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Understanding Local Perceptions and the Role of Historical Context in Ecotourism Development: A Case Study of St. Kitts

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UNDERSTANDING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND THE ROLE OF HISTORICAL CONTEXT IN ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF ST. KITTS

by

Amber Greening

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE in Human Dimensions of Ecosystem Science and Management

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2014
ABSTRACT

Understanding Local Perceptions and the Role of Historical Context in Ecotourism Development: A Case-Study of St. Kitts

by

Amber Greening, Master of Science
Utah State University, 2014

Major Professor: Dr. Ann Laudati
Department: Environment and Society

Ecotourism is a popular tool for biodiversity conservation and local community development. It has long been argued that the depth of community involvement and support is imperative in creating effective and sustainable ecotourism programs, although widespread community involvement is rarely achieved in practice. Local perceptions of the benefits and impacts of ecotourism development and held values for the resources utilized in ecotourism activities may influence community support and decisions to be involved; however, little is understood as to why such perceptions exist. This research highlights community perceptions of ecotourism and held values for sea turtles and explains the emergence of these perceptions within two villages on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts. Data were collected through face-to-face community surveys, key-informant interviews, and participant observation during the summer of 2012. The field data revealed that community members did not perceive ecotourism to be
widely beneficial, but instead viewed the government, people who work in the tourism industry, and tourists themselves to benefit from ecotourism practices. Further, community members perceived ecotourism as negatively affecting poor people, people who do not work in the tourism industry, and the environment. These perceptions of who or what is affected by ecotourism development were traced back through centuries of political-ecological processes on St. Kitts that have mediated local people’s relationship with their land and resources, as well as their relationships with each other. The results of this research suggest a focus on the role of ecotourism in amending the persistent marginalization of local people from their resources by applying a participatory development approach to ecotourism development through collaboration with existing community groups and social networks.

(101 pages)
Understanding Local Perceptions and the Role of Historical Context in Ecotourism Development: A Case-Study of St. Kitts

Amber Greening

Ecotourism is a popular tool for the conservation of fragile ecosystems and local development of the communities surrounding them. It is widely argued that the key to effective and sustainable ecotourism programs relies on the depth of community involvement and support. This research reveals a better understanding of community members’ perceptions of ecotourism and conservation, and how these perceptions potentially influence participation in current and future ecotourism projects within the villages of Cayon and Keys on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts. Data were collected through several qualitative methods including: face-to-face surveys with Cayon and Keys villagers; interviews with government workers, staff, and members of the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Reserve; and participant observation of sea turtle ecotourism activities as well as community and organization meetings.

The community surveys revealed that local people perceived ecotourism on St. Kitts as being beneficial to specific groups of people, namely those in government, those who work in the industry, and tourists. Community members perceived poor people, people who do not work in tourism, and the local environment as being negatively impacted by ecotourism activities. In addition,
issues such as environmental apathy or disinterest in conservation of resources such as turtles, as well as a pervasive distrust in the government, were shown to exist among residents of Keys and Cayon that work as barriers towards support and participation in ecotourism activities. Historical analysis of the field data revealed past socio-political processes that help to contextualize and explain why these perceptions exist. The results of this research highlight these challenges and suggest a focus on understanding community concerns and needs, while building participation from already established community groups and social networks.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s ecotourism emerged as a socially and environmentally beneficial development strategy for rural communities across the globe (Honey, 2008; TIES, 1990) and has since gained credence as a tool in the “fight against poverty and the protection of the environment” (UN News Centre, 2013). More specific forms of ecotourism development, such as community-based ecotourism (CBE), have become popular tools for development of rural communities with little to no other options for access to global markets (Grandoit, 2005). It is argued that the key to effective and sustainable conservation and development efforts relies on the depth of community involvement and support for CBE-type initiatives even though few examples of such currently exist. What it is that motivates community members to partake in these practices is not fully understood. Perceptions that community members have of the environment and factors that influence their decisions to engage in CBE initiatives are crucial steps in designing programs that will elicit the widespread support needed for them to truly be effective. Therefore, this thesis investigates the perceptions that affect individual decisions to participate in CBE, and the factors that shape those perceptions using a case study of the Caribbean island of St. Kitts and the community-based organization, St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network (SKSTMN). This information furthers the understanding of local people’s perceptions of ecotourism within the insular Caribbean and provides insight into how the region’s common historical and political factors inform these perceptions and thus affect motivations to participate in an increasingly popular industry.
Local participation in ecotourism development

Community participation and involvement in ecotourism development has become a popular option in the designation of such programs since it claims to better provide direct benefits to communities and that their involvement thus makes ecotourism projects inherently more sustainable (Woodley, 1993). Furthermore, it is argued that when communities have access to resources and control over ecotourism activities they will support conservation practices because it affects their livelihood and well-being (Scheyvens, 1999). However, as much as the role of communities in CBE has been lauded, there has been recognition that in practice CBE has failed to garner widespread “active participation” of community members throughout the design, implementation, and monitoring of such programs, resulting not only in failed projects (Reimer & Walter, 2012; Salazar, 2012) but also negatively affecting the ecosystems that they were trying to conserve (Brockington, Duffy, & Igoe, 2008; Buckley, 2004).

Scholars agree that no one cause works alone to influence participation. Rather, a complex interaction of economic, social, and political factors exist at various scales of social organization – from local to global –to either inhibit or motivate community involvement (see for example, Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Berkes, Kofinas, & Chapin, 2009; Hulme & Murphree, 1999; Pegas & Stronza, 2010; Tosun, 2000). For example, equitable distribution of economic benefits, local power and access to resources, and control over the decision-making processes are all consistently argued as common factors determining community participation (Berkes, 2004; Campbell, 1999; Scheyvens, 1999). Although such aspects are very important, first understanding the community context in
which CBE programs are placed is critical in the development of any participatory tourism program. This means recognition of local people’s perceptions of the benefits and impacts of tourism development (see for example Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004) and elucidating the factors that inform these perceptions in order to help mitigate people’s concerns as well as to better suit their livelihood needs. As important as local context is in developing a community-based ecotourism program, little research has been done to investigate this perspective within the insular Caribbean.

The research presented in this thesis attempts to redress this issue by looking at the following research questions: 1) What are local people’s perceptions of ecotourism and conservation? 2) How do local people value a popular tourist resource, such as sea turtles? and 3) What historical, political-ecological processes inform these perceptions?

Case-study setting

The Caribbean island of St. Kitts provides an interesting location to investigate the community concept and its role in the development of community-based ecotourism. St. Kitts, along with Nevis, make up the twin-island federation of St. Kitts-Nevis located among the Eastern Caribbean chain of small islands that separate the Caribbean Sea from the Atlantic Ocean. It was a prized sugar colony of the British for hundreds of years until the island gained independence in 1983. Even after independence, St. Kitts maintained sugar production as its main industry until its closure in 2005 and thus began to concentrate its resources towards the development of a strong tourism industry. Within the last decade many of the small islands of the Eastern Caribbean have made the transition from centuries of export crop-based industries to new monocultures focused on tourism. Now, many islands are working to diversify their tourism product in order to
stand out from the common “sun, sand, and sea” brand of the Caribbean and market alternative forms of tourism, including community-based tourism ventures.

Since 2003, St. Kitts has had an established community-based program called the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network which operates in St. Mary’s Parish along the island’s Atlantic coast. The group focuses on sea turtle conservation and utilizes ecotourism as a tool for public education and economic development for the surrounding communities of Cayon and Keys. Both of these communities were once wholly involved in sugar and agricultural production. Keys, with a small population of 399, was once a prominent fishing village due to its proximity and access to the mile long stretch of sandy coastline that also serves as the main sea turtle nesting beach for St. Kitts. Cayon (pop. 2122), lying only two miles to the northwest of Keys, developed into a major agro-industrial center of St. Kitts with much of the 20th century characterized by both sugar and cotton production. By the 1970s the cotton ginnery at Spooner’s estate in Cayon closed down followed by sugar only a few decades later. Keys itself has seen a decline in fishing activities due to a combination of legal restrictions on the harvest of turtles and other marine resources as well as a lack of interest in the fishing trade among the younger generation. However, the rich biodiversity and agricultural history of these communities, along with the presence of an already established ecotourism program, led to the designation of St. Mary’s Parish as a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve in late 2011. It is touted as the first biosphere reserve in the English-speaking Caribbean and has resulted in a concentrated focus on the expansion of community-based ecotourism activities in St. Mary’s Parish. Expansion and development of this new industry has profound implications for the villages of Cayon and Keys.
**Thesis structure**

This thesis is prepared in a multi-paper format. There are two main chapters that are prepared for publication, which together describe the role of communities in ecotourism programs on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts. The data used in this research were collected during the summer of 2012.

Chapter 2 discusses, on a more descriptive level, community members’ perceptions of the environment and ecotourism practices. These perceptions reveal challenges towards extensive community involvement in CBE development on St. Kitts, but also highlight the concerns and needs of community members. It is suggested that planners and advocates of CBE on St. Kitts integrate the needs and concerns of community members in order to elicit the support and participation needed to create locally beneficial and sustainable CBE programs.

Chapter 3 focuses on the historical and political factors that influence local perceptions on St. Kitts. Following Offen’s (2004) historical political ecology approach, historical data were used to contextualize the concerns community members expressed and the perceptions that emerged as barriers to support for CBE. In Chapter 4, the conclusions from the research as a whole are discussed and implications for a participatory approach to ecotourism development are explored.
References


Abstract

Ecotourism is a popular tool for biodiversity conservation and local community development. It has long been argued that the depth of community involvement and support is imperative in creating effective and sustainable ecotourism programs, although extensive community involvement is rarely achieved in practice. This study assessed community perceptions of ecotourism and held values for sea turtles on St. Kitts in order to better understand the role of ecotourism in effectively addressing community concerns and desires for development. Research was carried out during the summer of 2012 in the communities of Cayon and Keys with data collected through face-to-face community surveys, key-informant interviews, and participant observation. It was revealed that local people perceived ecotourism on St. Kitts as being beneficial to specific groups of people, namely those in government, those who work in the industry, and tourists. Community members perceived poor people, people who do not work in tourism, and the local environment as being negatively impacted by ecotourism activities. Furthermore, issues such as environmental apathy or disinterest in conservation of resources such as turtles, as well as a pervasive distrust in the government, were shown to exist among residents of Keys and Cayon that work as barriers towards support and participation in ecotourism activities. Potential strategies for eliciting support and extensive involvement include collaboration with local community groups and implementing participatory development
approaches that work to involve community members in the ecotourism development process.

1. **Introduction**

   It is widely agreed that ecotourism practices should provide benefits to the communities in which they are situated. Understanding what those benefits are and how to achieve them, along with the role of communities in such endeavors, however, is more contested (Brown & Hall, 2008; Scheyvens, 1999). In many cases planners and practitioners of community-based ecotourism programs have expectations about the nature of community participation based on their own notion of how ecotourism can benefit communities which may or may not align with the perceptions of needs and the desires held by community members. Yet it is likely that these perceptions, along with the actions and influence of ecotourism planners, are what motivate or inhibit communities’ decisions to participate (Andereck et al., 2005; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Thus, understanding the community perspective is critical in implementing a truly participatory development approach in ecotourism initiatives.

