

## PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF MICANOPY, FLORIDA

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**Abstract:** This study examined the perceptions of the present level of tourism and future tourism development held by three groups of residents (government officers, residents, and entrepreneurs) in Micanopy, small town in Florida. This study collected the data in depth interviews from each group member as well as participant observation techniques. The impetus for this study was that Micanopy was allocated \$5000 for the purpose of tourism development. Several meetings between various groups were held in Micanopy to decide how to spend the \$ 5,000 to attract more tourists and encourage them to stay longer. The meetings used for this study were “Meeting of Town Commission”, “Meeting of Micanopy Historical Society” and “A Visioning Meeting” with residents. The results indicated that each of the three groups (government officials, residents and entrepreneurs) have different perceptions about the current level of tourism development. In addition, all three groups had different opinions about future tourism development. Most importantly, residents tended to have a negative attitude regarding tourism development in Micanopy. The government officers were the most supportive group. The results suggest that understanding each host groups’ perceptions is absolutely necessary for the development of tourism in small town.

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### Introduction

In rural communities throughout the United States, the growth of tourism has been recognized as a regional economic development tool (Liu &

Vari, 1986). However, only some communities can achieve the positive impacts expected through tourism. For the development, successful operation, and sustainability of tourism, the support of the host city is essential (Jurowski, Uysal & Williams, 1997).

The goals and strategies of tourism development must reflect or incorporate host’s views to ensure community consensus on development policies and programs. If resident’s perceptions and preferences do not support tourism development policies and programs, then programs are likely to fail or be ineffective after their implementation (Pearce, 1980). If government employees and decision makers are in disagreement with the public and business community regarding the type and extent of tourism development, then it is unlikely that politicians will be reelected. For the successful development of tourism, understanding host perceptions is necessary and this is even more important in small communities.

With the recognition of the importance of host perceptions and attitudes in communities, numerous studies of perceptions toward either tourism in general or to a specific tourist destination have been conducted. However, most of them have focused on residents (Liu & Var 1986; Pizam & Milman 1986; Allen, Long, Perdue & Kieselbach 1988; Ap, 1992; Ross, 1992; McCool & Martin 1994; Snepenger. et. al 1998; Andereck & Vogt 2000) and few have investigated the perceptions different groups who are directly involved in the tourism industry: the residents, visitors, government officials and entrepreneurs (Lankford 1994; Kavallinis & Pizam 1994). Also, many studies have focused on resident perceptions about the impact after tourism development (Liu & Var 1986; King, Milman & Pizam, 1988, Allen Long, Perdue & Kieselbach, 1988; Ap, 1992; Ross, 1992; Kavallinis & Pizam, 1994). There is little research conducted on perceptions and attitudes about proposed tourism development (Mason & Cheyne, 2000). Further, there is almost no research that has included both perception of present tourism levels as well as attitudes about future development.

Reallocation of the Alachua County Visitor Convention Bureau (ACVCB) budget allowed for a new focus on “small towns.” Each small town

was designated \$5000 for tourism development and/or promotion. The question became "how will the \$5000 be used to promote Micanopy as a tourism destination? In order to decide how to spend the \$5000 the input of different groups within the community was sought. This was important because (1) understanding host perception is necessary for successful tourism development; (2) most research has focused on resident perceptions rather than examining differences between groups of residents. The questions guiding this particular study were: (1) what are the perceptions of the present level of tourism held by three groups of residents (Government officers, Residents, and Entrepreneurs) in Micanopy? (2) What are the perceptions of future tourism development held by three groups of residents in Micanopy?

### Literature Review

Numerous studies of host community tourism perceptions and attitudes have been conducted over the past few years (Murphy, 1980, 1983; Sheldon & Var, 1984; Pizam & Pokela, 1985; Allen, Liu & Var, 1986; Liu & Var 1986; Milam & Pizam, 1988; Long, Perdue & Kieselbach, 1988; Keogh, 1990; Long, Perdue & Allen, 1990; Ross, 1992; Lankford, 1994; mason, Cheyne, 2000). With the purpose of identifying the attitudes and concerns of the "public" and special interest groups, many of these studies have focused on identifying differences in attitudes toward tourism among different types of local residents (Long, Perdue & Allen, 1990). These types have been identified on the basis of length of residence, attachment, economic dependency on tourism, distance of tourism center from the respondents, level of contact with tourists, and demographics characteristics.

