Impacts of Tourism Development on Livelihoods in Placencia Village, Belize

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Impacts of Tourism Development on Livelihoods in Placencia Village, Belize

by

Crystal Ann Vitous

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a concentration in Biocultural Medical Anthropology
Department of Anthropology
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ABSTRACT

Placencia Village is one of Belize’s leading “eco-destinations,” due to its sandy-white beaches, coral reefs, and wildlife sanctuaries. While the use of “green washing,” the process of deceptively marketing products, aims or policies as being environmentally friendly, has proven to be effective in attracting consumers who are thought to be environmentally and socially conscious, the exponential growth, coupled with the absence of established policies, represents a significant threat to Belize. This thesis examines the political-ecologic dimensions of rapid tourism expansion in Southern Belize by investigating how the health of the biophysical environment is perceived, what processes are responsible for change, and how these changes are impacting the socioeconomic livelihoods of the local people.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Although not always recognized as a tourism destination compared with its neighbors, southern Belize now serves as one of the most valuable tourism assets of the region (Diedrich 2010, Vernon 2014). In Placencia Village, located on the Placencia peninsula in Stann Creek District in southern Belize, this can be seen in the intensity and scale of tourism development that has been transpiring since 2001—a period that for many long-term residents marks the end of a transition from fishing to tourism economies. Unfortunately, for many people in the village, this transition is already being threatened due to economic and ecological impacts that this new level of intense tourism development has brought with it.

As an area that has a long history of isolation and proud independence from the central government, the influx of immigration and tourism development has caused profound changes for long-term residents of the village (Spang 2014a). Although there are differing accounts of when rapid changes started to take place, many people of Placencia mention Hurricane Iris in 2001 as a significant marker of intense change in the village (Spang 2014a). Others suggest that the introduction of the paved road in 2010 initiated the scale and intensity of the changes taking place. Many residents also cite the introduction of mass cruise tourism into Harvest Caye in November of 2016 as a major catalyst of change in the village.

Regardless of the cause, these transitions have caused the people of Placencia to experience rampant real estate speculation, the escalated cost of goods and services, and new jobs and wealth bringing in Belizeans and immigrants looking for work (Spang 2014a). In
addition, for some, this transition has also caused environmental degradation, a polluted water supply, an increased strain on wastewater management systems, negative impacts on livelihood, and physical and mental health consequences (Myles 2008).

Beginning in the 1980s, Belize focused on small-scale ecotourism that was based on small, manageable scale marine activities, natural history, and adventure markets (BTB Tourism Policy 2005). These “responsible tourism” practices were centered on being environmentally sound and focused on cultural promotion and involving locals (BTB Tourism Policy 2005). Although the significant majority of long-term residents have favorable feelings on keeping this type of small-scale tourism in the village, the influx of wealthier outsiders and tourists has changed what tourism and development means, as well as who is benefiting. This idea of a “new Placencia” is catering towards high-end tourists and many feel is virtually excluding the local population from being included in the development plans (Alexander 2008). In addition, the policies that incentivize foreign investors and the lack of enforcement of environmental regulations are further perpetuating the problems being felt.

The changes in scale and intensity of development on the peninsula are leaving many long-term residents feeling resentful towards the outsiders coming in. These socio-economic frictions resulting from rapid change and growth are largely being directed towards the people building million-dollar properties, resorts, and gated communities. Simply stated, this new way of life is not how many Belizeans are used to living, nor does it represent a way of life that many want to participate in. This is like what Laurie Medina (2005) observes in her work in the Cayo district of Belize, where there is a strong dichotomy between how the practices of tourism development are perceived between foreign investors and long-term residents of the village. Although the foreign investors see their presence as representing development for all, many of
the Belizeans suspect that this type of development is neither contributing to nor benefitting their economic interests.

**Research Setting**

The research setting of this study was strategically chosen with the help and guidance of faculty from University of South Florida. This study took place in Placencia Village, which is in the Stann Creek district in southern Belize (see Figure 1). The Placencia Peninsula is home to people sharing diverse cultural and linguistic heritages, that reflects influences from the Caribbean, Central America, as well as its status as a former British colony until its independence in 1981. The Placencia Peninsula is bordered by the Placencia Lagoon to the west and a segment of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System to the east. Placencia Village occupies the southern tip of the peninsula. The northern part of the village is an area of intensive tourism, transportation, and residential development that is funded primarily by foreign investment and is emerging as an increasingly popular “eco-destination” because of its sandy white beaches, coral reefs, and wildlife sanctuaries (Boles et al., 2011). Placencia is often referred to as a “barefoot paradise” because of its casual dress, casual bars and restaurants, vendors of souvenirs (Vernon 2014).
Per 2010 Government of Belize census data, the current population of Placencia Village was 1753 people and approximately 644 households at that time (Belize 2010 Census Report UNFPA). It should be noted that things have changed significantly since that census data was collected. Although none of the big developments were established by that time, more reliable numbers are currently unavailable. The average household size is 2.7 people. The population data by cultural group reflects the diverse population of Placencia and includes Creole, Mestizo/Hispanic, Caucasian, Maya, Garifuna, East Indian, Asian, and other (Belize 2010 Census Report UNFPA). See Figure 2 showing an image of the village.
Study Overview

This study utilized an exploratory ethnographic approach to gather qualitative data through in-depth and semi-structured interviews and a photovoice project—a participatory action research method that is designed to empower members of vulnerable groups (Bernard and Gravlee 2015, Wang 1999). In particular, this study looked at perceptions about tourism development among various long-term residents in Placencia Village. In addition, this study looked at the impacts of these changes on livelihoods of residents in the village. This study was conducted over the course of three months, from June through August, 2015.

The in-depth interviews with 12 participants in Placencia Village sought to gather demographic information, to assess collective experiences of tourism development, and to explore personal beliefs about the causes of biophysical changes to the landscape in the village.
The photovoice project (n=7) aimed to elicit visual representations of how participants felt that tourism development has impacted the environment in Belize. As a research assistant on the larger National Science Foundation-funded project entitled “Impacts of Tourism, Wastewater, and Water-energy Development on Livelihoods and the Environment on the Placencia Peninsula of Belize” (USF IRB Study # Pro 00012766), I also carried out dozens of interviews with tourists, residents, and key stakeholders, which provide context for the thesis data collection.

This research used political ecology and anthropology of tourism to ground and inform its approach, both of which are useful to understanding intense tourism development and environmental change. Political ecology offers useful insight into the resulting power structures that are produced in tourism development as well as the ways in which people construct nature, allowing for a broad evaluation of how political, economic, social and ecological inform decisions that are made as well as who ultimately benefits (Robbins 2012, Stonich 1993). Anthropology of tourism acts as a useful accompaniment in evaluating the impacts of tourism at a local level (Stronza 2001).

This research sheds light on the ways rapid large-scale tourism development is being experienced in Belize. The findings from this study contribute to further research in tourism development and guide community-based advocacy in regards to environmental enforcement in southern Belize. Overall, this work builds on current scholarship that highlights the increasing environmental impacts of tourism development in developing areas and demonstrates the implications for livelihoods in Placencia Village, Belize (Alexander 2008, Diedrich 2010, Karlsson and Bryceson 2014, Key 2002, Medina 2005, Sutherland 1998). Research findings will be shared with community members through the sharing of this thesis, the dissemination of an executive summary report, and through the data collected from the photovoice project. This
information can be used to better understand local perceptions and experiences of tourism development on the peninsula.

Research Aims

This research focuses on the attitudes of long-term residents towards tourism development within the setting of Placencia Village, Belize, where the intensity and scale of tourism have grown at an exponential rate following Hurricane Iris. In addition, it captures a better understanding of how the unequal power relations are contributing to the growing inequities between longer-term “local” versus shorter-term “non-local” residents. Finally, this research seeks to place these unequal power relations in a local context, evaluating what impacts the transitioning political ecologies are having on local relationships as well as how Belizeans are adapting to the changing social and environmental landscapes. The overall research aims to:

1. Understand how the health of the environment (aspects of natural and built environment that may affect is perceived, with specific attention to the relationship to tourism development,

2. Explore the concerns that long-term residents of Placencia Village have regarding the impacts of tourism development on their livelihoods and how this compares to other groups in the village (foreign investors, expatriates, short-term residents),

3. Understand the impacts that environmental change has had on the relationship between longer-term “local” versus shorter-term “non-local” residents, and

4. Explore how residents are adjusting to the changing ecological and economic landscape in Placencia Village.
Thesis Outline

Chapter Two presents existing research on tourism development in Belize. This chapter focuses on the historical and political factors that have influenced tourism development in the country. It also provides an overview on current tourism policies and development strategies. This chapter discusses the history of changing political ecologies within the country. These issues are framed in the literature of anthropology of tourism and political ecology. Information is framed in both a broad and local perspective and explains how historical and political factors are influencing development in Belize – ultimately impacting the environment.

Chapter Three presents the research methodology used for this study. The description includes an overview of the larger National Science Foundation research study under which this project was funded, participants, recruitment process, data collection activities, data analysis, positionality, and ethical considerations.

Chapter Four presents qualitative results to address the first and second research questions of the research study. Findings are broken down into sections based on data analyzed from the semi-structured interviews and photovoice project. Each section is broken down further into sub-sections based on findings and themes.

Chapter Five presents qualitative results to address the third and fourth research questions of the research study. Findings are broken down into sections based on data analyzed from the semi-structured interviews and photovoice project. Each section is broken down further into sub-sections based on findings and themes.

Chapter Six presents a critical discussion of the results presented in the previous two chapters. Themes pulled from the findings are explored in detail and considered within the broader context of the social, cultural, and economic factors, which influence the environmental
impacts of tourism development and how this relates to livelihoods. Areas for future research are discussed. Contributions this research makes to applied anthropology are highlighted and limitations of the research are addressed.
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In this chapter, tourism development is examined through the lens of the anthropology of tourism and political ecology. According to environmental anthropologist Amanda Stronza, the anthropology of tourism can conceptually be divided into two halves; one half addresses the origins of tourism, while the other addresses impacts of tourism (2001). Stronza suggests that, even when combined, this bipartite approach only produces a partial analysis of tourism and that the goal should be to “explore incentives and impacts for both tourists and locals throughout all stages of tourism” (261). Stronza asserts that although the study of the anthropology of tourism provides an ideal context for studying political economy, social change and development, natural resource management, and cultural identity, we still lack an understanding of why people and communities engage in tourism the way they do. Political ecology, then, acts as the perfect complement for allowing these relations of power to be analyzed, specifically within the context of the environment (Robbins 2012, Stonich 1993). Drawing on scholarship in the field of political ecology, control over land and natural resources in Belize are placed in context of the history of colonialism and the reliance on external capital globally and locally.

Furthermore, this chapter provides an overview of development and tourism policies in Belize, with specific regard to the impacts that these policies have had on the livelihoods of the local population. This chapter also describes the theoretical models used to guide this research in both practice and analysis: anthropology of tourism and political ecology and why they are appropriate to address the research questions.
Brief Historical Overview

According to Johnson, Belize has historically been characterized by a small white political elite ruling over a majority black slave population, with a “mid-size free colored, free black and poor white population” occupying the middle of this hierarchy (2003, 601). In 1506 Spanish conquistadors declared it a colony but did not settle the land, due to its supposed lack of resources (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006). In the 17th and 18th centuries, English and Scottish settlers and pirates, a group known as “Baymen,” entered the area and established a logwood trade colony, slave economy, and port in what is now known as the Belize District (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006). The Baymen first settled the area in 1638 in search of a sheltered area in which they could attack Spanish ships (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006). Turning to cutting logwood in the 18th century, the settlers established slave labour using black slaves (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006). The logwood produced a fixing agent for clothing that was valuable to the wool industry, resulting in the Spanish granting British settlers the right to occupy the land in exchange for an end to piracy (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006).

Prior to 1786, Belize was not recognized as a colony because of the fear that establishing it as such would provoke a Spanish attack (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006). This delay in oversight allowed for the settlers to establish their own form of government, resulting in a few wealthy settlers gaining control of local legislature known as Public Meeting (Johnson 2003). In the 19th century, the British wanted more control over the settlers and threatened to suspend Public Meeting unless it eliminated slavery (Johnson 2003).

Although slavery was abolished in 1833, it did little to change the working conditions in the new colony (Myles 2008, Wilk 2006). The British settler oligarchy maintained control by monopolizing the land in order to ensure an abundant agricultural labor force, denying ex-slaves

Once recognized as a colony, Belize started to attract British investors. This was in part due to the falling prices in the world market for forest commodities in the 1850s, which resulted in settlers who dominated these markets filing for bankruptcy (Johnson 2003, Wilk 2006). British firms purchased many of these holdings, with the Belize Estate and Produce Company coming to acquire half of all privately held land (Johnson 2003). Although attempts were made by England to develop plantation crops, the Great Depression of the 1930s coupled with a devastating hurricane in 1931 led to a decrease in expenditure and investment, creating deteriorating working conditions of the lower classes (Myles 2008, Wilk 2006).

The economy continued to face stagnation due to the debts accumulated during World War II, leading to Britain’s decision to devalue the British Honduras dollar in 1949 (Johnson 2003). This decision worsened the economic conditions and led to the formation of the People’s Committee, whose main intention was to demand the independence of the country (Johnson 2003). In 1954, the People’s United Party (PUP) won the first election under universal suffrage and sought to expand constitutional reforms by expanding voting rights to all adults (Johnson 2003). The PUP considered widespread poverty to be the result of colonial exploitation and viewed the solution as being economic growth with reinvestment in Belize (Medina 2004, Shoman 2011). Although under self-government since 1964, British Honduras was officially renamed Belize in 1973 and independence was officially granted on September 21, 1981 (Johnson 2003).
Although the United Democratic Party (UDP) defeated the PUP in 1984, the PUP returned to power in 1989 (Commonwealth Network 2016). Guatemala formally recognized Belize’s independence in 1992 and withdrew the majority of British soldiers in 1994, though disagreements about borders and land control between Guatemala and Belize continue until today. The UDP regained power in 1993, again under the leadership of Manuel Esquivel. Esquivel suspended the pact with Guatemala reopening the border tensions that continued into the early 21st century. In 1998, the PUP won the national elections under Said Musa. The PUP maintained majority in 2003, with Musa continuing as prime minister. Musa pledged to improve conditions in the underdeveloped southern portions of the country. In 2005, Belize faced unrest due to discontent with the PUP, setting the stage for Dean Barrow of UDP to be sworn in as the first black prime minister of the country in 2008. Since gaining its independence, a British garrison has been retained at the request of the Belizean government.

Belize is currently a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth as symbolic Sovereign (Commonwealth Network 2016). It is a democratic, bi-cameral legislature is based on the Westminster system Sovereign. The executive power belongs to the Minister Cabinet, which is under the leadership of the Prime Minister Sovereign. The legislative power belongs to the Senate and the House of Representatives Sovereign. The 12-member Senate is appointed by the Governor-General and serves a term of five years Sovereign. The 29-member House of Representatives is elected by direct popular vote and also serves a term of five years Sovereign. The two major political parties are the PUP and UDP.

In Belize, the politics of colonialism have long been related to the politics of development, as colonial legacies of a former British colony continue to play out today. Prior to the 1983 victory by the UDP, tourism received little government support in the country and was
not seen as a desirable form of development (Myles 2008, Wilk 2006). The UDP, which embraced more liberal economic policies, encouraged foreign investment when it realized the widespread appeal of tourism and started to promote it as a way to earn foreign exchange and further economic development (Myles 2008, Wilk 2006). This combined with a severe balance of trading deficit, forced the newly elected government to start borrowing money from the IMF the same year it came into power (Moberg 1992, Myles 2008). Due to pressure exerted by the IMF and World Bank, tourism became a viable way to diversify the economy. In 1989, the UDP approved the Integrated Tourism Policy and Strategy Statement, which made tourism the countries second economic priority next to agriculture (Mowforth and Munt 2003, Myles 2008).

