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**TOURISM AS A SUSTAINABLE
RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY:
BUILDING CONSENSUS IN
RESIDENT ATTITUDES**

By Paul B. Siegel and Paul M. Jakus

ABSTRACT

A survey of community leaders, broadly categorized as business people, public officials and conservationists, was conducted to assess attitudes toward tourism in a six-county region of the Southern Appalachian Highlands of Tennessee and North Carolina. Broad support for tourism development was found across all groups, with the caveat that economic growth not take place at the expense of community character or environmental quality. In general, however, members of conservation organizations were more concerned about the negative impacts of tourism development than were business people or public officials. The methodology employed highlights issues of agreement and conflict among influential community groups. This approach can help communities engage in a consensus-building process and plan a sustainable tourism-based development strategy that is acceptable to all groups.

INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic structure of many rural communities in the South has undergone substantial change in recent years (Drabenstott and Gibson, 1988). Most notable among the changes has been the

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declining share of employment in traditional natural resource sectors (farming, mining, forestry, fishing) and in traditional manufacturing sectors (e.g., textiles). As a consequence of the decline in traditional economic sectors, many rural communities in the South are actively seeking alternative activities that can provide jobs to residents and revenues for local government (Brown and Glasgow, 1991).

The promotion of economic activities associated with natural resource amenities, such as tourism, has become a popular development strategy for rural communities, particularly in the South (Bergstrom, et al., 1990; McGranahan, 1992; Luloff, et al., 1994).¹ Tourism-related jobs can be found in many different sectors, including food service, lodging, entertainment, retail sales, travel planning, and sectors providing transport services (e.g., public transport, taxi service, auto maintenance and repairs). Tourism-related development has driven much of the employment and population growth in the rural South during the 1980s. In contrast, many rural regions, especially in the North, have experienced employment and population decline (Johnson, 1993). Compared to other regions in the United States, the South is popular because of the lower costs for tourism-related goods and services, the mild climate, the abundance of lakes, coastlines, and mountains, and the lower congestion from people and vehicles (Sastry, 1992). Tourism is expected to be a major rural development strategy for the rural South in the 1990s and beyond. Recognizing this, the Southern Rural Development Center has identified tourism as a major area of rural development efforts (Hedges, 1994; Woods and Hisey, 1994).

As a rural development strategy, however, tourism has both positive and negative aspects. Tourism development can stimulate new businesses, create new jobs, increase tax revenues, and is often perceived as an environmentally clean growth industry requiring few public services. On the other hand, it has been argued that many tourism jobs are low-paying and seasonal, with few additional benefits; that tourism development can destroy the local culture, degrade the local natural environment, strain public services, increase the local cost of living, and cause conflicts among residents (Feuerstein and Feuerstein, 1992; Frederick, 1993; Gibson, 1993). In addition, Fritz (1989) points out the evolutionary nature of tourism-based development, in which private and public benefits accrued in the short-run may be countered by costs in the long-run. Thus, the

positive and negative aspects of tourism development need to be evaluated at a given point in time, and over time. The key for success is striking a balance between the private and public benefits and costs of tourism development over time.

For decision-makers in rural communities considering tourism development, it is important to gauge the attitudes of residents because successful tourism-based rural development projects require the support of local residents. Henning (1990, p.3) stresses the need for decision-makers to assess attitudes of residents when considering alternative tourism development strategies:

"Hostile or indifferent residents can have a negative impact on visitors. Steps to resolve conflicts between the community's values and beliefs and tourism development may be needed. Comprehensive planning considers the potential benefits from tourism development and the potential social and environmental costs of development."

Peine and Welch (1990) emphasize the need to assess resident attitudes in order to build a community consensus about tourism development, which requires identification of community groups playing a major role in defining the future of a community. Each group brings with it a different "vision" of the future, and a rural development plan acceptable to all community groups can only be achieved by first identifying areas of agreement and conflict, and second by undertaking a consensus-building process (Peine and Welch, 1990; Sears, et al., 1992).²

Consensus-building is critical for the design of sustainable tourism development strategies. Herein, a broad concept of sustainability that simultaneously considers and integrates economic, environmental, and social systems is used (Sargent, et al., 1991; Thomas, 1992). This concept of sustainability is closely related to the concept expounded in the book *Our Common Future* — to ensure that development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.8). According to this concept, satisfying individuals' economic, environmental and social

well-being over time is the objective of sustainable development. This concept of sustainability accepts the fact that there are potential trade-offs between economic, environmental, and social objectives, and that economic, environmental, and social systems in a community change over time.³

In this paper, attention is focused on residents' attitudes toward economic, environmental and social aspects of community well-being.

