

# UTAH RECREATION & TOURISM MATTERS



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## Rural Tourism and Gendered Nuances

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### Introduction

Despite numerous studies conducted on rural residents' perception of attempts at tourism development in their communities, findings are often contradictory. While several explanations have been provided for these contradictions, the two of interest here are a tendency to view residents under study as a single group, rather than examining variation among local subgroups, and the related tendency to ignore or trivialize possible differences in men's and women's orientations (Mason & Cheyne, 2000).

Drawing upon survey data collected in the Intermountain West of the U.S., we explored ways gender is related to tourism attitudes by looking at four subgroups within various rural communities—both male and fe-



male supporters and opponents of tourism. Identifying gender differences on tourism attitudes may be “significant in informing the tourism planning and management process” (Mason & Cheyne, 2000, p. 407). This analysis of various subgroups is also intended to provide researchers, public officials, and citizens with a better understanding of rural residents' views on tourism. An understanding of how tourism is perceived by all residents “is important for planners and leaders alike as they struggle to balance quality of life issues with building a strong economy” (Harvey et al., 1995, p. 363)

### Study Methods

Our analysis focuses on three study areas— Star Valley, Wyoming; Western Wayne County, Utah; and Escalante, Utah (Figure 1). These areas were chosen based on several criteria, including significant declines

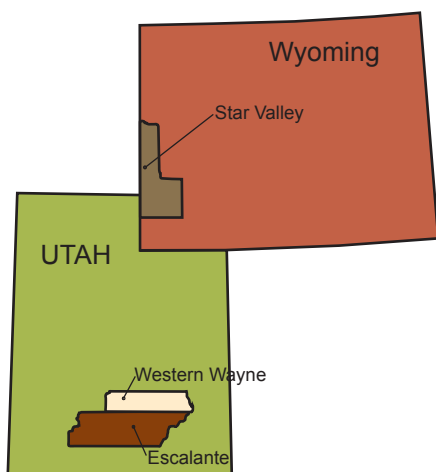


Fig. 1 Map of the study area.



in employment in natural resource-dependent sectors such as mining, agriculture, and forestry, and locations in areas characterized by the presence of natural amenities (e.g., scenic landscapes) on public lands with the potential to draw tourists. All three areas are exhibiting a transition toward a tourism-based economy.

The Star Valley study area is located in Lincoln County, at the western edge of Wyoming, approximately 50 miles southwest of Jackson and Grand Teton National Park. Star Valley is comprised of a cluster of individual rural settlements. In 1990, 19% of Lincoln County residents were employed in occupations that included agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining. This dropped to 12% in 2000. As the economy of Star Valley continues to change, tourism and recreation-based services have come to play an increasingly important role in the economy. Tourist spending in Lincoln County increased from \$32 million in 1998 to \$38 million in 2001 (Petrzelka, 2005).

The Western Wayne County study area, located in Southern Utah, is also comprised of a cluster of small communities. Western Wayne County is bordered by the Dixie National Forest and the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument to the south and the Fish Lake National Forest to the north. Capitol Reef National Park is located immediately east of the study area, near the town of Torrey. In 1990, 24% of Wayne County residents were employed in occupations that included agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining. This dropped to 16% in 2000. Increasingly, tourism has become a major component of local economies. The number of jobs generated in Wayne County by tourism was 249 in 1998; this increased to 274 jobs in 2001 and accounted for more than 20% of total non-farm employment (Petrzelka et al., 2005).

Escalante is located in southern Utah in Garfield County. The surrounding area is dominated by extensive tracts of public lands, with over 95% of the county's land area in federal and state ownership. In 1996, the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was established on Bureau of Land Management lands surrounding Escalante, bringing increased national and international attention to the area. The monument, coupled with the many other natural amenities in the region, has drawn tourists to this rural area in increasing numbers. In 1990, 11% of Garfield County residents were employed in occupations that included agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining. This dropped to 10% in 2000. Tourism generated 974 jobs in Garfield County in 1998 and 1,027 jobs in 2001. As with Wayne County, these jobs accounted for more than 20% of total non-farm jobs in 2001 (Petrzelka et al., 2005).

Data for this study were collected through use of self-completion questionnaires. During the summer of 2001, these were delivered to a random sample of households drawn from public utility records in each study area. The completed survey forms were then picked up by researchers. These survey procedures produced response rates of 81% (n=129) in Star Valley, 85% (n=151) in Western Wayne County and 81% (n=123) in Escalante.

