

PERCEPTIONS OF HAITIANS TOWARD TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL HAITI

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Abstract

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the perceptions of Haitians regarding social, economic and environmental impacts, which tourism development might have in rural areas of Haiti. Three sites were chosen based on their annual flow of visitors, namely low, moderate and high. The researcher used the ethnographer's approach where a domain analysis was built by gathering data from local people. This domain analysis was then tested with interviews among locals. A population of 80 vacationers (adults, students and professionals) were chosen randomly and surveyed. Nonparametric tests were used to analyze data collected in the summer of 2003. The perceptions of locals changed (become more positive or negative) with the increased flow of visitors. The perceptions of vacationers about social impacts of tourism were more negative among older vacationers than younger vacationers. Locals and vacationers had different perceptions about the future development of tourism in rural Haiti.

1.0. Introduction

The intent of this research was to analyze the perceptions of locals and vacationers regarding tourism development in rural Haiti. Several researchers have discussed the impacts of tourism development in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) and have concluded that tourism could have both beneficial and harmful effects (Tisdell 1983). Tourism should be developed with some consideration to reduce the harmful impacts it might have on local communities and the environment (Burke et al. 2000). Therefore, as suggested by several researchers, the beneficial and negative aspects of tourism are likely to be found in the perceptions of Haitians.

Tourism is one of the biggest industries in the world. Tropical weather and sandy beaches made the Caribbean

one of the places with the fastest growth in the tourism industry (Crusol & Vellas 1996). Several Caribbean countries, such as the Bahamas and Barbados, have based their economy mainly on tourism income (Marshall 2002). Nevertheless, the tourism industry accounted for a low percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in some other Caribbean countries such as Haiti. After being one of the pioneers of tourist destinations in the region during the 1950s and 1960s, internal turmoil and other circumstances drove Haiti out of the mass tourism market. According to the Plan Directeur du Tourisme or PDT (1996), investments required to relaunch mass tourism in Haiti were close to \$60 million per year over 7 years. The required funds were not found to launch the PDT properly.

In addition to mass tourism in Haiti, the PDT considered the development of other types of tourism. Some researchers recommended that nature-centered tourism, such as ecotourism, should be developed alongside of or instead of mass tourism. (Burke et al. 2000; Crusol & Vellas 1996). Researchers, scientists and policy makers developed a long list of tourism types, such as ecotourism, ethnotourism, rural tourism, etc. The concept of rural tourism is the focus of this research. Rural tourism has been defined by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) as a set of activities carried out in the rural environment that go beyond accommodation (Wyss 2003). This definition gives rural tourism a non-conventional tourism status, in contrast to mass tourism; and like ecotourism, it has the potential of finding its place in the tourism market. The argument is that this form of tourism brings cash more rapidly and more directly to rural people.

2.0 Perceptions Toward Tourism Development

Among the different impacts attributed to tourism, three of them were the most relevant to this research, namely economic, social, and environmental impacts. However, all of them can have both positive and negative perceptions among people.

2.1 Economic Impacts

Job creation was the most important effect associated with tourism development in the past. With new

job opportunities, local residents had a better chance to ameliorate their income and their quality of life (Cattarinch 2001; Lewis 1998; Quinn & Strickland 1994; Wilson et al. 2001; Wyss 2003). In the small Caribbean island of Barbados, the tourism industry accounted for 30% of the available jobs, which was ten times more than the agricultural sector (Marshall 2002). Another example is wildlife tourism in Southern Africa, through which locals increased their income by selling handicrafts to tourists (Barnes et al. 1999). However, the fact that some small islands rely almost exclusively on tourism for economic success puts them at great risk regarding the volatility of the tourism market. Furthermore, the seasonality of the jobs does not provide enough money to locals for them to rely on tourism exclusively as an income source (Tisdell 1983). At the national level, countries with their economy relying on tourism are in danger if the industry collapses (Burke et al. 2000).