A number of studies have indicated that the longer residents have lived in a community, the more negative they are towards tourism development (Allen, Long, Perdue & Kieselbach, 1988; Liu & Var, 1986; Sheldon & Var, 1984). Liu and Var (1986) examined residents' attitudes to the economic, socio-cultural and ecological impacts of tourism development in Hawaii and suggested among eight demographic categories (living place, gender, ethnicity, length of residency, income, education, occupation, and job type) length of residency had the most influence on support for

tourism. The community development literature suggests newer residents exhibited more negative attitudes toward increased community development (Ayers & Potter, 1989). McCool and Martin (1994) examined the attachment residents have for their community and investigated whether those with strong feelings were more negative towards tourism than those who were less attached. In their study they found that those with stronger attachment did have a stronger view relating to both positive and negative impacts, and that those with more attachment were more informed and hence more concerned. Residents (or their relatives, friends, and neighbors) who depend on tourism-based employment have been found to be more favorable toward tourism and tourists (Liu & Var 1986; Milam & Pizam, 1988; Pizam & Pokela, 1985; Perdue, Long & Allen, 1987). In addition, research has revealed that urban and rural residents and the distance they live from tourism centers accounts for some of the variation in attitude (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Pearce, 1980; Sheldon & Var, 1984). In general, rural residents and those living further from the tourist center are more apathetic toward tourists and tourism. Brougham & Butler (1981) found that the level of contact with tourists influenced the residents' attitude toward tourism and tourists. Finally, Pizam & Pokela (1985) and Ritchie (1988) found that gender also influences support for tourism.

In spite of the importance of understanding perceptions and attitudes of the different groups in the community, such as the residents, visitors, government officials and entrepreneurs for appropriate community development and policy, there are limited studies that do this (Allen & Gibson, 1987; Lankford, 1994; Kavallinis & Pizam, 1994). Lankford (1994) examined the attitude of entrepreneurs, salaried government officials, elected/appointed officials, and residents of the 19 regions, and found that the residents vary from government officials and entrepreneurs with regard to the level of support for tourism development. He found residents were less supportive than the other groups with regard to the level of support for the tourism development. However, all groups agreed that tourism plays a major economic role in the community by providing jobs. Kavallinis and Pizam (1994) examined the different perceptions of residents, tourists and entrepreneurs toward the

**Table 1. — Perception about the Present Level of the Tourism**

| Items  | Gov't Officials                                     | Residents                        | Entrepreneurs                                |
|--|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Are you satisfied with the present number of tourists?                     | Very unsatisfied                                    | Very satisfied                   | Very unsatisfied                             |
| Are you satisfied with the present tourism marketing activity in Micanopy? | Unsatisfied   | Very Satisfied                   | Unsatisfied                                  |
| Are you satisfied with the present level of tourism development?           | Very unsatisfied<br>(It is beginning)               | Very satisfied                   | Not sure                                     |
| What is the strength of Micanopy as a tourism site?                        | Accessibility                                       | Historical resources             | Environmental features                       |
| What is the weakness of Micanopy as a tourism site?                        | Restaurant/ Information/<br>Operation hour of shops | Nothing/<br>Every thing is great | Public facility<br>(Restroom & sitting area) |

**Table 2. — Attitudes between Three Groups toward Future Tourism Development**

| Items  | Gov't Officials                          | Residents   | Entrepreneurs                                       |
|--|--|---|---|
| How do you feel about experts being involved with tourism development in Micanopy? | Strongly agree                           | Strongly disagree                                 | Strongly disagree                                   |
| What are your ideas for \$5,000?   | Website links/<br>Signboard/<br>Brochure | Disagree for marketing/<br>Using for preservation | Public restrooms/<br>Advertising/<br>Micanopy guide |
| Do you agree with more tourism marketing activity?                                 | Strongly agree                           | Strongly disagree                                 | Agree   |
| What is your vision for tourism for the town of Micanopy?                          | Growth                                   | Just like it is/<br>Preservation                  | Town will be bigger/<br>Expect more tourism         |

environmental impacts of tourism and found that there are perceptual gaps between tourists and the two other groups. Thomason, Crompton and Kamp (1979) examined the different perceptions of residents, entrepreneurs, and public sector personnel. They found entrepreneurs perceived visitors more favorably than the other two groups. Comparing perceptions of community life and services between residents and leaders, Allen and Gibson (1987) found residents were less satisfied than leaders on every dimension of community life. And they concluded that responses of community leaders are not generally congruent with the desires of the public regarding specific community issues and concerns. They also emphasized that efforts should be made to gather information directly from the residents through town meetings, public hearings, community-wide surveys, or other public involvement approaches.