It is assumed that information on attitudes from different groups of residents can be used to identify areas of agreement and conflict in a community. This information can, in turn, be used for a consensus-building process. Implicit in this emphasis on consensus-building is the hypothesis that different community groups may have different attitudes toward tourism development. To test this hypothesis, the attitudes and perceptions of different groups of community leaders toward the positive and negative aspects of tourism development are elicited. The groups, identified by Peine and Welch (1990), can be broadly categorized as business persons (individuals categorized by type of employment), public officials (individuals who are elected), and members of conservation organizations (individuals who are self-selected by joining an organization).⁴

By assessing the points of agreement and conflict among these different groups, it is possible to help residents identify a sustainable tourism-based development strategy that is suited to their community. A sustainable development strategy derived from a consensus-building process that considers positive and negative impacts of different types of tourism development on different individuals and groups should, hopefully, strike a balance between economic, environmental, and social dimensions of community well-being (Sargent, et al., 1991).

DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

Six counties in the Southern Appalachian Highlands, three in Tennessee and three in North Carolina, were selected for this study. Each county is adjacent to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and has significant potential for tourism development. The counties differ in terms of socio-economic characteristics, natural resource base, tourist attractions and the relative importance of tourism to the local economy. Popular tourist attractions in the region include Ober

Gatlinburg, Dollywood and outlet malls in Sevier County; Cherokee Indian Reservation and Oconaluftee Indian Village in Swain County; Maggie Valley, Ghost Town in the Sky and Cataloochee Ski Area and Ranch in Haywood County; Fontana Village and Lake in Graham County; and Tuckaleeche Cavens in Blount County. All six counties have amusements, lodging facilities, restaurants, gift and craft shops, hiking and camping areas, and land- and water-based recreation facilities. Table 1 lists the different types of tourist attractions found in the respective counties.

The information in Table 2 highlights some key socio-economic variables for the six-county region. In general, the counties on the Tennessee side of the National Park experienced far more rapid growth in population and employment than the North Carolina counties. Much of this growth in the Tennessee counties, especially in Sevier County, can be attributed to tourism-related activities. Unemployment in all of the Tennessee and North Carolina counties is greater than or equal to the respective statewide averages, with Cocke, Graham and Swain Counties all having unemployment rates in excess of 10 percent. In five of the six counties median family income is lower than the respective state average. The high unemployment, low population growth counties — Cocke and Graham — have the lowest median family income. These two counties also had the fewest travel-generated jobs.

Travel expenditures generate about 5 percent of all jobs in Tennessee and North Carolina (U.S. Travel Data Center).⁵ Within Tennessee, it is estimated that travel expenditures generate almost 50 percent of the jobs in Sevier County.⁶ By contrast, in Blount and Cocke Counties, travel expenditures generate between 3 to 5 percent of the jobs. Within North Carolina, it is estimated that travel expenditures generate about 15 percent of the jobs in Swain County, and about 6 to 8 percent in Graham and Haywood Counties. This brief socio-economic profile of the study area points to numerous differences in the six counties.⁷ These differences can influence individual resident's attitudes toward tourism development in his or her community.