2.2 Social Impacts

Economic opportunities are among the primary reasons for migration from rural to urban areas. People migrate to pursue a better life (Afolayan 2001; Parnwell 1993). At the same time, tourism brings new economic opportunities to rural areas. Therefore, locals do not have to migrate to cities in their quest to improve their quality of life (Lewis 1998; Pelligrino 2000). Economic opportunities from tourism development encourage natives to return to their homes and non-natives to seize this opportunity to establish themselves in local areas (Paviagua 2002). The negative social impacts of tourism include crime, prostitution and all types of violence (Lea 1991). The Bahamas, Barbados, and Jamaica were among the tourist destinations with the highest crime rate in the Caribbean for the last three decades (Levantis 2002). Other negative impacts are exchanges between locals and visitors that often lead to acculturation and a loss of identity, traditions, and values. Rural areas appear to be more sensitive to acculturation than urban settings (Tisdell 1983). Sex tourism, considered one of the negative impacts of tourism development, has a more positive aspect in Thailand where sex tourism is one of the major industries in the country (Bronson 1993).

2.3 Environmental Impacts

Tourism serves as a nonconventional educational tool. In rural areas, nonconventional tourism creates an ideal situation for tourists to socialize with local people

and scientists to conduct research (Pattulo 1996; Rome & Romeo 1998). The hope is that the results found with scientific research would lead to a better understanding of the local community in particular and the environment in general (Quinn & Strickland 1994). On the other hand, this educational tool has the potential to become harmful for the environment. The number of visitors should be limited, regarding the carrying capacity, to prevent pollution and other types of destruction of the natural resources (Burke et al. 2000; Pattulo 1996). The carrying capacity in tourism terms is understood to be the maximum number of people that an area can support without damaging the environment. As an illustration, Cancun was a small angler village on the Caribbean side of Mexico 30 years ago. Tourism development has brought millions of people to Cancun. As a result, the local population grew ten times its size. The government took necessary legal measures to protect natural areas from this continuous development (Burke et al. 2000).

3.0 Hypotheses

The hypotheses guiding this research were grouped into two categories: perceptions of locals and perceptions of domestic visitors. For perceptions of locals (rural people), the hypotheses stated: 1) the flow of visitors has a negative social impact; 2) the flow of visitors has a positive economic impact and 3) the flow of visitors has a negative environmental impact. For perceptions of domestic visitors (urban people), the hypotheses stated: 1) visitors with more disposable income think more positively about the economic impact of tourism; 2) older visitors have a more negative perception of social impacts of tourism than younger vacationers (students); 3) younger visitors have a more positive perception of environmental impacts of tourism than older vacationers (professionals); and 4) older visitors have a more negative perception about environmental impacts of tourism.

4.0 Materials and Methods

The methodology adopted for this research consisted of two distinct sections: data collection and data analysis. Data collection was based on observations, interviews and questionnaires. Observations are a valid means for collecting data among a community. They provide information on culture, behavior and environment (Kirk & Miller 1986). Formal interviews and informal conversations were used to gather data from locals in their community. A questionnaire was used to collect

data from vacationers. Data analysis was done with non-parametric tests, frequencies and salience reason methods.

4.1 Data Collection

Data collection consisted of three distinct sections: site selection, local interviews and visitor survey.

4.1.1 Site Selection

Three rural sites were chosen based on the flow of visitors, attraction for tourists and accessibility. Because most vacation sites are access-free, it becomes harder to devise reliable statistical estimations of visitor numbers. Therefore, any estimation of the flow of visitors became somewhat subjective and based on observation. For this research, three qualitative categories were defined as low, moderate and high, referring to the annual flow of visitors: where low (Fort Royal) would represent less than 500 visitors, moderate (Vallue) between 500 and 1000, and high (Saut d'Eau) more than 1000 visitors per year. This categorization was made by combining data gathered among locals, on-site observations and additional information received from other contacted persons.

4.1.2 Informant selection and local interviews

Local leaders and authorities were the first persons contacted. Local authorities were mayors or other members of city hall, and priests or other heads of the church. Local leaders were other well-known individuals among local people. A primary contact with locals was necessary for planning the research, having a list of potential informants, and working on schedule plans.

The purpose of the research was discussed with the contact person who was invited to comment on the research and to provide other suggestions that might increase the feasibility and the validity of the research. The first person was asked open-ended questions about tourism development in the particular rural area, such as "What are the impacts of the flow of visitors on the environment?" The answer was a list of responses that were the most important or obvious to the respondent. Examples were: "I have no idea; there are not so many people visiting the place; the problem of the environment is due to cutting trees to make charcoal." This free-listing process continued with the second, and third respondents, etc. After the fifth respondent had been questioned, the domain analysis was made with the most salient answers given by the five informants. This domain

