

UTAH RECREATION & TOURISM MATTERS



Institute for Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

September 2011

No. IORT/025

Natural Resource-Based Occupations and Desire for Tourism Are the two necessarily inconsistent? Peggy Petrzelka and Stephanie Malin

Introduction

One explanation given for resistance to tourism in rural areas focuses on the role of occupational identity in natural resource extraction-based occupations. An occupational identity is one in which its “members’ sense of identity is closely tied to its occupation” (Carroll & Lee 1990:142). Two main components of natural resource-based occupational identity are individuals’ involvement with aspects of the occupation during their “off” time from work and an attachment to the natural resource around and in which they work (Carroll, 1995; Reed, 2003). In those areas where an identity based on resource-based occupations is prevalent, studies suggest there will be resistance to tourism, as tourism-based economic development is inconsistent with rural residents’ identity (Johnson et al., 1994; Mason & Cheyne, 2000). For example, in an area of Idaho that historically relied on natural resource-based occupations, research suggests negative perceptions of tourism may be due in part to the local population viewing themselves as “primarily mine and timber workers” (Johnson et al., 1994, p. 638). Other 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.406).

The assertion that tourism is inconsistent with rural residents’ identity is problematic, however, for several reasons. First, the link between resource-

based occupational identity and tourism development has not been documented systematically, but has instead been presented as self-evident. At the same time, “conventional wisdom” regarding this untested assertion has, in the authors’ experience, resulted in quick dismissal (and rejection) of proposals for tourism-oriented development programs by some rural development grant review panels.

Using survey data from three rural communities in the US Intermountain West, communities that share similar natural resource-dependent industry histories and are now experiencing varying degrees of tourism-related activity and development, this study addresses two questions:

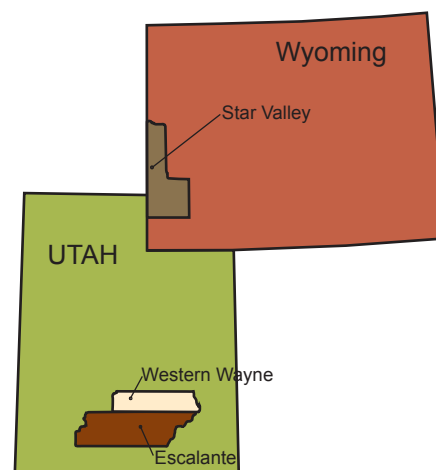


Fig. 1 Map of the study area.



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 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). 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 (Dean Runyun Associates, 2003).

The Western Wayne County study area, located in Southern Utah, also comprises a cluster of individual small communities. Western Wayne County is bordered by the Dixie National Forest and the Escalante-Grand Staircase 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 “gateway” 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 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Increasingly, tourism has become a major component of the local and regional economies. The number of jobs generated in Wayne County by tourism was 249 jobs in 1998; this increased to 274 jobs in 2001 and accounted for more than 20% of total non-farm employment (Utah Division of Travel Development, 2004).

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, increasingly has drawn tourists to this rural area. In 1990, 11% of Garfield County residents were employed in occupations that included agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining. This dropped to 10% in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Tourism generated 974 jobs in Garfield County in 1998 and 1027 jobs in 2001. As with Wayne County, these jobs accounted for more than 20% of total non-farm jobs in 2001 (Utah Division of Travel Development, 2004).

1) What differences exist, if any, between those residents who exhibit a strong sense of resource-based occupational identity and those who do not in terms of attitudes toward tourism development?

2) What is the strength of this relationship in the face of other potentially influential variables?

It is important to note we are not advocating for tourism in rural areas; for we believe, as do others, that tourism brings both “opportunities” and “threats.” What we are advocating is the need for a more nuanced view of the relationship between natural resource-based occupational identity and tourism attitudes, rather than simply dismissing tourism as an economic development alternative on the assumption that it is incongruent with local identity and cultural orientations. Given the rapid transition some rural communities are undergoing from traditional extractive industries to tourism-dominated economies, this topic clearly deserves attention.

Study Communities

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 in employment in natural resource sectors such as mining, agriculture, and forestry, and their locations in areas characterized by the presence of natural amenities on public lands which attract, or have the potential to attract, tourists (such as scenic landscapes and lands suited for outdoor recreation use). These natural amenities are the dominant attractions for tourism in these regions, with all three areas exhibiting a transition toward a tourism-based economy.

