

# COMMUNITY ATTACHMENT, REGIONAL IDENTITY AND RESIDENT ATTITUDES TOWARD TOURISM

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## INTRODUCTION

An important tourism policy objective is to sustain local values, culture and quality of life. Yet, faced with a decline in traditional industries such as mining, agriculture and forestry, many rural communities turn to tourism as a source of economic revitalization (Long et al., 1990). Often the culture and identity of these communities are bound up in the very industries being lost (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Tourism policy, to be successful, must deal with the changes that will inevitably occur to community life and the surrounding environment. In short, successful tourism development depends on the cooperation of local communities (Allen et al., 1988; 1993; Lankford, 1994; Murphy, 1985).

The nature and strength of attachment to community, and to surrounding landscapes, may influence how residents perceive potential impacts of a growing tourism industry and may be important determinants of successful coexistence between residents and the tourism industry (McCool & Martin, 1994; Sheldon & Var, 1984; Um & Crompton, 1987) The purpose of this paper is to compare the influence of community attachment and regional identity on attitudes toward tourism development among residents living adjacent to or within a USDA Forest Service administered national recreation area in the southern Appalachian region of the USA. Within the context of a broad economic development agenda for the region, Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area is seen as a viable tourism destination. The U.S. Forest Service, in responding to rising local interest in tourism development, has sought input from local residents regarding potential development in the region and policy and development directions for the NRA.

Attachment has been measured differently across the few studies that have looked at its relationship to attitudes toward tourism. Sheldon and Var (1984) used length of residency as an attachment measure and found that lifelong residents were more sensitive to the sociocultural impacts of tourism than were short-term residents. Um and Crompton (1987) combined length of residency with birthplace and heritage to create a Guttman scale of community attachment. Their findings indicated that the greater the level of attachment, the less positively residents perceive the impacts of tourism on their community. McCool and Martin (1994) produced mixed results when they compared measures of community sentiment (sorrow to leave and preference for community over all others) and length of residency. Contrary to expectations they

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found only a small correlation between length of residency and attachment (0.20), suggesting that one can choose to live in a community and become attached to it very rapidly. Comparing each of the two measures with attitudes toward several types of tourism impacts, they found that strongly attached respondents rated the positive dimensions of tourism higher than unattached respondents. However, with respect to length of residency, old-timers expressed more concern about equity dimensions of tourism impacts such as sharing the costs between tourists and residents. McCool and Martin also concluded that people living in communities with higher levels of tourism development (as measured by per capita accommodations tax) have the strongest sense of community attachment, but also have the shortest tenure.

McCool and Martin proposed two possible explanations. First, highly attached newcomers living in tourism settings may in fact represent a kind of resident-tourist who, having made a conscious decision to settle in a resort community, become quickly attached. The second explanation offered is that the community attachment construct has been mostly concerned with friendship and network ties. They speculate that a highly attached newcomer may use attachment to the local physical environment as a frame of reference when answering survey questions, while a long term resident thinks of attachment in terms of social and interpersonal ties. New residents often choose to live in an area because of its physical attributes and have had little time to become integrated into local society. Thus, some may identify with the regional landscape (tourist newcomers) while others (long-term natives) have stronger ties to the social aspects of the community.

Within environmental psychology, many have defined place attachment as a kind of bond with a physical place (Altman & Low, 1992) or landscape (Williams et al., 1992). In an attempt to better differentiate between physical and social forms of attachment and their influence on attitudes toward tourism, this study employed a measure of place attachment modeled after Shamai (1991). Shamai proposed a scaling approach that could measure attachment to a series of places "nested" within one another and ranging from the local to the regional or even national level. Since resource-based tourism development often takes place on a regional scale, Shamai's approach may offer insights into attitudes toward tourism not revealed in previous studies using local sentiment and residency measures. By employing Shamai's approach in a regional tourism attitude study, we attempt to clarify some of the conflicting findings suggested in previous studies. In this study we compare four measures of place attachment in terms of their influence on attitudes towards tourism impacts and support for various types of tourism development. Two measures, community identity and regional identity, are based on Shamai's sense of place scale. The other two are the more widely used measures of community attachment, length of residency and community sentiment.