analysis was tested among ten to fifteen other informants. While being tested, the domain analysis became richer with other responses from subsequent respondents (Cutz & Chandler 1999; Spadley 1979). In addition to this free listing process, respondents were asked to rank their responses when possible (Weller & Romney 1988). Data were collected using the interview format in Haitian Creole. This option made the informant feel more comfortable with giving his perception of his community (Spradley 1979). Fifty-five people were interviewed in the three rural sites in 4 weeks. The interview guide was comprised of three sections. In the first section, questions were asked about local income sources, flow of tourist visits, and speculation on the reason for visits. Informants were asked about accommodations, eating facilities, and activities of visitors. The second part of the conversation focused on the impacts of visitors in social, economic and environmental terms. In this part of the conversation, informants were asked to comment on the ways that tourism can help local communities with economic development, environmental protection, and management. The conversation concluded by asking about the role that tourism might play in a local development process.

4.1.3 Vacationer interviews

The researcher planned to interview active tourists visiting vacation sites (on-site) and potential visitors in cities (off-site). Twenty to thirty interviews were planned on-site (Saut d'Eau, Petit-Goâve) and off-site (Port-au-Prince). A two-page questionnaire was prepared to collect data, and 10 minutes was the minimum time required per interview. A brief summary of the purpose of the research was given to them. Their freedom and willingness to participate or not participate in this research was respected.

Almost all vacationers at the site of Saut d'Eau were too busy to participate in the research. Only two of them agreed to fill out the questionnaire themselves. Observations and informal talks were used to overcome this problem. Data were collected from Haitian vacationers in Port-au-Prince and Petit-Goâve. They agreed to fill out the questionnaire themselves after being informed of the purpose of the research. These vacationers were randomly chosen in Port-au-Prince and Petit-Goâve. Their ages ranged from 18 to 65. According the Haitian Institute of Statistics (IHSI), 46% of the Haitian population falls in this age range.

From 80 questionnaires distributed, 72 were completed and collected. Based on the objectives of this study, the sample was coded as two social groups: professionals and students. The professionals represented all respondents who worked or were retired. The students represented the non-professionals or the younger visitors. The process lasted 6 weeks, from late June to mid-August of 2003.

The questionnaire was designed to give freedom to the respondent with 13 open-ended questions. Respondents had the opportunity to state what they did on vacation, the places that they visited and the places they planned to visit. They gave their opinions on what could attract more visitors in rural areas and what types of housing should be promoted for tourist accommodation. They found room to talk about the impacts, positive and negative, that tourist flow might have on rural communities in social, economic and environmental terms. They were asked to share their personal experience in rural areas and to try to define the type of tourism that might be the best for local development. Finally, respondents were asked to define rural tourism and to give other suggestions about tourism development as a tool for rural development in Haiti.

4.2 Data Analysis

Most of the collected data were qualitative. Non-parametric tests were more appropriate for the analysis. Salient reason method, Chi-square and Cramer's V were used to study the frequency and association between qualitative variables (Healy, 2002). Salient reason is a tool used when multiple answers are associated with one question. Salient reason is a function of frequency by rank. For this research, answers were first weighted. For example if three answers were given to one question, the weighting was calculated as follows: $3/3 \times \text{answer 1}$, $2/3 \times \text{answer 2}$, and $1/3 \times \text{answer 3}$. Second, the salience reason was obtained as follows: $3/3 \times \text{answer Y (respondent A)} + 4/5 \times \text{answer Y (respondent B)} + 3/4 \times \text{answer Y (respondent C)}$. In other words, salience reason was obtained by adding all the similar pre-weighted answers from different respondents (Chandler, personal communication, October 30, 2003; Venugopal 1999).

4.2.1 Perceptions of locals and visitors

To study the perceptions of local people about tourism and local development, hypotheses were tested with Chi-square and Cramer's V tests. The first hypothesis to be tested was as follows: the perceptions of local

people become more positive (or more negative) with an increased flow of visitors. The independent variable was the flow of annual visitors, and the three rural sites were ranked as low, moderate and high. The dependent variables were the perceptions of the locals regarding social, economic and environmental impacts. To study the perceptions of visitors, the following hypothesis was tested: the perceptions of visitors vary with their occupation, economic status or age. The perceptions of vacationers were divided into subcategories regarding economic, social and environmental issues. Each of these subcategories was a sub-hypothesis tested separately.

5.0 Results and Discussions

The selected sites were less than 100 km from the nation's capital. They offered different attraction types to visitors. Perceptions of locals varied with the flow of visitors. However, perceptions of visitors were not different in all cases.

