Exploratory and Descriptive

Another issue that deserves consideration in the development of resident perception studies is the nature of the studies conducted. Although there is a substantial number of studies conducted on resident perceptions, the great majority tend to be largely exploratory and descriptive in nature (Mathieson and Wall, 2006), which may be due to specific practical needs for which the study was undertaken. However, from the present critical analysis, it can be noted that the majority of the studies generally report research project results in a descriptive way but do not state *why* residents in tourist destinations hold either positive, negative or neutral perceptions towards tourism. This has been noted before as it has been claimed that the lack of explanatory research limits the current literature on understanding resident responses towards tourism (Ap, 1992). Although the following excerpt was written almost 20 years ago, the analysis of existing literature suggests that it is equally applicable today:

[...] one persistent problem in this body of work is that the theoretical understanding of residents perception of, or attitude to, tourism is weak. This accounts for the general absence of explanation grounded in the social structure of the destination society. There is, so far, no theoretical justification of why some people are, or are not, favourably disposed to tourism (Husbands, 1989: 240).

Perhaps one of the potential and partial solutions to this problem could be a full consideration of the importance of the emic paradigm, which has been required to *understand* community reactions to tourism (Pearce *et al.*, 1996). While the etic approaches generate their own constructs to describe the observed behaviour or cultural pattern, the emic approaches seem to be more explanatory as they draw upon the actors' interpretations and local inside knowledge of the meaning of the behaviour (Pearce *et al.*, 1996: 4).

Undoubtedly the large amount of scholastic work conducted so far, either focused on *perceptions* or *attitudes*;



with or without theoretical foundations; or whether quantitative or qualitative, has contributed to a broad - yet partial - understanding of resident perceptions towards tourism. There are therefore still a wide variety of issues to uncover within this topic. For example, pertaining to methodological approaches, qualitative measures are needed for the inclusions of a more 'personal voice' of the community residents (Petrzelka *et al.*, 2005). In terms of locations, there is a growing need to assess resident attitudes in areas that are beginning the development process, such as emerging destinations in Latin America, Africa and Asia (Harrill, 2004). Furthermore, with regard to tourist comportment, future research should be directed at determining more explicitly the perceptions and attitudes of hosts towards the presence and behaviour of particular types of tourists (Wall and Mathieson, 2006).

## 7. Propositions

Considering the whole preceding critical discussion, some general propositions need to be made. Undoubtedly, the following propositions will not be by any means definite, nor will they be the only possible suggestions to improve the development of resident perception studies. However, they will certainly provide an idea of what can be done regarding the weaknesses of the literature examined above.

First, in terms of the development of models/frame-works on resident perceptions, it is proposed that tourism scholars should not rush in developing such models. Scholars should be careful when categorising theoretical propositions as models. Instead, researchers should rather proposed hypotheses to be tested by further studies. In order to support the development of more carefully designed models, it is suggested to conduct more comparative studies, be at regional, national or international levels. Furthermore, it is also proposed that such hypotheses consider the ample variety of existing realities around the world. Also, researchers should be cautious when considering the existing 'models' as the basis of their empirical investigations.

Secondly, regarding the studies on factors influencing residents' perceptions, it was claimed that it has been difficult

to draw meaningful conclusions from the existing studies. Therefore, for a better understanding of such factors, it is proposed to carefully consider the instruments utilised in previous studies when being applied in later investigations. Adequate and necessary modifications to such instruments need to be made by taking into account the particular characteristics of the location being researched. Similarly, the use of analogous methodologies and theoretical frameworks may strengthen the possibilities to obtain results concurring in this subject.

Closely related to the points above, a third proposition is made. Should true evaluations of resident perceptions are sought, it is believed necessary to provide studies with theoretical basis leading the particular research efforts. In proposing this theoretical orientation for further studies on resident perceptions towards tourism, it is hoped to stimulate

future theoretical development and understanding of the area under discussion. Although tourism itself has not developed firm theoretical bases for the development of future research, theories belonging to other areas of knowledge such as Sociology or Psychology may be fruitfully utilised.

A fourth proposition is considered to be appropriate. This proposition however has to do more with practical rather than methodological or theoretical issues. It is proposed that in order to gain valuable insight into resident perceptions to tourism, a consideration of other factors -widely ignored up-to-date- is needed. In addition to investigating, for example, residents' social and demographic backgrounds as factors

influencing perceptions, the contemplation of the inherent cultural background is also of importance should a more fruitful avenue in search for antecedents of resident opinions is sought. The consideration of issues such as the existing values, and moral principles, for instance, may help gain a deeper understanding of the subject.