   While the community-based ecotourism (CBE) concept has been around for several decades, it only recently gained popularity in the Caribbean region and particularly within the Eastern Caribbean. Preferential access to EU markets for the Caribbean ended in the mid 2000s and for many small island states it resulted in the transition out of old cash-crop industries that employed a majority of local people living in rural villages (OECS, 2005). Ecotourism is now promoted as the only option for economic development in these areas that arguably have little else to offer global markets except their tropical nature (Grandoit, 2005). Furthermore, ecotourism in the Caribbean is
promoted as a move away from tourism planning that previously was based on the needs of the tourist (Holder, 1988) and towards a focus on the socio-economic demands of the communities as well as conserving their unique natural resources (Garraway, 2008). In most cases this has meant a transition away from traditional subsistence to land-use practices based on a new environmental ethic focused on conservation for tourism. Such a transition surely has implications on how communities’ perceive ecotourism practices and hence affects their decisions to participate in CBE programs, yet little research has been done to elucidate these perceptions amongst communities within the Eastern Caribbean.

This study addresses this gap by utilizing a qualitative approach to reveal and assess community perceptions of ecotourism and conservation in the case study setting of St. Kitts, and analyzes how these perceptions may inhibit or motivate involvement in community-based ecotourism initiatives. With a specific focus on ecotourism planning and activities associated with the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network (SKSTMN) and the St. Mary’s Biosphere Reserve, a member of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve (MAB) network, implications for extensive community involvement in CBE on St. Kitts, as well as the wider Caribbean, can be made.

1.1 Ecotourism as a conservation and development tool

Ecotourism is a subsector of the broader tourism industry and generally is defined as ‘responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local peoples’ (TIES, 1990). It is considered a small-scale, socially conscious, and environmentally sensitive form of the tourism industry that helps promote
rural development. This contrasts to traditional mass tourism which caters to a high-density of tourists, is extremely dependent on foreign currency, and is criticized for economically benefitting foreign investors and national elites instead of rural people and communities (Conway & Timms, 2010; Goodwin, 2008; Weaver, 2001). Many scholars add that ecotourism should be viewed as an incentive for local people to ‘buy into’ conservation where economic factors such as job creation and alternative forms of income are utilized as incentives for people to participate (Campbell, 2000, 2002; Pegas & Stronza, 2010). However, these incentives have not always led to extensive community participation, nor do they help change conservation perceptions and behaviors (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Belsky, 1999).

1.2 The role of communities in ecotourism development

To further emphasize the social benefits of ecotourism, community-based forms of ecotourism work to provide direct socioeconomic benefits and chances for local people to have greater participatory opportunities in conservation practices that utilize ecotourism as a development tool (Buckley, 2004). According to Scheyvens (1999), when communities have access to resources and control over ecotourism activities they become empowered and this empowerment will lead to support for conservation practices that affect the livelihood and well-being of the community. In addition to increased support for local conservation practices, it is also argued that CBE helps build a community’s social capital, the norms and networks that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit and aid in local development (Woolcock, 1998). This is created from the cooperative work that strengthens relationships of trust and reciprocity between
community members and instills a ‘strong sense of solidarity’ (Jones, 2005). Because of this, community-based forms of ecotourism are viewed as being more resilient to environmental and social changes since communities can adapt and cooperatively seek innovations to problems that arise (Berkes, Kofinas, & Chapin, 2009). Therefore, many scholars highlight the importance of extensive community involvement as a means towards the sustainability of ecotourism programs (Berkes, 2004; Campbell, 2007; Hipwell, 2007; Reid, 2003).

However, as much as community participation in CBE has been lauded there is recognition that in practice CBE projects often fail to garner widespread support and involvement of community members throughout the ecotourism development process (Berkes et. al., 2009). This may result not only in failed projects (see Belsky, 1999; Reimer & Walter, 2012; Salazar, 2012) but can also negatively affect the ecosystems that they were trying to conserve (Brockington, Duffy, & Igoe, 2008; Buckley, 2004). Hence understanding what it is that influences community support and involvement in CBE is important in creating sustainable programs that provide economic benefits to the communities and help protect unique or fragile ecosystems.

1.3 Local perceptions and the expected nature of community involvement

Many scholars agree that community participation in ecotourism programs is influenced by a complexity of economic, social, and political factors at various scales of social organization (see for example, Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Berkes et al., 2009; Hulme & Murphree, 1999; Pegas & Stronza, 2010; Tosun, 2000). For this study, the focus is on community level perceptions of the concept of ecotourism and the role of
CBE planners and practitioners in influencing community member’s support for ecotourism development. Such a focus is based on the argument that the local perspective is crucial in understanding the preconditions for successful CBE development (Ap, 1992) and the reality that the local voice is often excluded in development planning processes (Honey, 2008). To highlight the importance of understanding the local perspective, Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) claim perceptions about the social, cultural, and economic impacts of tourism influence individual decisions to support and participate in the tourism development process. Their research in the Western U.S. revealed that levels of concern for the community and held values of natural resources affect local people’s perceptions of the costs and benefits associated with tourism. Specifically, when high levels of community concern existed along with high values held towards the environment, there would be greater support for tourism development perceived (or promoted) as benefitting the community and preserving natural resources (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

It is also important to understand the role of local CBE planners and practitioners in initiating community support and involvement. Moscardo (2011) argues that ecotourism projects in communities reflect the priorities and goals of planners and conservationists more so than the needs and desires of community members. And further, as Turner (2006) points out in a study of community-based tourism in South Africa, local participation is often a decision point made first in the ecotourism development process by organizations and institutions outside of communities. These exogenous groups may refer to brief consultations as participation rather than extensively involve community members in decision-making processes associated with ecotourism development (Turner, 2006). Such an approach is common in developing countries and follows what Tosun
(1999) describes as *induced or coercive* forms of participation that cannot be sustainable since it undermines community empowerment by leaving control over decision-making processes to groups or organizations outside of the community. Also, in extreme cases it may lead to retaliatory acts of sabotage or vandalism on tourism structures and natural resources (see Belsky, 1999; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997). Thus, in addition to gaining insight into local people’s perceptions of ecotourism, understanding the expected nature of community participation by organization members facilitating the CBE development process can help further elucidate barriers towards extensive community involvement.

This study utilizes the perspective of local community members and CBE planners associated with the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere program in order to describe the level of support for the development of rural ecotourism activities on St. Kitts. The data come from on-site interviews and surveys that help to contextualize CBE’s role in development and conservation practices on St. Kitts and perhaps also be applicable in understanding the efficacy of such programs within the broader Eastern Caribbean.

### 1.4 Case study context

St. Kitts is part of the twin island Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, located among the leeward islands of the Eastern Caribbean archipelago. It is the bigger of the two islands with an area of nearly 65 square miles and a population of approximately 48,000, (St. Kitts-Nevis Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2006). The largely African-descent population and the thousands of acres of overgrown cane fields that blanket the countryside are legacies of the island’s colonial past. For centuries, St. Kitts was the most profitable territory for England and was deemed the ‘mother colony’ and center for sugar
production in the British West Indies (Richardson, 1983). Sugar production lasted on the island for over 350 years, continuing even after St. Kitts and Nevis gained independence from Britain in 1983. However, declining profits, coupled with the island’s increasing debt and the loss of preferential access to EU markets, forced the closure of the monoculture in 2005. As a result, nearly 1500 workers were displaced, many of whom resided and worked in the rural communities of the island (OECS, 2005).

The government of St. Kitts had been aware of the impending closure of the sugar industry for years as preferential access to EU markets was set to end in 2006, meaning the small island would not be able to compete against larger global producers (St. Kitts-Nevis Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2006). Faced with few other options to access global markets, St. Kitts decided to support tourism and developed a strategic plan to facilitate the transition of sugar workers into the industry (St. Kitts-Nevis Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2006). Several workshops were implemented to train individuals for employment in hotel and restaurant hospitality as well as the wholesale and retail sectors (OECS, 2005). But in the decade since the ‘retraining’ effort, as Clarke and Barker (2012) argue, many former sugar workers were unable to transition completely into the tourism sector. Their study on displaced female workers found that a key barrier to their successful transition into tourism was due to the separation people felt from the land and the distance they had to travel to work in tourism related activities concentrated along the island’s southeastern peninsula (Clarke & Barker, 2012). This could be changing, however, as a more recent focus on nature-based tourism activities aims to diversify St. Kitts’ tourism product beyond the sun, sand, and sea experience of the resorts that line the peninsula.
In late 2011 St. Kitts became the first English-speaking Caribbean nation to have a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Reserve (MAB). These reserves are recognized as areas having high ecological and cultural diversity that may provide opportunities for ‘innovative approaches’ to combine local economic development with conservation activities (UNESCO, n.d.). On St. Kitts, the reserve encompasses the entirety of St. Mary’s Parish (see Figure 1.) and includes the island’s main sea turtle nesting beach, several sugar plantation ruins, a cotton ginnery heritage site, and the once vibrant sugar producing villages of Cayon and Keys. This makes the parish an ideal location in terms of tourist attractions, (SKN List, 2011) and also due to the need for spurring employment opportunities in Cayon and Keys in the wake of the closure of sugar production. Development projects and funding proposals for the reserve go through a MAB steering committee that is made up of several government representatives, three of whom reside in Cayon village. The committee has already discussed expansion of the ecotourism model provided through the activities carried out by the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network (SKSTMN), a community-based organization that focuses on sea turtle conservation and education, with ecotourism as its foundation for local development.

The SKSTMN was first founded by an American veterinarian in 2003 with the goal of promoting sea turtle conservation practices across the island. The initial years of the group’s existence entailed only monitoring activities – carried out by volunteers from the expatriate community – in order to catalog the presence and frequency of the three endangered marine turtle species found around St. Kitts: hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*), green (*Chelonia mydas*), and leatherback (*Dermochelys coracea*). Though all
three species are considered critically endangered across the globe, St. Kitts still has an open harvest season for turtles which runs from October 1 to February 1. Because of this, SKSTMN implemented ecotour activities in 2006 to encourage an alternative, sustainable use of turtles through paid visitor tours, craft sales, and sea turtle adoption packages. The money generated by these activities flows back into the program to help cover operating expenses and wages for local staff hired by the group. Currently, SKSTMN has six Kittitians working as either a technician/tour guide or as security during night patrols on nesting beaches. Only one of these individuals resides in Keys, where SKSTMN conducts its activities, and the rest are from other villages across the island.

There is recognition, from both SKSTMN and individuals associated with the MAB program, that there is a paucity of local interest in the development of their ecotourism initiatives. With the government of St. Kitts and local NGOs increasingly looking towards placing ecotourism practices in rural villages to instigate local economic development (Phipps, 2009; St. Kitts Tourism Authority, n.d.), understanding why such a low level of engagement exists is crucial.

2. Research approach and methods

This study elucidates community perceptions of conservation and ecotourism within the rural communities of Keys (pop. 399) and Cayon (pop. 2122) on St. Kitts (CARICOM, 2009). In addition, this research highlights areas where divergent or congruent perceptions exist between community members and those involved in SKSTMN and the new MAB program. A qualitative approach was adopted and data were collected from June to August in 2012 in order to encompass the leatherback
nesting season that ends in early July. The accessibility of the turtles at the time meant SKSTMN was conducting ecotours and facilitating educational activities, thus making the topic of conservation and ecotourism more salient within the communities.