5.1 Selected Sites

The site with the lowest rank for visitor flow was Fort-Royal, a remote area near the city of Petit-Goâve, 65 km southwest of Port-au-Prince. Visitors disregarded Fort-Royal as a vacation destination while the site had a noticeable potential for tourism development. The main attraction was the ruins of the fort (Fort-Royal) built during the colonial era to protect the city of Petit-Goâve against pirates and other naval attacks. The second attraction was the wild beach and the small island that lies in the middle of the small bay. The third attraction was the small-cultivated plain that could be seen from a hillside. The fourth attraction was voodoo. Fort-Royal was a place where people came to contact spirits and to consult medicine men. Finally, Fort-Royal offered the opportunity to rest in a peaceful environment free from disturbing noises.

The site with the moderate rank for visitor flow was Vallue located 55 km southwest of Port-au-Prince. The main attraction was the compound of APV¹⁴, Association of the Peasants of Vallue. APV has conducted several projects with the local community, for example, school programs, soil conservation, reforestation, and food processing. Recently APV has introduced an ecotourism development program. At more than 600 m above sea level, Vallue offers a unique scenic view of the Gulf of

¹⁴Haitian NGO involved in rural development in Vallue since 1989.

La Gonâve and both bays of Grand-Goâve and Petit-Goâve to visitors. In addition, the sunrises and sunsets were two impressive natural events to be observed. Hotel rooms at the APV compound, rented rooms at peasant homes and staying with friends were visitor choices for accommodation. Some trails were offered to visitors for hiking.

The third site with the highest rank of flow of visitors was the well-known town of Saut d'Eau, also named Ville Bonheur (Happiness Town), at 60 km north of Port-au-Prince. Each year thousands of people visit Saut d'Eau to celebrate the festival of Our Lady of Mont Carmel on July 16. The main attraction was the mystic waterfall, the highest in the country. According to local belief, the Virgin Mary appeared on the top of falls during the 1860s. Since then, thousands of pilgrims and believers have come every year in their quest for luck and happiness. Another visitor attraction was the mass celebrated in the Catholic Church. Catholics, voodoo believers and others chose the same place to express their faith. They came to take a bain de chance or "luck bath" to become stronger in their fight with problems in life (Hurbon, 1993).

5.2 Perceptions of Locals

Locals were examined according to their perceptions of the impacts of tourism. In the research social, economic and environmental outcomes were considered.

5.2.1 Social impacts

Locals were questioned about their perceptions of social impacts from tourism development on their community. The sub-hypothesis stated that the flow of visitors has a negative social impact in the perceptions of locals. Perceptions of locals were grouped into two categories: no impact and social exchange. The social exchange category grouped perceptions of locals related to all exchanges that tourism might facilitate between locals and visitors. A typical response was: "With tourism more people will discover our place and that would help us with some local project". This example illustrated the way that locals viewed tourism development as a tool that can play a dual role. This perception was shared by 100% of the respondents of Saut d'Eau, the most visited place. The no impact category grouped all responses of those who thought that tourism had or might have no social impact on their community. This perception was shared by 40% of respondents of Vallue, the place

with moderate flow of visitors and 15% of respondents of Fort-Royal, the least visited place. The salient reason method helped to rank the responses regarding rank and frequency. Social exchange was the first answer for locals of Vallue and Saut d'Eau. The no impact category was the primary perception of locals of Fort-Royal. The perceptions of locals toward social impacts became more positive with increased flow of visitors (χ^2 : 23.4; $p < 0.05$). The perceptions of locals strongly varied (Cramer's $V > 0.5$) from neutral to positive with the higher flow of visitors. The answers grouped under social exchange were viewed as good opportunities for communication and other exchanges between locals and visitors. Experience and habit played a role in the perceptions of locals. With the habit of the flow of visitors, locals experienced positive results in term of social impacts. In Saut d'Eau, the flow of visitors was one of the factors that attracted attention to the community. As a result of the continuous growth in the flow of visitors, several social projects were executed for the community, such as road maintenance, potable water and electricity. However, locals complained about the fact that people are interested in Saut d'Eau only once a year. According to one local, "once the month of July is gone, locals get back to their hard reality of life and have to count on themselves only." In Fort-Royal, the less visited site, locals expressed more of a neutral point of view regarding the socio-economic impacts of tourism development. In conclusion, there was not enough evidence to support the sub-hypothesis that 1) the increased flow of visitors has a negative social impact. Rather, the higher flow of visitors created a positive perception about the social impacts of tourism development. This perception was statistically different among locals from different sites.