Table 1. Tourist Attractions (by county)

Attraction	Blount County TN	Cocke County TN	Sevier County TN	Graham County NC	Haywood County NC	Swain County NC
Amusements such as water parks, go cart tracks or miniature golf courses	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Motels/Hotels of 50 or more units	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Time Share Condominiums			✓		✓	
Theme Parks			✓		✓	✓
Convention Center			✓		✓	
Gift Shops	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Local Craft Shops	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Restaurants	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Camp Grounds	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Youth Camps	✓		✓		✓	
Bed and Breakfast	✓		✓		✓	✓
Natural parks and Recreation areas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bicycle or Nature Trails	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

METHODS

Survey Design

The survey questions were developed in consultation with persons associated with the Southern Appalachian Man and Biosphere (SAMAB) Cooperative.⁸ Time and budget constraints prevented the use of focus groups, so the survey instrument was reviewed and

Table 2. Socio-economic Profile of the Study Area

	Population 1990	Population Growth 1980-90 (percent)	Employment 1990	Employment Growth 1980-90 (percent)	Unemployment 1990 (percent)	Median Family Income (\$)	Travel- Generated Employment (# of jobs)
State of Tenn.	4,877,185	6.3	2,272,000	4.6	5.2	29,546	128,750
Blount Co.	85,969	10.5	38,840	23.9	5.2	30,277	1,800
Cocke Co.	29,141	1.2	12,474	23.8	11.0	20,644	410
Sevier Co.	51,043	23.2	24,309	43.7	9.3	26,340	12,250
State of N.C.	6,648,689	13.1	3,261,868	19.0	4.3	30,200	148,950
Graham Co.	7,195	-0.3	2,823	-4.8	19.1	21,800	230
Haywood Co.	46,950	1.0	20,763	6.6	5.2	26,600	1,290
Swain Co.	11,283	9.6	4,450	7.5	10.3	18,900	660

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Census, 1990.
 Tennessee Statistical Abstract, 1992/1993.
 North Carolina Census, 1990.
 U.S. Travel Data Center. *The Economic Impact of Travel on Tennessee Counties, 1992.*
 U.S. Travel Data Center. *The Economic Impact of Travel on North Carolina Counties, 1991.*

critiqued by experienced survey researchers at the University of Tennessee. Upon completion of these reviews, the survey was pre-tested using students and staff who were current or recent residents of the counties to be surveyed.

To identify members of community groups (broadly categorized as business owners, public officials and conservationists), a mailing list was constructed for each county. The list was compiled using Chamber of Commerce member lists, state and local government directories, and membership lists provided by the Tennessee Land Conservancy and the North Carolina Wildlife Federation. About 2,100 names and addresses were compiled into a master list. Of this master list, the public official and conservationist lists consisted of only 308 and 280 names, respectively. In order to assure an adequate sample size for statistical analysis, it was decided to completely enumerate these groups. Of the remaining 1,500 business people, all counties but Blount County (with 900+ Chamber members) were completely enumerated. A random draw of 208 Blount County business persons was made from a uniform distribution.

The survey instrument and a stamped return envelope were mailed to 1,454 persons, followed by a single reminder postcard one week later. Five hundred eighty-six surveys were returned, yielding a raw response rate of 40.3 percent.⁹ Amongst the three identified groups, the response rates were 35.4 percent for business persons, 43.2 percent for public officials and 53.9 percent for conservationists.¹⁰

Statistical and Sampling Issues

The statistical test used in the following analysis is the Pearson Chi-square test of difference in proportions for the responses from each group. The procedure tests the hypothesis that people chose their responses in equal proportions regardless of group identification — it is assumed that there are no differences in responses between groups (e.g., business people versus public officials, business persons versus conservationists, and public officials versus conservationists). Rejecting the hypothesis suggests that the responses were different across the group assignments.

It is not known if the groups were sampled in proportions appropriate to their presence in the population at large. It would seem

likely that the business and public official populations were oversampled simply because the sampling frame for these populations was more concentrated and more easily identified and obtained. In contrast, the sampling frames for conservationists tended to be less concentrated (i.e., compiled statewide rather than at the county or community level) and more difficult to identify and obtain. Consequently, the state samples are heavily weighted by the large proportion of business people. Because the true population proportions for these groups are not known for either state, the appropriate weighting scheme for reliable cross-state comparisons is unknown.¹¹ Because true differences across states may be masked by inappropriate sample group proportions in each state, cross-state comparisons are not made.