A qualitative approach was utilized in order to move ‘inquiry toward more meaningful explanations’ (Sofaer, 1999) as to why a lack of participation and support for current sea turtle conservation practices exists within these communities. This approach provided nuance in understanding the local context that shapes community perceptions and in turn influences decision-making towards involvement (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012). Since qualitative data collection is an iterative process, several techniques were utilized concurrently in order to further explain the themes that emerged. These techniques included: 1) observation of SKSTMN activities and MAB meetings, 2) implementation of community surveys, and 3) the administration of key informant interviews.

Participant observations were undertaken during ecotourism activities with SKSTMN and meetings with the MAB steering committee in order to qualify the level of engagement and involvement of community members in conservation and tourism planning activities. It required the researcher play ‘an established participant role in the scene studied’ (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994), and in this case meant participation in SKSTMN’s beach patrols and summer youth camp activities, as well as observing MAB steering committee meetings in the capital of Basseterre. Five observations were carried out with SKSTMN during their evening beach patrols with tour groups and two days of observation occurred during their youth camp activities among school-aged children from across the island for a total of 34.5 hours of participant observation. These activities
provided information into how many local people are employed through SKSTMN, their job duties, amount of pay, and how many community members volunteer with camp activities. An additional two hours of observations were made during a MAB community meeting in Cayon and revealed the level of interest and concerns held by community members in the MAB development, as well as demonstrating how the steering committee approached the process of participation for the biosphere development. The data gathered helped to provide a nuanced understanding of community and organizational relationships and highlighted the level of interest and engagement of local people in ecotourism-type practices.

Community surveys were conducted to reveal the opinions towards conservation and ecotourism of Keys and Cayon community members. Specifically, the surveys collected information about community: 1) opinions on conservation; 2) definitions of ecotourism; 3) held values towards sea turtles; and 4) perceived benefits and impacts of ecotourism. In order to not limit the range of answers or to create any bias in responses, the survey included 15 open-ended questions. Community members and local students from the Environment Club at Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College were consulted to ensure appropriate survey design and language for the region (see Appendix A). Five students from the club volunteered to help administer the surveys. The volunteers underwent a day of survey training and were involved in pre-testing the survey instrument. Surveys were conducted in-person by the author and student volunteers on July 5th–8th and on July 12th in both Keys and Cayon. Because of time constraints and the geographic layout of the research setting, random sampling was not appropriate. Instead, participants were chosen based on an intercept approach, meaning that potential respondents were recruited within
a public area as they carried out daily activities in the communities for this study (Floyd & Fowler, 2009). Each survey took 10–15 minutes to complete and once saturation in emergent categories was reached, or when no new information was being collected (Morse, 1995) a total of 135 surveys had been administered: 87 in Cayon, 48 in Keys (see Table 1).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews provided nuance to survey responses, particularly in explaining the historical context of politics and society, which influence Kittitians’ relationship with their environment and resources. Thirty-three interviews were conducted using a snowball sampling method that started from baseline interviews with SKSTMN staff and MAB committee members and led to subsequent interviews with Keys and Cayon community members with a specific interest in activities relating to the environment and ecotourism development. Additional interviews were conducted with individuals from other villages that were described through the snowball sampling method as having further insight into topics relating to ecotourism development (Table 2). All interviews were conducted by the author and lasted an average of 30-45 minutes. Questions were structured so as to tease out personal values held about the environment and level of involvement in environmental initiatives on the island, yet were flexible enough for participants to further explain or elaborate on issues they deemed important (see Appendix B). All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed for coding and analysis.
3. **Findings**

3.1 **Participant observation**

Participant observation data revealed a low-level of engagement of Cayon and Keys community members in SKSTMN activities as well as a lack of interest in the topic of sea turtle conservation and future ecotourism related activities within the newly designated biosphere reserve.

3.1.1 **Beach patrols**

The St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network conducts nightly beach patrols for nesting leatherback sea turtles from April 1st until mid July, depending on the frequency of leatherbacks at that time. A week or two following the end of the nesting season, the annual sea turtle youth camp takes place in the Marriott Hotel located on the Southeastern Peninsula of the island. This means the four local technician and two local security officers associated with the group are hired for at least 4 months of the year. Only one technician with the group is hired on all year round. Starting pay for a technician is $10 Eastern Caribbean dollars an hour with a chance of a $1 raise for each subsequent year. During beach patrols, one to two work from 8 p.m. until 3 or 4 am. They work as guides on nights with a tour group, discussing the history of turtle harvesting on the island, the cultural significance and lore on the physical effects of turtle products on the body, the need for sea turtle conservation, and the goals of the activities carried out by SKSTMN. Two of the four technicians are former turtle fishermen from communities outside of St. Mary’s Parish; one is a teacher from a village along the Caribbean coast with a personal interest in science and conservation; and the other a young resident of Keys village. The technicians work alongside at least one to three hired American interns that pay their own
way to work on the project for the summer, yet are given room and board and a food stipend paid by SKSTMN. The observations revealed that on nights with a tour group present, the local technicians work primarily with the tourists, while the interns did most of the morphometric data collection and tagging of nesting turtles. On nights without any tourists or visitors, the local technicians still played a lesser role in data collection.

3.1.2 *Sea Turtle Camp*

SKSTMN’s annual sea turtle youth camp takes place over the course of two weeks, with each week representing one group of primary school aged children from across the island. It runs from 9 am until 4:30 pm at the Marriott Resort Hotel in Frigate Bay, located on the island’s highly developed Southeastern Peninsula. At least two to three local technicians are present each day to help facilitate the camp, although observations revealed only minimal engagement as the technicians sat in the back of the room or stood against the walls and watched the American interns carry out presentations and run craft projects with the kids. Throughout the observations of camp activities, local technician involvement was minimal except for aiding in trying to keep order with the children. There were several local teenagers who helped facilitate activities and it was explained that these teenagers were former campers who were now too old to participate in the camp, but had still expressed interest in being involved.

3.1.3 *MAB Community Meeting*

A community meeting about the newly designated UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve (MAB) took place on July 12th from 7 pm to 9 pm in the village of Cayon. Members of the MAB steering committee and the American interns as well as
two local technicians from SKSTMN were present. An estimated 18 people were present that were not associated with MAB or SKSTMN (estimated due to people walking in and out of the community center). Of them, 7 were female and included a Peace Corps volunteer from the village of Cayon, a Kittitian national living in Barbados, and the partner of one of the technicians for SKSTMN. Of the four remaining females, two were from the community of Cayon and were paid to supply snacks for the meeting, and the other two from outside of the community. The rest of the audience consisted of a few men from the villages of Cayon and Keys and others from around the island with a specific interest in tourism activities within the St. Mary’s Parish.

The meeting was facilitated by the MAB steering committee with presentations by SKSTMN and a representative for the restoration of Spooner’s Cotton Ginnery project. Overall, the meeting worked to describe to the audience current activities being carried out in St. Mary’s Parish and future projects proposed for ecotourism development in the area. Questions and comments from the end of the meeting revealed the audience’s concern for the following: 1) lack of community involvement and interest; 2) increasing crime in the villages and across the island; and 3) illegal sand-mining on the Keys to Cayon beach.

3.2 **Surveys and interviews**

Three themes emerged from the survey and interview data as factors that work against extensive participation in community-based ecotourism on St. Kitts. First, the surveys revealed community perceptions of the benefits and costs of ecotourism, which differed in comparison to those held by MAB and SKSTMN members. Second, interview responses elaborated on the influence of politics and people perceived to be involved
with ecotourism program. Third, there exists a pervasive and growing disinterest in work with the environment and low held values for resources such as sea turtles.

3.2.1 Conservation for what?

Community members held different perceptions of what to conserve within St. Mary’s parish compared to representatives with MAB and SKSTMN. Interview respondents associated with MAB and SKSTMN described the sea turtle nesting beach, White’s estate, Spooner’s cotton ginnery, the bat cave in Keys, and local fruit trees as the main features of the reserve needing to be conserved. The common reason for listing these sites was based on their perceived value for tourism activities. To illustrate, a committee member from MAB explained that these features ‘could bring a lot more tourists to St. Kitts and could diversify our tourism plans.’

However, when survey participants from Keys and Cayon were asked what they believed should be conserved, fifty-eight (43%) mentioned natural resources or a specific feature of the local environment; more specifically, forty-one responses mention the conservation of water or plants based on their importance to daily life. One participant aptly noted, ‘without water we dead.’ Yet when a few participants mentioned other aspects of the environment like ‘animals’ or the ‘beach,’ none of them mentioned for the purpose of tourism. More revealing was the frequent reference to people and culture needing to be conserved, representing thirty-two (23%) and twenty-eight (20%) of the survey responses, respectively. When asked to elaborate on their answers, comments included concerns about increasing crime and gang violence among the youth, and the divisive nature of politics on the island as the reasons for these needing to be conserved.
Many participants mentioned a lack “togetherness” within the communities and one urged the need “to keep a bond between the people in the community” (Figures 2 and 3).

3.2.2 Ecotourism for whom?

Interviews with members of SKSTMN and MAB consistently showed favorable views of ecotourism as “striking a balance” between protection of natural resources and “residents in the area making a living” from those protected resources. Many respondents referenced the work of SKSTMN as a model for ecotourism success, noting its accomplishments in hiring former sea turtle fishermen and “educating” them on the sustainable benefits of protecting turtles rather than harvesting them for a “one-time income.” Respondents also viewed ecotourism as being a more appropriate fit for the unskilled laborers formerly employed with sugar or farming, than the traditional tourism industry. For example, a member of MAB noted, “Although there’s some jobs in the hotels, not everybody is suited to that kind of work. They’re used to being outside and working outside and working with their hands.” But interviews also revealed that organization members were aware that ecotourism was a new concept to the island, particularly in terms of “the conservation and the sustainable use” aspect of it, as noted by one respondent. Because of this, it was consistently stated that the communities needed to be educated and “sensitized” as to how ecotourism could benefit them.

When the topic of ecotourism came up in the surveys, responses from community members coincided with claims by MAB and SKSTMN members that ecotourism is a new concept within the communities (Figure 4). Fifty-four (40%) community members stated they did not know what the term meant. Fifty-seven (42%) community members mentioned that they believed it had something to do with the environment and tourists
visiting and some even mentioned it as a new form of tourism. For example, one participant explained it as: “Using natural resources to attract visitors as opposed to beaches, hotels, food; use hills, animal life, using resources not used before.” Thirty-one participants specifically mentioned ecotourism as selling the resources of the island to foreigners, or more specifically, “white people,” as illustrated by the following comment: “You know when they give away our land to the white people dem.”

After survey participants gave their own explanation as to what ecotourism was about, they were read the common definition used by The International Ecotourism Society (see section 1.1 above) and asked if they knew any activities in the area that fit that definition. Sixty-three (47%) acknowledged activities such as turtle tours and horseback riding on Keys beach that could be defined as ecotourism activities (Figure 5). However, as much as the MAB program and SKSTMN have praised the benefits of ecotourism, only 54 (40%) survey participants perceived that ecotourism was, or could be, generally beneficial, “but it may come slow.” Half of the comments felt that the government (n = 29), people that work in the tourism industry (n = 21), and tourists themselves (n = 20) were the ones who benefited from ecotourism activities (Figure 6).