Finally, in addition to the consideration of the points above, it is proposed to uncover areas that have been largely neglected in the subject. As mentioned before, it is believed that more studies on host community perceptions towards tourism in developing countries such as Mexico and Thailand need to be conducted. Also, research attention to the perceptions towards

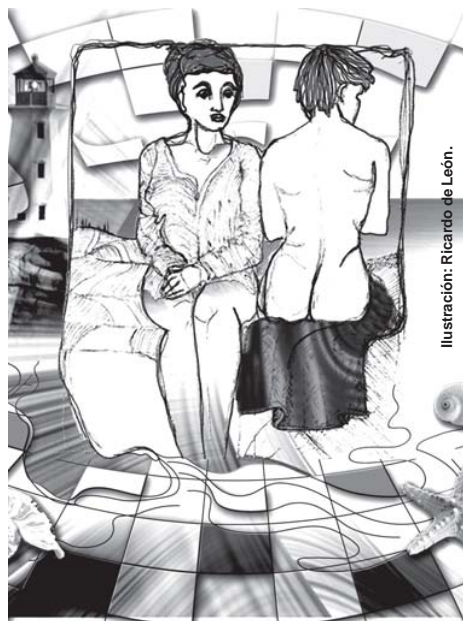


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non-conventional forms of tourism such as sex tourism and gay tourism should also be undertaken. Within a more practical framework, further research should focus on integrating the efforts and strategies of tourism planners/officers with the perceptions of host communities towards tourism in order to fulfil the requisites of the sustainability paradigm, which has nowadays gained significant academic attention.

## Conclusions

The whole preceding discussion aimed to provide a theoretical context on the perceptions towards tourism held by residents, and raised many issues to consider for future studies. One of these issues is the fact that the literature varies widely in many regards. One of the most noticeable variations is with regard to findings. The investigations analysed have frequently reported inconsistencies which have ranged from slightly similar to completely opposite views held by residents considering a particular dimension (*e.g.* sociodemographics). Although it is recognised that such inconsistency may be due to specific practical needs of the investigations, in terms of theoretical advancement, such a slight or extreme discrepancy has played an important role in the development of tourism knowledge as it has not permitted the significant extrapolation of study findings.

Within a theoretical context, one of the issues that seem to be influential for such discrepancies is the lack of standard scales for measuring resident attitudes towards tourists and perceptions of tourism impacts in different circumstances, thus not providing a basis for adequate comparative analysis. This has previously been acknowledged when claiming that

[A]nother ongoing difficulty concerns [the] ability to develop measures that provide a valid understanding of [...] the impacts that tourism may have [...] The ability to measure and/or infer the impacts (both negative and positive) that are directly attributable to tourism, does not inspire confidence (Crouch and Ritchie, 1999: 139).

Bearing this in mind, some scholars have developed different scales to assess attitudes and possibly compare findings. However, the lack of consistency in the findings might not have to do only with methodological issues, such as standard scales, but with the particular contexts of host communities. 'Standard' scales might be useful when applied to 'similar' host communities in terms of both their intrinsic (*e.g.* gender, age, ethnicity) and extrinsic variables (*e.g.* level of tourism development, community's economic dependency). However, the universal use of

'standard' scales seems to be quite impractical due to the significant inherent variations in host communities and the specific needs of the research in question. Therefore, it can be concluded that in many contexts it might be more practical and reasonable to develop instruments that are based on the particular circumstances and characteristics of the community under consideration. As a proposition, however, it was suggested that whenever existing instruments are to be adopted for future research, scholars should be cautious by carefully adapting such instruments to the community in question.

The several models discussed in the literature review also need further attention. The discussion revealed that although certain models have been widely supported, they also have been contradicted by empirical studies. Plus, such models (*e.g.* Irridex and Lifecycle Theory) seem to be applicable only to destinations that follow certain development pattern and have been criticised for their unidirectional propositions. Other models such as that of Butler's host attitudinal/behavioural matrix, seem to be more encompassing as they recognise the possible variations in opinions within the same community; models that seem to reflect the varying reality of host communities. The applicability and value of such models, however, need further academic acceptance, which has not been echoed in the existing empirical case studies. In this vein, it was therefore suggested that scholars should be cautious when considering such models –although it was observed that some should be regarded as hypotheses rather than models– for the development of further studies. Also it was proposed that more comparative and empirical studies ought to be made before jumping into the development of theoretical models.

A final point that needs special consideration as a concluding remark is that the existing literature regularly varies with regard to the methodological approaches, which might also be a reason for discrepancies in findings. Although there is a clear major tendency towards positivistic approaches –mainly reflected in the quantitative tenets– the importance of considering qualitative approaches has started being recognised (Riley and Love, 2000). This methodological variation, however, can be regarded as one limitation for comparisons as the etic perspective predominantly surpasses the emic one. This fact has commonly taken place despite the recognition of the valuable contribution of emic approaches to the development of studies on resident attitudes (Pearce *et al.*, 1996), and has been reflected in the descriptive nature dominating the majority of studies. The reasons *why* residents hold certain perceptions towards tourism are therefore still generally unknown.

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