Comparisons across community groups are not affected by this problem, but are sensitive to the group assignment protocol described above. As a preliminary check on the group assignment, the survey contained a question in which respondents were asked to check the group which best described them. Sixty-two percent of respondents selected the category to which they had been assigned. Application of the chi-square test rejects the hypothesis that people identify themselves in equal proportions regardless of group assignment ($p=0.00$), suggesting the cross-group comparisons reported in this paper are appropriate.¹²

RESULTS

Growth Rate of Tourism in the Community

In general, all groups were fairly satisfied with the rate of tourism growth. (See Table 3.) There were, however, statistically significant differences in the responses between groups. Business persons and public officials, for example, were more likely than conservationists to respond that growth was too slow. But, business people differed statistically from public officials in their responses — business people were the group that most wanted to see more rapid tourism growth. The inter-group differences can also be observed with respect to the differing percentages of responses that tourism was growing "too quickly." About 21 percent of conservationists responded that tourism

Table 3: Attitudes Toward Growth Rate of Tourism

Do you feel the tourism industry in this community is growing....	Too Slowly	About Right	Too Quickly
Business People ^b ° (n=309)	43.7	46.6	9.7
Public Officials ^a ° (n=132)	38.6	47.7	13.6
Conservationists ^a ^b (n=143)	11.2	67.9	20.9

^a = Significantly different from the responses of Business People ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^b = Significantly different from the responses of Public Officials ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^c = Significantly different from the responses of Conservationists ($\alpha = 0.05$)

was growing "too quickly," compared with about 14 percent of public officials and only about 10 percent of business people.

Over all, the group responses were consistent with *a priori* expectations. Business people wanted the most rapid growth in tourism, while conservationists were least enthusiastic about tourism growth. The large proportion (79 percent) of conservationists, however, who were satisfied with the rate of growth (68 percent) or desired more rapid growth (11 percent) was quite surprising given general perceptions about members of conservationist groups as "anti-development." Thus, even the group believed to be the most "anti-development" is quite supportive of tourism-based development.¹³

Impacts Associated with Tourism

Quality of Life

Given the positive view of tourism growth described above, one would expect to find residents satisfied with the changes in the quality of life resulting from tourism development (Table 4). In response to the statement that "tourism increases the quality of life in this community", however, it is possible to observe significant differences between conservationists and the two other groups. Conservationists were less positively inclined towards the contribution of tourism to the quality of life, with only 51 percent giving a positive response, and a large proportion stating they were "uncertain." A similar pattern resulted from questions capturing tourism impacts on environmental quality ("Tourism reduces the quality of outdoor recreation in this

Table 4. Quality of Life

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>"Tourism increases the quality of life in this community"</i>					
Business People (n=309) ^c	29.4	46.6	14.6	6.8	2.6
Public Officials (n=128) ^c	31.3	47.7	9.4	10.2	1.6
Conservationists (n=137) ^{ab}	10.9	40.1	21.2	17.5	10.2
<i>"Tourism reduces the quality of outdoor recreation in this area"</i>					
Business People (n=307) ^c	6.8	16.6	16.6	43.3	16.6
Public Officials (n=128) ^c	3.9	14.8	17.2	47.7	16.4
Conservationists (n=137) ^{ab}	10.2	22.6	27.0	34.3	5.8
<i>"Local residents have suffered from living in a tourist area"</i>					
Business People (n=310) ^c	3.2	10.0	17.4	49.0	20.3
Public Officials (n=128) ^c	4.7	15.6	17.2	41.4	21.1
Conservationists (n=138) ^{ab}	5.1	17.4	29.0	40.6	8.0

^a = Significantly different from the responses of Business People (α = 0.05)

^b = Significantly different from the responses of Public Officials (α = 0.05)

^c = Significantly different from the responses of Conservationists (α = 0.05)

community") and tourism impacts in a more social dimension ("Local residents have suffered from living in a tourist area"). Conservationists were more likely than other groups to agree that outdoor recreation quality had been negatively impacted. Business people and public officials were less likely than members of conservation groups to agree that local residents had suffered from living in a tourist area. In general, the responses of conservation group members were significantly different from those of business persons or public officials. These results suggest that conservation group members, while being generally supportive of tourism development, are more circumspect in their judgements as to tourism's positive impacts. Conservationists appear to be more sensitive to negative environmental and recreational impacts of tourism.