The attention to tourism as an economic development strategy was further bolstered when the PUP returned to power in 1989 (Myles 2008, Wilk 2006). Although previously opposed, the government was eager to capitalize on the new trend in vacation travel and became oriented towards an approach focused on respecting and restoring nature, preserving and valuing local culture, and building sustainable development (Belsky 1999, Myles 2008, Wilk 2006). New marketing strategies were employed to appeal to tourists who were interested in more "authentic", "individualized" and "natural" tropical experiences (Belsky 1999, 647).

**Development Policies**

In Belize, many of the state’s economic development projects take the form of tourism, land-development, and increasingly, eco-tourism and sustainable development. But the focus remains on attracting external capital, rather than addressing the needs of the local inhabitants. Although Belize has not always been recognized as a tourism destination compared with its neighbors, the number of tourists jumped from 86,000 in 1991 to 176,100 in 1998 (Diedrich
By 2008, this number increased to 245,000, contributing between 18% to 25% of Belize’s total GDP (NSTMP 2011). A more significant increase can be seen in the amount of cruise visitors, which increased to 597,000 in 2008 (NSTMP 2011). According to Diedrich, the exponential growth, coupled with the absence of fully established policies for managing resulting impacts, “represents a significant threat to natural and cultural resources and the future of tourism in Belize” (2010, 235). This point is further discussed below.

The reliance on external markets creates a situation where the economic performance of Belize is contingent on world commodity pricing as well as the continuation of preferential trading agreements, particularly when it comes to agriculture (Key 2002, Vernon 2014). In 2012, the U.S. gave over seven million dollars in aid (USAID 2015). Further, in 2014, the U.S. accounted for 35% or 312 million of Belize’s total exports and provided 31% or 105 million of all Belizean imports (U.S. Department of State 2015). Private U.S. investors play a key role in the economy, particularly with tourism, being responsible for $250 million in total investments (U.S. Department of State 2015). It is estimated that approximately 70 to 90 percent of the country’s freehold land is foreign owned and nearly 65 percent of the members of the Belize Tourism Association are foreigners (McMinn and Cater 1998). The Belizean economy is currently being characterized by a debt crisis largely influenced by its reliance on the export of natural resources and tourism, both of which are contingent on market fluctuations and environmental change (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014).

Belize is currently a member of the British Commonwealth, the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM), the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization of American
States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank, and of many other regional and international organizations.

**Tourism in Belize and the Placencia Peninsula**

In 1999, a group of predominantly foreign lodge-owners in the Cayo district formed the Belize Ecotourism Association (BETA) with the interest of promoting ecotourism in the country (Medina 2005). According to Medina, this organization asserted that the efforts of their organization were adequately benefiting the local community by creating job growth in various service sectors (2005). One lodge-owner stated that these practices helped the local community members to become a part of the tourism project, rather than just being on the outside looking in (Medina 2005, 289).

This perception stands in contrast to how organizations like the Small Hotel Association (SHA) and the Cayo Tour Guide Association (CTGA) view the economic gains of these investments. Not viewing long-term foreign investors as being “local” or as contributing to the local economy, the perception is that foreign investors are not providing economic benefit to the local community but rather “pursuing their own self-interest rather than the greater good of Belize” (Medina 2005, 290). While the SHA acknowledges the need for additional regulations, it also fears that the enforcement of stricter regulations would create standards that are too high for local businesses, effectively “regulat[ing] the little ones right out of business” (Medina 2005, 290). In addition, there is concern that this population would be excluded from the process of establishing standards as they lack adequate knowledge of how tourism markets are structured and are often intimidated by the assertiveness of foreign investors in public meetings (Medina 2005).
Although tourism accounts for approximately 28% of employment (NSTMP 2011), many investors fail to recognize that locals understand that wage labor is intended to benefit the employer and that working for someone else is not how they want to participate in the local economy (Medina 2005). Unfortunately, while local business owners do exist on the peninsula, the inequitable access to financial resources prevents many Belizeans from obtaining what would be required to become a business owner (Medina 2005). These sentiments not only stand in opposition to what international experts’ deem as providing economic benefits to the community, but places small groups at a distinct disadvantage to foreign-investors (Medina 2005).

Although “backpacker” tourism has long existed in Belize, it became increasingly desirable in the mid-1980s when it was featured on a 60 Minutes segment as one of the “last pieces of undiscovered paradise where one could retreat to a simple lifestyle unspoiled by civilization” (Sutherland 1998, 92). This endorsement made Belize desirable to people who were looking to escape modernism. Possessing no industry or manufacturing base; a poor infrastructure of roads, electricity, telecommunications, education, waste disposal, and port facilities; and very rudimentary agricultural production, Sutherland proposes that the sudden introduction to globalization caused Belize to “skip” the transition to modernism and go straight to postmodernism (1998, 3).

Backpacker tourism flourished in Belize during the 1990s as a part of the “Ruta Maya” circuit where low-budget travelers would tour through Yucatán peninsula, Belize, and Guatemala to see Maya archaeological sites, and stay in small budget hotels or family-run lodges on beaches and inland rural areas (pers. Comm. R. Zarger). Placencia, with its less expensive and more informal accommodations, appealed to this clientele and became one of the stopping points for these travelers. In Placencia Village, families hosted tourists in second story apartments in their
homes on the beach and in one and two story motels situated throughout lush groves of mango trees, coconuts, and colorful houses on stilts concentrated on the southern tip of the peninsula. During this decade, smaller luxury lodges catering primarily to American diving or fishing tourists were established along the peninsula, which had an unpaved, very rough road and a sand airstrip. The village was also served by the Hokey Pokey, a small boat taxi service run by a local family from Mango Creek to Placencia village, a service that continues today (pers. Comm. R. Zarger).

An additional influx of intensive tourism and economic development on the Placencia Peninsula began to emerge after the devastation caused by Hurricane Iris in 2001. Quickly becoming one of the most popular tourist destinations in Belize, tourists come from all over the world to experience a small piece of what is commonly advertised as a utopian paradise. With many of the attractions touting the framework of “ecotourism” and “sustainability,” consumers are being sold on an idea of an “authentic experience,” concepts that imply a level of reciprocity being offered back to the local community (Myles 2008). Unfortunately, the realities of tourism development for some of the local residents have instead caused environmental degradation, a polluted water supply, an increased strain on wastewater management systems, negative impacts on livelihood, and physical and mental health consequences (Myles 2008), all of which can be said to be the unintended consequences of decision-making practices related to land ownership and the uneven outcomes that emerge due to these choices.

Ecotourism

As described earlier in this chapter, ecotourism began to emerge as an important economic strategy for Belize in the 1980s. According to recent research by Medina, however, there are “some key terms used in defining ecotourism and setting criteria for its evaluation [that]
may have multiple and contested meanings within and across local and international arenas” (2005, 293). Using a case study from Belize, Medina asserts the following disagreements from key stakeholders in Belize: (1) who should count as 'local', (2) what should count as 'participation' by locals, and (3) what constitutes a 'benefit' to local communities (2005). When evaluating certification programs that push towards sustainable practices, some critics argue that because the people in charge of developing these criteria are often from developed countries and/or transnational corporations based out of those countries, the policies often privilege the interests of global North over the global South (Medina 2005). Medina asserts that the standards set by these governing entities are often too low to protect environment and too high for small and medium enterprises to meet, thereby perpetuating and making worse inequalities between global North and South (2005). In addition, the process of eco-labeling causes confusion among consumers, which Medina proposes causes difficulty in operating these programs effectively (Medina 2005).

Medina also proposes that “Belizeans draw lines between 'foreign' and 'local' in structurally different places than some international ecotourism experts” (2005, 292). According to Medina, Belizeans problematize the concept of participation in the following different ways: (1) regarding how people desire to participate in ecotourism development— as employees or entrepreneurs, and (2) regarding the arenas available for participatory planning and assessment of ecotourism development and the degree to which different stakeholders are able to have a voice in the decisions being made (2005). According to data collected for the case study, Medina draws the conclusion that Belizean villagers “express a desire towards self-employment over wage labor, perceiving the latter to benefit the employer more than the worker” (Medina 2005, 293). This sentiment poses serious obstacles for Belizean villagers in terms of financial
resources, business knowledge, and tourism expertise that need to be addressed (Medina 2005, Moreno 2005).

Qualified Retired Persons Incentive Program

In addition to the inequities established by the policies of ecotourism, there are other regulations that disproportionally benefit outsiders more than long-term residents of the village. An example of this is the Qualified Retired Persons Incentive Program (QRP), which is an initiative processed by the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) in 1999 in collaboration with the Ministry of National Security and Department of Immigration and Nationality (BTB n.d.). It was created for retirees who want to live in Belize and can prove a source of permanent income from investments (abroad or in Belize), pensions, or other retirement benefits. Anyone over the age of 45 can qualify, including spouses and children under the age of 18. The BTB markets this program as being desirable because of the tax breaks, the sub-tropical climate, and the easy access to land for development and the abundance of natural resources. All designated QRPs are entitled to import personal effects and approved means of transportation (cars, boats, small aircraft) free of import duties and taxes. QRPs are also exempt from taxes and duties on all work or investment income from outside of Belize. In exchange, recipients of the benefits are not supposed to work for pay while in the program.

In areas like Placencia, a growing number of tourists are deciding to purchase land in what was once referred to as a quiet fishing village. The country has developed a strong reputation of providing a haven for wealthy Americans escaping tax laws and avoiding harsh drug sentences (Sutherland 1998). In what can best be described as a “lifestyle migration,” many Westerners are becoming Belizean citizens through the UDP-instituted Economic Citizenship Program where passports can be purchased for U.S. $25,000 (Sutherland 1998). The practice of
the government selling citizenship is a controversial idea in Belize with those in opposition
“accusing the party in power of ‘selling’ the country to foreigners to put money in its political
coffers” (Sutherland 1998, 27).

Tourism Strategies

In the mid 1980s, Belize began to pursue tourism as an economic development strategy, with more than 40% of the country being designated as protected areas (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014). As tourism began to increase in Belize, the state started to formalize the tourist economy, gaining authority through taxation (Key 2002). In the 1980s new laws emerged to accommodate tourists, but there was not a lot of enforcement on these new regulations (Key 2010).

The Draft Tourism Policy for Belize

The country established its first national tourism strategy in 1998 (Diedrich 2010). The Draft Tourism Policy for Belize, for example, was a result of a study commissioned by the Ministry of Tourism, and carried out by the Blackstone Corporation of Toronto, Canada in association with Help for Progress, a Belizean non-governmental organization (Diedrich 2010). This collaboration resulted in the creation of what is commonly referred to as the Blackstone Report, which was fundamental in the sense that it brought “responsible, ecologically and culturally oriented tourism development to the forefront of national discussions about Belize’s future” (Diedrich 2010, 235). The chief declaration of the Blackstone report states:

The fact that Belize is attracting the high-yield, upscale tourist means it does not need to resort to attracting mass tourists, who tend to spend less, are less culturally sensitive and who typically require large, homogenous types of hotel products that place stress on the natural environment, and which often see much of the wealth escaping back to non-
resident owners. The type of tourism that Belize has chosen unwaveringly to pursue through its protection of the environment and the adoption of “ecotourism” is a tremendous strength in and of itself (1998, 7).

The current version of the Blackstone Report acknowledges the importance of this original recommendation and warns that the exponential growth in tourism places Belize at risk of losing its identity as an ecotourism destination as it moves closer to embodying the characteristics of a mass tourism destination (Diedrich 2010).

In her work evaluating the neoliberal governance of ecotourism and conservation politics in Belize, Medina provides a case study from the Cockscomb jaguar sanctuary that demonstrates how in areas like Belize, ecotourism has emerged as a “market-based mechanism for protecting ecosystems that emerged at the confluence of biodiversity and debt crises” (2010, 247-48). Medina describes how, at the urging from Belizean and North American conservation groups, Mopan Mayan villagers lost access to forest resources they counted on for their livelihoods (2010). According to Medina, with the Belize Audubon Society in charge of running the sanctuary, the concept of ecotourism was used as a way to generate revenue to cover operating costs, turning the sanctuary and surrounding communities into a “global market for protected tropical nature” (Medina 2010, 273). Medina suggests that this way of managing ecotourism and conservation projects in Belize and other areas of Central America leads to the eviction of people from their land and for those not relocated, restricts access to resources that people need to make a living (2010).

Similarly, in providing data from three case studies in Central America—including Ambergris Caye and the town of Punta Gorda in Belize—Moreno evaluates how a joint tourism promotion pact signed in 1988 by the presidents of Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras,
and Mexico paved way for less restricted tourism and promotion of foreign investment (2005). This was followed by a similar declaration in 1996 that attracted support from the World Bank, IDB, USAID, and United Nations (Moreno 2005). The main goal of these pacts was to secure technical and financial aid from the European Union for expansion of tourism (Moreno 2005). These pacts stand in opposition to ecotourism, which is focused on “advance planning, development within existing settlements, local developers, and consideration for ecological and social issues” (Butler 1999, 218).

**National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan of Belize 2030**

The National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan of Belize 2030 (NSTMP) outlines a strategic approach that is believed to provide the country with a dynamic, competitive, and sustainable tourism industry (NSTMP 2011). Some of the guiding principles of this plan include that the local environment will play a meaningful role in tourism, that tourism activity will be designed to improve the quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of Belize, and that there will be a better management of tourism resources (NSTMP 2011). The NSTMP proposes that the main stakeholders for this plan are Belize Tourism Board (BTB), National Sustainable Tourism Trust Fund (NSTTF), and Belize Trade and Investment Development Service (BELTRAIDE), believing that this will open the market for several opportunities of investment including ecotourism and adventure tourism, nature tourism, sun and beach resorts, facilities for cruise tourism, as well as nautical tourism (BELTRAIDE 2012). Ironically, the major stakeholders of this plan do not include the voice of smaller NGOs or other grassroots operations, organizations that would typically focus more attention to small operators.
Cruise Tourism

According to Vernon, a long-time resident, the residents of Placencia have worked hard to build a responsible tourism model that both preserves the quality of life and natural resources of the village (Vernon 2014). Vernon suggests that many residents feel that mass cruise tourism will destroy what the village has worked so hard to develop (Vernon 2014). Similar concerns have been unfolding in Belize City where talk of the potential rapid increase of cruise tourism “necessitates immediate and thorough attention to understanding the potential implications from environmental and socio-economic perspectives and also in terms of how it might affect the current overnight tourism market” (Diedrich 2010, 234). In Placencia, the debate on cruise tourism has been going on since it was first proposed on the peninsula in 2010, when Royal Caribbean Cruise Line wanted to establish Placencia as a port of call (Vernon 2014). Hundreds of Placencia residents and major investors showed up to voice their opposition to this initial proposal during a public consultation in Placencia Village (Vernon 2014). Concerns over limited economic opportunities for the village, environmental concerns, and threats to overnight tourism are cited as the main reasons residents opposed the proposal (Boles 2011, Ramos 2010, Vernon 2014).

Following the Royal Caribbean Cruise Line proposal and wanting to be proactive rather than reactive to what was going on in the village, a coalition of citizens and community groups initiated the Peninsula 2020 initiative (Usher and Flowers 2011). The project was funded by the World Wildlife Fund, with the local chapter of the BTIA acting as the contracting party (Usher and Flowers 2011). A steering committee, which included the Placencia and Seine Bight Village Councils, the Southern Environmental Association, the Placencia BTIA, the Placencia Fishermen’s Cooperative, the Placencia Tour Guide Association, the Placencia Tour Operators
Association and the Peninsula Citizens for Sustainable Development, guided the project and chose consultants Mark Usher and John Flowers to conduct research and produce a report (Usher and Flowers 2011). Although not legally binding, the document is a product of community voices and concerns and has been provided to government, private developers, NGO’s, and local and international financial institutions (Usher and Flowers 2011). The main recommendations of the report call for new laws as well as the enforcement of existing laws (Usher and Flowers 2011).