## **METHODS**

Using local telephone directories, a random sample of 2,494 residents of five Southwest Virginia counties were selected for this study. All five counties border the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area (NRA) and several small communities are actually inside the boundaries of the NRA. Residents who live closest to the NRA were more intensely sampled than those residing in the outlying portions of the study area in order to better represent those who would be most affected by tourism development in the NRA. Mail-back surveys were sent to each selected household with a cover letter requesting that the adult household member with the next birthday complete a questionnaire dealing with attitudes toward quality of life, economic development,

tourism, community and the use of the Mt. Rogers NRA as well as a series of demographic questions. Three follow-up reminders and a lottery for a \$100 savings bond resulted in 1069 completed surveys for a final response rate of 42.7%. Non-response analysis identifies a slight tendency for respondents to be younger and more involved in outdoor recreation activities than non-respondents.

Attitudes toward potential impacts of tourism were measured using a five point Likert-type scale which asked how much each of 12 items (e. g., crime, environment, incomes) would improve or worsen for residents if tourism were to increase in the area. Similarly, support for tourism was measured by asking respondents to indicate how strongly they would support or oppose six types of tourism development: nature based, attraction based, cultural/historical, folk events, outdoor recreation, and nature programs.

In an attempt to broaden understanding of place attachment a scale modeled after Shamai (1991) was developed to measure identity at two levels of scale, local and regional. Six true/false statements were designed to represent the phases of sense of place (belonging, attachment, commitment/sacrifice) in Shamai's proposed scale and directly refer to the levels: (1) not having any sense of place, (2) knowledge of being located in a place, (3) belonging to a place, (4) attachment to a place, and (5) two items measuring sacrifice for a place. A seventh item, "I have negative feelings for this place", was added to address possible dislike for a place. For each statement, respondents were asked to indicate true or false for each of five places (their town, their community- if different, Mt. Rogers area, Southwest Virginia, and Southern Appalachian region). Community identity was measured using the town and community responses and regional identity was measured using the Mt. Rogers, Southwest Virginia and Southern Appalachian region responses.

The other two measures come from the sociological literature on community attachment (Janowitz & Kasarda, 1974; Goudy, 1990). Length of residence, age, and income have come to be defined as variables in a "systemic" model of community attachment. These variables have been shown to be positively related to measures of community sentiment and social ties. With length of residency usually having the strongest relationship, it has often been used alone as a measure of place attachment, though some studies have questioned its use (McCool & Martin, 1994). In this study it is simply measured as the number of years residing in the five county region. Following Janowitz and Kasarda (1974) local sentiment consisted of an additive index of two items: (1) how sorry or pleased the respondent would be to leave the community and (2) how at home the respondent feels in the community. A five point scale was used in each case to indicate strength of feeling.

## **RESULTS**

Correlations between the four place attachment measures used in this study are quite variable. Length of residency is more strongly correlated with community sentiment (0.29) than with either community identity (0.14) or regional identity (0.11). As would be expected, the correlation between community sentiment and community identity is much stronger at 0.52 than the correlation between community sentiment and regional identity (0.35). The correlation between the two identity measures is the strongest at 0.62 (Table 1). Correlations between the systemic variables (age, generations in the community, income and education) and the four place attachment measures indicate that long-term residents have lower incomes and educations and are older and have longer generational ties to the area. Community sentiment is not significantly

related to age, but shows a similar, though weaker pattern as length of residence on generations, income and education. The patterns for community identity and regional identity are virtually identical with weak but significant positive relationships with generations and income (Table 2).

In order to examine the influence of length of the four place attachment measures on tourism attitudes, residency, community sentiment, community identity and regional identity variables were correlated with the tourism impact and tourism development variables (Table 3). Regional identity is significantly correlated with attitudes towards tourism economic and social impacts and community identity with economic impact. In these cases more attached residents perceived impacts more favorably. Length of residency is negatively correlated with all types of tourism development except theme/attraction. Regional identity is also significantly, but positively related to all forms of tourism development, except theme/attraction.