Study Methods

Data were collected through use of self-completion questionnaires. During the summer of 2001, questionnaires were delivered to a random sample of households drawn from public utility records in each study area, using a drop-off/pick-up method. 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.

As those with strong natural resource-dependent occupational identity tend to spend their “off” time with others in the same occupation, resource-based occupational identity (hereafter referred to as OID) was measured by assessing residents’ degrees of involvement in several of voluntary organizations that are associated with traditional resource-based occupations. To measure involvement, survey participants were asked to indicate on a response scale from zero (not at all involved) to six (highly involved) their involvement in the local watershed council, local irrigation district group, water conservation district group, and agricultural production organizations. Local watershed councils are involved with resource-based occupations such as logging and mining as well as with agriculture; the other organizations all focus primarily on agricultural activities. To measure respondents’ attachment to the natural resources linked to traditional occupations, responses to items assessing the importance of preserving opportunities for traditional multiple use activities such as grazing and logging, as well as the importance of the ability to earn a living off the land (e.g. farming, logging) were used. Responses for these items ranged from zero (not at all important) to six (extremely important). An index incorporating the four variables measuring involvement in resource-based

organizations along with the two variables measuring attachment to natural resources linked to traditional occupations was then created (ranging from a score of zero to 36).

Attitudes toward tourism were measured using an index that combined responses to two survey questions. Respondents were first asked to indicate how important they thought increasing tourism as a means of economic opportunity was 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 of 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).

An additional variable that may impact attitudes toward tourism is perception of the local economic situation (Petzelka et al. 2006). This was measured by asking respondents to indicate how important they thought increasing opportunities to earn an adequate income was 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).

Because age, gender, length of residence, and income have been shown to be related to attitudes held toward tourism (eg., Petzelka et al., 2006), our study also includes these four variables. 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 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 Findings And Discussion

The OID index has a potential range of zero to 36, with a lower score indicating lower affiliation with resource based occupational identity, and a higher scored indicating a strong affiliation with this identity. The index has a mean of 13.54. This low score suggests that occupational identity is not universally strong among those involved in extractive industries, and/or many residents in these study areas are not tied to such occupations or identities.



Table 1. Response Distributions for Occupational Identity Index

	Combined Samples	Escalante	Star Valley	Western Wayne County
Low OID†	31.3%	21.2%	41.0%	31.3%
Some OID†	33.3%	39.8%	37.7%	24.7%
High OID†	35.4%	39.0%	21.3%	44.0%
N	390	118	122	150

† Low OID refers to those who have low involvement in/attachment to resource-based occupations, Some OID indicates those with minimal involvement/attachment, and High OID those respondents with active involvement/attachment.

Response values on the OID index were split into three approximately equal groups. Low OID includes those who fall between zero to nine on the index (31% of sample); Some OID ranges between 10 and 14 on the index (33%); and High OID includes those with scores between 15 to 36 on the index (35%). Response distributions for the index categories and study communities are reported in Table 1. Some differences are evident when these groups are compared by study area. The table shows a higher proportion of Star Valley’s respondents were classified as Low OID and a lower proportion as High OID than in either Escalante or Western Wayne County.

For portions of the subsequent analysis we combine responses from residents of all three communities because they exhibit similarities with respect to patterns of economic change associated with

resource dependent industries and growing reliance on tourism-based businesses.

When examining the three levels of OID groups in terms of demographic characteristics those with the strongest OID tend to be slightly older (Table 2). The high OID group included a higher percentage of males (53%), while the low OID and some OID categories had higher percentages of females. This relationship between gender and OID is consistent with research which documents the tendency for men to be more highly involved than women in activities linked to resource-based occupations such as those discussed here (Petrzelka and Mannon 2006).

