

# LOCAL RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD POTENTIAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF ANSTED, WEST VIRGINIA

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Maureen Y. Bender  
Division of Forestry and Natural Resources  
West Virginia University  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6125

Jinyang Deng  
West Virginia University

Steve Selin  
West Virginia University

Doug Arbogast  
Travel Green Appalachia

R.A. Hobbs  
Ansted, WV

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**Abstract.**—The purpose of this study was to understand residents' attitudes toward tourism development in the town of Ansted, WV, using self-administered surveys. The attitude assessment in this study was part of a tourism planning process conducted for the town. The results indicate that perceptions of tourism development among Ansted's residents are generally homogeneous and highly positive. They do not believe that issues normally resulting from increased tourism, such as crowding, increased prices, or pollution would be a problem for the community. Rather, they are inclined to support tourism development for its potential to spur local economic development and provide related benefits. This finding is consistent with the social exchange theory that the more dependent a community is on economic benefits, the more likely it is that the community will support tourism development. The findings of this research will be an important contribution to a plan for sustainable tourism development in Ansted.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

West Virginia is the second most rural state in the United States (West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources 2007). Rural communities in the state have been struggling to improve residents' quality of life without compromising the appealing features that are associated with rural places. In many parts of the world, tourism has been regarded as an effective means of promoting rural economic development and diversification. However, tourism can also destroy the resources on which its development depends. Community-based tourism planning has been used to solve this dilemma by considering local residents' attitudes toward tourism development during the tourism planning process. The purpose of this study is to understand residents' attitudes toward tourism development and its impacts in rural Ansted, WV. The attitude assessment in this study is part of a tourism planning process being conducted in the town.

Established in 1873, the Town of Ansted, WV, is located along U.S. Highway 60 on a portion of the Midland Trail National Scenic Byway overlooking the New River. The town is rich in Civil War and coal mining history. It has many historic attractions, including Civil War-era buildings, museums, and African-American cemeteries. There are also abundant natural attractions in and around the community, including Hawk's Nest State Park, the Midland Trail National Scenic Byway, and the New and Gauley National Rivers.

West Virginia is one of the most economically depressed states in the country, with a state average per-capita annual income of \$16,477, lower than the national average of \$21,587 (Ansted Blueprint Community 2007). The town of Ansted had a 1999 per-capita annual income of \$15,671 (as reported in 2000 U.S. Census data), which is lower than the state average and much lower than the national average (Ansted Blueprint Community 2007).

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Residents' attitudes toward tourism development have been extensively examined from social, economic, and environmental perspectives. The literature review for this study focuses on the importance of uncovering residents' attitudes toward tourism development during community-based tourism planning and a discussion of previous studies concerning resident attitudes.

Tourism is often characterized by haphazard development that generates unevenly distributed benefits. Such circumstances apply especially to rural communities, in which few residents stand to benefit directly from tourism. Many communities experience economic leakages, in which most of the profits from tourism leave the community. This outflow occurs mainly because those who have decision-making authority over tourism development reside outside the community. This situation can lead to the eventual deterioration and abandonment of tourism destination sites, leaving the local people worse off than before tourism development began (Mitchell and Reid 2000). There is also increasing interest in the social and environmental impacts—both positive and negative—that tourism can bring, especially with respect to environmental and economic sustainability (Allen et al. 1988). Many tourism practitioners and researchers have begun to favor “community-based tourism,” in which communities are placed at the center of tourism planning and management (Mitchell and Reid 2000). Proponents argue that community participation in tourism planning and development is necessary to ensure that the benefits of tourism reach community residents (Simmons 1994). In addition, this type of planning encourages local employment and small business development, which in turn promote higher economic multipliers. A community approach to decision-making also helps to ensure that traditional lifestyles and community values are respected. Community participation also may generate environmental benefits; where local natural resources are essential to tourism, community members would ideally act as stewards in environmental conservation (Campbell 1999).