It is worth mentioning that the steering committee of the Peninsula 2020 initiative contained a mix of organizations–some staffed primarily by Belizeans and Placencia-born residents and others mostly by non-locals. Certain tensions exist between these different groups in terms of their agendas relating to tourism development in the village. Although these groups may not always see eye to eye, they came together to write the plan nonetheless.

Despite the efforts of the local coalition, in 2013 Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) made a second proposal to the government of Belize. The original version of this plan called for NCL to purchase Crawl Caye, a nearby island, where large ships could dock and unload passengers on the Placencia beach (Vernon 2014). Despite opposition from BTIA who remained firmly against cruiseship tourism, this US$50 million-dollar investment was justified with the promise of economic opportunity for both the local villages as well as for the government (BTIA 2013, Vernon 2014).

It should be noted that the topic of cruiseship tourism has been a source of conflict with people in Placencia. In 2014, at the start of the larger NSF project that this thesis research contributes to, our research team found that nearly half of participants surveyed expressed at least somewhat favorable feelings about pocket cruise tourism, or ships carrying less than 300
passengers (Zarger et al. 2016). Participants from the project expressed feeling that small-scale
cruise tourism could have potential gains, specifically in regards to employment opportunities—a
sentiment that is also reflected in the literature (Boles 2011). This support, however, seemed to
decline in each field season as residents learned more about the project and expressed growing
concern over environmental impacts, lack of infrastructure, and the lack of high-paying
employment opportunities (Zarger et al. 2016).

The original site of Crawl Caye was abandoned as a potential site after environmentalists
brought to the attention of the government that it is a marine reserve, which formed part of a
consent for construction on Harvest Caye, a 70-acre island three miles south of Placencia, in
2014 (Vernon 2014). The first cruiseship docked at Harvest Caye in November of 2016. To date
(January 2017) it is unclear what the impacts of cruiseship tourism will be in the coming years,
but this will certainly be a process that demands future ethnographic research.

**Changing Political Ecologies**

Belize has experienced a history of social change largely influenced by global and
economic processes (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014) over a period of more than 200 years (Wilk
2006). As Karlsson and Bryceson suggest, the natural resource extraction of timber, agricultural
exports (bananas, sugar, and citrus), and then marine products are examples of how livelihoods
in Belize “have been continuously influenced by broader political-economic relations and
processes transcending the national boundaries” (2014, 2). In more recent years, tourism has
been employed as an economic development strategy that has significantly transformed coastal
livelihoods in Belize (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014). Researchers suggest that the adaptations
made in response to these environmental changes cannot be evaluated without examining the historical connections between macro and local levels (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014, Whitehead 2002, Wilk 2006).

In evaluating livelihood shifts and adaptation in coastal Belize, Karlsson and Bryceson found that it was common for informants to describe life “before” as being simpler and easier due to their access to resources (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014). While appreciating the greater access to cash income, many informants asserted that fishing and tour guiding were the only accessible occupations to locals in the village and many felt that the next generation “was expected to invent and fight for their own livelihoods… that discontinuity rather than stability in ways of making a living was anticipated and accepted” (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014, 13). Karlsson and Bryceson assert that this sentiment is largely driven by the fact that valuable natural resources are likely to change in the future, with livelihood adaptations being partially driven by global consumer demands (2014). The authors further assert that environmental threats, such as pollution, coastal development, climate change, shoreline erosion, and decreased precipitation are “likely to constrict future adaptation options” (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014, 14).

In his work in Caye Caulker, King also evaluates livelihood transitions in Belize. Documenting how lobster fishing—the main way of making a living in the area—is currently “changing in the face of other changes locally, nationally, and globally, as more tourists visit Caye Caulker and fishermen produce more lobster for export,” King suggests that tourism has caused a new market for lobsters resulting in undersized and prereproductive lobsters being sold to local restaurants (1997, 456). If fishermen continue to harvest small-sized lobsters at the present rate, fishermen will experience negative consequences in the form of lobster depletion
According to King, this will have reverberating effects on all Caye Caulker villagers who derive their livelihood not only from tourism but also from a steady supply of lobsters (1997). Although the more successful fishermen on Caye Caulker have invested their earnings in the areas of equipment and materials for fishing, tourism development, and education for their children, these adaptation strategies are limited to those with the financial means to participate in these options.

In her work on food studies, Spang also evaluates how local Belizeans are adjusting to a changing economic landscape by focusing on linking the countries two biggest industries, tourism and agriculture (2014a). Spang describes how the growth of food tourism as a sector of the industry has caused tourists to demand a wide range of novel offerings, and hosts to provide them (2014a). By marketing Belizean foodways as a series of “exotic” ethnic cuisines, local chefs and restaurants are adjusting to the changing demographics in their country (2014a).

The people of Belize have long been influenced by the changing political economies influenced by larger local and global processes. As tourism continues to be used as a development strategy, Belizeans are challenged with continuing to find ways to adapt to their ever-changing environmental and socio-economic landscapes. Although the adaptations made to these changing landscapes have impacted people at many different levels, it is becoming increasingly difficult for many Belizeans to continue to find ways to sustain their economic livelihoods.

**Anthropology of Tourism**

Martha Honey (1999, 25) summarizes the ideal framework of ecotourism as being:

[T] ravel to fragile, pristine and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact
and small scale. It helps educate the traveler, provide funds for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities and fosters respect for different cultures and human rights.

Unfortunately, while the use of green washing, the process of deceptively marketing products, aims or policies as being environmentally friendly, has proven to be effective in attracting consumers who are presumably environmentally and socially conscious, there is a growing dichotomy between “what ecotourism should be and the pragmatics of what it ultimately becomes” (Hunt et al. 2011, 376). With little regulation regarding terms that elicit social and environmental responsibility, the realities of many ecotourism projects tend to include an increase in social differentiation, a growing gap between the rich and poor, the assignment of low status low paid jobs, reduced access to natural resources, escalating cost of food, manufactured goods, housing and land cost, outside ownership of resources, and the deterioration of the biophysical environment (Stonich 1998). Among other things, these realities have significant impact on the shifts and adaptations that people have had to make in regards to their livelihoods. A political economic analysis of ecotourism does not see much difference between traditional tourism and ecotourism, considering them both to be a threat to local economies, cultures and environments (Hall 1994).

Similarly, the ideal of sustainability is defined by Chambers, an anthropologist of tourism, as being an “assurance that a resource can be put to human use without threatening its ability to replenish itself” (Chambers 2000, 85). Much like ecotourism, however, the concept of sustainability often fails to embody its definition, especially in regards to tourism development. The ability to accommodate the ever-increasing number of tourists and the lack of sufficient infrastructure often poses a significant threat to the local populations (Chambers 2000).
In Belize, the framework of anthropology of tourism is particularly useful in examining the impacts that tourism development has had on the local environment as well as the livelihoods of local community members. More specifically, when combined with political ecology, this framework is beneficial in evaluating how relations of power influence social change and development as well as how resources are managed. In order to develop forms of tourism that can be equally beneficial, we need to study the relations of power in context of tourism that determines who wins and who loses (Stonich 2000, Stronza 2001, Young 1999).

**Political Ecology**

In the 1960s, a new Left emerged as “a critical response to the limited impact of environmentalism in face of the magnitude of the ecological crisis, as well as in reaction to the failure of Marxism and social democracy to transform society” (Roussopoulos 1994, 89). Focused on grassroots democracy, proponents of this perspective assert that ecology cannot be divorced from politics and sought to redefine “the quality of life in opposition to the ideology of limitless growth and endless accumulation of commodities on which the existing consumer society is founded” (Roussopoulos 1993, 87). Officially coining the term *political ecology* in the 1970s, Eric Wolf used this framework to "mediate between the pressures emanating from the larger society and the exigencies of the local ecosystem" (Wolf 1972, 202).

Since its introduction in the 1970s, political ecology has been used extensively to examine the connections between how actors (such as farmers, consumers, transnational lending banks, and national governments) alter the environmental landscape in ways that either fit their needs or are prevented from doing so by those that possess more power (Whiteford et al., 2016).
Susan Stonich asserts that the essential elements of political ecological analysis should encompass:

- the *ideologies* that direct resource use and influence which social actors benefit and which are disadvantaged; *international interests* such as donor agencies or private investors that promote particular patterns of natural resource use; the function of the *global economy* in promoting particular patterns of resource use; the *role of the state* in determining and implementing policies that favor the interests of certain social actors over those of others; the relationship of *class and ethnic structures* to conflicts over access to productive resources; the interrelations among *local resource users* and groups of society who affect resource use; and *diversity in* the decisions of local resource managers (Stonich 1993, 29)

Researchers from a variety of disciplines including anthropology, geography, political science and history use political ecology—with a recent upsurge associated with the influence of Blaikie and Brookfield who combine political economy with issues of ecology (Stonich 1993).

Political ecology evaluates the ways in which international and state forces influence the actions of local people on their environment as well as how to influence policymakers of the complexities surrounding environment and development (Robbins 2012, Stonich 1998). These evaluations focus on the relative power of various stakeholders, particularly in relation to the access and management of natural resources, and further links these actors through relations of power (Stonich 1998). Political ecology finds that impoverishment is often connected to reduced access to land and natural resources due to the actions of more powerful individuals and corporations (Stonich 1998). In addition, large-scale enterprises, along with individuals with
more power, are often granted land on concessionary terms by the state (Stonich 1998). According to Stonich, this “allows them to treat land as low-cost input and more economical to move elsewhere after destroyed rather than attempt to conserve it” (1998, 30).

Stonich further asserts that because of the policies that are institutionalizing unequal access to resources, the same policies that are creating favorable conditions for the wealthy are responsible for the impoverishment of others (1998). According to Bryant and Bailey, political ecology is based on the following three assumptions: 1) the costs and benefits of environmental change are uneven; 2) the unequal distribution reinforces social and economic inequalities; and 3) these inequities hold policy implications in regards to uneven power (1997).

In Placencia, a political-ecologic framework is useful to examine the shift in its economic base from fishing to tourism and how that shift has impacted the quality of life for local community members. When Placencia was a fishing village, the local community relied on marine resources for their own consumption and a limited local market (Key 2002). Eventually, the high price paid for lobster and conch in areas like the United States led to a decade of exploitation for marine resources, promoting the organization of a fishing cooperative movement (Key 2002, Sutherland 1998). While the success of this initiative decreased the exploitation by Western nations, it led to overfishing from locals as well as fishermen from other parts of Belize and poachers from Honduras and Guatemala (Key 2002, Sutherland 1998). Facing a decline in profits in the 1990s, villagers began to turn to tourism related enterprises, creating a reliance on external markets (Key 2002, Sutherland 1998).

In countries like Belize, tourism as a development strategy has had the ability to obstruct peoples’ ability to make citizenship claims for access to environmental resources (Myles 2008). In addition, transnational forces have long influenced Belize, meaning that land has been
occupied and altered by human influences for thousands of years (Myles 2008). The focus on political ecology allows for a reevaluation on the ecotourism and conservation claims so frequently made by foreign investors, such as Belize being “Mother Nature’s Best Kept Secret” (Stinson 2013).

In her work in the Placencia Peninsula in Belize, Sara Alexander evaluates how the neoliberal capitalist interests following Hurricane Iris increased the vulnerability of families living in poverty (2008). Despite the residents’ desire to want to rebuild the area as it had been, the government went forward with their promotion of a “new Placencia,” one that not only catered towards high end tourists but also virtually excluded the local population from being included in the development plans (Alexander 2008). With little assistance being offered by the government, the aftermath of the storm left many households not only financially vulnerable but also with serious emotional trauma and social collapse (Alexander 2008). With limited opportunity for maintaining their livelihood, many landowners eventually reluctantly chose to sell their land to large developers, making way for the village to be “developed” into an international tourist destination (Alexander 2008, 111). With very few options available for relocation, many of these populations have been displaced and those who chose to stay face a different set of challenges.

**Placencia Today**

What was once a sleepy fishing village has emerged as an increasingly popular destination on the Caribbean. Today, Placencia boasts a number of amenities, including coffee shops, internet cafes, the harbor, guesthouses, casual bars, and local restaurants (Vernon 2014). Souvenir vendors line the 4,071-foot long walkway that runs through the village selling jewelry,
hammocks, baskets, woodcarvings, and paintings (Vernon 2014). The village also has other features such as a gas station, four banks, multiple real estate offices, a post office, a police station, a social security office, and a medical center (Vernon 2014). Several businesses and grocery stores can be found on the main road. Many people still refer to the village as a “barefoot paradise” because of its casual dress of no shirt and no shoes (Vernon 2014). According to Vernon, Placencia is still relatively special compared to other places in the Caribbean and is “a place where friendly people live as against a place where people visit (2014, 19).”

Although the increase in tourism development has created some benefits in the village, there are definite disparities that exist when it comes to who has access to tourism profits. With the economic benefits not being distributed evenly, the shifting scale of tourism development has raised concerns about the changing environment, access to resources, and changes in livelihood (Zarger et al. 2016). Many residents’ express concerns that they are losing the small-scale tourism that has historically characterized the peninsula and instead seeing more mass tourism, a product of growing foreign investment (Zarger et al. 2016). According to Zarger and colleagues, these changes illustrate a “complex and shifting socio-economic and political landscape,” wherein the ideas about the scale and types of tourism that are considered desirable are dependent on individual perspectives and social categories such as age, gender, occupation and ethnicity (2016).

The current concerns of Placencia Village include concerns over involvement, ownership, access to resources, and increasing costs associated with large-scale development projects on the peninsula such as cruiseship tourism on Harvest Caye (Boles et al. 2011, Peninsula 2020 Initiative 2011, Zarger et al. 2016). More specifically, a significant number of residents express the need for greater community control over access to information as well as the means to
participate in decision-making processes for development projects and resource management technologies impacting the peninsula (Zarger et al. 2016). In the next chapter, I describe the methods used in this study and rationale for their selection.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Current research on tourism development in Belize has drawn primarily on qualitative data. This anthropological approach is useful when looking at attitudes towards tourism development, perception on changes in the biophysical environment, and access and control over resources in developing nations. In this project, an ethnographic study design was combined with a photovoice project in order to bring to light issues that are specific to Placencia Village in a way that encourages community empowerment and participation. This research was conducted over a ten-week period during the summer of 2015.

Data Collection

The primary methods of data collection for this project were qualitative and included the review of data collected as part of a larger National Science Foundation-funded project, participant observation, daily recording of field notes, semi-structured interviews, and a photovoice project. More details on how each method was used can be referred to in Table 1. All of the semi-structured interviews and some of the photovoice interviews were audio-recorded with permission from participants. The photovoice interviews that were not recorded were due to requests of participants. Detailed field notes were taken on all photovoice interviews that were not audio-recorded.
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<th>Methods</th>
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<td>How is the health of the environment perceived? Is it related to tourism development’s impacts on environmental resources? If so, how?</td>
<td>Review of NSF data, Semi-structured interviews (n=12), Photovoice (n=7), Participant Observation</td>
<td>Perceptions and experiences regarding environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What concerns, if any, do long-term residents of Placencia Village have regarding the impacts of tourism development on their livelihood? How does this compare to other groups in the village?</td>
<td>Review of NSF data, Semi-structured interviews (n=12), Participant Observation</td>
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<td>What impacts, if any, have environmental changes had on the relationship between local and non-local community?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How are residents of Placencia Village adjusting to the changing landscape?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (n=12), Photovoice (n=7), Participant Observation</td>
<td>Perceptions and experiences regarding how residents are adjusting to a changing landscape</td>
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**Preliminary Study**

The semi-structured interview questions were based on preliminary research with a research team that was part of a larger National Science Foundation-funded project entitled “Impacts of Tourism, Wastewater, and Water-energy Development on Livelihoods and the Environment on the Placencia Peninsula of Belize.” The research conducted by this team utilized a mixed-methods approach and occurred between 2013 and 2016. Interview data was collected using a snowball and geographically-based sampling technique and included over 75 informal meetings and unstructured interviews with community members and visitors, 46-in-depth, semi-structured interviews with key informants, and two focus groups. Qualitative and
quantitative survey data was collected using a stratified sampling technique and includes 164 orally-administered surveys with residents, tourists, and workers throughout the communities using the KoBo open-source research tool for smart phones (www.kobotoolbox.org).