A substantial majority of those with high OID (81%) had lived in the community for more than 10 years, compared to 52% of those in the low OID category. Length of residence has been shown

Table 2. Relationships between OID Groups and Respondent Background Demographics

	Low OID†	Some OID†	High OID†
Age (means)	49	51	54
Gender			
Male	43%	36%	53%
Female	57%	64%	47%
Length of Residency in Community			
10 years or less	48%	30%	19%
More than 10 years	52%	70%	81%
Household Income			
<\$10,000 - \$19,999	24%	32%	19%
\$20,000 - \$39,999	24%	31%	36%
\$40,000 - \$59,999	21%	20%	26%
\$60,000 - \$79,999	10%	5%	8%
\$80,000 or higher	21%	12%	11%

† Low OID refers to those who have low involvement in/attachment to resource-based occupations, Some OID indicates those with minimal involvement/attachment, and High OID those respondents with active involvement/attachment.

to be associated with overall levels of community integration and attachment (Beggs et al., 1996, Goudy, 1990); such attachment may well extend to include increased identification with traditional occupations and lifestyles. Also, a larger percentage of those with low OID reported higher household incomes than those in the high OID category.

There are also some differences in tourism attitudes across the three OID categories; those with low OID seem to be more desirous of tourism, while those with high OID appear to be less so (Table 3). In addition, while all three groups are in relative agreement that increasing opportunities to earn an adequate income is important for maintaining and improving the future quality of life in their community, those with low OID feel least strongly about this. The high mean in this index suggests that those with some and high OID are not necessarily resistant to all community changes—they agree that increasing economic opportunities is important, but tend not to view tourism development as the favored approach.

When examining the strength of the occupational identity-tourism relationship in the face of other potentially influential variables, our findings indicate a modest tendency for those with higher levels of OID to be less supportive of tourism development (Table 4). In addition, as the perceived importance of increasing local opportunities to earn an adequate income increased, so did favorable attitudes toward tourism. Attitudes about the importance of increasing local opportunities to earn an adequate income appear to play a larger role in accounting for the degree of opposition or support expressed for tourism than OID. In these and other rural areas similarly affected by an erosion of traditional economic activities, tourism development is likely to be seen by many residents as having the potential to provide an alternative source of economic opportunity. None of the individual sociodemographic characteristics were statistically significant predictors of tourism attitudes.

Table 3. Differences between OID Groups for Measures of Attitudes Toward Tourism Development and Importance of Increasing Opportunities for Earning Adequate Income (N=390)

Index	Range (Min-Max)	Total Mean	Low OID†	Some OID†	High OID†
Attitudes toward Tourism Development	0-12	6.73	7.09	6.63	6.42
Importance of Adequate Income	0-6	4.98	4.70	5.13	5.13

† Low OID refers to those who have low involvement in/attachment to resource-based occupations, Some OID indicates those with minimal involvement/attachment, and High OID those respondents with active involvement/attachment.

Table 4. Multiple Regression on Attitudes toward Tourism Development, OID, Importance of Opportunities to Earn an Adequate Income, Community of Residence, and Resident Socio-demographic Characteristics (N=370)

Attitudes toward Tourism Development			
Independent Variables	Correlation	b	B
Constant		2.927	
OID	-.110	-.064	-.150**
Importance of adequate income	.371	.870	.382***
Dummy #1 (Star Valley)	-.029	-.285	-.041
Dummy #2 (Western Wayne)	.009	.230	.034
Age	.025	.009	.047
Gender	-.113	-.219	-.034
Length of residence	-.001	-.095	-.014
Household income	-.048	.016	.006
Coefficient of determination (R ²)	.166		

** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Conclusion

What we are advocating here is the need to better understand resource-based occupational identity and its link to tourism attitudes and related factors, rather than simply dismissing tourism as an economic development alternative that won't work because tourism is "inconsistent with residents' identity." While our results do provide some support for this claim, perception of the local economic situation was a more powerful predictor of attitudes toward tourism in our analysis. Given the rapid transition some rural communities are undergoing from traditional extractive industries to tourism-dominated economies, this topic clearly deserves attention. We hope the information provided here can provide researchers, public officials, policy makers, and citizens involved in tourism promotion with a better understanding of rural residents' perspectives on tourism more clearly.

For further information on this study please see:

Petrzelka, P., Krannich, R.S., and Brehm, J.M. (2006). Identification with resource based occupations and desire for tourism: Are the two necessarily inconsistent? *Society and Natural Resources* 19:693-707 or contact Peggy Petrzelka, Associate Professor of Sociology, peggy.petrzelka@usu.edu, 435.797.0981.

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Research supported by the Utah Agricultural Experiment Station, projects UTA 839 and UTA 840.