Quality of Jobs

In response to the statement that "tourism brings better jobs to the community" conservation group members again expressed more uncertainty than the other groups (Table 5). A statistically significant difference in responses was recorded only between conservationists and business persons. The broad agreement with this statement among the groups, however, is contrary to the widely voiced argument that low-paid, seasonal jobs are poor jobs. Examining the quality of jobs issue further, large proportions of each group expressed a major or minor concern that "jobs in the tourism industry tend to be low paying with minimum benefits" and "jobs in the tourism industry tend to be seasonal part-time jobs." Although there were no significant differences between any groups at the 0.05 level, job quality is one issue on which business persons and public officials gave different responses at the 0.10 level. Public officials were more concerned about the low-paying jobs, whereas business people were more concerned about the seasonality of employment. These responses are consistent with the broad social welfare perspective of public officials seeking a larger tax base, and the desire on the part of business people for a smooth cash flow and reduced hiring/training costs.

Community Infrastructure, Appearance and Harmony

In general, members of conservation groups appeared to be more sensitive to the environmental and social impacts of tourism on the community across a wide variety of measures (Table 6). While there

Table 5. Quality of Jobs

	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Uncertain</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>
<i>"Tourism brings better jobs to this community"</i>					
Business People (n=310) ^c	31.3	30.3	20.0	15.5	2.9
Public Officials (n=129)	30.2	25.6	23.3	16.3	4.7
Conservationists (n=137) ^a	16.1	27.7	29.2	19.0	8.0
<i>"Please indicate the degree to which the following issues associated with tourism development in the community are of concern to you"</i>					
	<i>Major Concern</i>	<i>Minor Concern</i>	<i>Not A Concern</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>	
<i>"Jobs in the tourism industry tend to be low paying with minimum benefits"</i>					
Business People (n=306)	43.1	39.2	15.7	2.0	
Public Officials (n=131)	42.0	48.1	8.4	1.5	
Conservationists (n=135)	42.2	40.0	13.3	4.4	
<i>"Jobs in the tourism industry tend to be seasonal part-time jobs"</i>					
Business People (n=309)	51.8	34.6	13.3	0.3	
Public Officials (n=130)	43.8	46.2	10.0	0.0	
Conservationists (n=136)	45.6	36.8	14.7	2.9	

^a = Significantly different from the responses of Business People (α = 0.05)

^b = Significantly different from the responses of Public Officials (α = 0.05)

^c = Significantly different from the responses of Conservationists (α = 0.05)

Table 6. Community Infrastructure, Appearance and Harmony

Which of the following factors associated with tourism development adversely affect the community?"

	Very Adversely Affected	Slightly Affected	Not Affected	Don't Know
<u>Traffic Congestion</u>				
Business People (n=261) ^c	52.1	31.0	16.5	0.4
Public Officials (n=115)	59.1	28.7	12.2	0.0
Conservationists (n=128) ^a	62.5	30.5	5.5	1.6
<u>Lack of Land Use Planning</u>				
Business People (n=250) ^c	53.4	20.5	19.3	6.8
Public Officials (n=113) ^c	50.4	19.5	24.8	5.3
Conservationists (n=124) ^{ab}	68.6	16.9	8.9	5.6
<u>Lack of Adequate Zoning</u>				
Business People (n=250) ^c	56.2	19.5	19.1	5.2
Public Officials (n=114) ^c	50.0	14.0	28.1	7.9
Conservationists (n=125) ^{ab}	68.0	13.6	9.6	8.8
<u>Inappropriate Architectural Style</u>				
Business People (n=250)	43.2	25.6	27.6	3.6
Public Officials (n=111) ^c	33.3	31.5	27.9	7.2
Conservationists (n=124) ^b	50.8	22.6	21.8	4.8
<u>Rapid Population Growth</u>				
Business People (n=250) ^{bc}	11.2	35.2	50.4	3.2
Public Officials (n=114) ^a	21.1	33.3	42.1	3.5
Conservationists (n=127) ^a	24.4	40.2	32.3	3.1

Table 6 continued on next page.

Table 6. (continued)

"Which of the following factors associated with tourism development adversely affect the community?"