Although the analysis for this project is ongoing, the preliminary themes that have emerged out of the research include concerns of scale, timing, and context as it relates to tourism development on the peninsula (Zarger et al. 2016). Respondents expressed concerns over the transition from small-scale tourism to mass tourism, an impact of growing international investment (Zarger et al. 2016). For many, this change in scale has caused concerns about the changing environment, access to resources, and changes in livelihood (Zarger et al. 2016). For others, these transitions are impacting how community members are viewing and maintaining their cultural heritage (Zarger et al. 2016). The preliminary results of the NSF study, particularly the themes of scale and timing, informed the research questions of my thesis project.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation is considered a foundational method of anthropology and appropriate for exploratory research: it is key for enhancing the quality and interpretation of data, encourages the formulation of new research questions, and offers opportunities to understand experiences that are not verbalized in interviews (Bernard and Gravlee 2014). The purpose of participant observation for this project was to familiarize myself with the locality of Placencia Village, understand the various ways in which residents experience tourism development and environmental resources, and to understand the outcomes that these experiences have on the livelihood of community members within the village. The participant observation portion of this study occurred alongside the interviews and photovoice project.

I conducted participant observation and recorded daily field notes throughout all phases
of research. Some of these activities included 1) conducting informal observations in Placencia Village, 2) participating in local events and customs in Placencia Village, 3) visits with community members inside their homes and in public locations, and 4) participating in “typical” tourist experiences such as land and sea tours. The informal observations made in Placencia Village helped to shape my research questions and methods. It was also during this time that I met with community leaders to review interview questions and photovoice prompts in order to make any necessary changes regarding phrasing and appropriateness for the participants in the village.

**Semi-Structured Interviews**

A semi-structured interview guide was built on the exploratory data collected during the preliminary phase of the research. The interview guide was used to assess how residents perceive the health of the environment, the impacts of tourism development on livelihoods, and whether these changes have influenced relationships between local and non-local community members in the village. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that allowed for the participants to talk about their experiences candidly. A snowball sampling technique was used to conduct 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews with residents of the peninsula. In order to increase the variability of the study population, I accounted for demographics such as gender, age, nationality and extent of involvement with the tourism development industry. In addition to the semi-structured interview guide, I also added three questions related specifically to my thesis research to the larger NSF project during the 2015 field season–collecting data from an additional 12 participants.

The interviews were approximately thirty minutes long with the length being partially determined by how much the participants chose to elaborate on each question. Key informants
included fishermen, tour-guide operators, local activists, and a marine biologist. All interviews were conducted in English.

**Photovoice**

Photovoice is a participatory action research method that is designed to empower members of vulnerable groups to “identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang 1999, 185). The three objectives of photovoice are (1) to record and community strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about community and personal issues, and (3) to reach policymakers (Wang 1999). The goals of photovoice for this project were to understand the various ways in which residents experience tourism development and environmental resources, to understand the outcomes that these experiences have on the livelihood of community members within the village, and to create an exhibit that promotes empowerment in the community.

Once participants were selected and agreed to participate, an initial meeting was set-up with each participant. The topics covered in the first meeting included the nature of the project, the methodology, potential risks and benefits to participants, how to use the camera, the ethics of taking pictures, how to take pictures safely, and how to frame an image to get the desired effect (Langhout 2014). The prompt for the project asked residents to take pictures of how tourism development has impacted the biophysical environment in Placencia Village. Participants had one week to take between 15-20 pictures and return the digital cameras.

A second meeting was held with each of the participants of the photovoice project. The decision to hold these meetings one-on-one was made in order to be more flexible and accommodating to each participant’s schedule. Discussion on the photographs included how participants perceive their biophysical environment as well as what factors they believed were
responsible for any changes experienced during their time on the peninsula. During those meetings, participants reviewed their photographs on a laptop computer provided by the researcher and selected four to five images for discussion. The individual discussions were facilitated using the SHOWED method (Wang 1999, 188). The following questions were used to facilitate the discussion.

1. What do you see here?
2. What is really happening here?
3. How does this relate to our lives?
4. Why does this situation or concern exist?
5. How could this photo be used to educate policy makers?
6. What can we do about it?

In addition to having participants take new photographs for the photovoice project, three participants volunteered to provide existing photographs that they had of Placencia Village. Two sets of photographs were from before intensive tourism development began on the peninsula and showed both the changes in the coastal environment as well to the land itself. The individual discussions based on these photographs were also facilitated using the SHOWED method as described above (Wang 1999, 188).

The photovoice interviews were approximately twenty minutes long; the length being determined by how much the participants chose to elaborate on the photographs that were chosen. Key informants included a tour guide operator, a local artisan, a marine biologist, and an environmental activist. All photovoice interviews were conducted in English.

I experienced a couple of challenges in using the photovoice method for the project.
Although many of the people I approached about the project expressed interest in the concept, it was difficult to find participants who were willing and able to dedicate the time to participate. Several people also expressed concern over not possessing the technical skills required for the project. In order to overcome these challenges, I began to ask participants that expressed the above-mentioned concerns if they had existing photographs of the village that they would be willing to share for the project. This modification not only allowed me to recruit additional participants but also added an additional dimension to the project as the timelines for the photographs collected ranged from the 1980s to current. These photographs provided a profound visual representation to how tourism development has impacted the biophysical environment in Placencia.

**Participants**

In order to understand the impacts of tourism development on the livelihood of individuals in the community, a total sample of twelve people were recruited for semi-structured interviews. Seven of the participants were male and five were female. This sample size was driven by feasibility, including time constraints and knowledge and comfort with the topic of the project. An additional seven participants were recruited for the photovoice project. Four of the photovoice participants were male and three were female. This sample size was also driven by feasibility, including time constraints and interest/comfort in using a camera.

**Recruitment**

The inclusion criteria for interviews and photovoice required participants be over the age of 18, be a long-term resident of the village (at least five years), and with an interest in
participating in the project. Initially, a purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants from the tourism and fishing industries. This decision was made based on information that was gathered during participant observation that suggested these two groups had significant experience and knowledge regarding the biophysical environment in Placencia. Further sampling was done through chain-referral from people participating in both projects. There was no language requirement as English is the widely spoken, along with Belizean Kriol, many residents’ first language, in Placencia Village.

Data Analysis

All of the semi-structured interviews were transcribed. The interview data and fieldnotes were then coded for qualitative analysis using the DeDoose software package. Themes and patterns were then identified based on the research questions of the project. The main themes to emerge were: significant changes to the biophysical environment that many respondents correlate to the scale and intensity of tourism development, the resulting negative impacts on the livelihoods of many local community members, concerns over the future of the peninsula, and a growing resentment between local and non-local community members. More discussion on these themes follows in chapters four and five.

The photovoice interviews were analyzed for themes and patterns with each respective participant. Participants selected four to five images for discussion, which was facilitated using the SHOWED method described earlier in this chapter. In addition, the photovoice interviews that were audio recorded were transcribed. The data from these interviews as well as the detailed notes from the interviews not audio-recorded were coded for qualitative analysis using the DeDoose software package. The main themes to emerge overlapped significantly with the data
from the semi-structured interviews. The most profound emphasis being placed on the scale and intensity of tourism development and the resulting negative impacts on the livelihoods of many local community members.

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, a formal exhibit was not held for the photovoice project. Instead, ten photographs were framed, along with quotes from participants of the project, and left with a member of the Placencia Village Council. A possible follow-up for this is to create an online platform that can be sustained by a local resident in order to share the results and support ongoing empowerment and dialogue in Placencia Village. I will return to this point at the end of the thesis.

**Positionality**

Conducting international fieldwork can pose concerns in regards to issues of representation, positionality, and reflexivity in scholarly work (Sultana 2007). One way to lessen these issues is by paying attention to the unequal power relations that exist between the researcher and research participant and to conduct research that minimizes power differentials (Sultana 2007). My position as an educated white woman from the United States acted as a sign of class, racial, and national privilege for many of the people in Placencia Village. This positionality also influenced my relationships with expatriates and foreign investors who thought of me as being similar to them, including shared attitudes and lifestyles.

My position as a young single woman also influenced my role as a researcher in a Central American country. This role gave me greater access to the male informants as I was viewed as being nonthreatening to many participants. This position also acted as a liability as it made establishing trust with women in the community more difficult. I was challenged to adapt to
customs that were unfamiliar to me and demonstrate reflexivity in my personal beliefs and actions.

Being part of an ongoing interdisciplinary research team helped me to establish credibility and rapport with community members. Although the field season in which I conducted my research was the first time I had been to Belize, many participants had become at least vaguely familiar with the research that our team had been collecting since the 2013 field season. This was particularly beneficial when meeting and receiving permission from community leaders to conduct research in the village.

**Ethics**

The research received IRB approval PRO 00012766 and fell under the larger National Science Foundation-funded project entitled “Impacts of Tourism, Wastewater, and Water-energy Development on Livelihoods and the Environment on the Placencia Peninsula of Belize,” from the University of South Florida. This information provided by participants may be used to improve the local and non-local understandings of how tourism development is impacting the environment and local livelihoods within Placencia Village. The results of this study will be shared with community members including village council leaders, environmentalists, tour guide operators, and fishermen.

As some of the participants involved in this research may be considered vulnerable subjects, appropriate measures were taken to ensure proper informed consent was received. Under the respect for person’s guidelines, all participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that participation in the project could be stopped at any time with no negative repercussions (Whiteford and Trotter II 2008). Privacy and confidentiality for all participants
were maintained throughout the study. Participants’ identities were protected with an ID number and during write-up; pseudonyms were used in place of real names.
CHAPTER FOUR: PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

The research topics explored in this chapter are how the health of the biophysical landscape is perceived and what concerns, if any, residents of Placencia Village have regarding the impacts of tourism development on their livelihoods. This chapter presents the comprehensive findings of these two research questions, including data from the in-depth interviews and photovoice project with participants in the village. As discussed in Chapter Two, research demonstrates the increasing environmental impacts of tourism development in areas like Belize. More specifically, this chapter addresses the significant implications these impacts have on livelihoods in areas that are dependent on fishing and tourism for their economic wellbeing. These repercussions speak to the increasing need to not only protect the dignity of landscapes but also to understand the socio-political involvement of foreign investment in order to mitigate damages.

Tourist Narratives of Placencia

Although recent tourism development on the peninsula ranges from small and modest guesthouses to “luxury escapes,” much of the advertisement on the Placencia Peninsula is touted under the framework of ecotourism and sustainable development. Phrases like “raw beauty,” “untouched by commercialism,” and “pristine sand and beaches” are used to describe a significant number of the rentals and resorts dotting the 18-mile long narrow stretch of land into Placencia Village (BTIA, 2016). Ranging from $100 to upwards of $1000 BZD a night, nearly
all of the advertisements provide tourists information on snorkeling, diving, fishing, and other attractions that encourage the traveler to “experience the Caribbean the way nature intended” (BTIA, 2016).

The photograph in Figure 3, taken at Mandalin Caye, provides a visual example of the idea of a “pristine environment” that is often sold to the presumably environmentally conscious consumers whom travel to Belize. Mandalin Caye is one of approximately 450 cayes situated between the mainland of Belize and the barrier reef. Tourists pay upwards of $100 U.S. to spend a few hours snorkeling, diving and swimming in what is often advertised as a “utopian paradise.”

![Image of Mandalin Caye 2015. Photo by author.](image_url)
During my first few weeks in the village, I accepted an invitation by a local tour guide operator to go on a snorkeling excursion to Mandalin Caye. On the morning of the tour, I met Tony, the tour guide and boat captain, along with two young tourists, at the dock where we loaded a small boat with snorkeling gear, food, and other supplies for the day. After brief introductions and a safety overview, we started towards the caye. Tony anchored the boat several times along the way, taking us on small snorkeling excursions as he dove for the lobster we would later eat for lunch and nudging our shoulders to ensure we were not missing the parrot fish, barracuda, or nurse sharks that were swimming below. Once we arrived at the caye, Tony docked our boat and instructed us to relax as he prepared a feast of freshly caught lobster, as well as potatoes and fruit. I took this opportunity to explore the island and chat with the caretaker who was charged with the task of maintaining the island.

The water surrounding the caye was crystal clear and the island deserted except for the small crew from our boat, the caretaker of the island, and a pair of sea rangers. The beach itself was immaculate—with freshly raked sand, palm trees, and a handful of mangroves dotting the perimeter. The two young tourists on the trip, both medical students, talked about their experiences in Belize. They had arrived on the peninsula a few days prior and were in the middle of a backpacking trip throughout Central America. They talked openly about their preference towards “authentic” travel experiences and how much they enjoyed the quaintness of villages like Placencia. They described how it was their preferred way to relieve the stress and anxieties of medical school life.

Despite the idyllic way in which this experience presents itself, however, Mandalin Caye is far from embodying the eco-destination traits that unsuspecting tourists might expect based on the ideas that are being sold. In an interview with Virginia, a local environmental activist, I
learned that the island is owned by a prominent international developer and, other than the few
tour guide operators that have access to the caye, very few locals are receiving any economic
gain from tours to this island. This sentiment was also reflected in an informal conversation with
the caretaker of the caye, an older man from Dangriga, who described how he had been working
on the island for several years but felt that he was overworked and underpaid. He described the
difficulties of being away from his wife and children for days at a time and how it was
challenging to care about an employer that he knew did not care about him.

In addition to the lack of economic opportunities presented to local Placencians by tours
to the caye, Virginia also directed me to a website that had information posted by the Peninsula
Citizens for Sustainable Development. The website asserts that the material used for the
extension of a seawall off Mandalin was supposed to be limited to rocks obtained within the site
and all materials were supposed to be stockpiled for inspection by the Belize Department of the
Environment. Accusations, however, have been made that this was not done and workmen were
found to be using live coral for construction. Informal conversations with residents in the village,
suggest that this situation is not unusual by whereas currently, only nine of the over 450 cayes
are designated as marine reserves, with the vast majority being owned by private investors
(Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, 2014) (see Figure 4). A number of long-term
residents suggest the fact that many international investors are corrupt and use Belize as a place
to evade the laws that would not be so easy to avoid in Western countries.
A second example is a water retention area where human waste can be seen draining directly from an expensive and exclusive “eco lodge,” where tourists spend upwards of $800 US/night off the main road entering Placencia Village (see Figures 5 and 6). After asking what long-term residents thought about this area, I found that several people in the community had
investigated the issue of water contamination at this site, as well as others believed to be contaminated. Although local environmentalists have taken samples from various water sources and sent them to laboratories to be tested for contaminants, the results from those tests consistently come back as being inconclusive or never manage to get back to the community. Long-term residents speculated that this is likely due to corruption and lack of enforcement that they believe is prevalent concerning environmental regulations. It is widely thought that those with money possess the power to avoid responsibility of the damages they are causing to the environment and those without power continue to pay the highest social and physical costs for these violations. In a conversation with Natalie, a long-term resident of the village, she asserted:

Well, until the government of Belize declares a moratorium, literally a moratorium, removal of mangrove, the dredging of the lagoon... until we can declare things like the lagoon a natural resource, it’s not going to happen. Because people are just going to do what they are going to do... That’s it! No more permits! You can’t rape our resources anymore. Somehow the government doesn't seem to respect that... They would much rather see money in their pockets from wherever their sources are rather than seeing anything long-term for the benefit of the country.
Figure 5: Image of drainage ditch across from eco-lodge 2015. Photo by author.