Although a lot of research has been conducted about perceptions and attitudes of residents, most research has focused on how residents perceive impacts after tourism development (Liu & Var 1986; King, Milman & Pizam, 1988, Allen Long, Perdue & Kieselbach, 1988; Ap, 1992; Ross, 1992; Kavallinis & Pizam, 1994). Only a small number of studies have been conducted either prior to development or decision-making. As Keogh (1990) indicated, most studies of host attitudes have taken place in areas where this industry is already well established, and very few studies have examined the hopes, expectations, attitudes, and concerns of residents prior to the establishment of tourism development. Further, there is a paucity of research that has examined perceptions and attitudes of very small host communities. This is important in that smaller communities are more likely to experience greater threats to the status quo (Mason & Cheyne, 2000).

## **Study Site**

### Brief History

Micanopy is the site of the ancient Seminole Indian village of Cuscowilla and is one of the oldest American settlements in Florida, which became a United States territory in 1821. In the spring of 1821 Edward Wanton established a trading post at this Indian village. Settlers built their homes near the post, and in 1835 Fort Defiance was built. Farms and plantations developed in the area around the new settlement, which became a center of trades for cotton planters and, in the years to come, for citrus and vegetable growers (Smyth, 2001). It was first called Wanton's after the first white trader. Later it was called Micanopy's Town after Chief Micanopy, the principal chief of the Seminoles. During the second Seminole War (1835-42) there was fighting between the Americans and the Indians. As a result, the fort burned down. It was rebuilt in 1837 and called Fort Micanopy. Eventually, the town was simply called Micanopy.

### Resident Demographics

The total population of Micanopy is only 653 (US Census Bureau, 2000). According to Fay Baird, a Town Commissioner, the number of residents within the last ten years has increased only 40 people. The population under 25 years old is 19.5%; however, the segment of people over 55 is 25.6%. Many older adults work in the community organizations in Micanopy (e.g., Micanopy Historical Society). An interesting fact is that there are only four American Indians living in Micanopy despite its history as an Indian settlement.

Most residents work in the educational, health and social services field (40.5%). Those who are employed in the retail trade comprise 10.6% of the population and those in wholesale trade make up 2.5%. Interestingly, very few people are employed in the travel and tourism industry. This fact was provided by interviews with shop owners and commission members. In addition, interviews with residents revealed that most shop owners live in Gainesville, and most Micanopy residents work in Gainesville. This fact can have significant effects on developing tourism in Micanopy because residents are not related to the tourism industry, and they do not want to encourage more tourists.

### Visitor Characteristics

The visitor characteristics of Micanopy were examined by two different methods. One method was through conversations with locals at the visioning meeting, and the other was through analysis of secondary data (a portion of a larger county wide tourism study). According to the residents at the visioning meeting, visitors to Micanopy tend to be: (1) educational tourists (2) elder hostel groups (organized type) (3) heritage tourists (IT) (4) sport tourists (participants in races or recreation clubs such as bicycle, car, motorcycle, and running) (5) festival goers (6) nature-based tourists (including outdoor recreation and state park visitors), (7) artists, such as photographers and (8) shoppers for antiques.

The visitor survey by Pennington-Gray (2002) showed specific visitor profiles in Micanopy. The total sample size was 97. According to the results of the survey, tourists tended to be over 40 years of age (78.5%), with higher incomes (over \$ 50,000 of income, 76.7%) and college-educated (77.2%). Regarding the primary purpose of visitation, the largest number of visitors came for the purpose of outdoor recreation (38.9%). Most visitors indicated that they used information sources; typically these sources were friends and relatives (52.3%) and previous visits (42.0%). The majority of people (82.6%) answered "shopping and antiques" as the most frequently participated in activity.

## **Methodology**

### Data Collection

The present study collected data in two ways. The first method involved in-depth interviews with each of the group members. While the second method, used participant observation in different kinds of meetings. During the research period for this study, Micanopy was allocated \$5000 for the purpose of tourism development by Alachua County VCB. Several meetings between various groups were held in Micanopy to decide how to spend the \$ 5000 to attract more tourists and encourage them to stay longer. The meetings used for this study are "Meeting of Town Commission", "Meeting of Micanopy Historical Society" and "Visioning Meeting" with residents.