	Very Adversely Affected	Slightly Affected	Not Affected	Don't Know
<u>Ethnic Conflicts</u>				
Business People (n=250)	5.6	22.8	66.0	5.6
Public Officials (n=111)	8.1	18.0	69.4	4.5
Conservationists (n=127)	9.4	26.8	56.7	7.1
<u>Conflict Between New and Long-Term Residents</u>				
Business People (n=258)	19.4	46.1	30.6	3.9
Public Officials (n=114)	14.0	51.8	30.7	3.5
Conservationists (n=125)	18.4	52.0	22.4	7.2

^a = Significantly different from the responses of Business People ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^b = Significantly different from the responses of Public Officials ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^c = Significantly different from the responses of Conservationists ($\alpha = 0.05$)

was broad agreement across all groups that residents had been adversely affected by traffic congestion induced by the tourism industry, conservationists gave more extreme negative responses than did business persons. With respect to land use planning and zoning, conservationists were more likely to claim they had been very adversely affected by the lack of planning or zoning. Business people and public officials gave responses that were statistically similar to each other. Conservationists were more concerned about the appearance of the community than public officials, as reflected in their attitudes about appropriateness of architectural styles.

While conflicts between ethnic groups do not appear to have adversely affected life in the communities, issues related to rapid population growth are a concern. Public officials and conservationists were more likely than business people to be concerned about rapid population growth, with 55-65 percent of these respondents saying life

in the community had been negatively affected by rapid population growth.

Conflicts between new and long term residents appear to be an issue in the community, with 65-70 percent of the respondents stating the community had been affected. Although there were no statistically different responses across groups, the broad agreement suggests that this is an issue which is perceived as equally serious regardless of group identification. This is a problem for tourism-based development that involves in-migrants to own or manage new enterprises or take newly created jobs.

To summarize findings with respect to impacts associated with tourism, members of conservation organizations tended to be more sensitive to the community impacts of tourism development than business persons or public officials. Conservationists' ambivalence toward tourism was consistent with the large proportion of "uncertain" responses given when asked about tourism's impact of the quality of life in the community. In general, conservationists appeared more sensitive to the social and environmental costs of tourism development.

Tradeoffs Associated with Tourism

There were two very direct questions about tradeoffs between economic benefits and environmental or social costs (Table 7). Conservation group members soundly rejected the statement "the economic gains of tourism are more important than environmental protection." As one might expect, the responses of conservationists were significantly different from those of business people or public officials. There does appear, however, to be strong agreement among residents with respect to the need to protect the environment, both to attract tourists and to improve their own quality of life. Thus, residents tended to have favorable views towards growth of the tourism industry, but not growth at the expense of environmental quality. Responses to the statement "the negative social impacts of tourism outweigh the positive economic contribution of tourism" were broadly consistent with previous responses. Responses of conservation group members were significantly different from those of the business community. The large "uncertain" group of responses by

Table 7. Tradeoffs Associated with Tourism

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>"The economic gains of tourism are more important than environmental protection"</i>					
Business People (n=309) ^c	2.9	6.2	13.6	41.1	36.3
Public Officials (n=129) ^c	0.8	5.4	12.4	51.2	30.2
Conservationists (n=138) ^{ab}	2.2	2.9	7.3	29.7	58.0
<i>"The negative social impacts of tourism outweigh the positive economic contribution of tourism"</i>					
Business People (n=305) ^c	9.5	13.8	16.4	37.4	23.0
Public Officials ^c (n=128)	10.9	11.7	20.3	37.5	19.5
Conservationists (n=137) ^{ab}	9.5	18.2	31.4	29.2	11.7

^a = Significantly different from the responses of Business People ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^b = Significantly different from the responses of Public Officials ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^c = Significantly different from the responses of Conservationists ($\alpha = 0.05$)

conservationists is consistent with the large "uncertain" group observed in previous analysis. (Refer to Tables 4 and 6.)

The Future Role of Tourism

While general agreement about respondents' vision of the future role of tourism emerged, there were some statistically significant differences across groups (Table 8). Business persons and public officials overwhelmingly agreed that "tourism should play a major role in the community's future." Conservationists were more cautious concerning the role that tourism should play in the community's future and their responses were significantly different from those of business persons and public officials. This concern appears to arise from greater sensitivity to the social and environmental costs of tourism on their communities. Still, more than 70 percent of conservation group members agreed or strongly agreed that tourism should play a major role in the community's future.