As discussed above, it is important to understand local residents' attitudes toward tourism development in order to plan and develop tourism in a sustainable manner. Accordingly, local residents' attitudes toward tourism have been widely examined in the literature. Harrill (2004) outlined three types of factors that influence attitudes toward tourism development: socioeconomic factors, spatial factors, and economic dependency.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between residents' attitudes and socioeconomic variables such as gender, income, and length of residence. Findings in these studies are not always consistent. For example, Allen et al. (1993) found that length of residence did not significantly influence attitudes toward tourism development in 10 rural Colorado communities. In contrast, Girard and Gartner's (1993) Wisconsin study, McCool and Martin's (1994) Montana study, and a Virginia study by Williams et al. (1995, cited in Harrill 2004) all found that long-term residents were more supportive of tourism development than short-term residents. In other research, gender has been found to be a more consistent predictor of residents' attitudes toward tourism development. For example, Mason and Cheyne (2000) found that women were less supportive of tourism development than men due to perceived negative impacts like increases in traffic, noise, and crime. Similar findings were also reported by Harrill and Potts (2003) in their study of Charleston, SC.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between locations/activities of tourism development and residents' attitudes, based on the hypothesis that “the closer a resident lives to concentrations of tourism activity, the more negative his or her perception will be of tourism development” (Harrill 2004, p. 253).

Tyrell and Spaulding (1984) found that Rhode Island residents had less favorable attitudes toward the tourism facilities close to their homes because of trash and litter. Gursoy and Jurowski (2002, cited in Harrill 2004) found that residents who used a nearby national recreation area frequently were more strongly opposed to tourism development than residents who

visited less frequently. In addition, Harrill and Potts (2003) found that residents of a neighborhood in a tourism core of Charleston received the brunt of the negative impacts from tourism and were less supportive of tourism development than residents of other communities farther away from the core. Raymond and Brown (2007) used spatial analysis to study Victoria, Australia, residents' attitudes toward tourism development based on their proximity to the development. They found that on surveys most residents offered conditional support for tourism development regardless of how far they lived from the center of the development. However, spatial analysis identified place-specific differences in residents' opinions about what types of tourism development would be acceptable or inappropriate.

Finally, according to social exchange theory, residents' attitudes toward tourism depend largely on how many tourism dollars can be generated and kept in the community (Harrill 2004). In addition, those who think they can benefit from tourism development are more likely to support it. Tyrell and Spaulding (1984) found that Rhode Island business owners and town officials showed stronger support for tourism development than other residents. In a study of the gambling community of Deadwood, SD, Caneday and Zeiger (1991) reported that the more money residents made in tourism-dependent jobs, the less likely they were to identify negative impacts. A study by Husbands (1989) in the Victoria Falls area of Zambia also found that white-collar workers had more positive attitudes toward tourism development than workers in the lower-tier managerial class. However, not all studies support this theory, especially if factors such as tourism-induced environmental deterioration come into play. For example, Liu et al. (1987) found that residents of Hawaii, North Wales, and Istanbul were more concerned about tourism's environmental impacts on their communities than its economic benefits.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

Findings from the literature, including the Tourism Impact Attitude Scale developed by Lankford and Howard (1994), were used to design a questionnaire to administer to Ansted residents. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: 1) perceptions of Ansted as a tourism destination or gateway community; 2) attitudes toward tourism development impacts (economic, environmental, and social); and 3) background information. Participants were asked to answer questions in Sections 1 and 2 using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). In addition, a blank space was provided for open-ended comments about tourism in Ansted.

One hundred and sixty-one copies of the questionnaire were distributed at a community meeting, at town hall, and at the high school (in order to get the input of the younger community members) in October 2007 and during tourism planning activities in November 2007. Eighty-five questionnaires were completed and returned for a 52.8-percent response rate. Data were analyzed by descriptive statistics and t-tests using SPSS 11.5 for Windows.