At each meeting, the questions were: "Are you satisfied with the present number of tourists?" "Are you satisfied with the present tourism marketing activity in Micanopy?" "Are you satisfied with the present level of tourism development?" "What is the strength of Micanopy as a tourism site?" "What is the weakness of Micanopy as a tourism site?" Further, for the direction of tourism development (related to the \$ 5000 grant) several topics were debated, such as: "Who gets to decide how to spend the money or how tourism is to be developed in Micanopy?" "How do you feel about experts being involved with tourism development in Micanopy?" "What kind of marketing activity is needed in Micanopy?" What is your vision for tourism for the town of Micanopy?

### Selection Subjects

The population of this study is government officials, residents and entrepreneurs in Micanopy. For selection of subjects, this study used the following:

- 1) Government officials (N=8)  
This study selected the Town Committee as subject for government officials. The Town Commission is the main civic organization, and has eight members. The Town Commission members are elected for 3 years terms, and are the only salaried members among all the organization.
- 2) Residents (N=60)  
Subjects for the residents were divided into two groups. First are the members of the Micanopy Historical Society, which is one of the biggest organizations. The members number between 90 and 100, and the average age of members is around 65. Second group of residents is attendants at the visioning meeting. The residents at the visioning meeting are people with more concern about the future of Micanopy.
- 3) Entrepreneurs (N=9)  
This study limited the people have shop or business owner related to the tourism for subject of the entrepreneurs. Most of them are antique shop owners and some of them are restaurant owners.

## **Results**

Perceptions about the Present Level of Tourism  
Table 1 shows the perceptions between three

groups about the present level of tourism development in Micanopy. Generally, it appears residents are more satisfied with the all items regarding the level of tourism development than government officials and entrepreneurs. Specifically, regarding the number of tourists, only residents are satisfied and think growth should be minimized. In addition, residents indicated that they do not want more tourists. An interesting point is that the three groups perceived strengths and weakness of Micanopy as a tourism destination differently. Government officials thought the accessibility from the highway was a strength, whereas residents considered historical resources to be the greatest strength. Entrepreneurs on the other hand said that the environmental feature of Micanopy was the greatest strength as a tourism destination.

### Perceptions about the Future Development

The results of questions regarding perceptions about future development revealed differences between three groups. First, only government officials were positive about experts being involved with tourism development in Micanopy? In addition, government officials agreed strongly that Micanopy needed more marketing or promotional activity. Entrepreneurs agreed with government officials about marketing and promotion but residents indicated they did not want any more marketing or promotions. In addition, residents said that they already have enough tourists and that they do not want festivals everyday. Each group had different opinions about how to spend the \$5000. Government officials wanted to spend the money on websites, signboards and brochures. Entrepreneurs wanted a public facility built such as restrooms and residents wanted to spend the money on preserving the local history or recreation for local people. The results showed that entrepreneurs wanted to encourage more development and promotion but did not want the involvement of experts from outside. Finally, government officials and entrepreneurs expected that the town would grow in the future and change as a result of the growth; whereas, residents refused to acknowledge the growth and insisted that the town not change but rather "stay just like it is."

## **Conclusion**

The results indicated that each of the three groups (government officials, residents and entrepreneurs)

had different perceptions about the current level of tourism development. In addition, all three groups had different opinions about future tourism development. Most importantly, residents tended to have a negative attitude regarding tourism development in Micanopy and government had a positive attitude. The government officers were the most supportive group. Perhaps this is because they recognize the positive impact of tourism and have a desire to see the community grow for political reasons. Also, as a side note these members tended to have a jobs related to the tourism industry.

The residents (represented as the Historical Society members and participants at the visioning meeting) were the least supportive group. Perhaps this is because most of them were retired. Many did not see how increased tourism would have a personal benefit but rather increased tourism would result in higher property taxes and increased congestion, negative impacts of tourism. These results are not surprising.

These differences are very similar to the result of Lankford (1994) and Thomason, Crompton, & Kamp (1979) that found residents significantly differed from government employees and business owners with regard to the promotion and support of tourism. Interestingly, in previous studies, shop owners were more supportive than the other groups. However, the result of this study showed town commercial commissioners were more supportive than entrepreneurs. In addition, unlike the previous studies, most of the shop owners (entrepreneurs) lived outside the town, whereas most of the residents and town commissioners lived within the town.

One of the limitations of this study was that it had a small sample size. A community wide survey would be helpful to increase the size of the sample. A larger sample could allow for more rigorous analysis of comparing perceptions of different groups relative to length of residence and demographics.

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