Attitudes toward tourism were measured by combining responses to two survey questions. Respondents were first asked to indicate how important they thought increasing tourism was, as a means of economic opportunity, for maintaining and improving the future quality of life in their community. Responses for this item ranged from zero (not at all important) to six (extremely important). Residents also were asked to indicate their degree of opposition to or support for a 50% increase in visitation by tourists/recreationists to the local community in the next five years. Responses for this item ranged from zero (strongly oppose the action) to six (strongly support the action).

To differentiate residents' attitudes, four subgroups were created by separating respondents by both sex and tourism support. The sample was split in this way in order to clearly distinguish between tourism opponents and supporters and simultaneously examine inter-gender differences. Only the 25% of respondents with the lowest and the 25% with the highest scores on the two tourism support question listed above were used



in this analysis, and were termed “low” and “high” tourism supporters, respectively. This subset of the larger sample consisted of 269 respondents, with 27% of women and 23% of men from the larger sample identified as “low” supporters, and 31% of the women and 19% of the men as “high” supporters. This larger percentage of women in the high supporters of tourism group is not surprising, for research suggests women are more active than men in promoting tourism in their rural community due to the economic benefits they perceive it brings to their community (Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Petrzelka, 2003; Puijk, 1996).

One explanation given for resistance to tourism in rural areas focuses on the role of occupational identity in resource-based occupations. Occupational identity is one in which its “members’ sense of identity is closely tied to its occupation” (Carroll & Lee, 1990, p. 142). In areas where an identity centered on natural resource-based occupations is prevalent, studies suggest there will be resistance to tourism, as tourism-based economic development is inconsistent with rural residents’ identity (Carroll & Lee, 1990; Johnson et al., 1994; Mason & Cheyne, 2000; Reed, 2003). Some researchers argue, “When increases in tourism are concurrent with decreases in traditional industries, tourism can be perceived as disrupting the local culture that is intertwined with these industries” (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997, p. 403).

Occupational identity was measured by assessing residents’ degrees of involvement in several voluntary organizations associated with traditional extractive industries. This surrogate for occupational identity was measured by asking survey participants to indicate on a scale from one (not at all involved) to

seven (highly involved) their involvement in the local watershed council, local irrigation district group, water conservation district group, and agricultural production organizations. Individual scores for these were then added together. Local watershed councils are involved with extractive industries such as logging and mining, as well as with agriculture; the other organizations all focus primarily on agricultural activities. A second organizational index measured broader patterns of community involvement, with respondents again asked to indicate on a scale from one (not at all involved) to seven (highly involved) their involvement in the Chamber of Commerce, planning groups, economic development groups, arts councils and local civic groups.

To measure levels of commitment to traditional local culture and values—an additional variable shown to be related to attitudes to tourism perceptions (Petrzelka et al., 2005)—an index was created using items addressing respondents’ views about the importance of preserving various aspects of community. These included traditional ways of life; a quiet, slow pace of life; opportunities for traditional multiple-use activities like grazing and logging; local culture and traditions; and an ability to earn a living off the land (farming and logging). Responses for these items were measured on a scale from one (not at all important) to seven (extremely important).

Views regarding the community as a place to live and perception of the local economic situation are additional issues shown to be related to tourism attitudes (Petrzelka et al., 2005). Residents were asked whether they thought their community had become more or less desirable as a place to live during the past five years; responses were recorded on a seven-point scale. Satisfaction with local economic conditions was measured by asking respondents to rate their satisfaction with the “opportunity to earn an adequate income” (responses were again recorded on a seven-point scale).

Because age, gender, length of residence, and income have been shown to be related to attitudes held toward tourism, our study also includes these four variables (Petrzelka et al., 2005). While measurement of age and gender are fairly straightforward, length of residence was split into two categories to differentiate relatively recently-arrived residents (10 years or less) from longer-term residents (more than 10 years). Household income



**Table 1** Analysis Across Subgroups for Community Involvement and Issues

Attitudinal Measures	Range and Mean Scores					
	Range (min-max)	Total Mean	Women (low) <sup>a</sup>	Women (high) <sup>b</sup>	Men (low) <sup>a</sup>	Men (high) <sup>b</sup>
<b>Community Involvement</b>						
Occupational Organizations (Occupational Identity)	4-28 <sup>c</sup>	8.59	8.58	6.69	10.25	9.79
Community Development Organizations	5-27 <sup>c</sup>	9.01	8.41	9.66	8.63	9.31
<b>Attitudes Regarding Community Issues</b>						
Local culture and Values	5-35 <sup>c</sup>	29.17	29.99	29.58	27.80	29.04
Whether community has become more or less desirable place to live	1-7	3.93	3.76	4.65	3.16	3.91
Satisfaction with adequate income	1-7	2.93	3.14	2.63	3.49	2.47

<sup>a</sup> Low supporters of tourism; <sup>b</sup> High supporters of tourism.