5.2.2 Economic impacts

Locals were questioned about their perceptions of economic impacts from tourism development on their community. The sub-hypothesis stated that the flow of visitors has a positive economic impact in the perceptions of locals. Perceptions of locals were grouped into two categories no impact and more money. The more money category grouped perceptions expressed by locals related to economic exchanges and job opportunities that tourism brought into the local economy. The perception of more money in the local economy due to tourism was shared by 100% of the respondents of Saut d'Eau. The no impact category grouped all open-ended responses of those who thought that tourism had or might have no

economic impact on their community. This perception was shared by 87% of respondents of Vallée, the place with moderate flow of visitors and 90% of respondents of Fort-Royal, the least visited place. The salient reason method helped to rank the responses regarding their rank and their frequency. No impact category was the first answer for locals of Vallée and Fort-Royal. On the other hand, the more money category was the main perception of locals of Saut d'Eau. The perceptions of locals toward economic impacts became more positive with increased flow of visitors (χ^2 : 13.8; $p < 0.05$). These perceptions of locals varied strongly (Cramer's $V = 0.5$) from neutral to positive with the increased flow of visitors. Experience and habit have played a role in the perceptions of locals. With the habit of the flow of visitors, people experienced positive results in terms of economic impacts. In Saut d'Eau, the continuous increased flow of visitors provided economic opportunities each year. These economic opportunities were in housing and accommodation, transportation, and the fresh food market. Locals from the other sites did not experience major economic outcome related to tourism. Nevertheless, locals from other sites thought tourism could have a positive impact on their economy. In conclusion, there was enough evidence to support the sub-hypothesis. Higher flows of visitors created a positive perception toward the economic impacts of tourism development.

5.2.3 Environmental impacts

Locals were questioned regarding their perceptions about the environmental impacts of tourism development. The sub-hypothesis stated that the flow of visitors has a negative impact on perceptions about the environment. Answers were grouped into two categories, namely no impact and impact. Open-ended responses from those who considered tourism to have no impact on the environment were included under the first category. The responses from those who considered tourism to have any impact on the environment were grouped under the second category. In the second category, positive impacts were related to a better management of the environment and negative impacts were related to pollution. An example of a positive impact from the less visited site was: "the more visitors have an interest in this beach, the cleaner locals will keep it." A negative example was illustrated by the following statement: "every year the high number of visitors becomes a problem because of the lack of toilet facilities." This illustration came from respondents in the most visited site who complained

about odors because of the lack of toilet facilities on-site. Salient reason method helped in ranking the different answers. The no impact category was the first answer for 80% of the respondents of the less visited site and for 40% of the respondents of the site with the moderate flow of visitors. On the other hand, the impact category was the first answer for 94.7% of the respondents of the most visited site. This research showed how the perceptions of visitors were sensitive to the flow of visitors (χ^2 : 8.1; $p < 0.05$; Cramer's $V < 0.2$). However, in contrast to the most visited place, the perceptions of locals from the less frequented sites were neutral and positive. Perceptions in the most visited place were divided equally between the positive and negative impacts of tourism development. In conclusion, there was enough evidence to support the hypothesis. In other words, the flow of visitors was perceived as having a negative impact on the environment.

5.3 Perceptions of Visitors

Perceptions among visitors did not change much. The only statistical difference was observed on social impacts that tourism development might have on rural Haiti. No statistical difference were found about economic and environmental impacts.

5.3.1 Economic impacts

The four most important impacts viewed as positive by vacationers were similar for students and professionals. Their perceptions of economic impacts were ranked similarly: improvement of local economy > more jobs > new market opportunities > local development. The less important perceptions were ranked: improvement of quality of life > discovery of the site > cultural development. The concept of improvement of local economy represented answers referring to economic opportunities in general and more jobs and new market opportunities specifically. The more jobs category included different jobs associated directly with tourism such as accommodation from service providers, and jobs created indirectly such as construction workers. The new market opportunities referred to markets for fresh produce and handicrafts. The local development category consisted of infrastructure improvements (roads, electricity, phones, etc.) in general. No statistical difference was found between students and professionals in the way that they ranked the four most important economic impacts. There was not enough evidence to support the sub-hypothesis stating vacationers with

higher socioeconomic status perceive of more positive economic impacts of tourism. In other words, the positive perceptions of students and professionals were statistically similar (χ^2 : 0.1; $p > 0.05$; $N = 63$). The student population had a higher non-response rate (16.7%), while the professional population presented a lower rate of 3.3%.