Figure 6: Image of retention pond across from eco-lodge 2015. Photo by author.
These anecdotes, along with other data collected during the 12 semi-structured and seven photovoice interviews, serve as examples of the many stories that I learned about during my ten weeks in Placencia Village. It was difficult to ignore the dichotomy between the beauty that stood before me and the often less than pristine realities of what was hiding beneath the surface. While it does not diminish the beauty of the cayes, or of the peninsula, it points to the multi-layered and complex realities that are part of the tourism industry on the peninsula.

**Beginnings of a “new Placencia”**

The current issues facing the landscape of the peninsula are ones that long-term residents have experienced over time. Placencia-born residents, like Kaylon, often reminisced about his memories growing up on the peninsula. “When I was a kid, all back here, used to run in the bush playing. Foxes, all kinds of animals were running about the village.” Others described how the area used to be green with lots of flowers and lush jungle (See figure 7).

![Figure 7: Image of Placencia Village prior to Hurricane Iris late 1980s. Photo provided by photovoice participant.](image-url)
Although several processes led to the transition on the peninsula, many long-term residents draw a connection between the start of these changes and Hurricane Iris. Making landfall on October 8, 2001, Hurricane Iris hit southern Belize with winds of nearly 145 mph, a Category 4 storm. Although it caused significant damage throughout Belize, Iris caused the worst damage in Placencia and surrounding areas. People recalled their memories of seeing their village destroyed—seeing building on top of building—destroying nearly 95% of the buildings and infrastructure on the peninsula. Many residents were left homeless and their businesses left destroyed.

People described how after the hurricane, many international investors took advantage of the plummeting land prices and began the process of increasing development. This led to an escalation in real estate prices—a process that surprised many locals. Virginia, a local environmental activist and photovoice participant, had this to say regarding the transitioning landscape after the hurricane:

*I thought the hurricane would slow it down. Who would want to invest in land that was just destroyed by a natural disaster? But actually, it accelerated it. Everything was cleaned out so people could see what was there. Property values actually went up. It was like urban renewal.*
Although Hurricane Iris is often cited as a major turning point for the accelerated development, it was not the only process responsible for change on the peninsula. Long-term residents of the peninsula described how the introduction of a paved airstrip in the mid-2000s and then the road in 2010 made travel in and out of Placencia Village much easier.

Other people focused on the economic factors that they believed propelled this transition. For example, Areli, a Belizean and current real estate agent in the village, described how five to six years ago there was an economic recession and that is when she saw the type of demand, desired destination, and lifestyle of the tourist change. This also carried over to the real estate
market where the needs and wants of buyers transformed. Figure 9 is an image of the model unit of a resort condo project for the marina. Areli describes how the landscape was altered for this particular development. The area was dredged, a process that she describes as being a “new change in development” where investors are “changing [the] peninsula in order to make a profit.”

![Image of model unit of resort condo project for marina 2015.](image)

*Figure 9:* Image of model unit of resort condo project for marina 2015. Photo by photovoice participant.

Although there are differing perspectives regarding the factors that caused the escalation in tourism and housing development, one would be hard pressed to find residents who have not experienced changes in the biophysical environment that they believe have been caused by development. As one Belizean woman described:

*We are losing a lot of our green. We are getting a lot of the lagoons filled in because for real estate, we are like red meat. I mean, the thing is, it has driven up the cost of real estate so much that an average local family, hardworking average local family, can no*
longer afford to buy property in Placencia, or on this peninsula anymore. The people with money end up coming in and developing the lagoon property. At some point I can’t see our children getting land, so they will have to start moving away.

Now when you drive from the top of the peninsula into the village at its tip, the main road is lined with resorts, restaurants, and housing developments. For-sale signs that offer phrases like “the ultimate in beach front living” are positioned on every vacant lot (see Figure 10).

According to one woman, a long-term resident of Placencia:

The cement houses keep getting bigger and bigger and bigger. It’s like you move down and you see that what your neighbor has built and decide to build an extra floor, to add another 1000 square feet on. And it’s like, and it’s almost like the foreigners have their middle finger up. It’s like, we don’t care how you live. This is how we do it. We are going to take over your country. And they do.

Figure 10: Image of current real estate development in Placencia Village 2015. Photo by photovoice participant
Coastal and Marine Health

Coastal erosion is a significant theme to emerge out of responses to interview questions focused on how development has impacted the biophysical health of the local environment. Dennis, a Placencia-born tour-guide operator, provided the photograph in Figure 11, which depicts what the coastline looked like prior to intensive tourism development taking place. Dennis described how the beach used to be bigger and how the area that we were sitting in used to be the lagoon.

![Figure 11: Image of Placencia Beach late 1980s. Photo by photovoice participant.](image)

Although participants attributed some of this change to processes such as climate change and seasonal fluctuations, some discussed the various development projects that they believed to be responsible for the erosion on the coast. Dredging, in particular, came up as a process that is having significant negative impacts on both the lagoon and coast. Long-term residents, like Kaylon, described how, “A big issue has been at [resorts] where they built seawalls. It’s been causing building on one side and erosion on the next because it disrupted the wave action and water flow. A lot of people complain about it.”
During a photovoice interview, Coconut Man (a participant who was resolute on not wanting to be anonymous when it came to sharing his perspective) described how he moved to Placencia from Belize City many years ago. With limited education and unstable employment opportunities, Coconut Man saw Placencia as a place that offered a low cost of living, less crime, and the potential to generate a livable wage by making crafts from coconut husks. He describes how the coastal erosion shown in Figure 12 has impacted the health of coconut trees along the coast, and worries that these changes will impact his ability to make a living. When asked what processes were responsible for the growing concerns of coastal erosion, he stated:

*The beach used to be bigger. They say before you do construction you have to do an environmental assessment. Maybe I am wrong, but I suspect that it is all being swept under the rug. Because I am seeing opposite to what the rich people are doing. They say they are going to walk the chalk line and do the right thing. But everyone is breaking the rules for profit and gain.*

Coconut Man believed that sharing the accounts of long-term residents of the village could have the ability to disrupt the current narrative that exists regarding the realities of environmental changes in the village. He asserted:

*We going to use the same weapon that started this in the first place. The weapon is advertising. Same way we advertise tourists that come here, we could advertise about this; the thing that they don’t want to talk about. This is what people don’t want to talk about.*
In addition to the issue of coastal erosion, long-term residents also had concerns regarding how the marine environments have been impacted by the increase in tourism development. In informal conversations with fishermen on the peninsula, they described the loss of biodiversity that they have experienced in the marine environments. Many described fishing in the lagoon as children and being able to see dozens of lobster from the boat and how “you don’t see that anymore.” Participants also described how the destruction of mangroves has threatened the biodiversity found in the lagoon and coast.

Belizeans are not the only people on the peninsula to notice the impacts of development on the biophysical landscape. For example, Janet, an American who owns property in Belize,
had this to say about the changes that she has experienced in the 22 years she has been traveling to Placencia:

*I would say overall the health has gone down tremendously. I see all the developments going in and I know there are lots more algae blooms… Now they are developing a caye off here and dredging up the corals for the new cruiseships. I just think that’s going to be disastrous for the community.*

**Norwegian Cruise Line in Placencia Village**

In addition to documenting and discussing how the biophysical environment has already been impacted by development, participants also brought up their anticipated concerns with the construction of the Norwegian Cruise Line Port (NCL) off Harvest Caye. Although the majority of the construction is occurring on the caye itself, it is having reverberating effects both in Placencia as well as in surrounding villages.

Areli, a photovoice participant, provided the image in Figure 13 of a site in Malacate, a town six miles from Placencia Village, where an international investor dug out an area, which sits about 300 yards from a cruiseship pier. Areli speculated that this was done so that he could sell it at a higher price, since waterfront property is typically in higher demand for people looking to relocate to this area. She asserted that the area is hardly a beach anymore with almost all of it now being private and how she has seen this transition over time. When asked to describe the image she selected, she stated:

“This is the foundation for the dock that will be used for the cruise ship. I used to play there as a kid. People want to say that they are eco-conscious. Maybe they are. But in the end it’s all for profit.”
A number of people reported that they lack a voice in the decisions that are being made in regards to the scale and type of development that is occurring. While few would argue the economic benefits of having small-scale tourism on the peninsula, some felt that not only are they not benefiting, they also do not play an active role in decisions being made on what happens with regard to larger-scale development on the peninsula. This is reflected in comments like the one made by Meredith, a long-term resident of the peninsula, “everyone had good sound opinions about cruiseships. Did that make a difference?”

It should be noted that according to data collected for the larger NSF project, there were initially mixed opinions regarding cruiseship tourism by people in the village. Among Placencia residents surveyed, 48% reported feeling negative about the prospects of mass cruise tourism while 36% reported feeling at least ‘somewhat positive’ (Zarger et al. 2016). Some residents viewed cruiseship tourism as having the potential for providing economic opportunities to
residents in the village. The support, however, was primarily centered towards small-scale pocket cruise tourism and tended to wane as the NCL project advanced.

What once used to be considered a “sleepy little fishing village” and “backpacker tourist destination” has transitioned into an economy that is based in large-scale tourism. For many, the ability to sustain economic livelihoods through tourism is now being threatened as the scale and intensity of development continue to expand. This sentiment is articulately captured in the photovoice image (Figure 14) and interview with Coconut Man where he asserted:

*The reality is the environment is being destroyed, people are spending money to put up structures and they are not worried about the environmental damages because everybody wants to grab, grab, grab. Everybody just wants to have a big house to touch the sky or something. Everybody want the perfect view. And it is not a good thing for us who is from here. I am seeing a.. It’s not healthy, I’ll just put it like that.*

Figure 14: Image of development in Placencia 2015. Photo by photovoice participant.
Impacts of Rapid Growth in Larger Scale Tourism

Many long-term residents expressed concern over what the increase in largely foreign-funded development means for them. While some participants acknowledged that one potential benefit of tourism development is job creation, others asserted that a significant number of the jobs being created are limited to low-skill and low wage positions or reserved for those directly involved in tourism. A number of participants mirrored the sentiment that the opportunities being presented are less than ideal. Areli, a photovoice participant, described how although tourism employs most people, there is no union, no job security, and the positions are based on a minimum wage of $2.50 Belize an hour. According to Areli, “People come in and invest because they know wages are low. [The same people] complain that workers are unskilled but not willing to train them.”

Long-term residents in the village described how positions that offer better wages are reserved for investors and their families, with little to no opportunities for the higher paid positions to be filled by the local labor force. Mila, a woman on the village council, gave an example from the local chapter of the BTIA where she described how expatriates, primarily from the U.S., Canada, and Europe, are filling the majority of high-wage positions. Mila described how this is not beneficial to the long-term residents of the village and how Belizeans could fill positions like these if proper training were provided. She asserted:

*If you are going to bring her in, bring her in on a stipend to train a younger person.*

*These are the things that cause resentment. With that dynamic, how do you change things in the local population? You can’t.*

Another concern is that tour guide operators and fishermen are facing increasing competition from non-local entities. Tour guide operators describe how many resorts are staffing
their own tour guides to use for local tours and that the majority of these operators are not from Placencia or the surrounding villages. Tour guide operators also express suspicion that many of the foreign-owned resorts are dissuading tourists from booking with local independent operators and/or rebooking tours once the guests arrive at the resorts. Tour guide operators expressed concern with these practices, as expressed in this statement from Ludin, a local tour guide operator and restaurant manager:

*When BTB came here they were like, “oh, our numbers are up. More tourists are coming in and records are showing that this is happening.” So I told them, yes-but who is this benefiting? Cause we’re not seeing the numbers on the tours. Are you just checking the numbers at the resorts? Cause maybe they’re the ones benefiting. Everybody else, local restaurants and stuff, we are not seeing it.*

Some local tour guide operators also described how the people filling these positions do not know the area as well as those with a long history in Placencia and don’t pay the same attention to destruction of corals or other marine habitats. Local tour guides described practices such as asking people to wear rash-guards instead of sunscreen and requiring life jackets in order to ensure they are protecting the coral. They described the responsibility that they feel they have when it comes to protecting the environment. This is a sentiment that is also reflected in other participants in the community, such as Mila, a member of the village council, who asserts:

*Of course it will impact the local tour guide because the local tour guide, when they take people out for whatever it might be, and you’ve got overcrowding islands and you know, your corals aren’t looking as healthy because you have people trampling over your corals. It will be a turn-off and I believe that in the end it will be something that we have*
been trying to preserve, we will end up losing. And we will lose it for the same reason that we are trying to preserve it.

Fishermen are experiencing similar problems when it comes to the scale and intensity of tourism development. Fishermen described how they have experienced a decrease in biodiversity over their lifetime—both in the lagoon and coastal environments. Several factors—such as overfishing, effluent, poaching, and dredging—were cited as being responsible for these changes. Members of the fishing cooperative described facing increasing difficulty in making a living on fin fishing alone and many blame this process on not being able to compete with large transnational companies as well as hatcheries being removed from the process of clearing mangroves. Fishermen also describe how the government should be setting stricter standards for fishermen in order to ensure more sustainable practices.

**Tourism and Livelihoods**

In addition to the increase in social differentiation, the assignment of low status low paid jobs, and outside ownership of resources, long-term residents also report facing difficulties with the escalating cost of food, manufactured goods, and housing and land cost. Despite the fact that Placencia has seen a growth in the number of grocery stores and produce markets in the village, the majority of these markets cater towards the expatriates and tourists in the area. Beth, a long-term resident and restaurant owner in the village, described how many people travel to area like Dangriga in order to purchase food and other manufactured goods. In addition to traveling to acquire goods, many long-term residents described how people have started to move to areas like Seine Bight and Independence because they can no longer afford to purchase or rent housing in the village. Beth described how the cost of living has gone up. Rentals that used to be $300 are
now $800. Electricity and other utilities have also become more expensive. Many families, especially workers, are sharing spaces.

According to informal conversations with long-term residents in Placencia, the village council has purchased land near the airstrip that is said to be reserved for locals who are unable to afford land in the village. Unfortunately, the majority of this land is considered swamp and would need to be filled with sand prior to building any structures. In 2015 there were a handful of structures that were in the process of being framed (See Fig 15). When I returned in 2016, the structures appeared to be in the same stage of development. None of the long-term residents I spoke with viewed this as being a viable option for their family to consider, rather identified areas such as Seine Bight and Independence as potential areas to relocate.

Figure 15: Image of land near airstrip 2015. Photo by author.
Policy Enforcement

When asked what processes are responsible for the changes that have been experienced in the village, many participants cited the lack of enforcement of policies and regulations. This is particularly evident when it comes to development on the peninsula. Natalie had this to say about what she has experienced during her time on the peninsula:

*I think that for whatever reasons we are getting developers who are coming down here who don’t care about the environment. They just care about their profit. They take their money and they bring it down here and they are going to do what they are going to do. And a lot of things are things that they could never do where they come from. And the government of Belize is allowing them to do it.*

In an interview with Virgina, a local activist, she explained how when she built her house she was guaranteed that, “all properties [are] only supposed to be developed 16%.” Several years after building her house, however, developers came in and started building right on top of her. She described the process of going to the Central Building Authority in Belize City and how she was given the run around until she eventually gave up. In an interview with Emmeth, a local fisherman, a similar sentiment was expressed in the ways that certain laws are evaded. He asserted, “*In our country there is a law that we Belizeans should own 49 and developers should own 51. I don’t see that taking place.*”

Long-term residents also express concerns over the lack of enforcement when it comes to the environmental regulation of marine resources. During an interview with Meredith, the “original expatriate in the village,” she asserted that the “rules about dredging and mangroves are neglected [due to] political decisions. [People] get a permit to cut 1 acre and [they] cut 3 acres
Instead. Nobody is here to stop them. The environmental damage down the road is going to be tremendous.”