One participant explained that the government benefits because “they getting all of the tax money and the profits,” while another participant stated that tourists are ‘having fun’ and that “we local people pleasing them.” It was not surprising then that when survey participants were asked who was negatively impacted by ecotourism, 60 (44%) participants mentioned “people.” Specifically, poor people and people who work outside of the industry were deemed to be negatively impacted since they are not directly employed in tourism. Thirty-five (26%) people mentioned the environment being
negatively affected as one participant stated, “We say that we are preserving it but we actually harming it with our development” and another exclaimed that “What people do when they travel to these natural areas affects the animals” (Figures 7 and 8).

Nevertheless, the survey responses did reveal a desire to be involved in future ecotourism activities. Eighty-two respondents said they would like to be involved and considered working with turtles, hiking, and farming as long as they could get a job. Many even responded that they would work in “anything available” but wanted to wait and see what is offered.

3.3 The social representation of ecotourism

The research revealed perceptions about ecotourism activities representing the interests of specific social groups.

3.3.1 Influence of politics

St. Mary’s Parish is the most divisive on the island when it comes to politics. The village of Cayon itself is split between followers of the government’s Labour Party, and the minority party, the People’s Action Movement. Interview responses and survey comments revealed that ecotourism projects are often negatively associated with the government. As noted in section 3.1.2, twenty-nine survey participants felt that only the government benefitted from ecotourism activities. Yet even more telling was the reaction of potential participants when asked to participate in the community surveys, several of whom declined because they thought the study was supported by the government. One man in Upper Cayon village apologized for declining to answer survey questions and explained that regardless of what comes of the study “…dey still gonna do what dey wan’
even if you tell dem what you think” and expressed disillusionment towards communities ever coming together outside of politics, claiming “we’re too far gone.” In an interview with a former civil servant, this disillusionment was described as arising from a long history of dependencies that started under colonialism and continue with the island’s government today: “…everything must depend on the government and as a consequence it reaches a kind of apathy, doesn’t it?” This apathy was further elaborated on in other interviews as a failure of many government projects to come to fruition and provide benefits to locals. Specifically, job creation outside of tourism and in agriculture was consistently mentioned as an example of failed promises by the government.

3.3.2 Influence of people

The issue of race was elaborated on in interviews as many respondents described environmental conservation concerns as those being held by “white people” or foreigners on the island. Interview responses illustrated that the message of conservation and the notion of pro-environment behavior has always been viewed as an agenda important to, as well as benefitting, white people and local elites. A former sugar industry worker described that for years the “… voice [you] would hear was an articulate voice saying to you ‘care for de earth’…” either through the radio or in the newspaper, adding that “…you didn’t have a lot of ordinary people being a part of [that].” A woman from Cayon added: “Them white people like animals… our culture was not one that started off thinking of these things, it was just about existing, getting by.” This pro-environment mindset was not only a view held by foreigners, but a practice that benefitted them as well. A government worker from a village outside of St. Mary’s Parish described that pro-environment behavior is now seen as aiding in tourism development: “Every day we
have to hear how tidy you have to keep the environment when the tourists come, how friendly you should be to the tourists, how much money tourists can bring into our economy.” Thus, it has become difficult to separate the pro-environment behavior and conservation practices from the interests of tourists or, more generally, “white people.”

3.4 Environmental disinterest

Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was the pervasive lack of interest and knowledge in the activities of SKSTMN and MAB within the communities. Sixty-eight (50%) survey participants had never worked with SKSTMN and did not want to because they were “not interested,” “too busy,” or found it “boring.” Moreover, sixty-five (48.1%) participants specifically stated that sea turtles had ‘no value’ to them (Figure 9) and one participant mentioned that they used to value the turtles as food, but no longer cared since they could not eat them. Community members explained that this disinterest extended beyond just sea turtle conservation and into any work with the environment. Many saw it as a result of a culture shift away from traditional subsistence work and a subsequent devaluing of the environment. Within this theme emerged two different causal explanations: abrupt restrictions on use of certain resources and modernization leading to the influx of imported products. For the older generation, they had experienced the restrictions placed on the harvest of historical food sources such as lobster, conch, and sea turtles. But as one woman explained, “I would hear we can’t catch the lobster at this time or you can’t catch the turtle at this time. Nobody ever told us why, we were just told we can’t do this,” and it was felt as an imposition upon the local culture. Because of this, as one Keys villager noted, the older generation may resist becoming involved in conservation practices. Evidence of this appeared in seventeen (13%) surveys, with
participants over the age of 36 stating that they still valued sea turtles as food, adding that they were not interested in working with SKSTMN because of this.

Disinterest within the younger generation manifested as an “ignorance and apathy” or a “don’t know… don’t care” mentality commonly described by community members. One young man further elaborated on the interests of his generation: “…we young persons don’t really want to be up working in the field… [we] wanna stay home in the house and play game. [We] don’t really wanna go out and enjoy the scenery an’ views and the trees, ya know?” Another young community member added that her generation was ‘doomed’ because they only cared about themselves and partying.

4.  Discussion

In order to understand factors that may influence extensive community participation, this study explored community and local organization member’s perceptions of ecotourism and conservation within villages located in St. Kitts’ newly designated Man and the Biosphere reserve. Several factors were revealed as limitations towards community involvement and were largely based on the fact that ecotourism planning and practices on the island have not aligned with the desires and interests of the communities. Participation at this point in the ecotourism development process could be viewed as following Tosun’s (1999) coerced or induced typology of participation. Involvement by community members has been controlled through the organizational hiring of technicians for SKSTMN and by invitations to community meetings where information about what will or could be developed is disseminated. Involving community members in decision-making roles has not taken place. Furthermore, community members did not feel as if ecotourism was beneficial to the local people, viewed work
and issues relating to the environment as being concerns held by the government or foreigners, and expressed concern for the conservation of community relationships.

The findings show that community members of Keys and Cayon held different perceptions about the impacts of ecotourism and the goals of conservation activities in comparison to those held by SKSTMN and MAB members. A majority of survey responses revealed perceptions that ecotourism only benefitted specific people, namely those in government, those who work in the industry, and tourists. There was recognition that ecotourism could be beneficial, but it has yet to be realized extensively within the villages. Furthermore, unlike members from MAB and SKSTMN that lamented the need to conserve turtles, mangrove forests, and historical structures, community members voiced their concern over the need to conserve daily resources like water and plants, as well as a need to conserve people due to a perception of disintegrating community ties and relationships. This concern for community is understandable as St. Kitts has witnessed a drastic rise in crime in the last decade and even more so in the last few years. Statistically, the island earned the dubious title of ‘murder capital of the world’ in 2009 after it recorded an unprecedented 27 murders (Spaulding, 2011). It later broke that record in 2011 with a total of 34 murders and an overall increase in aggravated assaults (Hewlitt, 2013). Petty crime is almost common-place across the island and even SKSTMN is not immune. After a couple of incidences of vehicle break-ins on the beach at night, the group added security to its nighttime beach patrols in 2009. This suggests that activities associated with SKSTMN and MAB should focus on bringing ‘people closer [to] build a better community’ as hoped for by one Keys villager.
It was also revealed that community perceptions about who is involved or associated with the program can act as inhibitors towards participation. As Moscardo (2011) argues, when the planning process for tourism development is “directed by an external agent, then the social representation of the external agent may be imposed upon the community.” For St. Kitts, tourism development is closely associated with the government and foreign nationals. Tourism initiatives are increasingly supported by the Labour-controlled government of the island as a means to tackle their amassing debt but with little benefits being perceived by community members. As shown in section 3.2.1 above, community members viewed the government and tourists as benefactors of ecotourism practices and further expressed the notion that ecotourism and environmental programs are issues based on the concerns of “white people.” This also underscores the argument that ecotourism plays out a Western-construct of environmental use and management in developing countries (Cater, 2006; Turner, 2006). Of the SKSTMN staff and MAB members, only 4 actually represent the communities of Keys and Cayon. One Keys member works for SKSTMN, and 3 Cayon villagers are a part of the MAB steering committee.

Furthermore, this study exposed a pervasive disinterest among community members over environmental concerns and working with the environment in general, though reasons given varied according to age. The older population of villagers remembered times when eating local foods and communal gatherings over the harvest of sea turtles was commonplace. As island development increased and more foreign imports have flooded the supermarkets, less time has been spent cultivating local crops. Additionally, global conservation initiatives have led to restrictions on the harvest of
endangered marine animals such as turtles and the further enforcement by the presence of SKSTMN have resulted in the halt of poaching activities on the Keys to Cayon beach. Several interviews elaborated on the changing palate of Kittitians as a main cause for the removal of Kittitians, and their interests, from the land. While another issue concerning the government selling old sugar land in exchange for St. Kitts citizenship, known locally as the “land-for-debt” campaign, only compounds local people’s frustration over control and access to their resources. Such environmental apathy can be seen as an enduring process that, as Tosun (2000) describes, is “enmeshed in a globally-integrated system of resource use over which they cannot exercise control” and that Brohman (1996) warns as contributing to the rising alienation of host communities based on the unequal distribution of burdens and costs to tourism development and a perceived sense of loss of cultural identity. Thus, the implication of such apathy and sense of alienation can be considered as one of the main limitations to participation in ecotourism development (Tosun, 2000).

These findings collectively illustrate the importance of context in understanding what motivates or inhibits local people to participate in community development strategies focused on a new land ethic. Specifically, it highlights the need for further research into the historical dimensions of communities in order to describe the processes in which perceptions of ecotourism, social representation, and the values held for the environment evolved, especially within the Caribbean region. Further contextualization may help to understand how current, top-down approaches in eliciting participation are closely linked to historical associations of colonialism.
5. Conclusion

In this study, community perceptions of ecotourism and conservation on St. Kitts were evaluated. The focus of the assessment was on how these perceptions may influence support and involvement in ecotourism practices within the communities of Cayon and Keys. It was found that community members perceived ecotourism to have the potential to be widely beneficial, but for the most part expressed that the government, tourists, and people who specifically work in the tourism industry are the ones who benefit from ecotourism. Further, many respondents described the need for conserving local resources utilized in daily life, such as water and food plants, as well as conserving people and social ties. Most respondents did not mention conserving resources for economic or tourism related reasons. Thus, the barriers that exist towards extensive community involvement in ecotourism activities on St. Kitts are based on the fact that the development of such programs has not aligned with the needs and desires of the communities aimed to benefit from them.

Although ecotourism development is not currently viewed as aligning with the needs and interests of community members, survey responses did reveal that local people are interested in being involved in future ecotourism activities. One of the main reasons given was based on the desire for locally based employment. Many community members also explained that they preferred to wait and see what would develop before getting involved. This implies that ecotourism development within Cayon and Keys may have to continue to be driven by local elite and foreign entrepreneurs as has already been the case with the establishment of the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and by the designation of the MAB reserve. But these projects need to be better aligned with the
concerns of the communities and moving forward it is suggested that ecotourism initiatives on St. Kitts might better serve as avenues to build social cohesion rather than being marketed to communities as ways to conserve the environment and earn economic benefits. Members of SKSTMN and MAB and planners of future ecotourism initiatives on the island should pursue collaboration with established community groups. In St. Mary’s Parish there are several church groups, youth and sports groups, and a committee that oversees activities of the popular Green Valley festival that is held in Cayon each year. Coordinating ecotourism development efforts with these established groups can help create the bottom-up approach towards development that ensures community involvement in the decision-making process. Failure to do so will undermine any attempt to devolve control over ecotourism development to the communities on St. Kitts and thus has implications for the success and sustainability of these conservation and development projects.