5.3.2 Social impacts

The five most important impacts viewed as negative by students were ranked as follows: social degradation > demographic explosion > prostitution/ diseases > increased cost of living > drugs/violence. Professionals followed a different path in their view of negative social impacts. Their perceptions were ranked: social degradation > prostitution/diseases > drugs/violence > increased cost of living > demographic explosion. The social degradation category included answers related to changes in behaviors, traditions and local habits. Prostitution/diseases categorized answers regarding prostitution and the spread of diseases such as AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases. There was enough evidence to support the sub-hypothesis stating that older vacationers (professionals) have a more negative perception about social impacts of tourism (χ^2 : 9.8; $p < 0.05$; $N = 51$). Significant differences were observed in responses about social degradation and demographic explosion. A lower rate of non-response was found in the professional population (10.0%) compared to the students (42.9%).

5.3.3 Environmental impacts

The three most important positive impacts viewed by students were ranked: natural resources/environmental appreciation > natural resources/environmental protection > job creation. The three most important positive impacts viewed by professionals were ranked: natural resources/ environmental protection > natural resources/environmental appreciation > job creation. The appreciation of natural resources and environment category included answers related to sustainable use of natural resources and use of fruit and other products to sell or to transform into products (food processing). The protection of environment and natural resources category grouped answers related to the need for having restricted areas, soil conservation and restoration. Job creation was related to environmental impacts, because it referred to jobs derived from tourism that might reduce pressure on the use of natural resources for income. A

higher rate of non-response was found in the student population (30.9%) compared to professionals (13.3%). Even though there were differences among how answers were ranked in both cases, there was not enough evidence to support the sub-hypothesis. No significant difference was observed between the two groups regarding their positive perceptions of environmental impacts of tourism development (χ^2 : 5.9; $p > 0.05$; $N = 55$). In other words, younger visitors (students) do not have a more positive perception about environmental impacts of tourism than older vacationers (professionals).

The three most important negative impacts viewed by students were ranked: pollution > environmental degradation in general > natural resources reduction. In contrast, professionals ranked their perceptions: environmental degradation in general > natural resources reduction > pollution. No significant difference was observed between students and professionals in their negative perceptions toward environmental impacts of tourism development (χ^2 : 2.6; $p > 0.05$; $N = 48$). The non-response rate was 40.5% for students and 23.3% for professionals. Even though there were differences among how answers were ranked in both cases, there was not enough evidence that supported the sub-hypothesis. In other words, older visitors (professionals) do not have a more negative perception about environmental impacts of tourism than younger visitors (students).

6.0 Conclusion

This research was intended to analyze the perceptions of locals and domestic visitors about the potential for tourism development in rural Haiti. Some patterns in responses to open-ended questions were observed. The perceptions of locals varied with the increased flow of visitors. There was enough evidence to support two of the subhypotheses: the increased flow of visitors had positive economic and negative environmental impacts from the perspectives of locals. Locals from the most-visited site of Saut d'Eau thought tourism development might increase pollution. The lack of toilet facilities was one of the major concerns of locals regarding the flow of visitors in their region. On the other hand, there was not enough evidence to support that the increased flow of visitor had a negative social impacts from the perceptions of locals. The perceptions of domestic visitors were similar to each other in most cases except for social impacts of tourism development. There was not enough evidence to support the hypothesis regarding the perceptions of

visitors (students and professionals) toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism. The perceptions of visitors about social impacts of tourism were mostly negative. Only informal education was considered to have a positive social impact. In conclusion, there was enough evidence to support that older visitors had more negative perceptions about social impacts of tourism than younger visitors.

The limitations of this research suggest the need for further studies. One of the limitations refers to sample size. This study failed to identify respondents representing the poor among locals and vacationers. The perceptions of this group would give a broader spectrum of meanings for tourism development opportunities in rural areas. Another group that was not reached is the unemployed among vacationers. Even though Haiti has a high rate of unemployment, people without jobs have some vacations or some perceptions about tourism development. With its economic potential, unemployed people could view tourism as a source of job opportunities. A second limitation was time. More time is needed to study if the perceptions of people will change over time and in what direction. A third limitation is the diversity among sites. More sites need to be studied to have a complete view of the potential and variety of tourism development in rural Haiti.

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