### **4.0 RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Socio-demographic Information**

The survey respondents consisted of an almost equal number of males (50.6 percent) and females (49.4 percent). More than half (53.6 percent) of the participants were over the age of 55. The most common occupation was retirement (35.3 percent), followed by various professions, none of which stood out above the rest. Professional occupations were the most common at 10.3 percent. Most of the respondents (61.4 percent) had a household income between \$20,000 and \$60,000/year (the majority of whom earned less than \$40,000/year). All of the respondents had at least a high school education and 40.4 percent had either an undergraduate or graduate degree. Finally, more than half of the respondents (59.8 percent) had lived in Ansted for at least 15 years and more than a quarter had lived in the town for 35 years or more.

## 4.2 Perceptions of Ansted as a Tourism Destination/Gateway Community

Figure 1 presents participants' perceptions of Ansted as a tourism destination and/or a gateway community. Responses to all 14 statements concerning the town as a tourism destination and/or a gateway community were highly positive. For instance, the majority of respondents believed communities in the region should attract more visitors (91.8 percent). They also favored tourism development in and around Ansted (89.3 percent) and believed that Ansted could serve as a gateway to surrounding parks and attractions (86.6 percent).

T-tests indicated that there were no significant differences between males and females, between the more and less educated, or between the affluent and the less affluent in their responses to the 14 statements about Ansted as a tourism destination with the following exceptions. Females ( $M = 3.68$ ) were more likely ( $p < .003$ ) than males ( $M = 3.02$ ) to believe that Ansted is already a tourism destination. Respondents who had attended college ( $M = 4.52$ ) were more supportive of Ansted forming partnerships with surrounding communities ( $p < .010$ ) than those

who had less education ( $M = 3.92$ ). Those with an annual income of less than \$60,000 ( $M = 3.22$ ) were more likely to believe that Ansted is competitive with surrounding communities in tourism development ( $p < .031$ ) than those who made over \$60,000 per year ( $M = 2.47$ ).

There were, however, some significant differences between age groups (See Table 1). Respondents age 55 and above were generally more positive in their perceptions of Ansted as a tourism destination than respondents under 55. This observation was especially true in their perceptions of tourism development in and around Ansted ( $p < .000$ ), Ansted's competitiveness with the surrounding communities in tourism development ( $p < .001$ ), and Ansted's potential to become more of a tourism destination ( $p < .002$ ). Despite these differences, both groups were not significantly different from each other in the other five statements: Ansted is already a tourism destination; is visited by a large number of visitors; should be in partnership with surrounding communities in tourism development; should be a political advocate for Hawks Nest State Park; and needs beautification.