References


Table 1. Survey response demographics.

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Table 2. Group and organization distribution of interviewees.

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<th>St. Christopher National Trust</th>
<th>Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College</th>
<th>Cayon village</th>
<th>Keys village</th>
<th>Citizens with specific interest in ecotourism development**</th>
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* Interviewees represented the following ministries: Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources; Ministry of Sustainable Development; Ministry of Social and Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs

** These participants included a former sugar factory worker, a former civil servant, a Solid Waste Management Corporation employee, and a Kittitian repatriate formerly from the U.K.
Figure 1. St. Mary’s Biosphere Reserve Cadastral Index Map. Source: St. Kitts-Nevis Department of Physical Planning and Environment. Source: St. Kitts and Nevis Department of Physical Planning and Environment
Figure 2. Keys and Cayon villagers’ perceptions of what is important and needs to be conserved within their communities.
Figure 3. Specific natural resources Keys and Cayon villagers believed should be conserved within their communities.

Figure 4. Community perceptions of the concept of ecotourism.
Figure 5. Community perceptions of activities considered as ecotourism.

Figure 6. Community perceptions of who or what benefits from ecotourism.
Figure 7. Community responses of who or what is negatively impacted by ecotourism activities on St. Kitts.
Figure 8. Cayon and Keys villagers’ perceptions of specific groups of people negatively affected by ecotourism practices.

Figure 9. Keys and Cayon villagers held values for sea turtles.
CHAPTER 3
LINKING HISTORICAL POLITICAL-ECOLOGICAL PROCESSES WITH CONTEMPORARY COMMUNITY CONCERNS ABOUT ECOTOURISM ON ST. KITTS

Abstract

The involvement of local people in community-based ecotourism development is vital towards the success and sustainability of such programs. Much research into the topic has looked at understanding how community perceptions influence decisions to support and become involved in ecotourism development, yet little is known about how these perceptions emerge from historical political-ecological processes and why understanding this dimension to local ecotourism development is important. This study investigated local people’s perceptions of and concerns over ecotourism development and conservation practices within two communities on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts, and endeavored to explain why such perceptions exist. Data were collected through community surveys, key informant interviews, and participation observation to reveal three areas of community concern: loss of control and access to land and resources; the transition of labor from sugar production to the service based industry of tourism; and a loss of community and a sense of togetherness. Historical analysis of the field data revealed past political-ecological processes that help to contextualize and explain why these perceptions exist and their importance for informing future ecotourism development initiatives. The results of this research highlight how ecotourism development reiterates
the same exclusionary processes associated with colonization and a plantation society that dictated local people’s relationship with their resources and with each other. This research reveals a need for a more nuanced and contextualized understanding of the communities set to benefit from local ecotourism development in order to avoid resurrecting sentiments of the past.

**Introduction**

Diversification and expansion of the tourism product on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts has become paramount as the small nation marks nearly ten years since the closure of its once lucrative sugar industry. Many islands in the wider Caribbean aim to identify themselves as distinct from the traditional sun, sand, and sea market of the region, and St. Kitts has focused on ecotourism activities with an increasingly community-based approach (SKNIS, 2013). Interestingly, the fervor to develop the tourism industry on St. Kitts in the last decade resembles the same transformative processes that led to the island becoming a sugar monoculture over two hundred years ago. In order to make sense of how this transformation – from lands of crop production for export to lands of consumption through local tourism experiences – affects support and participation in community-based ecotourism (CBE) practices, this paper introduces the historical dimensions of the human-environment relationship and community concept on St. Kitts. Guided by the historical political ecology framework proposed by Offen (2004) and utilizing Vayda’s (1983) progressive contextualization approach, this field-informed analysis of human-environment relations in the past works towards a more
nuanced understanding of how race, slavery, and colonialism can be reiterated through alternative forms of tourism development like that represented in the community-based ecotourism approach. The results of this research serve to inform the social and ecological elements of tourism studies as well as being applicable in amending the externally-mediated relationship local Kittitians have always had with their environment and with each other.

Fieldwork in the villages of Keys and Cayon on St. Kitts revealed insightful local perceptions of ecotourism and the environment as rural communities across the island are increasingly focused on as places for alternative tourism development. The villages of Keys and Cayon lie within the boundaries of a newly designated UNESCO Man and the Biosphere reserve and are home to the island’s most popular sea turtle nesting beach and the accompanying conservation and ecotourism activities of the community-based St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network. Both villages were once vibrant with work and activities centered on the production of sugar, but today are set to play an important role in future ecotourism activities on the island. After the fieldwork, archival research helped to elucidate historical patterns of exclusionary processes that inform local perceptions of ecotourism and the environment and thus helped to explain why such perceptions exist. Before describing these findings, the rationale for such an approach is mapped out within the tourism studies literature concerning community-based ecotourism and significance for the findings is illustrated in an overview of the case-study setting.
Ecotourism is considered a socially just and environmentally conscious form of the broader tourism industry. Generally defined as a responsible form of travel that helps improve the livelihoods of host communities and conserve fragile ecosystems (TIES, 1990), the practice gained global credence in 2013 when the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution that recognized ecotourism as a development tool in the “fight against poverty and the protection of the environment” (UN News Centre, 2013). The resolution stressed the need for member states to promote development of ecotourism initiatives in rural communities within their national tourism plans. Such a declaration underscores the increasing global popularity and frequency of community-based forms of ecotourism development despite the reality that in practice CBE programs often fail to garner extensive local support and community participation (see for example Li, 2002; Turner, 2006). Yet, it is arguably the support and involvement of community members in local ecotourism development that is vital to the success and sustainability of such programs (see for example Berkes, Kofinas, & Chapin, 2009; Mitchell & Reid, 2001) and thus why much academic attention has been paid towards understanding what motivates or inhibits community participation in tourism development in general.

Studies from the last thirty years have utilized a variety of conceptual frameworks and methodologies to further understand the factors that influence community participation. Earlier academic recognition about the economic (Fletcher, 1989; Pattullo,
1996), social (Doğan, 1989; Gmelch, 2003; Pizam, 1978), and environmental (Beekhuis, 1981; Boo, 1990) impacts associated with tourism in general, led to a heavy focus of community perceptions of these impacts in particular (Sharpley, 2014). Most of these studies look to understand the needs and desires of the communities and utilize the theory of social exchange to understand what communities perceive as the costs and benefits associated with tourism development (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004). Indeed, perceptions studies on the impacts of tourism have been so popular that in a recent review of the literature by Sharpley (2014) over 1000 articles were found to have been published on the topic in the last thirty years. In addition to this, a more recent turn in the research has focused on understanding community relationships and networks of trust in affecting public participation in local ecotourism development (Jones, 2005; Liu et al., 2014). These concepts of social capital and social cohesion are adopted from the field of development studies that has long interrogated the role of various social networks and relationship structures within communities in affecting public support for local development initiatives (Portes, 2000; Woolcock, 1998). And for ecotourism specifically, scholars have found that communities with high levels of social capital are more likely to support and participate throughout the development process (Jones, 2005). These studies have helped reveal different factors that exist within the dimensions of community perceptions and community relationships and have undoubtedly expanded our knowledge about what it is that influences local support for ecotourism development. Yet, there still exists limitations towards a deeper,
holistic understanding of the communities in which ecotourism programs are placed with implications towards more meaningful explanations as to why certain perceptions and concerns exist to affect support in ecotourism development.

Foremost missing within the field of tourism studies is analysis of historical political-ecological processes in which communities and their landscape emerged and how these past processes still inform contemporary perceptions in the places where CBE programs are implemented. Understanding this dimension of communities is important especially in postcolonial settings where communities and their landscapes are products of contentious social, cultural, and environmental transformations from the past. For example, scholars have highlighted the resurrection of race, colonialism, and slavery associated with the broader tourism industry (see for example, Pattullo, 1996) and within local ecotourism projects particularly within the Caribbean (Belsky, 1999, 2000; Campbell, 2002). These associations arguably work against eliciting support and extensive participation in CBE programs as Jill Belsky (1999, 2000) pointed out in her research on CBE in Belize. She described the lack of support and participation from community members as resistance against an industry where the distinction between service for a wage and “coerced servitude” are not well defined (Belsky, 1999). Further adding that CBE programs in the Caribbean fail to recognize these historical associations within their implementation and risk creating a “new and subtle form of domination” (Belsky, 1999). But Belsky offers little historical analysis to link the resistance she observed in Belize with specific political-ecological processes from the past; yet, doing
so may provide insightful information about communities that can help guide ecotourism development and prevent the continued marginalization of Caribbean communities throughout the process. As Karl Offen (2004) points out, local people’s relationship and understanding of their natural resources is the manifestation of past relationships of power that influenced local people’s perceptions of their environment and mediated their behavior in it. Understanding this historical dimension of the community context provides a better understanding as to why certain perceptions and concerns about a new development and land-use paradigm, such as ecotourism, exist.

In addition to this missing dimension within the literature, many scholars have recognized that much of the research to date has been heavily weighted with data collected through quantitative methods. According to Deery, Jago, and Fredline (2012) as well as Sharpley (2014), this has left the field of tourism studies with many descriptions of what inhibits or motivates participation in tourism activities, but without meaningful explanations as to why. Deery et al. (2012) argue that the research has left us at a stage where all the symptoms have been identified, but the root causes for certain perceptions or weakened community relationships have not been explained. Thus not only does this urge for interrogation into the past, but as Deery et al. (2012) point out, it implores for more qualitative methodologies in order to reveal the nuances and meanings of the findings so as to guide tourism managers and planners.

This study addresses such gaps in the literature in two ways. First, by applying a qualitative methodology this study uncovers local perceptions of ecotourism and
explanations as to why they exist on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts using the designation of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve and the activities of the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network as examples of a new paradigm for land and resources use practices. Second, this study applies Karl Offen’s (2004) historical political ecology approach in order to better understand the community context for ecotourism development. Since Offen (2004) argues that local people’s beliefs and perceptions are the result of past landscape ideologies and practices, this study weaves historical content into data collected in the field from surveys and interviews to situate Kittitian’s concerns and beliefs about ecotourism within past political-ecological processes from which their community and social identity emerged. Ecotourism, like sugar production, came about on the island in response to global economic and political forces, guided by a dominant Western ideology of land and resource use practices. Traditional forms of resource use by communities have now been appropriated by the same exogenous political and economic forces from which emerged traditional subsistence practices and the spatial structuring of communities found on St. Kitts today.