<sup>c</sup> Measured using an index of four or five seven-point scales, providing measures ranging from 4-28 or 5-35, respectively.

was measured by asking respondents, “Which of the following categories describes your total household income before taxes in 2000?,” with respondents given five categories from which to choose.

### Study Results

Male respondents were more highly involved in organizations linked to production and local extractive industries (occupational identity) than women (Table 1). However, higher levels of involvement in natural resources-based industry groups do not necessarily

correspond to low support for tourism, as evidenced by the fact that male supporters of tourism showed the second-highest prevalence for involvement in resource-based industry organizations. Similar levels of community involvement were found among all four groups, with both male and female supporters of tourism most active in community development organizations.

The results also indicate preservation of local culture and values is important to all four groups. Although both female groups exhibited the highest mean scores

**Table 2** Comparison of Selected Demographic Characteristics Across Subgroups

Demographics	Women (low) <sup>a</sup>	Women (high) <sup>b</sup>	Men (low) <sup>a</sup>	Men (high) <sup>b</sup>
<b>Mean Year Born</b>	1951	1948	1946	1946
<b>Percentage Responding</b>				
<b>Length of Residency in Community</b>				
Less than 10 years	34%	30%	28%	36%
More than 10 years	66%	70%	72%	64%
<b>Number Responding</b>				
<b>Household Income (\$)</b>				
<10,000 - \$19,999	22	32	19	25
\$20,000 - \$39,999	32	26	37	46
\$40,000 - \$59,999	30	24	26	17
\$60,000 - \$79,999	10	9	7	6
\$80,000 or higher	6	9	11	6

<sup>a</sup> Low supporters of tourism; <sup>b</sup> High supporters of tourism.



on this index, differences across all four groups are small. This finding reveals a point of consensus among the groups, and can alert promoters of tourism to an important aspect of community values in the study areas that needs to be taken into consideration in discussions about tourism development.

Female supporters of tourism were more likely to indicate their communities had become more desirable as a place to live during the past five years. “Improved shopping and commercial development” was the primary reason given in the survey by both female (27%) and male (33%) tourism supporters for this increase in desirability. When asked why their community had become less desirable, “increased tourism activity” was indicated by 12% of female and 8% of male opponents. More specifically, undesirable impacts of tourism were highlighted as making the community less desirable, as seen in this female resident’s comment: “There has been an undesirable proliferation of ghastly motels in a uniquely lovely place.” Similarly, a male opponent added, “The service stations and motels to me are an eyesore.”

Satisfaction with the opportunity to earn an adequate income in the community was higher for both female and male opponents than among supporters of tourism. The finding suggests those who favor tourism are often dissatisfied with economic opportunities and may believe this industry will enhance economic conditions in their rural communities.

When looking at demographics, age, length of residency, and income do not clearly distinguish opponents and proponents of tourism in the sample of local residents (Table 2). Nevertheless, some suggestive patterns are evident in the data. In particular, those highly

supportive of tourism tend to have lower household incomes than do opponents. Given that the two groups highly supportive of tourism are also the groups most dissatisfied with opportunities to earn an adequate income, this may again reflect a belief that tourism development can provide economic opportunities.

## Conclusion

Analysis on various subgroups assists researchers, public officials, and citizens in providing a better understanding of rural residents’ views on tourism. In addition, this analysis may assist in identifying where points of commonality and consensus exist and facilitate movement forward on issues of concern regarding tourism shared by all. This study shows there are differences, not only between men and women, but also among them. Just as importantly, the study results also reveal similarities between the subgroups. In particular, despite varying attitudes towards tourism, importance of preserving local culture and values was an important community concern shared broadly across all categories of respondent. This finding should guide those who plan tourism in rural communities so that it will occur in a manner that does not threaten these important characteristics of rural communities.

For further information on this study, please see the following article:

Petzelka, P., Krannich, R.S., Brehm, J., & Trentelman, C.K. (2005). Rural tourism and gendered nuances. *Annals of Tourism Research* 32(4), 1121-1137.

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## For More Information:

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