Table 8. The Future Role of Tourism

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>"Tourism should play a major role in the community's future"</i>					
Business People (n=312) ^c	66.3	26.3	3.2	3.2	1.0
Public Officials (n=133) ^c	60.9	26.3	6.8	4.5	1.5
Conservationists (n=138) ^{a,b}	29.7	41.3	9.4	10.1	9.4
<i>"This community should control tourism development"</i>					
Business People (n=310)	50.3	36.1	8.4	3.2	1.9
Public Officials (n=132)	59.8	32.6	6.1	1.5	0.0
Conservationists (n=138)	60.1	31.9	4.3	1.4	2.2
<i>"The character of the community should be preserved"</i>					
Business People (n=313)	63.3	25.9	8.3	1.9	0.6
Public Officials (n=132)	64.4	29.5	6.1	0.0	0.0
Conservationists (n=138)	64.5	29.0	5.8	0.0	0.7

^a = Significantly different from the responses of Business People ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^b = Significantly different from the responses of Public Officials ($\alpha = 0.05$)

^c = Significantly different from the responses of Conservationists ($\alpha = 0.05$)

Although there were differences between conservationists and others on the role of tourism, all groups agreed that "the community should control tourism development." There were no significant differences across groups. Respondents also felt that "the character of the community should be preserved"; again there were no statistically significant differences across groups. Thus, these issues — concern about the need for controlled tourism development that preserves the character of the community — can serve as a basis for consensus-building among the various groups.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The survey results indicate some support for the hypothesis that different community groups pursue different agendas when considering tourism as a development strategy, but the groups do not appear to hold polar attitudes. Conservation group members are indeed more sensitive to the negative social and environmental impacts of tourism than either business persons or public officials, and are consequently more uncertain of the positive economic impacts of tourism-based development. The degree to which conservation group members disagree with other groups over development issues is not as pronounced as one might expect, however. Further, while business persons and public officials say they are less adversely affected by the social and environmental costs of tourism development, they still broadly support community planning and zoning with stricter controls on development of tourism resources. All groups were uniformly supportive of the desire to preserve the character of the community.

There appears to be a basis for a community consensus as to the role of tourism in these communities. Such a consensus can serve as a foundation for a sustainable development plan which balances the desire for economic benefits from tourism development against the resulting social and environmental costs of tourism. In the Southern Appalachian Highlands, a sustainable development strategy acceptable to influential community groups will likely include elements to maintain and preserve the rural character of the community and the environmental quality of the region. A sustainable development strategy will assure members of conservation organizations that they will not suffer from living in a tourist region. Such assurances may take the form of a zoning board to preserve the appearance of the community, and planning agencies to design the long-term infrastructure needs of the community. Finance options should be outlined to cope with future infrastructure needs to deal with problems such as traffic congestion and the strain on water and sewage systems. Tourism development should not be so rapid as to cause conflicts between established and new residents.

By working toward community consensus on the optimal mix (in terms of amount and type) of desired tourism, a sustainable strategy

for the development of tourism resources can be designed. The type of a study carried out for this research project can help residents plan a sustainable tourism-based development strategy; one that integrates economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainability. A survey of resident attitudes that identifies areas of agreement and conflict can provide important information for consensus-building process. It must be emphasized, however, that consensus-building is not a "one-shot deal." Rather, consensus-building is an evolutionary process that considers changing attitudes of residents to economic, environmental, and social objectives over time, and changes in economic, environmental and social conditions.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The results from this study seem to counter previous claims that the negative aspects of tourism in many Appalachian communities outweigh the positive aspects (e.g., Raitz and Ulack, 1984; Smith, 1989), at least from the perspective of certain residents. This study was based on a survey of politically influential groups, while some other studies focused on attitudes of politically marginal groups. The differences and similarities in attitudes between politically influential and politically marginal groups is one subject for future research.