Other people describe how policies like the Qualified Retirement Plan (QRP) are having an impact on employment opportunities in the community. Several long-term residents described how people are finding ways to abuse the system. According to Ludin, a tour guide and restaurant manager:

*And then a lot of people come in from the QRP plan, so they come in and say they are going to open a business but not work. You can own a business but you’re not supposed to work. So that’s good. It seems black and white. But that doesn’t happen like that. 80% of the time they actually work. They might have a couple jobs for a couple people, but most of the time, especially manager positions, they won’t give that to the locals.*

Many people discussed the lack of enforcement by environmental organizations as well as building authorities when it comes to what is being constructed on the peninsula. Although there are inspectors that come to the peninsula before a permit is granted, many people believed that a significant amount of corruption occurs within this process. Some long-term residents felt that these workers are often underpaid and receive cash bribes from the international developers and expatriates. In general, participants express empathy for the workers—stating that they are just doing what anyone would do to provide for their families. People do, however, express resentment towards the local and national governmental agencies that they feel are responsible for these processes and lack of regulation enforcement.
Summing Up

The data presented suggests that many participants understand that the negative impacts to their biophysical environment that they have experienced are the result of uneven power relations between various groups in the village. These processes can be said to be the unintended consequences of historical and current decision-making practices related to land and resource ownership and the uneven outcomes that emerge due to these choices. These results point to the need for greater enforcement of environmental regulations as well as more equitable decision-making practices related to land and resource ownership at local and national levels.
CHAPTER FIVE: ADJUSTING TO CHANGE

The research topics explored in this chapter are: the impacts environmental changes have had on the relationship between longer-term, or Placencia-born “local” versus shorter-term, “non-local” residents in the wake of tourism intensification; the shift in the types of tourism development; and how long-term residents are adjusting to ecological and livelihood changes. This chapter presents the comprehensive findings of data collected to address these topics, including the in-depth interviews and photovoice project with participants in the village.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Placencia is an area where many people’s livelihoods are connected to the environment, with the changes experienced having a direct link to economic wellbeing. This rapid change and growth is resulting in growing frictions between long-term residents and others in the village, with many people expressing an increased sense of resentment towards the new style of tourism and development taking place on the peninsula (Spang 2014a). These topics are particularly relevant in Belize, a country that continues to be reliant on tourism and external markets as its main economic driver (Key 2002, Vernon 2014, West 2016). The people of Belize have had a long history of needing to adjust to transitioning landscapes and continue to be resilient in face of these changes (Alexander 2008, Key 2002).

Resentment and Inequality

I was sitting on a brightly colored picnic table bench at small outdoor café that specializes in local seaweed shakes when a middle-aged American woman initiated a
conversation with me. She expressed curiosity in who I was and what I was doing in the village. She had moved to Placencia several years ago from the United States and told me about the plans she had to bring her adult children to the area. She told me about all of the things she loved about the village: the weather, the landscape, the affordability, but above all the comfort in all the other expatriates that make her feel “at home.” Despite feeling so warm about the life she created in the village, however, she gave me a warning about some of the “locals.” She described how she used to be idealistic, was even friends with some of “them” but after her house was burglarized, her opinions changed. It is what made her want to build a literal and figurative gate around her and her haven of expatriates.

Sentiments like this one are contributing to the growing resentment by Belizeans and other long-term residents towards foreign investors on the peninsula. People who grew up on the peninsula describe how they feel “the foreigners have their middle finger up” and how, for some, it feels like they are taking over the country. It is not difficult to understand this feeling after spending several months there in 2015 and 2016. While Placencia has still managed to maintain some of its small fishing village “charm,” many of the towns just north of the village have been overtaken with million dollar properties, resorts, and gated communities (see Figure 16). An example of this is The Placencia Hotel and Residences located in North Maya Beach, just a few miles north of Placencia Village. The developer responsible for this enterprise started his empire with an 18-room hotel in 2003 (BVC 2016). In 2004 he purchased property to begin what is now Placencia Residences, which consists of 156 lots (BVC 2016). Factors such as the country’s demographics (one of the lowest population densities on the planet), the “unspoiled, natural environment,” and the fact that it is the only Central American country that is English-speaking and functions under British Common Law, are sited as factors that are driving the demand for
this type of development in Belize (BVC 2016). According to a representative of the
development company, the country also boasts “very friendly economic incentives” such as no
purchase restrictions for foreigners and the Retirement Incentives Program that allows Qualified
Retirement Persons to move personal effects to the country free of all import duties and taxes
(BVC 2016). The representative also states that by the time the current development plans are
complete, they will have 2,500 residential components asserting that they are “building an
international town” (BVC 2016).


Figure 16: Image of Placencia Residences development on Placencia Peninsula 2015.
Photo by author.

In addition to the palatial structures that are being built, some of which are unoccupied
years after their construction, as Figure 16 above shows, there is also concern about the
increasing number of people who are moving to the village. Natalie, a business owner who
possesses a dual American-Belizean citizenship, described how, “as more people come the gap
between the people that have and have not widens.” She discussed how many of the people
moving to Belize are coming to make money and describes it as a “financial bonanza” where
people are contributing very little to the local economy and wanting a lot back in return.

Maurice, a Placencia-born tour guide operator, shared this sentiment and asserts that:

> [foreign investors] are allowed to do whatever they want to do. And no one can say anything about it. Because they have money and money talks. That’s the way I see it. I don’t really like it that much but I can’t really express that to them because um, I would like to, but it would affect my business... So, it’s like a double edge sword for me. It’s hard. I feel like I am fortunate to have my own business. And I am able to still live here. But what about the others? This is their home. They were born and raised here. They grew up here. To have a foreigner come in and just push you out pretty much, out of your home. It sucks. Big time.

Some long-term residents also described resentment regarding the ways they are being treated by others in the village. This is expressed in statements like this one from Mila, a member of the village council, who describes how she feels about some of the foreign investors in the village: “they start bashing and putting down, belittling some of the local business owners that have been here forever. Not realizing that [they] are destroying somebodies business because [they] couldn’t have [their] own way.”

Others described their frustrations with the inequitable access to resources. As development continues to expand, many people are facing an astronomical increase in the cost of land. As Maurice explained:

> I was born and raised here and it hurts me every time I pass those big buildings because I don’t own a piece of land here. I don’t own a house. I’m one of the most deserving persons here on the peninsula to have a house and land. And yet I see all these big
houses not owned by locals. That land should be, should stay for locals. Just, I want to kick someone’s butt.

Some participants described how families are having to sell their land piece by piece, and that the cost of land is now to the point that only rich people can afford to buy even small plots on the peninsula, if at all.

It is important to mention that the feelings of resentment and frustration are not reflective of all foreign investors on the peninsula. In fact, according to interviews with people who have lived in the village for more than five years, many expatriates and foreign investors have moved to the village and assimilated into village life. They send their children to local schools and live in houses that are in areas of the village where Belizeans still live. Although some start businesses, they hire Belizeans and do not restrict employment opportunities to low-skill and low-wage positions. It is also worth noting that the growing resentment is not homogenous amongst all expatriates. The people that have embraced village life have also tended to be embraced by the village members.

Responding to a Continually Changing Landscape

Despite the fact that many long-term residents do not feel that the scale and intensity of development on the peninsula can be stopped due to the current government policies, there is local movement being built in the community. Long-term residents, specifically Belizeans, are doing their best to adapt to the “new Placencia” by creating opportunities to benefit from the new forms of tourism—some more successful than others.

An example of this can be found in the newly formed tour guide cooperative where approximately 20 local tour-guides joined together with the intent of negotiating a contract with
NCL after the company purchased Harvest Caye in 2013. While members of this cooperative were upfront in their decision to try to participate in economic opportunities presented by the incoming cruise tourism industry, they were also clear that it was a decision that was made in an attempt to maintain their livelihood. Ludin, a local fisherman and member of the cooperative asserted:

*like I said, why we formed the cooperative was to bring all members of the community together. The restaurants, the hotels, the tour guides, the tour operators... Cause that way we can get a bite of the pie that was coming from the cruise ship.*

Unfortunately, while initially successful and optimistic in their negotiations with NCL, this group was eventually told that in order for this contract to be put in place, the tour guide operators would need to purchase insurance at a premium that far exceeds what would be economically feasible for most to undertake. Without having access to the same forms of credit and capital as their non-Belizean counterparts, some long-term residents are going back to the drawing board to figure out how to best adapt to the changing economic conditions in the village.

Fishermen are also making attempts at adjusting to a changing landscape. Samuel, a Placencia-born resident and member of the fishing cooperative, described how he feels that the cooperative is not doing well. He described how fishermen aren’t selling to the cooperative anymore because they are able to get better prices from some of the foreign owned resorts. Not only is this impacting people on an individual level, it is also causing the country to lose foreign exchange for short-term gain. Manny, another member of the fishing cooperative explained how fishermen are “invent[ing] a new type of fishermen” in which they diversify their skills and products because of the changing times. Examples of this include expanding to the markets of
seaweed and oyster farming in order to maintain their living. While some of these products remain in the tourism market, fishermen are working on strategies of expanding seaweed products to the beauty market outside of Belize. In an informal conversation with Emmett, a Placencia-born resident and seaweed farmer, he described how some of these products are in the development stage and they are planning to bring them to “high-end,” international markets soon.

Although the tour guide and fishing cooperatives provide good examples of local groups that are engaging in new economic initiatives, many Placencia-born residents are hesitant to be too active or cause disruption in the local politics of the community. Several people described past attempts at trying to build solidarity—such as addressing the concern of increasing drug use in the village—and promote change in the community. They also described how these attempts led to them being ostracized by the village council and others in the village. One long-term resident of the village confided that although he would assist in informally providing information regarding environmental change in the community, he did not feel comfortable with a formal interview or participating in the photovoice project. This was a decision that was made based on past repercussions that he has faced when trying to promote dialogue on the issue of drug use in the community.

This was not an uncommon sentiment. Ludin, a member of the tourism cooperative and restaurant manager described how:

*A lot people are afraid to say in community meetings, like again, because of the same things. Afraid of the effects, the lash back. But I had it mostly in my tour guide meetings. I remember one time the local tourism association was there. We were talking about it in several previous meetings. But when he was there I*
was like okay, well no one is going to say anything, everybody is afraid to talk now. And I said it, and when I said it, you could hear a pin drop. Nobody backed me up. Nobody.

This is a group that relies on connections and reputation within the village to make a living. Some expressed that if it were not for the fact that they personally or their family needed these connections to survive, they would be less hesitant to speak out. Ludin stated that if he didn’t have to think of his family he “would probably run a revolution in this place.” But as James, a Placencia-born tour guide operator asserted, “poor people don’t speak.” People in the village describe the debt acquired from purchasing houses and boats, many cutting corners due to the inability to pay insurance and other requirements on these assets. Speaking out puts them at risk of losing what they have managed to acquire in a precarious situation–creating a situation where many are silenced through indirect means.

Although non-Belizean residents also expressed this sentiment, there was less concern from this group regarding how it would impact their reputation in the village. The majority of residents who expressed less concern regarding social impacts are foreign investors and expatriates–ranging from self-described activists to marine biologists to business owners. These individuals described their attempts to disrupt the status quo and fight against the land developers and governmental agencies that are responsible for violating the regulations that are intended to protect the environment. These groups have used online platforms and printed newsletters, such as The Placencia Breeze and Roots and Reef, as a means of providing a counter-narrative to what is often touted as a form of eco-tourism development. This group of expatriates and investors, however, recognized the limitations of not having local voices in charge of these counter-narratives, such as Amelia, a property owner in the village.
Amelia described how she has been using photography to visually document the changing landscape of the peninsula for years. Some of this documentation has been sent to the Department of Environment (DOE), causing governmental agencies to put more pressure on developers to enforce regulations. This process has had some success, such as Figure 17, which depicts Las Brisas, a residential subdivision created by dredging and filling in the Placencia Lagoon. The developers were trying to get away with not using silt curtains—used for marine construction, dredging, and shoreline restoration projects to control silt and sediment in body of water—but eventually had to follow policy when people began making a fuss.

![Figure 17: Image of Las Brisas 2011. Photo provided by photovoice participant.](image)

Unfortunately, not every project reported to DOE results in change. For example, Figures 18 and 19 show Hatchet Caye, where significant acreage of mangroves were removed and coral was dredged up in order to create a seawall and extend the island. Despite the fact that these violations were reported to DOE, the developers were not required to do anything about it. In an
informal conversation with Amelia, the photovoice participant that provided these images, she described how she has been using photography to visually document the environmental changes that the peninsula has been experiencing over time.

Figure 18: Image of Hatchet Caye 2010. Photo provided by photovoice participant.
Although people like Amelia have made some small strides in attempting to promote the enforcement of environmental regulations, many understand that the real power lies in the voice and narrative of the Placencia-born residents. As Amelia stated, “I want to raise awareness. I want someone to champion the case and bring it down. But it’s not a white person’s job. It needs to be Belizean.” This is a statement that is mirrored by Edric, a young Belizean tour-guide operator who stated:

_As long as the local people are in charge we can say that we are safe. If the foreigners get in charge there is a battle. Locals have a bigger scope. We were born here and raised here and been through all we have seen here. We know what we are trying to hold onto. It is easy for him to just look away. So as long as the locals are involved we will be all right for a little bit._
Sentiments like these speak to the need to question the roles of NGOs, researchers, and others in relation to the future of the peninsula. Although Placencia Peninsula regularly attracts the attention of international scholars and NGOs from a number of fields, many long-term residents openly voice their frustrations regarding the lack of projects that develop from this research as well as the lack of follow-up on research that was conducted in the village.

**Future of Placencia Village**

At this point, there is little hope from the participants regarding stopping the process of large-scale tourism and residential development in the area. In fact, many people describe how in 20 years, the peninsula will no longer resemble what it did in the past and few, if any, Belizeans will remain. Residents described how at the rate of current development, Placencia Peninsula is quickly on its way to becoming another San Pedro or Miami, with the land being filled with condos and high-rises, and experiencing a continued loss of vegetation and destruction of coastal and marine life. Some long-term residents describe the destruction of anything that is left of their quiet little fishing village, with one woman asserting that if development continues:

*Oh, god. I don’t even want to think about it. I have no idea. We may not have a peninsula. Because of all the development that has already gone on and the destroying of the mangroves. If a hurricane comes through, god forbid. It could just totally wipe us out. And that would mean not just a loss of property but a loss of livelihood, and more importantly, life. So if we continue in 20 years I don’t see much future for this peninsula. I think we would be lucky to just be here.*
It should be noted that these perceptions are strongest felt by long-term residents of the village. People who are new to the area or who use the area primarily as a vacation home do not seem to share the same level of concern for the environment. Older Placencia-born residents have a history with the land and remember the ways that things used to be. This can be seen in sentiments like this one from this Placencia-born man in his forties who asserts, “I already see fences going up. For a person like me who is used to being free. I’m used to being able to take a mango off the tree, that’s not going to be possible anymore.” The younger generations seem to be slightly more disconnected but still aware of the damages that are being caused, as expressed in statements like this one from Edric, a young Belizean male in his twenties:

*We are the younger generation. We know what is going to happen. As long as the local people are in charge we can say that we are safe… So as long as the locals are involved we will be alright for a little bit.*

Other residents described how the changes experienced in the village will not be limited to the environment. Many expressed concerns that some of the long-term residents of Placencia will face increased pressure to relocate. For example, Maurice, a Belizean tour guide operator asserted that:

*Pretty soon there will be hardly any trees left. Pretty soon there will be no manatees or dolphins in the lagoon because of all the run-offs and saltation, sedimentation, all of the stuff. The wildlife is going to be dead. Before we used to see all that stuff in the lagoon. Not anymore. Not as much at least. It’s even running out to the sea. Just pushing everything out. Just like they are pushing the locals out.*

This is a sentiment that was mirrored by Kim, a business owner who holds dual citizenship in China and Belize, who when asked what the future of the peninsula will look like stated, “I think
they will chase the villagers out. Some of the people they just could not afford the life here. A lot of them [have] move[d] to Seine Bight already.”