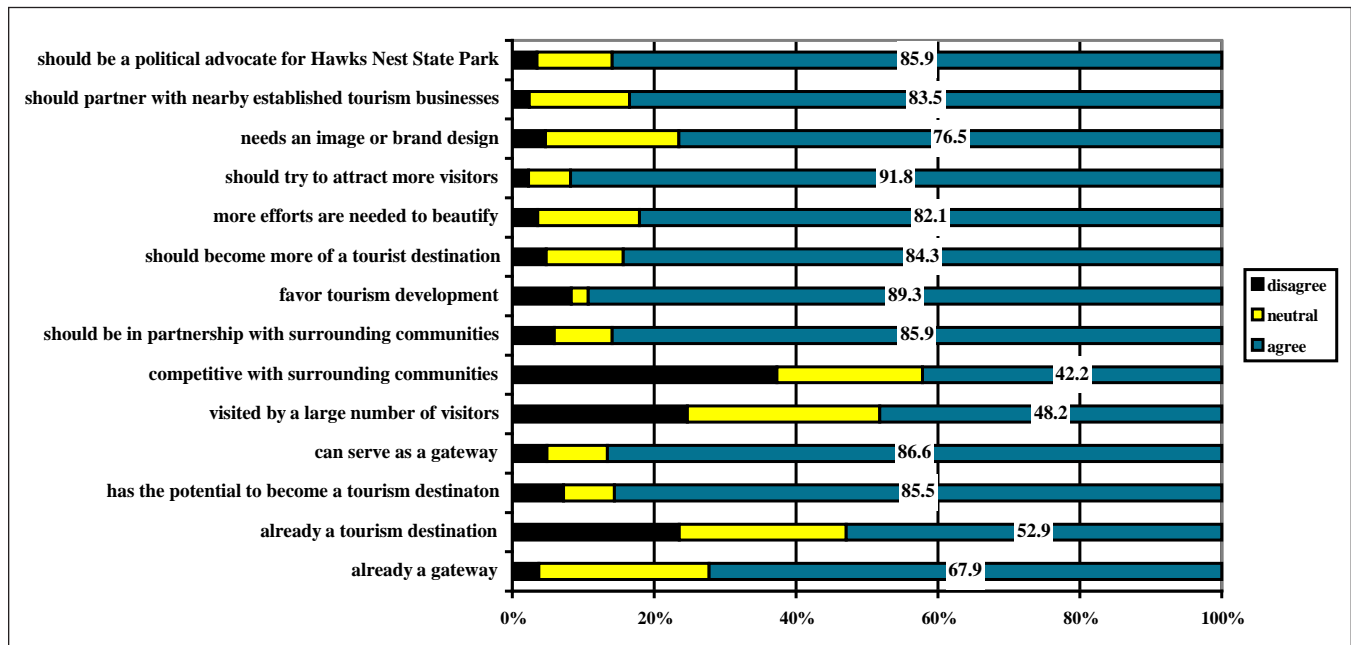


Figure 1.—Perceptions of Ansted as a tourism destination/gateway community.

**Table 1.—Differences between age groups concerning perceptions of Ansted as a tourism destination**

	Age	Mean	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Ansted is already a gateway to surrounding parks/attractions	< 55 ≥ 55	3.50 4.18	-0.68	-3.174	.002**
2. Ansted is already a tourism destination	< 55 ≥ 55	3.15 3.49	-0.34	-1.476	.144
3. Ansted has the potential to become a tourism destination	< 55 ≥ 55	4.05 4.67	-0.62	-2.984	.004**
4. Ansted can serve as a gateway to surrounding parks/attractions	< 55 ≥ 55	4.05 4.64	-0.58	-2.945	.004**
5. Ansted is visited by a large number of visitors	< 55 ≥ 55	3.03 3.38	-0.35	-1.614	.110
6. Ansted is competitive with surrounding communities in tourism development	< 55 ≥ 55	2.50 3.41	-0.91	-3.531	.001**
7. Ansted should be in partnership with surrounding communities in tourism development	< 55 ≥ 55	4.15 4.49	-0.34	-1.567	.121
8. I favor tourism development in and around Ansted	< 55 ≥ 55	4.13 4.91	-0.78	-3.934	.000**
9. My community should become more of a tourism destination	< 55 ≥ 55	4.05 4.68	-0.63	-3.141	.002**
10. More efforts are needed to beautify my community	< 55 ≥ 55	4.13 4.48	-0.35	-1.887	.063
11. Communities in this region should try to attract more visitors	< 55 ≥ 55	4.33 4.73	-0.40	-2.635	.010**
12. Ansted needs an image or brand design for tourism development	< 55 ≥ 55	3.95 4.42	-0.47	-2.328	.022*
13. Ansted should partner with nearby established tourism businesses	< 55 ≥ 55	4.10 4.58	-0.48	-2.487	.015*
14. Ansted should be a political advocate for Hawks Nest State Park	< 55 ≥ 55	4.41 4.44	-0.03	-0.164	.870

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

### 4.3 Attitudes toward the Impacts of Tourism Development

The respondents generally had positive attitudes towards the impacts of tourism development (Fig. 2). Concerning economic impacts, 90.6 percent believed that tourism development would provide more jobs for local people, 87.1 percent felt that the tourism industry would play a major economic role in the community, and 82.4 percent supported the development of new tourism facilities. However, only 36.9 percent would support tax levies for tourism development and most of the respondents (73.8 percent) did not want gambling to be a tourist activity near the town.

Regarding social impacts, most of the respondents believed that tourism would produce more cultural events (89.3 percent) and an increase in the quality of public services (58.8 percent). Only 15.7 percent believed that crime would increase as a result of tourism. Similarly, only 27.1 percent thought that tourism would cause crowding problems.