More research is needed to help quantify the positive and negative impacts of alternative tourism development strategies on different types of individuals and different types of communities. It is also important to link studies about residents' attitudes with studies that analyze the economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism development. It is critical to identify the winners and losers of tourism development, and to gain greater insights into the forces shaping individuals' attitudes toward tourism development. Sorting out the winners and losers is germane to assessing the potential "not-in-my-backyard" or "NIMBY" syndrome of development as tourism-related activities proliferate. If NIMBYs have an important effect on shaping residents' attitudes, tourism-related rural development strategies will be harder to promote. Clearly, these issues are of paramount importance for the rural South, where tourism is touted as a major development strategy for the future.

The key issue concerning the sustainable tourism development is determining the optimal mix of tourism-related activities, and identifying the types of actions that the community must pursue to achieve the desired outcome. This requires a concerted consensus-building effort that brings together different individuals in the community. It must be emphasized that there is no unique "optimal" tourism development strategy because the optimal mix of tourism-related activity is site-specific and dynamic. Rural development researchers and practitioners need to provide better information about the choices available to communities, how to expand the set of choices available to the community, how to assess the benefits, costs, and trade-offs of the choices, how to go about choosing the desired types of tourism-related and non-tourism related economic activities, and how to carry out a sustainable tourism development plan. A national conference on rural tourism development programs scheduled for April 1995 should provide a forum for addressing these needs (Woods and Hisey, 1994).

ENDNOTES

¹ The in-migration of retirees attracted by resource amenities also has been an important rural development strategy in the South (Reeder, et al., 1993; Siegel and Leuthold, 1993).

² There is no single way to conduct a consensus-building process. The process, however, does require citizen involvement in a variety of forums, such as community meetings, group discussions with extension agents, and organized debates. A survey of resident attitudes that identifies areas of agreement and conflict can provide important information for the forums.

³ This concept of sustainability assumes that some optimal balance between economic, environmental, and social systems evolves from generation to generation. Non-sustainability implies an imbalance between these systems and institutional and/or natural constraints to addressing this imbalance.

⁴ The central role of leaders in influencing community decisionmaking is widely accepted. The ability of leaders to impose their will on the

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community depends on a complicated set of relationships between leaders and other residents; these relationships may change over time (Gilbreath, 1992). In some cases attitudes of leaders and other residents may overlap, and in other cases they may conflict. The similarities and/or differences in socio-economic characteristics between leaders and residents will greatly influence the degree of community consensus. (Ayres and Potter, 1989).

⁵ The U.S. Travel Data Center defines travel expenditures as money spent by U.S. resident travelers on transportation, lodging, food, recreation and incidentals while travelling away from home overnight or on day trips to places 100 miles or more away from home. Using this definition, among the 50 states, Florida (2), Texas (4), Virginia (9), Georgia (10), North Carolina (13) and Tennessee (15) were ranked in the top 15 recipients of such expenditures.

⁶ Almost 10 percent of all travel-related jobs in Tennessee can be found in Sevier County, which only has about 1 percent of total state employment.

⁷ See Jakus and Siegel (1992) for a more detailed description of the region.

⁸ SAMAB is a consortium of public agencies, including the National Park Service and the Tennessee Valley Authority, which encourages environmentally benign rural economic development. Some of the questions were drawn from previous studies (Liu and Var, 1986; Milman and Pizam, 1988; Long, et al., 1990; Sargent, et al., 1991).

⁹ The overall response rate is quite good for a mail survey with a single reminder postcard and suggests that the topic was timely and important to the populations targeted. Liu and Var (1986) were pleased to obtain a 20 percent response rate with a similar mail survey.

¹⁰ Among Tennessee addresses, 442 surveys were returned, giving a raw response rate of 38.6 percent, while 143 responses were received from North Carolina (46.3% response rate). The residence of one respondent could not be identified.

¹¹ In principle, there should be some measure of the true populations for public officials and for business persons, however, this data is not readily available from secondary data sources.

¹² Interestingly, only 37 percent of those whose names were drawn from conservation lists identified themselves as "conservationists". Some 30

percent described themselves as business persons and 23percent described themselves as "other" than a business person, public official or conservationist. It is possible that the label "conservationist" has a negative connotation, even to members of conservation groups, in this six-county region.

¹³ Recalling that only 37 percent of individuals drawn from lists of conservation groups identified themselves as "conservationists", it is possible that the "anti-tourist" core of conservationists may not be well represented in the sample.

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