**Social Impacts of Rapid Large-Scale Tourism Development**

Mila, a village council member and photovoice participant, described how she sees the issue of growing inequality being perpetuated by the Peninsula International Academy, a primary school initiated by expatriates on the peninsula (see Figure 20). According to Mila, the village council was approached by an international investor about starting a new school several years ago because a woman was unhappy with the way her kid was being taught at St. John’s Memorial School (see Figure 21). Mila described how the “majority of people decided that if [they] supported it, [they] would be doing a disservice to the local school” and so the village council voted against it. Despite the lack of support at a local level, however, the Ministry of Education (MoE) supported the project and the International Academy was built. Mila stated that “you can’t blame them, everyone wants the best education for [their] children. But in starting that school, the local school has suffered so much.”

![Figure 20: Image of Placencia International Academy 2015. Photo by photovoice participant.](image-url)
In informal conversations with long-term residents in the village, several people expressed interest in being able to send their children to the Peninsula International Academy. Residents communicated that they were impressed with the facilities as well as the resources that the academy had access to. Unfortunately, the majority of long-term residents also expressed that the tuition at the International Academy was too expensive and that very few scholarships are available to support lower income families. Residents like Mila expressed how this gives greater opportunities to kids of the international investors and is worried about what this means for future opportunities within the village.

**Summing Up**

The changes experienced by the long-term residents have had a direct impact on their relationships with others in the village. A number of participants expressed feeling resentment towards the people who are coming in and building million dollar properties, resorts and gated
communities. As the scale and intensity of tourism development continues to increase, so does the gap between long-term residents and others in the village. Long-term residents express feeling that foreign investors are making it difficult for them to compete for economic opportunities in the village. The changes are also causing inequitable access to resources and forcing some to relocate to areas like Seine Bight and Independence. Many residents express increasing concern about what these changes mean for future generations in the village.

Despite these challenges, however, many long-term residents are finding ways to adapt to the “new Placencia” by creating innovative economic opportunities—such as seaweed farming. Others have organized groups like the tourism cooperative in an attempt to find ways of participating in the changes that many find to be inevitable. Finally, some residents have been proactive in documenting the environmental regulations that are being violated and sending complaints directly to the DOE. Although this has only resulted in limited success, it speaks to the strength and continued resilience of the long-term residents in the village.
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter presents a critical discussion of the results presented in the previous two chapters. Conflicting ideas of tourism development and power differentials between long-term residents and others are explored in detail and considered within the broader context of the social, cultural, and economic factors, which influence the biophysical environmental impacts of increasing tourism development and the impacts on livelihoods. Recommendations are outlined based on their applicability to address the environmental impacts of tourism development in the setting of southern Belize and how they address research questions outlined in the introduction to the thesis. The study’s limitations are highlighted to inform future research in this area. Finally, a discussion of how this research contributes to applied anthropology is included.

Introduction

In her work on food, identity, and tourism in Belize, Lyra Spang identifies Hurricane Iris as being a main driver in the transformation of the Placencia Peninsula (2014). Describing how the destruction left in the wake of this devastation caused many landowners without insurance on their property to sell their properties in order to build back their homes and businesses, Spang describes how a door was opened for the first real estate companies to quickly respond and open up offices on the peninsula (2014). This included locally owned businesses like Yearwood and later on foreign franchises like Remax (Spang 2014). This is a sentiment that is mirrored in this
study, where many participants identified Hurricane Iris as being the starting point for intensive tourism development. As noted previously, Virginia, a local activist, stated:

*I thought the hurricane would slow it down. Who would want to invest in land that was just destroyed by a natural disaster? But actually, it accelerated it. Everything was cleaned out so people could see what was there. Property values actually went up. It was like urban renewal.*

Intensive tourism development in Placencia Village is expected to continue to expand at an exponential rate. While the perceptions regarding how these changes will, or already have, impacted local livelihoods and the impacts that this has or will have on the relationship between long-term residents and others are complex, an overwhelming majority of residents in the village asserted that there is a clear connection between the declining environmental health of the peninsula and tourism development. As new shopping centers, resorts, and private homes continue to be built on the peninsula, long-term residents have seen the environment, as they know it, transform. Residents expressed concern about how these processes have impacted both land and water resources as well as how these changes will impact the future of the village. These are concerns that have become increasingly significant with the recent opening of the Norwegian Cruise Line enterprise off of Harvest Caye.

**Conflicting Ideas**

The findings from the semi-structured interviews and photovoice project demonstrate that despite what has been advertised to tourists as an eco-friendly or sustainable tourist destination—with developers capitalizing on phrases like “raw beauty,” “untouched by commercialism,” and “pristine sand and beaches”—many international investors and resort owners in Placencia have failed to embody the pillars of what those terms are meant to encompass (BTIA 2016). Based on
the experiences of those interviewed, it appears that rather than ensuring the protection of the environmental resources in the village, investors have found ways to circumvent those processes while marketing an idea of a “pristine” environment to outsiders. Not only have these violations had impacts on the biophysical environment of the peninsula, they also impacted the ability for local community members to sustain particular kinds of livelihoods in the village.

As discussed by Zarger and colleagues, not all development on the Placencia peninsula was considered to be bad by long-term residents of the village. In fact, roughly 68% percent of residents that participated in their study indicated feeling somewhat or very positive about foreign investment on the peninsula as it remains one of the main economic drivers in the village (Zarger et al. 2016, 3). Rather, there were conflicting ideas regarding the scale and types of tourism that were viewed as being desirable (Zarger et al. 2016). These perspectives varied based on categories such as age, gender, occupation, ethnicity, and class (Zarger et al. 2016). As the data in chapter four presented, the frustration of long-term residents was rooted in the lack of economic opportunities made available by foreign investors as well as the increasing impacts on the biophysical environment that many attribute to be the result of unchecked development on the peninsula.

Much like Stonich asserts in her work on the political ecology of poverty and environmental destruction in Honduras, the realities of many development projects have tended to include an increase in social differentiation, a growing gap between the rich and poor, the assignment of low status low paid jobs, reduced access to natural resources, escalating cost of food, manufactured goods, housing and land cost, outside ownership of resources, and the deterioration of the biophysical environment (1998). This is very similar to what has taken place
in Placencia since 2001 when Iris struck the coast of Belize. These processes have effectively forced out locals through indirect aggressive measures.

Natalie, an American-Belizean business owner described how, “as more people come the gap between the people that have and have not widens.” She discussed how many of the people moving to Belize are coming to make money and describes it as a “financial bonanza” where people are contributing very little to the local economy and wanting a lot back in return.

Although some residents asserted that the increase in tourism development on the peninsula led to some job growth, many more described the type of jobs created as being low skill and low wage. This is reflected in comments like the one from Mila, a member of the village council, who described how organizations like the BTIA have hired expatriates to fill the majority of the high-wage positions and locals have not been given the opportunity to be trained on these positions. It is also reflected in comments from people like Ludin, a Placencia-born tour guide and restaurant manager, who described how despite BTB reporting tourism numbers being up the locals have not been the ones that have benefitted. As Areli described, although tourism employs a lot of people on the peninsula, the majority of these positions offer no protection or security.

These feelings also reflect the idea that although tourism development has accounted for some job creation on the peninsula, it is not the type of employment that represents progress according to many long-term residents of the village. This is something that has also been researched by Medina in her work on the pragmatics of socially responsible tourism in Belize. Medina asserts that many people are very much informed on the difference between being a wage laborer and being an entrepreneur (Medina 2005). So although tourism accounts for approximately 28% of employment (NSTMP 2011), many investors fail to recognize that people
in Placencia understand that wage labor is intended to benefit the employer and that working for someone else is not how they want to participate in the local economy, particularly in an environment that offers little to no employee protection (Medina 2005). When there is movement to be involved in better opportunities, many often face obstacles as far as having and acquiring the financial means. An example of this in Placencia is when the tourism cooperative attempted to work with NCL on acquiring contracts for providing tours to cruise-ship passengers. Although the cooperative was originally successful in meeting with NCL representatives, they soon realized that their inability to acquire the necessary insurance would prevent them from getting a “piece of the pie” as they originally imagined.

Medina points out that many people do not view long-term foreign investors as being ‘local’ or as contributing to the local economy; the local perception is that foreign investors are not providing economic benefit to the local community but rather “pursuing their own self-interest rather than the greater good of Belize” (Medina 2005, 290). This is a sentiment that was very prevalent in Placencia. Recall, for example, Coconut Man who asserted:

*The reality is the environment is being destroyed, people are spending money to put up structures and they are not worried about the environmental damages because everybody wants to grab, grab, grab. Everybody just wants to have a big house to touch the sky or something. Everybody want the perfect view. And it is not a good thing for us who is from here. I am seeing a.. It’s not healthy, I’ll just put it like that.*

This quote speaks to the growing division between those that have and those that do not. Recall a similar comment from one of the long-term residents of the village who described how she felt “foreigners have their middle finger up.” The shared sentiment of these quotes express the idea that people have come in and created what they want despite what it means for the long-term
residents of the village or the local environment. It also speaks to the long history of populations like this one lacking the power to be part of the decisions being made. The people with the money hold the power and are being incentivized by programs like the QRP. The selective enforcement of environmental regulations has further rendered many of the long-term residents of Placencia powerless to what impacts these practices have had on their economic livelihoods and on their environment.

In their work on local perspectives of ecotourism in Nicaragua, Hunt and Stronza investigate the growing dichotomy between “what ecotourism should be and the pragmatics of what it ultimately becomes” (2011, 376). Hunt and Stronza assert the gap between what scholars identify as being a potential alternative to conventional tourism or if it is simply an old idea that has been repackaged to appeal to presumably eco-conscious consumers (2011). The research for this project implies that, at least in Belize, it is more the latter hypothesis. This can be seen in assessing the environmental impacts, the lack of economic opportunities, the lack of control in decisions being made, and the growing economic division between long-term residents and others. As Areli so articulately stated, “People want to say that they are eco-conscious. Maybe they are. But in the end it’s all for profit.”

Recall Mandalin Caye, where live coral was being used for construction of a seawall despite the fact that it was being advertised as an “untouched” paradise to tourists or the water retention area near the expensive and exclusive eco-lodge where human waste could be seen draining directly from a drainage ditch off of the main road entering Placencia Village. Despite the fact that tourists pay upwards of $800 US/night to stay in what is being marketed as this eco-lodge, the owners neglected to incorporate appropriate infrastructure for wastewater disposal. What’s more is that although attempts have been made in both of these situations to bring light to
the fact that environmental regulations are not being enforced, neither situation has resulted in any change being made by the developers or owners, or regulatory institutions and policies. This is largely influenced by the fact that the Belizean economy is currently being characterized by a debt crisis largely influenced by its reliance on the export of natural resources and tourism (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014). These issues are exacerbated by the fact that many of the inspectors working for the regulatory agencies tend to be underpaid and overworked, making them more vulnerable to the cash bribes being offered by some of the international investors and others on the peninsula.

In her work on the political ecology of poverty and environmental destruction in Honduras, Stonich asserts large-scale enterprises, along with individuals with more power, are often granted land on concessionary terms by the state (Stonich 1998, 30). According to Stonich, this “allows them to treat land as low-cost input and more economical to move elsewhere after destroyed rather than attempt to conserve it” (1998, 30). The same policies that are creating favorable conditions for the wealthy are responsible for the impoverishment of others (Stonich 1998). The examples provided in this section serve as examples that despite the ideas that are being sold to tourist consumers in Placencia Village, the environment is being negatively impacted by tourism development. The lack of enforcement of these regulations is rooted in a history of politics. With an economy that continues to be based on external markets, many of the policies are intended to benefit foreigners more than local Belizeans who have called this peninsula home for generations.
Power Relations and Control Over Resources

The processes transpiring on the peninsula are not new or unique to the country of Belize, or elsewhere around the globe. Many economic development projects take the form of tourism, land-development, and increasingly, eco-tourism and sustainable development, but the focus remains on attracting external capital, rather than addressing the needs of the local inhabitants. In the past, researchers have employed the use of a political-ecologic framework to examine the shift from agriculture to fishing and then to tourism in Belize (Key 2002, Myles 2008, Sutherland 1998). The continued dependence on external markets and foreign investment makes residents in the village perpetually reliant on global neoliberal economies of scale and the ways they create dispossession from specific landscapes (West 2016). These are the same nations that are largely responsible for the rapid tourism development and resulting environmental impacts on the peninsula. Much like in the past, long-term residents in the village are attempting to find new ways to navigate how neoliberalism is not only impacting their landscape but also their agency (Wilk 2006). The use of a political-ecologic framework is more necessary than ever to evaluate how livelihoods are being threatened.

As Karlsson and Bryceson point out livelihoods in Belize “have been continuously influenced by broader political-economic relations and processes transcending the national boundaries” (2014, 2). This can currently be seen in what tourism means for fishers and tour-guide operators on the peninsula where many are facing another shift in practices. Tour-guide operators described their suspicions of losing business to non-local entities on the peninsula as well as their concerns that this new competition is not as invested in protecting the environment. This sentiment was mirrored by fishermen who described facing a loss in biodiversity in the
lagoon and coastal environments and not being able to compete with transnational companies, making it increasingly difficult to make a living on fin-fishing alone.

In his book on Placencia and its Environs, Lawrence Vernon states that many feel that increased tourism development—particularly mass cruise tourism—will destroy what the village has worked so hard to develop (2014). In her work on evaluating cruise ship tourism in Belize, Diedrich also asserts that exponential growth coupled with the absence of fully established policies for managing resulting impacts “represents a significant threat to natural and cultural resources and the future of tourism in Belize” (2010, 235). Further, the current version of the Blackstone Report, which outlines the national tourism strategy, acknowledges the importance of this original recommendation and warns that the exponential growth in tourism places Belize at risk of losing its identity as an ecotourism destination as it moves closer to embodying the characteristics of a mass tourism destination (Diedrich 2010).