Case-study Background: From Sugar to Tourism

St. Kitts is part of the twin island Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis, located among the leeward islands of the Eastern Caribbean archipelago. It is the bigger of the two islands with an area of nearly 65 square miles and a population of approximately 48,000 (St. Kitts-Nevis Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2006). European colonization of
the island started in the 16th century with the first one hundred years of settlement marked by the collective and ultimately successful efforts of both the French and British to eradicate the island of its “hostile” native inhabitants, the Carib Indians (Richardson, 1983). African slaves were then brought to the island to transform the landscape and work the rich volcanic soils into the production of sugar. For nearly two hundred years the importation of slaves to the island was rampant, with an estimated number of over 10,000 brought to the island during a ten-year period at the height of the slave trade. The result was the creation of a highly organized and hierarchically structured cultivation system that shaped the local economy for centuries and unintentionally bred new identities for the displaced African slaves that now serves as the “basis of social and cultural distinction” on the island today (Olwig, 1995).

Sugar remained the main industry on St. Kitts for over 350 years until the loss of preferential access to EU markets and increasing debt forced its closure in 2005 (Dodds & McElroy, 2008). The closure of the sugar industry on St. Kitts reverberated beyond purely economic impacts as it affected a culture and a way of life that had existed on the tiny island for over 350 years. By the time of the last sugar harvest in 2005, the island had already began its transition into an economy heavily dependent on tourism, marked by the opening of its largest, full service resort on the Southeastern peninsula the year prior (Morton, Liburd, & James, 2010). The island has since welcomed several more hotel and resort developments and time-share communities along the beaches of the peninsula and miles away from local villages.
Like many of the other islands in the Caribbean, St. Kitts is now heavily dependent on tourism as its main industry. This transition to tourism is not surprising given that recent statistics show the industry as a whole accounts for 30% of the world’s exports (UNWTO, 2013) with annual growth in international tourist arrivals averaging 4% in the last three years and over 5% for the Caribbean region specifically (Nicholson-Doty, 2013). Yet translating these statistics into positive impacts on the island of St. Kitts has been a challenge. Approximately 1500 workers were laid off when sugar production closed, representing 4% of the workforce from a population of 35,217 (St. Kitts-Nevis Ministry of Sustainable Development, 2006). Research has shown that tourism, in the years since the closure of the sugar industry, has not absorbed all those left unemployed (Clarke & Barker, 2012) and further issues of environmental and historical structure degradation along the peninsula and across the island have become apparent (UNEP, 2010). For example, environmental issues such as illegal sand mining (Samuel, 2011), theft of stone from old ruins (Washington, 2012), and a visible increase in pollution from disposable consumer goods have all been linked to the rise of tourism development on St. Kitts. And according to the Minister of Tourism on the island, there is still a need for communities and rural people to “buy into” the industry so that the benefits can spread beyond the peninsula (Bobb, 2013). But this may be changing as recent initiatives aim to position rural communities as sites for ecotourism development. This research looks specifically at activities of the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and the recent
designated of the Man and the Biosphere Reserve to further understand the role of communities in development of ecotourism on St. Kitts.

Communities and Ecotourism

In November of 2011, St. Kitts became the first English-speaking Caribbean nation to have a United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and the Biosphere Reserve (MAB). Biosphere reserves are areas recognized as having high ecological and cultural diversity that can provide opportunities for “innovative approaches” in combining local economic development with conservation activities (UNESCO, n.d.). These reserves are broken down into three zonal areas (Figure 10): core, buffer, and transition. According to UNESCO’s website, core zones are protected areas in which minimal activities besides conservation monitoring practices occur, while buffer zones surround them and allow for economic activities such as tourism, and transition zones usually encompass area of settlement or human activity such as agricultural production. On St. Kitts, the reserve encompasses the entirety of an area known as St. Mary’s Parish and includes the island’s main sea turtle nesting beach as part of the core area, adjacent to the small villages of Cayon and Keys which lie in the transition zone (Figure 10). The turtle nesting beach is where activities of a small community conservation and ecotourism program, the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network (SKSTMN), have been carried out for the last ten years. The group conducts ecotours and works to educate communities away from sea turtle harvest and the harvest of sea turtle eggs within the villages of Keys and Cayon. And since there is still an open
season in which to harvest turtles, SKSTMN works to motivate conservation behaviors through ecotourism incentives.

In addition to the sea turtle nesting beach, the St. Mary’s Biosphere Reserve includes several old sugar plantation ruins, the Cayon cotton ginnery, and a portion of the cloud forest section of the mountain interior. There is a steering committee for the reserve that includes several representatives from various government ministries and three community members from Keys and Cayon. The committee’s duties are to oversee proposals submitted for research in the area and to guide development and marketing of projects to be carried out within the reserve. In the initial committee meetings, discussions centered on future plans for the reserve and included specific projects such as funding the development of a sea turtle interpretive center on the Keys to Cayon beach in addition to restoring the Cayon cotton ginnery as a site for heritage tourism activities. The steering committee for the reserve has acknowledged a lack of interest within the communities which was underscored by the author’s own observation of very few community members present at the advisory town hall meeting in Cayon at the time of the study. This is compounded by SKSTMN staff recognition of a lack of widespread local interest in their activities. Such a lack of involvement and support has implications not only for the sustainability of these programs (Berkes et al., 2009) but for the successful development of future ecotourism projects on the island. This research focuses on how communities perceive ecotourism and the palpable effect that colonialism and sugar production has had on informing these perceptions.
Research Approach and Methods

Following Offen’s (2004) historical political ecology framework, this study relies both on Caribbean fieldwork and library-based archival research. Fieldwork consisted of two months of qualitative research during the summer of 2012. Throughout that time, participant observation of the activities carried out by St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere Reserve committee, as well as semi-structured interviews with individuals associated with the groups, helped to describe the goals and objectives of both programs and the current level of community participation.

In July, open-ended surveys were administered in the villages of Keys and Cayon in order to reveal local perceptions of ecotourism, conservation, community, and values held for specific resources such as turtles. Following this, progressive contextualization (Vayda, 1983) led to further interviews with key informants in order to understand what influenced perceptions revealed in the surveys and how these forces work to create resistance to or support for, new ecotourism development approaches. This specifically meant investigating the community concept on St. Kitts, from spatial placement to social activities and relationships, and the evolution of these aspects.

Once back in the United States, secondary sources later helped to clarify the historical processes underpinning the interviews conducted in the field. These sources provided detailed historical information on land transformation, plantation and slave society settlements, subsistence use, and social interactions within the slave communities. Particularly useful were the Bonham C. Richardson’s book, Caribbean migrants:
“Environment and human survival on St. Kitts and Nevis” and Tracy Olwig’s article on “African Cultural Principles in Caribbean Slave Societies” to describe the historical, social, and ecological transformation of St. Kitts during the time of colonization. These texts, along with other secondary archival sources helped to illustrate the historical processes in which contemporary concerns about land and resources and the community emerged from the field data.

Sugar, Slavery, and Community

The following section works to historically contextualize the three themes that emerged from data in the field: 1) the lack of land made available for local ownership; 2) collective labor and work with sugar; and 3) sense of loss of community.

“Well, It Mean Giving Way We Land for de White People Dem” – Man from Cayon Village Defining the Term Ecotourism

Community surveys revealed that villagers were not familiar with the term or the concept of ecotourism. In fact, inquiry into the definition of ecotourism revealed perceptions of an association with the loss of land and resources. Since the time of colonization, land on St. Kitts has been a means to, and an attribute of, wealth for Europeans and other foreign nationals. Yet it serves as a constant reminder of the enduring hegemonic, global economic system that has consistently marginalized the people of St. Kitts.
Across the island, the remnants of the spatial structuring assigned for sugar production during colonialism remain visible upon the landscape. In St. Mary’s Parish, the villages are surrounded by empty, overgrown cane fields, while old sugar grinding mills and stone chimneys of the boiling houses dot the hillsides. The small sugar railway still runs through the heart of the villages, though instead of hauling cane to the capital of Basseterre for processing, today it carries eager tourists with cameras. In addition, there are other more subtle reminders for Kittitians about their colonial past. One being the appearance of fruit trees within the gullies of the mountainside as their presence was explained by an agricultural worker on the island:

Most of the land grow under da sugarcane. But these were marginal areas where there were no sugarcane, the ghuat sides, you know, some parts of the mountain. They use these areas to plant and establish fruit trees like avocado, mango, guavas, and those things… these lands they belong to the estates.

Geographer Bonham Richardson (1983) describes that the physical layout and stratification of labor on the sugar plantations of St. Kitts served to illustrate the economic, ecological, and social dimensions of the slavery era. In the early 19th century, at the height of sugar production across the British West Indies, a typical Kittitian plantation was roughly 200 acres; 150 used for cane, and the remainder for grazing, provision or waste land (Richardson, 1983). At the center of the plantation was the grinding mill powered by wind, with the curing and boiling houses, animal pens, owners and managers dwellings and the plantation hospital or hothouse nearby. The slave huts were then allocated on land considered unsuitable for cane cultivation and therefore some distance from the estate house (Figure 11). Additionally, land for provision gardening for
the slaves was also allocated in areas deemed unsuitable for sugar and far away from the slave huts. However, Richardson (1983) states that this provisioning of subsistence land was based more on the reduction of costs from food imports rather than any notion of humanity on account of the plantation owner. Slaves grew rootcrops and vegetables, and raised goats, pigs, and poultry for subsistence or for sale at the market when times were plentiful (Richardson, 1983). Yet these resources and provisions were still owned by the estate and during times of low return on sugar or during the off-season, as described further by a Cayon villager:

The plantation owners would send the workers many times to harvest these fruits and it was sort of a revenue, you see, how like back then the harvest of the sugarcane would have ended so therefore the estate was looking for areas to get more revenue so they would harvest these fruit trees.

This structure and layout for, and control over, production on the plantations persisted for centuries with changes made only in the technology used for processing sugar to make production more efficient. For example, grinding of the sugar cane evolved from cattle-driven mechanisms in the 17th and 18th centuries, to wind harnessing mills and steam in the latter 18th through the 19th century, and finally by combustion engine when sugar processing became centralized in 1911 and the railway was constructed to haul cane to the capital of Basseterre (Caribelle Batik, 2008). This centralization of processing, as explained by a former history teach on St. Kitts, came only after recommendation by Sir Henry Norman of England to make sugar production more efficient and profitable. Yet he also had another recommendation:
He sort of analyzed the system and found that we had a monoculture… St. Kitts should try and broaden the economic base by producing other crops, agricultural crops and that kind of thing… he recommended that there should be a system or they should look at the land tenure system and provide for a peasantry. Some estates should be broken up in order to give these people an opportunity to own land and develop these smaller type crops, you know, like cotton and other agricultural crops.

This last recommendation never came about. Instead, the plantation owners kept their large tracts of land and reduced wages where possible in order to maintain profits (Richardson, 1983). The lack of access to land or “a piece of the rock” as described by Kittitians had several significant and lasting effects. First, newly freed slaves moved onto the marginal areas left uncultivated by sugar. Hence villages, as described by Dyde (2005), emerged in the places where they are located today, the steep unused land adjacent to the old sugar estates. Second, St. Kitts developed a highly migratory population. Thirty years after the commission report by Norman recommended a diversification of agriculture and a land tenure system, the population of St. Kitts dropped nearly 43%. Laborers could acquire jobs on other sugar islands like Cuba and the Dominican Republic for a higher wage and were not bound to the island through ties to land (Richardson, 1983). Lastly, land ownership allowed access to processes that had largely been inaccessible to slaves and their free ancestors. Less than a century ago Kittitians had to own property in order to be eligible to vote, and today, land ownership to one Kittitian man meant, “I’ve got something I can pass on to my children, got something that I can take to the bank to get a loan.”
However, land ownership is still largely out of reach for many Kittitians. The government of St. Kitts acquired all valuable sugar lands in 1975, roughly 80% or over 32000 acres of land. Then in 1984 it began a “citizenship-by-investment” program that allows foreign nationals to purchase land at a certain cost in exchange for Kittitian citizenship and the added perks of access and travel to certain European countries. Furthermore, an IMF report in 2007 recommended the sale of government lands to help alleviate the island’s amassing debt. This led to a 2012 announcement of a “land-for-debt” campaign with the sale of 600 acres to local banks (Hewlett, 2013).