The participants were equally optimistic when responding to statements about tourism's potential environmental impacts on their community. Most (87.1 percent) believed that long-term planning by the town and region could control the negative impacts of

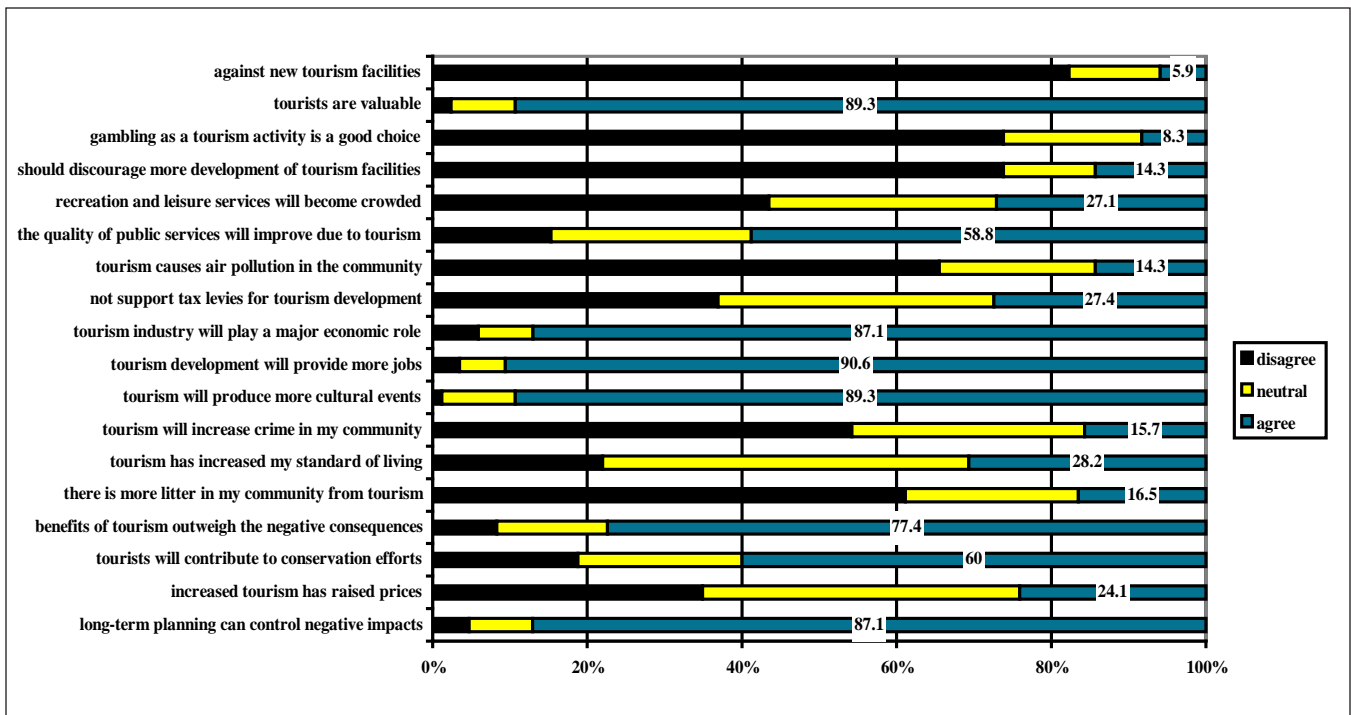


Figure 2.—Attitudes toward the impacts of tourism development.

tourism on the environment and 60.0 percent believed tourists would contribute to conservation efforts in the region. In addition, they did not think that tourism development would lead to increased litter (61.2 percent) or air pollution (82.4 percent). Overall, 77.4 percent of the respondents believed that the benefits of tourism outweigh the negative consequences of tourism development. In addition, 89.3 percent felt that tourists are valuable.