Long-term residents expressed concern that what was once considered a small fishing village will soon turn into a San Pedro or Miami. Not only were they concerned about what this meant for their livelihoods and the environment, but many interviewees also expressed resentment about their opinions not being heard. Recall Meredith who stated, “Everyone had good sound opinions about cruise ships. Did that make a difference?” Recall, however, the study by Zarger and colleagues which demonstrates that the opinions about cruise-ship tourism were initially split, where nearly half of participants reported at least somewhat favorable feelings about the possibility of pocket cruise tourism (Zarger et al. 2016). This support began to decrease as plans for mass cruise tourism moved forward, revealing minimal concern for including long-term residents in economic opportunities and also bringing forth concerns about what this would mean for the environment.
As Myles points out in his work on ecotourism in Belize, tourism as a development strategy has had the ability to obstruct peoples’ ability to make citizenship claims for access to environmental resources (2008). In her work on the resilience of vulnerable households after Hurricane Iris, Alexander describes how with limited opportunities to maintain their livelihood, many landowners eventually reluctantly chose to sell their land to large developers, making way for the village to be “developed” into an international tourist destination (2008, 111). This can be seen in Belize where already many long-term residents of Placencia have moved to areas like Seine Bight and Dangriga because they can no longer afford to live in the village. Recall Mila who asserted that:

*For real estate, we are like red meat. I mean, the thing is, it has driven up the cost of real estate so much that an average local family, hardworking average local family, can no longer afford to buy property in Placencia, or on this peninsula anymore. The people with money end up coming in and developing the lagoon property. At some point I can’t see our children getting land, so they will have to start moving away.*

Karlsson and Bryceson suggest that with the increase in environmental threats, such as pollution, coastal development, climate change, shoreline erosion, and decreased precipitation future adaptation options are likely to be constricted (Karlsson and Bryceson 2014, 10). Although I would argue that Belizeans are currently continuing to find ways to adapt—such as turning to seaweed farming—this sentiment is reflected in how certain members of the community viewed the future of the village. Many long-term residents expressed concern about how these processes will impact the future of the peninsula. Recall Natalie, who asserted:

*Oh, god. I don’t even want to think about it. I have no idea. We may not have a peninsula. Because of all the development that has already gone on and the destroying of*
the mangroves. If a hurricane comes through, god forbid. It could just totally wipe us out.

Hurricane Iris represents an important tipping point for the residents of Placencia Village. As the scale and intensity of tourism development continues to expand at an exponential rate, many residents expressed increasing concerns over what this means for them. Despite what is being marketed to the consumer as sustainable development, the growth in the village appears to be having significant negative effects on the biophysical health of the environment. As long as foreign investors continue to be incentivized by the state and avoid the enforcement of regulations, there will continue to be conflicting ideas of tourism development as well as the resulting power differentials between long-term residents and others in the village. The issues reflected in Placencia are not unique to Belize rather represent what is transpiring at a global level.

Despite these challenges, the people of Placencia continue to be resilient in the face of dramatic change. Just as they have done in the past with the transition from agriculture to fishing and then to tourism, many are figuring out how to resist being displaced or disposed from the environment. Although this is becoming more difficult to do as development intensifies, examples like the tourism cooperative and seaweed farming demonstrate that the people of Belize are continuing to find ways to transition to their changing landscape.

Limitations

A limitation in this study is that many of the participants benefit directly from the tourism industry and were thus reluctant to speak openly regarding their concerns—specifically as it relates to perceptions about tourists, tourism, and expatriates in the village. I found that
Placencia-born residents were reticent to speak openly in semi-structured interviews regarding their feelings towards others in the village but were more open in informal situations, such as bars and social gatherings. This was less of a limitation when interacting with others in the village, who did not express as much hesitation in discussing their feelings regarding their perceptions of Placencia-born residents of the peninsula. In order to alleviate the ethical considerations of gathering data in bars and social gatherings, I would regularly remind participants that my primary purpose in the village was to document activities and perceptions relating to tourism development and ensure I was abiding by the guiding principles of the Belmont Report, including respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (2009).

Similarly, several participants expressed concern over speaking openly about their perceptions of tourism development in a public setting. Participants recalled past experiences with taking a stance on social issues—such as drug use—within the village and the negative impacts it had on them personally. This limitation again had more of an impact on Placencia-born residents than it did on others in the village.

Due to the sample size and location of the research in one village in Belize, the generalizability of findings is limited. Basing my study on the preliminary findings of the larger NSF study and the strength of the methods employed, however, helped to counteract this limitation by making the findings of this project more robust. Obviously, findings from this research are not representative of all people in Belize or in tourism dependent economies. Time and financial constraints limited the number of in-depth interviews and photovoice projects that could be completed. Saturation in this study was met; nevertheless, more available time and funding would have allowed for more participation. Time and financial constraints further limited what I was able to share with the community regarding the photovoice project.
Findings from this research are also lacking the perspectives of more powerful stakeholders in the village—including representatives from projects like NCL and international developers. Although I attempted to contact members from these groups, I did not have any success securing formal (or informal) meetings with them.

**Recommendations and Future Research**

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations, primarily geared towards policy makers, are suggested:

1. Improve wastewater infrastructure on Placencia peninsula. Although wastewater poses major challenges, it cannot be ignored and entails policy change at the government level. Although some plans have been made for a centralized wastewater treatment facility, the plans are currently at a standstill. The lack of adequate wastewater infrastructure not only poses a significant threat to coastal and marine ecosystems it also poses human health concerns. The success of this recommendation will require greater pressure on government regarding the need for transparency and accountability for what the plans are.

2. There is a significant need for greater enforcement of environmental regulations. Although policies may be in place regarding land ownership, building regulations, dredging codes, employment regulations, etc. they are not being uniformly enforced. This is a structural issue that needs to be addressed at a governmental level. Appropriate enforcement of regulations will include greater accountability and transparency from government as well as uniform consequences for regulations that are not being enforced. This will also involve provide local leaders more options and decision points for issues that are specific to the village.
3. There is a need for change in policies that place a significant emphasis on benefitting foreign investors at the expense of local community members. This might include making credit easier to access and providing more training opportunities for local people to fill high-paying jobs. This may further include providing more opportunities for children to attend the Peninsula International Academy and/or increasing support of the local primary school in Placencia village. In order to do this, local voices need to be heard. This starts at a community level and will require implementing community-led workshops and town halls in a space where long-term residents can vent their frustrations in a way that does not cause fear of repercussion. These meetings should be regularly scheduled and staggered at different times to ensure that all interested people have the opportunity to attend.

There is a need to provide avenues for counter-narratives to the ways tourism development is being marketed in southern Belize. One option for this is through the use of photography. This could be done through the use of an online platform as well as through paper copies in the village. The platform should be run by long-term residents in the community and should emphasize the voice of Belizeans by being written from a local perspective and with local language. This will allow the problems to be defined at an educational level relatable to those targeted. The photovoice project could be used as the start to this idea. Participants and other long-term residents who were engaged with the project can use the data gathered as a starting point to start addressing some of the concerns that are viewed as being most pressing in the village. As mentioned in the data section, there has been some mixed success by individuals sending photographs of environment regulations violations to DOE. Although this might not
change the long-term outcomes, it could have the effect of placing greater pressure on developers to adhere to regulations.

In addition to the implementation of the above recommendations, it is also important to note the need for future research. This is particularly true regarding the impacts of NCL on both the biophysical landscape as well as on livelihoods in the village. With NCL officially offering cruises to Harvest Caye, this represents a pivotal tipping point in how things are transitioning. It is now more important than ever to continue working with long-term residents to build solidarity, community engagement and empowerment. If nothing else, it is crucial to document how these transitions are impacting the people of Belize at all levels. It should be noted that these actions should be community-based and -led. While researchers and other interested parties could be involved, it is pertinent that these movements are driven by long-term local voices, with researchers and others responding to needs and requests of the local population without continuing to perpetuate the history of power differentials and hierarchies in the village.

In addition, more research needs to be conducted to explore the lack of enforcement of regulations in southern Belize, specifically in regards to tourism development. What can be done to create urgency for greater enforcement? What impacts could this have for other areas in Belize?

Finally, further research needs to address how the literature on the anthropology of tourism intersects with political ecology. As evidenced by this study, it is difficult to divorce current politics from the polemics of past. In this thesis, I attempt to bring together these two theoretical frameworks by addressing the ways in which tourism is innately political in how decisions are made and what impacts these decisions have had on the environment. These two frameworks complement each other. The scholarship within the anthropology of tourism often
fails to pay attention to politics and the scholarship in political ecology often fails to attend to the local scale of the politics of tourism. The decisions on what is built and who benefits are often engrained in the structures of power, and as in the case of Belize, rooted in historical processes. Combining the frameworks of the anthropology of tourism and political ecology is needed in order to create forms of tourism in which all people benefit more equitably.

**Contributions to Anthropology**

Previous research has shown the uneven outcomes that often result from tourism development in countries like Belize (Chambers 2000, Medina 2005, Stonich 1998, Stronza 2001). This research study, in particular, confirmed this trend and provides an examination of the need to focus on establishing and enforcing regulations that prioritize the needs of citizens over foreign investors and others in the village. Not only does this study outline findings on the perceptions of tourism development, but it also frames a discussion on how long-term residents are adjusting to ecological and livelihood changes. Furthermore, this study highlighted the impacts and role of power differentials through combining the frameworks of anthropology of tourism and political ecology.

This research documented a specific period of time that marks a turning point of sorts for Placencia Village. It not only captured long-term residents perceptions towards tourism development, it also explores how the changes have impacted relationships and highlights the fears that many people express in regards to the future of their village. As the world continues to experience population growth, the depletion of natural resources, and the increasing demands for natural resources, observations like these are important for being able to make policy
recommendations that ensure a more equitable distribution of benefits and a reduction in environmental impacts from tourism development in countries like Belize.

Finally, this research contributes to applied anthropology through the use of photovoice. One strength that this method offers is the ability to use visual images to communicate up and down scales of power, which is useful in providing counter-narratives to what is being sold to consumers. In Placencia, long-term residents of the village have been using photography as a way to document and place pressure on organizations like the DOE to enforce regulations. This project, then, acts as an extension to what has already been started in the village and has the potential to act as an additional platform for these ideas to be communicated.

The results of this project will be made widely available to the people of Placencia Village in a number of ways. The first is that the thesis will be shared with the village (including participants, organizations, village council). In addition, I will condense the findings of this project into an executive summary that will synthesize the major themes and include contact information for those that are interested in finding out more about the project. Results will also be shared through the photovoice project, which will be available via an online webpage as well as paper form. This will also serve as a platform for people interested in continuing that aspect of the project.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Participant ID# _______________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. The following questions will ask you about demographic information and your general beliefs and perceptions about tourism development in Placencia Village. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability and please feel free to add any other information that you think is relevant. There is no right or wrong answer; I am simply interested in your personal views.

PART A: Demographics:
1. What is your age?
2. What is your nationality?
3. How long have you lived here?
4. Why did you decide to move here?
5. Are you currently working?
   a. No (skip to Part B)
   b. Yes
6. What do you do for work?

PART B: Tourism Development
1. Tell me about some of the risks or benefits of tourism development on the peninsula.
2. Tell me about how the beach has changed in your time living on the peninsula.
3. Tell me about how tourism development has affected your ability to make a living on the peninsula.
4. Tell me about the relationship between longer-term “local” versus shorter-term “non-local” residents in the village. Have these relationships experienced any changes in recent years? If yes, how?

5. Tell me about what you imagine Placencia Village will look like in ten years.

6. Tell me about what processes you believe are responsible for some of the change you have experienced in the village.

Additional comments:

Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have discussed today?

End of questionnaire:

*Thank you very much for your time! The information you provided is very helpful to this study.*
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. The following questions will ask you about demographic information and your general beliefs and perceptions about tourism development in Placencia Village. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability and please feel free to add any other information that you think is relevant. There is no right or wrong answer; I am simply interested in your personal views.

**PART A: Demographics:**
7. What is your age?
8. What is your nationality?
9. How long have you lived here?
10. Why did you decide to move here?
11. Are you currently working?
   a. No (skip to Part B)
   b. Yes
12. What do you do for work?

**PART B: Photovoice Questions:**
1. What do you see here?
2. What is really happening here?
3. How does this relate to our lives?
4. Why does this situation or concern exist?
5. How could this photo be used to educate policy makers?
6. What can we do about it?
4/21/2015

Eric Wells, Ph.D.  USF Department of Anthropology 4202 E. Fowler Ave. SOC 107 Tampa, FL 33620

RE: Expedited Approval for Continuing Review

IRB#: CR2_Pro00012766

Title: USF Social Science Team "Scaling Up" Season on the Placencia Peninsula, Belize, for the NSF PIRE project, Context Sensitive Implementation of Synergistic Water-Energy Systems

Study Approval Period: 5/16/2015 to 5/16/2016

Dear Dr. Wells:

On 4/21/2015, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s): Protocol Document(s):

Team_Main_eIRB_Research_Protocol_Updated_February 16 2015_v7 PIRE_USF_Social Science Research

Consent Scripts:

IRB_Adult Consent Script_Interviewee_FocusGroupParticipant_ver4_February 16 2015
IRB_Adult Consent Script_Mapping Collaborator_ver4_February 16 2015
The waiver of informed consent documentation has been renewed.

The IRB determined that your study qualified for expedited review based on federal expedited category number(s):

(6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson USF Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX D: NICH APPROVAL LETTER

My Ref: ISCR/R/H/2/15 (4)

Dr. Christian Wells
Dept. of Anthropology
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida USA

May 13, 2015

Re: Application for Research Permit

Dear Dr. Wells:

Your permit application to conduct your research project entitled "Impacts of Tourism, Wastewater, and Water-energy Development on Livelihoods and the Environment on the Placencia Peninsula of Belize" has been reviewed and found in observance of the stipulations outlined in the Conditions for Historical, Anthropological and Socio-Economic Research. In that regard, you and your research team have been granted a permit to conduct research within Belize. This approval is granted on condition of your compliance with the National Institute of Culture and History Act, Chapter 331, Section 71 and 72 (a), Revised Edition 2003, of the laws of Belize. Permission has been granted for a period of one year effective 1 June, 2015 – 1 June, 2016. This permit is subject to renewal for each subsequent year.

As a condition of this permit you are asked to submit a field report to the Institute for Social & Cultural Research (ISCR), at the conclusion of the first year. The field report should include information about preliminary findings of your field research. Additionally, at the conclusion of your study, you are required to provide ISCR with two (2) copies of your final research paper and any published paper resulting from the research. We also ask that you consider presenting your paper and findings in future forums and conferences hosted by ISCR/NICH.

Please let us know if we can provide any other assistance for the successful completion of your study. If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact us at any time. We thank you for your interest in conducting research in Belize.

Note: All social research involving persons under 18 years of age will require parental consent at the start of the study.

Mr. Nigel Encalada
Director
Institute for Social and Cultural Research
National Institute of Culture and History

Institute for Social and Cultural Research
Culvert Road, Museum Building, Belmopan, Belize C.A.
Phone: 501-222-3307 Fax: 501-222-3815
Email: iscr@nichbelize.org
PERMIT TO CONDUCT SOCIAL RESEARCH

Permit No. ISCR/ H/2/39

Grantee:

This is to certify that Dr. Christian Wells (Principal Investigator of Northern Kentucky University), Dr. Rebecca K. Zarger (Co-Principal Investigator of the University of South Florida) and Dr. Linda M. Whiteford (Co-Principal Investigator of the University of South Florida) and their research team have been granted permission to conduct social research in Belize.

Research Title:

“Impacts of Tourism, Wastewater, and Water-energy Development on Livelihoods and the Environment on the Placencia Peninsula of Belize”

Research Location(s):

Placencia, Stann Creek, Belize.

Validity:

This permit shall remain valid from 1 June, 2015 – 1 June, 2016 and shall be subjected to conditions hereunder and to the compliance by the Grantee with the NICH Act.

Conditions:

Permission has been granted by the Institute for Social and Cultural Research under the auspices of the National Institute of Culture and History (NICH) as contained in the NICH Act Chapter 331, Section 71 and 72 (a) Revised Edition 2003, of the laws of Belize. The Act requires the Institute for Social and Cultural Research to review and approve all proposed research involving humans that is conducted in the country of Belize.

Authorized: May 18, 2015

Mr. Rolando Cocom for
Mr. Nigel Encalada
Director
Institute for Social and Cultural Research
National Institute of Culture and History

NICHH
national Institute of culture and history