“You're Taking People from the Land and You're Putting Them into Tourism?” – Female Former Sugar Industry Worker about the Closure of the Sugar Industry

Sugar was an industry based on production through collective work that people had been accustomed to for generations. From the beginning, the production of sugar on St. Kitts required a large, collective workforce; first to clear the native vegetation in the late 1600s, then to ensure large yields to maintain profits for the estate in the centuries that followed. Richardson (1983) described that it took an estimated thirty men to harvest nearly 30 acres of cane a day. These groups of men, and at times women, were known as “gangs” and worked by hand to plant, cut, and weed the fields throughout the time of colonialism and slavery, and later as free laborers (Richardson, 1983). This activity of cultivation in the field remained the same until its closure, with only the technology of processing having evolved over time.
Goveia’s (1965) description of slave society in the British West Indies illustrates a typical work day that began before dawn and ended at sunset. At 9 a.m. the slaves took a break for breakfast for about 45 min then worked until 11 a.m. in which they were dismissed from the field for nearly three hours. During this time they rarely ate since they had to prepare bundles of grass for livestock and reconvene in the cane fields by 1 or 2 o’clock in the afternoon. Overall, field work was estimated to be 10 hours a day but increased during the harvest season to day and night in order to process the cane. Because of the brutality of the work, newly arrived slaves were given a year of “seasoning,” or guided work directed by an “elderly, reliable slave” instead of instantly putting them to work in the fields (Richardson, 1983). Ultimately, their survival was dependent on this conditioning period where they relied on the guidance and support of the veteran slaves. It was not until after emancipation and the industrial revolution taking place in North America and Europe that labor on the sugar plantation was reduced but not entirely replaced by machines.

The reduced labor that followed emancipation in 1838 instigated the introduction of processing technology. Horse drawn plows and weeding equipment had reduced the labor needed to one-fourth the number required before emancipation. Further mechanization occurred by the early twentieth century with the advent of steam powered mills, followed by the centralization of sugar processing into one factory by 1911 and the development of a 32 mile railway in which to carry cane from the estates to the factory (Dodds & McElroy, 2008). Nonetheless, the last one hundred years of sugar production
still followed a seasonal regimen with harvest occurring from February to June
(Richardson, 1983) but it required less time in the field than had been carried out by the
population’s ancestral slaves. As one former factory worker described:

You finish work at eleven o'clock in da morning you done. Yeah, suns hot,
you start early. Some people start work at six, right, so the sun isn't really hot
and if you put your head down you can finish by eleven o'clock in the
morning. But if you're weeding and you have twenty some odd acres to weed
and if you’re woman and can finish that and go home and cook or do a second
job, you know selling food or something.

Yet even in the 1980s Richardson (1983) notes that sugar on St. Kitts still maintained a
structure of production remnant of its colonial past as “…one large agro-industrial
production unit with the resident black labor force, their efforts coordinated and mediated
by a handful of planters, producing canes for the single sugar factory.” And it had a place
for everyone. As one Keys villager described:

…wedder you were working during the off or low season doing weeding or
planting and hoeing and so on… we would have a series of cane cutters… an’
you had a persons in the community who worked on de sugar train as train
drivers and also as switchmen, you know. So quite a number persons who
worked in da sugar factory from Keys so they used to pedal bicycles in the
day going to an’ from working in the tree various shifts, so we had a large
number of persons employed in sugar.

Thus not only did the transition to tourism eight years ago take “people from the
land,” but it affected the social fabric that had been created through centuries of
collective work in the Caribbean environment. One former sugar worker described their
time in the industry in the following way: “… to me it felt like a family… you're moving
from one estate to another and you know the managers and some people are working
there their whole life, you know?” Overall there was a sense of a loss of a way of life that
tourism could not replace and that some people did not feel accustomed to, as the worker further elaborated, “So you can have jobs and you can have workers but they don’t always go together you know?”

“I Know There is Development and You Can’t Go Back. But You Can Go Back and See How We Used to Have Community, We Used to be Close”
– Female from Cayon Village Describing Loss of Community

The communities that exist on St. Kitts today are artifacts of colonialism and slavery. Times of cohesion and disintegration can be understood through processes that allowed space for social networks and community ties to emerge. It first started with slavery, as Oldendorp (quoted in Olwig, 1995) described it as a brutal process that “accomplished something similar to what is achieved by death in the destinies of all men, namely, the removal of all external distinctions among them” (Oldendorp, 1987). What then followed was the construction of new social ties amongst the slaves of St. Kitts and what Richardson (1983) noted as an emergence of humanity and individuality in what was mostly inhuman conditions. Slaves started to create these social bonds during the process of displacement on the ships that brought them from Africa and later on the Caribbean plantations. The white planters would purposefully place new slaves in the hands of older, more experienced ones so they may teach them the new language and life on the plantation (Goveia, 1965). This became a continuing “process of incorporation” which helped Africans create social ties of belonging and form kin-like ties in the absence of blood relation (Richardson, 1983).
Further processes of social networking emerged in the spaces outside of the plantation and out of sight of the direct supervision of estate managers during days off (Olwig, 1995). Sunday markets were spaces in which the slaves could sell and trade produce, indulge in conversation, stories, and gossip about friends, as well as earn extra cash that could be saved for a myriad of supplies and provisions, or perhaps for the most frugal slave – freedom (Richardson, 1983). At Christmas the slaves had extended time off since the holiday fell between the planting and harvest seasons and it was during this time that the Christmas Sports tradition came about and would later evolve into today’s Carnival festivities. The Christmas Sports were a hybridized display of dramas and acts with African and European cultural influence. In this manner, the slaves were able to maintain aspects of their African culture and tradition of folklore and dance. In 1901, Dorothy Harding described these sports as a means for the laboring population to gratify their passion for dancing and for music that was most often muted by the plantation system. She described the festivities as something uniquely Kittitian (Harding, 1901).

And yet these festivals still remain a part of the culture and a means to create unity and identity within the villages. In Cayon, the Green Valley festival was created by community members in order to spur community development and cultural involvement. It has been around for over 16 years and is now promoted as a tourist attraction.

Another event deemed as part of the local culture and a means of strengthening community ties was that of the sea turtle harvest in Keys and Cayon. The harvest and consumption of turtles has long been a historical practice and tradition within the
Caribbean region and amongst a diverse group of people. First, the indigenous Amerindian tribes harvested turtles as part of their normal diet, and later, the early European colonizers of the region became dependent on turtles during their long voyages. But for African slaves and their free descendants, sea turtles meant more than subsistence, the seasonal occurrence of nesting leatherback turtles meant turtle meat and their byproducts were treasured items. The turtle harvest was an event that the villagers of Cayon and Keys recalled being centered on the fishermen specified for the task of catching turtles:

There was a lot of superstition surrounding the whole turtle, the whole culture surrounding turtle catching. It is said that those men who I told you about were famous for catching turtle, they say they were able to look at the sky at night and see the turtle tracks and so they knew when the turtle was coming to lay.

Once the turtle was brought up from shore the butchering, cooking, and feasting was a process that involved the rest of the community as explained by a villager from Cayon:

It was a community thing, where there were several men in da community who prided themselves in knowing when a turtle was in an’ they would go an’ cut it up for meat - they would sell the meat raw, or they would boil it, they would sell the eggs, and they would basically use the back to make oil, turtle oil, because it was good for medicinal purposes… They used to have a coppa that they used to boil the turtle in, a big coppa an’ it was really tasty an’ the whole community would come an’ buy an’ it would be almost like a gathering, a community gathering where they would eat turtle an’ communicate an’ talk about how big it was an’ how much it weighed and how difficult it was to kill and so on and so on.

Along with turtle meat, the eggs would be consumed in a soup or rolled into tiny dough balls and baked into “Johnny cakes,” while oil was processed from the back of the leatherback turtle. Compared to the meat, these parts of the turtle were perceived as
medicinal, especially the oil, which when combined with lime was considered a common treatment for the cold. The eggs held a special value for men in particular, as they were believed to be an aphrodisiac in addition to drinking the blood.

There is still an open season for sea turtles on the island today, though interest in their consumption has waned. Some have blamed this on SKSTMN’s conservation campaign and consistent presence on the main sea turtle nesting beach, but many Kittitians believe it is due to changing consumption preferences and a younger generation no longer interested in traditional foods. In fact, more than one interview respondent joked about the presence of American fast-food being the main reason for the protection of turtles on the island.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study’s description of the influence of historical processes on Kittitian’s perception of land and resources, as well as their relationships with each other, demonstrates the need for analysis of the historical context of communities in tourism research. Community-based ecotourism on the island risks reiterating the same political-ecological processes of power that have worked to consistently deny Kittitians legitimate access to, and control over, the resources they have utilized for centuries. Furthermore, without such contextualization opportunities in which to effectively engage community members based on their own emergent values and beliefs would be missed. This lends support for utilizing a historical political ecology approach in order to understand how certain community perceptions are shaped by exogenous, political-ecological forces.
First, it was revealed that Kittitians have a long and contentious history concerning land. They have continuously been placed on the marginalized edges of land deemed more important or more valuable based on Western land-use ideologies; first through colonization and the plantation system for the production of sugar, and now conservation for ecotourism that is mediated through the demarcation of the core, buffer, and transition zones of the MAB. What were once lands deemed worthless for sugar, are now restricted and valued as places of ecological concern and limited activity within the core zone. These include the beach and coastal area and the remnants of mountain forests above the old cane fields. This demarcation fails to recognize that the same historical political-ecological processes that have now rendered these areas fragile and endangered, gave rise to the global economic system of capitalism and the means in which well-off foreigners are now able to venture and experience these remnant ecosystems.

Second, though sugar production was initiated and is continuously represented as an artifact of slavery, it was also a system from which a new identity for the slaves displaced on the island emerged. Because of the collective work required for production, slaves and their free ancestors were able to strengthen community and social ties - albeit in the context of a brutal and harsh system of control by the elite planter class - through mutual labor on the land. In a recent study by Clarke and Barker (2012), the transition for former sugar workers into tourism has not been successful, as workers maintain a “gang mentality” described as group behavior that “boiled down to laughing, chatting, gossiping, early lunches, short work span and long break sessions.” What they found in
their study was that former workers, specifically women, needed the collective aspect in their new line of work. They also argued that their failure to transition into tourism work could also be viewed as a resistance to make use of the government’s training programs and thus alternative livelihood methods such as farming or agricultural work through collective gardening that is close to home should be pursued. Similar to these findings, this study also described a surprising affinity held for work with sugar due primarily to the collective nature of the industry. Resistance among women to participate in future CBE initiatives can be understood from this perspective of a desire to participate in collective methods of work.