## **DISCUSSION**

These findings tend to confirm McCool and Martin's (1994) suggestion that attached residents who are favorable toward tourism may be expressing ties to the regional character of the landscape more than ties to the community. Compared to McCool and Martin, the present study found a modestly higher correlation between length of residency and community sentiment (0.29 versus 0.20) and a weak correlation between length of residency and regional identity (0.11). As with the McCool and Martin study, old-timers in the present study are generally less favorable toward tourism development, and conversely, newcomers are more supportive of tourism development. Newcomers showed an indifferent attitude towards theme/attractions based developments. Unlike McCool and Martin, however, our analysis did not find significant relationships between tourism attitudes and community sentiment or community identity. Instead, highly attached residents, as measured by regional identity, tend to be more supportive of tourism development.

An important consideration in tourism planning is the impact of changes wrought by new development. The findings of this study suggest that residents are likely to react differently depending on their length of residency and the source of attachment to or identification with the region. Planners can ease the impacts of development by considering the nature of ties to community. One way to accomplish this is to develop an inventory of the places in the community that residents hold most dear and develop zoning and other strategies to protect these places. Improved measures of community attachment can help facilitate efforts to identify places that should and should not be protected from tourism development.

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**Table 1. Correlations Among Place Attachment Measures**

	Length of Residence	Community Sentiment	Community Identity	Regional Identity
Length of Residence	1.00	0.29	0.14	0.11
Community Sentiment		1.00	0.52	0.35
Community Identity			1.00	0.62
Regional Identity				1.00

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Note: All values are significant at the .001 probability level.

**Table 2. Correlations between Place Attachment Measures and Systemic Variables**

	Length of Residence	Community Sentiment	Community Identity	Regional Identity
Age	0.11	0.04*	0.03*	0.02*
Generations	0.23	0.14	0.11	0.12
Income	-0.24	-0.04*	0.08	0.08
Education	-0.21	-0.10	0.03*	0.05*

\*Correlation not significance at the .05 probability level.

**Table 3. Correlations Between Place Attachment Measures and Tourism Attitudes**

Attitude Variables	Length of Residence	Community Sentiment	Community Identity	Regional Identity
Econ. Impacts	0.02	0.07	0.10*	0.13*
Social Impacts	0.00	0.04	0.04	0.07*
Env. Impacts	0.06	0.05	-0.01	0.02
Overall Tourism	-0.10*	-0.02	0.03	0.10*
Nature Based	-0.16*	-0.03	0.03	0.06
Theme/Attraction	0.05	-0.01	-0.04	-0.00
Cultural	-0.12*	-0.01	0.02	0.09*
Folk Events	-0.12*	-0.01	0.06*	0.10*
Outdoor Rec.	-0.14*	-0.03	0.05	0.11*
Nature Programs	-0.15*	-0.02	0.06	0.14*

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\*Significant at the .05 probability level.

**Table 4. ANOVA for Length of Residence/Regional Identity Combinations**

Attitude Variables	New/Low Regional	LT/Low Regional	New/High Regional	LT/High Regional	F Test	Prob F
Concerns						
Economic	14.90	13.66	15.10	15.27	9.55	.000*
Social	19.03	18.20	19.12	19.82	3.03	.023*
Environmental	2.75	2.69	2.54	2.70	0.56	.159
Overall Tourism Support	45.71	42.21	46.67	45.74	8.94	.000*
Support						
Nature Based Theme/Attraction	3.66	3.22	3.75	3.60	11.34	.000*
Cultural	3.09	3.03	2.78	3.00	1.77	.078
Folk Events	3.94	3.71	4.12	4.00	6.09	.000*
Outdoor Rec.	4.00	3.76	4.18	4.09	6.57	.000*
Nature Prog.	4.11	3.71	4.18	4.06	10.53	.000*
	4.05	3.76	4.32	4.13	13.84	.000*

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\*indicates significance at the .05 or better probability level