Results of t-tests concerning perceptions of tourism development's impacts are presented in Table 2. There were no significant differences between males and females in their attitudes toward the impacts of tourism development. Moreover, education did not affect participants' responses except for one statement; those residents who had attended college ( $M = 4.40$ ) were more likely than those who had not attended college ( $M = 4.04$ ) to think that tourism would produce more cultural events in the community ( $p < .024$ ). In terms of income, those with higher incomes (\$60,000 or more per year,  $M = 1.84$ ) were significantly less likely than those with lower incomes ( $M = 2.51$ ) to believe crime would increase in the community due to tourism

( $p < .029$ ). In addition, the affluent ( $M = 1.80$ ) were also less likely to feel that there would be more litter in the community as a result of tourism ( $p < .019$ ).

The differences between age groups, however, were again quite prevalent with those age 55 and over being more positive in their attitudes toward tourism development than those under 55. For example, concerning economic impacts and benefits, respondents 55 and over were more likely than their under-55 counterparts to believe that: tourism in the community will play a major economic role ( $M = 4.58$  for 55 and over and  $M = 4.08$  for under 55,  $p < .014$ ); the community should encourage more intensive development of tourism facilities ( $M = 1.60$  for 55 and over and  $M = 2.18$  for under 55,  $p < .034$ ); and the benefits of tourism outweigh the negative consequences of tourism development ( $M = 4.51$  for 55 and over and  $M = 3.76$  for under 55,  $p < .001$ ). In the case of social impacts, those over 55 ( $M = 4.44$ ) believed more strongly than those under 55 ( $M = 4.11$ ) that tourism would produce more cultural events for the community ( $p < .025$ ) and that tourists are valuable ( $M = 4.73$  for the former and  $M = 4.34$  for the latter,

**Table 2.—Difference between age groups in their attitudes toward the impacts of tourism development**

	Age	Mean	Mean Difference	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Long-term planning by my town and region can control the negative impacts of tourism on the environment	< 55	4.10	-0.43	-2.325	.023*
	≥ 55	4.53			
2. Increased tourism has raised prices in general	< 55	2.77	-0.02	-0.098	.922
	≥ 55	2.79			
3. Tourists will contribute to conservation efforts in the region	< 55	3.21	-0.71	-3.188	.002**
	≥ 55	3.91			
4. The benefits of tourism outweigh the negative consequences of tourism development	< 55	3.76	-0.75	-3.332	.001**
	≥ 55	4.51			
5. There is more litter in my community from tourism	< 55	2.46	0.26	1.019	.311
	≥ 55	2.20			
6. Tourism in my community has increased my standard of living	< 55	2.85	-0.24	-0.946	.347
	≥ 55	3.09			
7. Tourism will increase crime in my community	< 55	2.46	0.24	0.924	.358
	≥ 55	2.22			
8. An increase in tourism will produce more cultural events	< 55	4.11	-0.34	-2.287	.025*
	≥ 55	4.44			
9. Tourism development in my community will provide more jobs for local people	< 55	4.23	-0.32	-1.864	.066
	≥ 55	4.56			
10. The tourism industry will play a major economic role in this community	< 55	4.08	-0.50	-2.519	.014*
	≥ 55	4.58			
11. I would not support local tax levies for tourism development	< 55	2.90	0.24	0.832	.408
	≥ 55	2.66			
12. Tourism causes air pollution in the community	< 55	2.26	0.42	1.621	.109
	≥ 55	1.84			
13. The quality of public services will improve due to tourism in my community	< 55	3.46	-0.27	-1.134	.260
	≥ 55	3.73			
14. Many recreation and leisure facilities will become crowded by tourists	< 55	2.72	0.14	0.583	.561
	≥ 55	2.58			
15. The community should discourage more intensive development of tourism facilities	< 55	2.18	0.58	2.156	.034*
	≥ 55	1.60			
16. Gambling as a tourism activity is a good choice for Ansted	< 55	1.68	-0.05	-0.200	.842
	≥ 55	1.73			
17. Tourists are valuable	< 55	4.34	-0.39	-2.275	.026*
	≥ 55	4.73			
18. I am against new tourism facilities, which will attract more tourists to my community.	< 55	1.72	0.38	1.852	.068
	≥ 55	1.33			

Note: \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ .

$p < .026$ ). Regarding environmental impacts, those 55 and over more strongly agreed than those under 55 that long-term planning by the town and region can control negative impacts ( $M = 4.53$  for the former and  $M = 4.10$  for the latter,  $p < .023$ ) and that tourists will contribute to conservation efforts in the region ( $M = 3.91$  for the former and  $M = 3.21$  for the latter,  $p < .002$ ).

Finally, many open-ended comments were written on the surveys. The two main topics were a desire to maintain Ansted's small-town atmosphere and concerns about the negative impacts of nearby strip mining on tourism development and the environment.

## 5.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Residents of the town of Ansted generally held positive views toward initial tourism development in their community. They were more focused on tourism's positive impacts than its negative impacts. In addition, residents' awareness of plans to develop tourism in their community will help them prevent decision-making with which they disagree. In this way, they will be able to maintain ownership over tourism development.

There was a discrepancy between the optimism of respondents age 55 and over and the less positive attitudes of those under the age of 55. This difference may be due to the low representation of respondents in the age 18- to 25-year-old group (3.6 percent) and the 26- to 39-year-old group (7.1 percent). It could also be attributed to a nostalgia that the older generation feels for the town but which the younger generation may lack. Younger people also seem to feel that the town does not have much of an ability to improve and revitalize. Whatever the reasons, it is important that the younger generation, especially those aged 18-25, become more involved with town development planning. If these young people do not feel strongly about Ansted's restoration, it is unlikely that young adults will carry out any tourism planning and implementation. Perhaps a participatory model targeting the 18- to 25-year-old age group could be useful in motivating the younger generation to become more involved in tourism development planning in the community.

As mentioned previously, there is no major concern among respondents about the environmental impacts of tourism development. For example, respondents did not feel tourism would bring more litter or air pollution to the community. This result could be explained by the social exchange theory as discussed above. Similar findings were also reported in Andressen and Murphy's (1986) study of two Canadian communities, where local residents focused on the potential economic benefits of increased tourism and did not think that tourism had created social or environmental problems.

Although the respondents to the Ansted survey believe that the benefits of tourism will outweigh the negative impacts, this response does not mean that negative impacts will not occur. It is important that the community residents recognize these consequences so that they will be able to monitor and attempt to control negative environmental impacts and to plan accordingly if negative impacts are escalating. On a more positive note, the respondents did recognize the importance of long-term planning to control the potential negative environmental impacts of tourism. They also believed that tourists would contribute to environmental conservation efforts in the region.

An interesting finding from this study is that gambling was not regarded as an attractive or appropriate tourism activity. Previous studies have found that casino gambling can be an effective driver of rural economic development in the United States (Reeder & Brown 2005) and that gambling is not strongly opposed in some communities (e.g., Long 1996). This strong contrast suggests that Ansted residents hope to maintain their town's rural atmosphere.

Residents also expressed their wish to maintain their small-town atmosphere in the comments. Small towns are becoming scarce due to urban sprawl and rampant development. The acknowledgement of the value of their small town will greatly benefit the residents of Ansted. They can promote their small town as a unique destination that tourists will want to visit.

This hope was also evident in their comments about outside influences, especially strip mining for coal. If tourists want to come to a small town bordered by beautiful, green hills, they will be sorely disappointed if they come to a small town surrounded by unsightly strip mines. Therefore, the community will need to plan accordingly. Residents may need to engage in dialogue with the coal companies as well as their state representatives in order to stop strip mining or to work out some sort of compromise. If strip mining continues as planned, the community will need to develop a tourism plan that takes the strip mines into consideration. During a conversation with the researcher, one study participant suggested building a



platform for tourists to view the strip mines in order to promote conservation and a grassroots movement against strip mining.

In conclusion, this survey was conducted in conjunction with a tourism planning process and its findings contribute to the understanding of how the community of Ansted, WV, perceives tourism development and its potential impacts.

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