Finally, specific events and activities such as turtle harvesting and celebratory festivals were shown to have emerged in the physical and temporal spaces outside of the plantation system, which helped to build a new culture and strengthen community ties within a powerful system that worked to suppress it. Stories were told about the turtle harvest in Cayon and Keys and revealed that the held value for turtles was based primarily on the social benefits of the harvest and the performance of cultural beliefs in the use of turtle oil and blood. Value was not based on subsistence needs or money that could be earned in selling the meat, an argument used to justify the conservation of turtles for ecotourism as an alternative livelihood strategy. Yet the perceived conservation of turtles for tourism, and not for the cultural benefit and enjoyment of the community can have implications for motivating participation in SKSTMN activities, especially for the older generation that still fondly recall stories of the harvest. Instead of viewing a lack of
participation in community-based ecotourism on St. Kitts as a rejection of the Western ideologies that are performed through and symbolized by SKSTMN, as Belsky (1999) would argue, it may be better to understand lack of participation based on what Offen (2004) describes as a difference over the cultural meaning of turtles that evolved from past ideological struggles during colonialism on St. Kitts. Turtles, like other resources on the island, have never belonged to local people as a means for great economic gain; instead, they are a natural resource that requires collective, group work in their harvest and consumption that helps to build and strengthen a sense of community and cultural identity. With the new conservation paradigm, Kittitians are being physically separated from their land and resources through new forms of labor focused on individual and direct interaction with foreign visitors, rather than collective, group work directly with the land. Thus, new ecotourism ventures not only reiterate past spatial structuring of communities and their surrounding land that denies local control and access to resources, but it also creates a new disjuncture through work based on individual service to foreign visitors that physically separates local people from their environment and consequently with each other.

The transition from sugar to tourism and the perceived role of communities within the new monoculture industry is embedded in, and influenced by, the history and context of colonialism and landscape perceptions on St. Kitts. Many of the forces at work on St. Kitts exist in other countries within the Caribbean: declining agricultural exports, tourism expansion into rural areas, and the increasing focus on community-based forms of
tourism activities. These forces emerged from a past that can help better explain the nuances of human environment relationships today (Offen, 2004).

Overall, this case study demonstrates that community participation, and to some broader extent the concept of community, is an emergent process. Planners and advocates of CBE should redirect focus away from local participation as an end goal and work in collaboration with existing community networks. In other words, instead of trying to elicit participation of communities, advocates and planners of ecotourism should look in places where participation already exists as emergent from the needs and desires of communities. For instance, in St. Mary’s Parish there are numerous church groups, sports and youth development groups, and a committee that has coordinated the popular Green Valley Festival activities in Cayon for over 16 years. Collaboration and coordination with these admired groups through participatory development strategies may help create a more deeply involved, locally supported, and thus sustainable ecotourism program.

References


Figure 10. St. Mary’s Biosphere Reserve zonation map. Source: St. Kitts-Nevis Department of Physical Planning and Environment.
Figure 11. William McMahon’s map of the sugar plantation landscape on St. Kitts. This shows slave villages downwind of the estate houses and on the marginalized areas of the sugar estates. Source: liverpoolmuseums.org.
Community-based ecotourism has become a popular conservation and development tool for communities across the world with little to no other options for economic development (Dodds & McElroy, 2008; Grandoit, 2005). Although this type of development aims to recognize the needs of communities, these projects are often designed and developed in alignment with foreign interests (Honey, 2008). This results in programs that lack the extensive involvement of the communities in order to make them socially and environmentally beneficial, as well as sustainable. The research presented in this thesis addressed this issue by revealing the perceptions held by St. Kitts community members about ecotourism development and pointed to avenues for a truly participatory approach. It analyzed how local perceptions are informed by centuries of political-ecological processes that have continuously denied local people realization of control and ownership over their resources. It also revealed factors that help influence Kittitians to become involved in community-based ecotourism projects.

First, this study showed that perceptions of negative impacts and lack of benefits from any form of tourism development existed among community members. Although local people expressed that the goal of ecotourism in general was to benefit everyone on St. Kitts, including rural communities, many revealed their belief that only the government, tourists, and foreigners benefitted from any tourism activities on the island. For example, community members viewed sea turtle conservation as beneficial to the turtle population, the marine ecosystem, and tourists who wanted to witness the turtles but realized it came at the loss of traditional, cultural uses of sea turtle products within
the communities. Furthermore, community members expressed concern over the conservation of community ties and relationships and activities that once brought communities together like that of the sea turtle harvest. Such perceptions exist amidst the depressing reality of years of increasing gang-related violence amongst the youth of the island. Programs like the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and any future initiatives brought about by the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) program, should focus on building community relationships and strengthening social ties through collaboration with established community groups. For example, in Keys and Cayon there exist several church, youth, and sports groups, as well as a committee that oversees the activities of the popular Green Valley Festival that has been held in Cayon for the last 16 years. Collaboration with these groups can work towards eliciting wider support and participation from strong, established social networks.

Second, it was found that Kittitian’s perceptions of ecotourism and the environment could be explained by enduring political-ecological processes that have consistently worked to mediate Kittitian’s relationship with the land and with each other. The demarcation of specific zones within the MAB reserve echoes the spatial organization of the plantation system during colonization and thus reiterates the same exclusionary processes that restrict local people’s access to and use of the land, environment, and resources. This reveals the need for local people to have control and access over their resources as well as the decision-making processes that determine specific resource use practices. This aspect not only helps motivate support and involvement of local people in CBE, but as Brohman (1996) mentions, it helps maintain cultural identity and social control. Working with community groups and utilizing
participatory development methods such as community mapping and needs assessments (Chambers, 1994) can help to devolve centuries of outside control over local natural resources by incorporating local knowledge and land use practices into ecotourism activities. Third, community members expressed interest in being involved in future ecotourism activities due mainly on the desire for locally based employment. However, community members were not adamant on being involved in any specific activity and instead preferred to wait and see what would develop. Similar findings of this manner (Campbell, 1999) suggest that participation in future ecotourism development may not emerge organically from the community but may rather be driven by local and foreign entrepreneurs, evidenced in this case with the establishment of the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network and through the designation of the MAB reserve. Yet this finding should not serve as an excuse for planners and advocates of community-based ecotourism to proceed with initiatives that are not informed or guided by local needs and desires, rather, it serves to further highlight the need for a new approach to effectively engage and incorporate local people in the ecotourism development process. Scholars such as Uzzel, Pol, and Badenas (2002) have argued that conservation and development strategies, like those represented in ecotourism projects, should “be located in the relationships that exist between people in the community… and their environment.” Given the importance of social relationships on St. Kitts and the contentious history the local people have had with their environment, conservationists and development planners on St. Kitts, and perhaps more broadly the Caribbean, should do the following: 1) conduct a social assessment on the existing perceptions of the benefits and impacts of ecotourism development; 2) pursue collaborative approaches with existing community groups where social networks are
already established, such as church or festival groups; 3) focus on the processes that
devolve control over and access to resources to the local people through participatory
development methods; and 4) implement activities that bring the community together
outside of the tourism development model. Perhaps within this latter recommendation
there is room in which communities can carry out cultural activities that involve a
restricted take of sea turtles for the sake of traditional ceremonies and the maintenance of
a distinct social identity.

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APPENDICES
Survey Questions:

Hello, good morning / afternoon. My name is ______________ and I am a student from Clarence Fitzroy Bryant College. I am involved in a research study about the perception and participation of communities in sea turtle conservation and community development projects in St. Mary’s Parish. If you agree, I would like to request 15 minutes of your time to ask you some questions. Your responses will be used for graduate research at Utah State University and may help guide future conservation and development projects within St. Mary’s Parish. I will not ask for any personal information which would identify you in this research. Your participation is completely voluntary. You can respond only to questions you want and stop the survey at any time. There are no right or wrong answers, so please always express your opinion. Would you like to participate?

If the answer is "NO", then thank you for your time and have a good day. If the answer is "YES", then “let’s get started....”

1. What do you enjoy most about living here on St. Kitts?

2. What does community mean to you?

3. What do you consider to be your community?

4. What does the term conservation mean to you?
5. What things do you consider to be important that should be conserved in your community?

Why:

6. What does the term ecotourism mean to you?

Ecotourism can be defined in many ways, but for this study the term *ecotourism* is defined as environmentally responsible travel to natural and cultural areas that promotes conservation and creates economic benefits to local populations. Keeping this definition, as well as your own definition in mind, please answer the remaining questions.

7. Do you know of any ecotourism activities happening within or near your community? _____ yes _____ no

If yes, which ones?

8. In your opinion, who or what actually benefits from ecotourism?

9. In your opinion, who or what is negatively affected by ecotourism?

10. Have you ever participated in sea turtle conservation activities? _______ yes _________ no

   If yes, which:
11. Are you currently involved in tourism or conservation activities that work with sea turtles?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No
   If yes, which:

   If no, why not?

12. Have you heard of the St. Kitts Sea Turtle Monitoring Network? _____ yes _____ no
13. Have you participated in any of their projects? _____ yes _________ no
   If yes, which:

   If no, would you like to be involved?

   Why or why not?

14. What value do sea turtles have to you personally?

15. Would you like to be involved in any future ecotourism projects?
   _____ Yes
   _____ No
   If yes, what type of projects would you want to be a part of?
Finally, we would like to obtain some additional information for analysis:

Male _______________ Female__________________

1. What age group do you belong to?
   ___18 – 25
   ___26 – 35
   ___36 – 45
   ___46 – 55
   ___56 – 65
   ___66 or older

2. How long have you lived in (village name)?

3. Are you employed? ____ yes _____ no

   If yes, then what is your current occupation?

   If no, what was your previous occupation?
APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions:

Community Members
Where are you from (country or village)?
What natural resources do you value the most and why?
How do other groups/people value natural resources?
What role do you feel natural resources play in the development or well-being of the community? On your livelihood?
How do you feel about tourism in local development? Any benefits? Any negative impacts?
Do you believe tourism can help improve or conserve the natural resources of St. Kitts? How so?
Have you personally benefited from tourism development? If not, do you believe that you can?
What do you think of current ecotourism and development projects on the island?
What future development projects would you like to see in your community?

SKSTMN Staff and MAB Committee Members
Tell me a little about yourself. Where are you originally from? What is your current job? How long have you been working with SKSTMN or MAB? How did you become a part of this group or project?
What are the main objectives of SKSTMN or MAB? What benefits do they have to the local economy? The environment? What is the overall goal of the group?
How do the various communities affected by SKSTMN/MAB value different natural resources? What role do you feel sea turtles and the local environment play in the livelihoods of these communities? What is the motivating factor for community members to be involved in local development practices associated with the program?
Who benefits most from the projects implemented by SKSTMN/MAB?
How much input has the local community had in the development of SKSTMN/MAB projects? What level of involvement would you like to see local community members play in the program?
Have you seen changes in behavior or activities towards the environment due to the presence of SKSTMN or the rise in ecotourism related projects?
What type of projects would you like to see implemented in the future? How would this happen?
What do you perceive to be the biggest barrier to the sustainability of projects associated with SKSTMN/MAB